

# *The Heart of the Matter*

≡ *Christian Attitudes* ≡

***by Jim Jonas***

## **Schedule**

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## Lesson 1. Why Do We Do the Things We Do?

### 1. The Free Moral Agency of Man

That which sets man apart from animals is the ability to reason and decide. Animals behave on an instinctive level, and they have a limited ability to learn from cause and effect. While we may kill animals that have caused death or destruction, we do not “punish” them as morally accountable creatures. A shark or a crocodile kills because it has been “programmed” to do so; it is his nature.

Humans, on the other hand, are constructed differently. We have been endowed with the power of choice. While there are some instinctive actions in our make-up (a baby’s suckling response; flinching, etc.), the fabric of our lives is woven largely from individual decisions. We choose to come or go, to love or hate, to learn or remain ignorant, to marry or not, to help or injure.

But with this freedom to act comes a frightful consequence: Our Maker has declared that He will hold us accountable for what we decide. We implicitly recognize and affirm this principle whenever we declare a man guilty of the violation of law and punish him. Justice says, in effect, “You behaved wrongly and you should have done differently.”

“Fate,” “karma” and Calvinistic predestination are not Biblical concepts. Man has created such doctrines to relieve him of the terrible guilt spawned by the knowledge that we have not lived as we know we should. When we choose to act, it is vital that we choose wisely.

### 2. What Affects Our Choices?

When we do make a choice, there are a number of things that influence our decision. We are not always conscious of these forces, but we have been shaped and conditioned by them in powerful ways.

**Genetic predisposition** is not to be ignored. While our technical knowledge of genetics has greatly increased, it has largely served to confirm what was formerly known

by observation: Some children are born with the temperaments and tendencies of their parents already in place. Some are headstrong; others are compliant; some have a “short fuse”; others are passive; some are optimistic; others are anxious and fretful.

**Parental nurturing** also has a significant bearing upon our deliberative process. Parents’ values will flavor the entire atmosphere in which children are raised. The mixing of these values with genetic predisposition can be volatile: They might be complimentary and reinforce one another, or they may clash and set a youngster up for confusion. We might also include sibling influence in this equation.

**Peer groups** increasingly exert influence upon humans as they broaden their interactions with the world. When it is discovered that there is life outside the immediate family, a tremendous amount of pressure is applied to gain favor and approval from that larger constituency.

**Self-interest** is at first a survival instinct.

For instance, a baby will insistently cry at all hours of the night until comforted. But as life progresses, such self-interest can turn from survival to self-indulgent pleasure. We may choose to act simply because *we like the outcome*, regardless of the consequences or impact upon others.

**at·ti·tude**: 2a: a mental position with regard to a fact or state b: a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state  
... 6: an organismic state of readiness to respond in a characteristic way to a stimulus (as an object, concept, or situation)  
(Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 114)

All of these influences seethe and swirl within our minds and are gradually forged into a mindset, a value system or a set of **attitudes** that define who we are as a person. We may camouflage our true selves

by speaking or acting in a way different from our real attitudes, thus deceiving others (and perhaps ourselves). But our real identity is revealed more often than we know, and it is always seen by God.

### **3. Discovering Our Own Attitudes**

We jokingly speak of people in need of an "attitude adjustment." In reality, we need to be constantly adjusting our attitudes to conform to the standards of God. (Since this lesson deals with the "Christian's attitude," we will assume that those who study the material already acknowledge the value of God's approval. We who believe in God fundamentally agree that God's standards for us are valid and superior.)

One of the first problems we encounter is identifying what our *real* attitudes are. This requires two basic qualities: self-awareness and honesty. First, we must learn to study and evaluate ourselves. "What do I think and why do I think it?" "What are my basic desires?" "Why do I favor option A as opposed to option B?" "What is my real motive?" These are uncomfortable questions to ask ourselves because the answers may be less than flattering. We sometimes assign to ourselves higher motives than we deserve, and to preserve the illusion we hesitate to peer very deeply into our own soul.

Secondly, unless we are honest with ourselves, we will plow ahead through life with thoughts and attitudes that God finds abominable even as we attend worship, read our Bibles, pray and speak religious lingo.

The most reliable way to study ourselves and dispassionately discern our true attitudes is to compare ourselves with the revelation of God. God, as our Maker, knows His human product better than we know ourselves. He knows what makes us tick – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. The Scriptures reveal our true inner self, even as a photograph depicts our outer qualities.

**Heb 4:12-13** – The word of God (only the written remains) "*is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" Of "discerner" (Gk. *kritikos*) Vine says: "fit for, or skilled in, judging (Eng., critical), found in

Heb. 4:12, of the Word of God ... i.e., discriminating and passing judgment on the thoughts and feelings" (Vol. 1, p. 315). A.T. Robertson comments, "Psychology is constantly changing its terminology" (Vol. 5, p. 363). How true; even the whole Freudian way of analyzing the human mind is giving way to modern postulates and theories. But the Scriptures stand unchanged, a rock-solid testimony to the Maker's analysis of the human mind and motivations. The written word is the key to understanding ourselves.

**Jas 1:21-25** – James connects the importance of *hearing* the word and then *doing* or *conforming* to it. He likens the failure of this obligation to looking into a mirror and promptly forgetting one's outward appearance. Likewise, if we look into the "perfect law of liberty" we will see our inner self – flaws and all. We then can make adjustments, as we do with our hair or clothing after looking into a mirror. This is the way by which the implanted word is able to save our souls (Jas 1:21).

### **4. Cultivating Godly Attitudes**

While genetics, nurture, peer pressure and self-interest all come to bear upon us, there is one overriding equalizer: We have volition or the sovereign right to choose what we will be. We have *free will*. Consider these Biblical examples of men and women who chose to go against the grain of their family and cultural influences:

**Joseph:** Neither parental favoritism nor sibling rejection, neither imprisonment nor political power, neither threat nor lust could shake him from due regard for God. His attitude was one of trust in and respect for God: "*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" (Gn 39:9).

**Moses:** Moses did not succumb to the trappings of Egyptian religion, power and privilege. He **chose** to identify himself with the people of God and suffer whatever came with it (Heb 11:25).

**Rahab:** This woman was thoroughly steeped in Gentile religion and culture. Yet she realized something about the threatening

nation amassing across the Jordan. Its God was different from the idols. Thus, in faith (Heb 11:31) Rahab abandoned idolatry and put her trust in Jehovah.

**Josiah:** Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, was the most wicked Judean king in history, surpassing even the wickedness of the Canaanites who inhabited the land before him (2 Kgs 21:11). In spite of Manasseh's later repentance, Josiah could very well have followed in the footsteps of his grandfather's ungodliness. Instead, this young man became one of Judah's most zealous reformers.

**Daniel:** Like Joseph, Daniel was plucked from his home and deposited in a foreign land. Unlike Joseph, however, Daniel did not have his native home to inspire him, for it had been destroyed and all the population scattered. Daniel had *nothing* in terms of family, society, country to define himself, and he was immersed in a heathen culture that would have slowly assimilated a man of lesser faith. But Daniel made a series of conscious choices not to surrender his faith or his obedience to heathen influences. He maintained his integrity and convictions in spite of the fact that all odds were stacked against him.

**Paul:** We only need to reflect briefly upon the great apostle to understand the power of free will. What he sacrificed and suffered for the sake of Christ should silence once and for all those who claim that "society" is wholly responsible for the choices made by individuals.

### **5. What Really Matters?**

What really matters in this life is learning what God would have us to be and then abandoning everything contrary to that model. This is not a process of outward conformity but inward change:

*"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18).*

What, then, is our attitude toward the world around us? We are daily confronted with choices concerning people, (friends, enemies, family) material things, sinful opportunities, employment, recreation, time (past, present and future), worship and a host of other things. What do we choose? Why do we choose it? Are we choosing that which would please God.

### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) Will a righteous man's son always choose to follow in his father's steps (Ezk 18:5-13)?
  - 2) Is a wicked man's son doomed to repeat his father's wicked ways (Ezk 18:14-18)?
  - 3) Is a wicked man necessarily doomed by his own sins (Ezk 18:21-23)?
  - 4) From where do the things which defile a man originate (Mt 15:17-20)?
  - 5) Can one be guilty of sin without committing an overt act? Explain.
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- 6) Look up the word "heart" in a concordance. List three Scriptures where the word refers to inward attitudes.
  
  - 7) What was God's assessment of the human heart in Jer 17:9-10? Compare this observation with conditions in Noah's day (Gen 6:5).
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## *Lesson 2. The Framework for 'Attitude-shaping'*

### **1. Two Competing Attitude Shapers**

Simply put, our attitudes will be formed by our respect for God and His word, or they will be molded by Satan. This can be true even if we offer Satan no conscious service. Acceptable attitudes are those which conform to the will of God; all else is of the devil.

Jn 8:30-47 – Jesus has come from God to do His will among mankind. The Jewish leaders (especially the Pharisees) opposed His teaching, His actions and His purpose. This opposition gradually grew murderous, and Jesus confronts them in this passage.

- 1) What is the origin of the things spoken by Jesus?
- 2) Who did the Jews insist was their father? If God were their true father, what would their attitude be toward Jesus?
- 3) Who did Jesus say was their real father? How are they connected to him?
- 4) Who hears God's words? Why did the Pharisees not hear Jesus?

1 Jn 2:15-17 – John makes this same distinction but refers to anti-God sentiment as "the world." Thayer defines *kosmos* in this context as: "worldly affairs; the aggregate of things earthly; the whole circle of earthly goods, endowments, riches, advantages, pleasures, etc., which, although hollow and frail and fleeting, stir desire, seduce from God and are obstacles to the cause of Christ" (p. 357). This world has been so corrupted by Satan and is so much under his spell that this meaning of "world" is synonymous with evil. Those who are "of the world" or worldly are evil. How does John characterize this evil world (of his day or our day)?

Note the distinction in 1 Jn 4:4-5. Who does the world hear?

Mt 15:10-20 – The wicked influence of the world affects the way a man thinks. It is not some outward corruption, like radiation poisoning, which compromises and destroys tissue upon contact. Rather, worldliness is a subversion of the mind, the attitudes or heart of a man. Vine says on the term "heart": "The word [kardia, jj] came to stand for man's entire mental and moral activity, both the rational and the emotional elements. In other words, the heart is used figuratively for the hidden springs of the personal life. 'The Bible describes human depravity as in the "heart," because sin is a principle which has its seat in the center of man's inward life, and then "defiles" the whole circuit of his action'" (p. 297, quoting also Hastings Bible Dictionary). The Pharisees put so much stock in ritual or ceremonial actions while their hearts remained polluted. Jesus addressed this mistaken notion in this passage.

### **2. Heart – i.e. Mind**

The mind that is ordered according to the principles of this world instead of higher, spiritual principles is called "carnal" or "fleshly." This is a life that is "sensual, controlled by animal appetites, governed by human nature, instead of by the Spirit of God, 1 Cor 3:3 ... having its seat in the animal nature, or excited by it, 1 Pet 2:11" (Vine, p. 89).

Further documentation of inward corruption comes from James. The term "wisdom" is used in contrasting applications: wisdom that is from above (Jas 3:17-18) and wisdom that has its origin in an evil realm (3:13-16). Vine says of the term "sensual": "here relating perhaps more especially to the mind, a wisdom in accordance with, or springing from, the corrupt desires and affections" (p. 427).

1. What attitudes spring from earthly, sensual, demonic wisdom?
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2. What effect do they have?

**3. Spiritual Renewal - Christ**

Eph 4:17-19 – Paul here describes the state of mind of the Gentiles, pagans who have for centuries been steeped in humanistic thinking. List the terms that describe their attitudes:

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 5. |
| 2. | 6. |
| 3. | 7. |
| 4. |    |

Eph 4:20-24 – Paul has mentioned the above mindset to remind the Ephesians that they should “no longer walk” this way (4:17). The key is “you have not so learned Christ” (4:20). The one taught by the Lord learns that he must “put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man ... and be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (4:22-23).

Rom 12:1-2 – How does Paul describe spiritual transformation? Is this passage an exhortation to the unsaved?

The very essence of Christianity focuses on a Person: Jesus Christ. It is His sacrifice of Himself that gives us life. It is His perfect life that models what God always wanted from man, and was always disappointed. It is His character in action that sets the example of how we should think of our Heavenly Father, of others, even of ourselves. It is His authority and power that now holds sway over the universe and will call us to account for our attitudes and the actions that spring from them. It is important that we see clearly and fully that our devotion is to a Person – Jesus, the Son of God and our Savior.

Gal 2:20 – This is one of the most comprehensive statements of personal commitment in the New Testament. Certainly Paul saw Jesus as a real Person more clearly than any other, first as his enemy and then as his master. When confronted with the enormity of his crime

against the Lord, Paul turned his mind from rebellion to devotion (repentance).

1. What is Paul’s mindset about his earthly life, ambitions, interests, etc.?

2. What motivates Paul to feel this way?

3. Compare this sentiment with 2 Cor 4:10-12. What does Paul mean in this passage?

Of course, it was Christ’s inward attitudes that caused Him to serve ungrateful men, exhaust Himself in caring for others, abide the flaws and foibles of His closest associates and forgive His murderers in the midst of the most heinous act ever committed. In Jesus God models what He wants us to be. Christians don’t merely give homage to a great man or collect a few tokens of memorabilia; no, we strive to reproduce His character in ourselves.

The goal of being Christ-like takes us far beyond merely trying to emulate a few admirable characteristics of Jesus. No, what we have committed ourselves to is a lifetime endeavor of trying to be like Him in the totality of our character.

Eph 4:7-16:

1. What happened on earth as a result of Christ’s ascension?

2. What gifts were given unto the objective of “filling all things”?

3. What is each individual’s goal according to 4:13?

4. Who helps us reach this goal?

5. What is essential to the process of maturity according to 4:14-15?

Rom 6:1-14 – Paul is arguing against his detractors who say that salvation by grace

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through faith amounts to license to sin. In this passage he argues that the changed relationship of a man to Christ should result in a changed attitude toward sin.

1. At what point does one "die to sin" (6:2-3)? What events from the life of Christ are depicted in this action?

2. In what way is a Christian "freed from sin" (6:7)? Freed from the inclination to sin?

3. Explain the Christian's "newness of life" in view of 6:8-11. How should our attitude toward sin be changed due to this spiritual death and rebirth? What role does repentance play in this?

### ***3. Led by the Spirit***

Rom 8:1-17 - When the Christian turns away from vain and self-centered thinking and enthrones Jesus in His heart, he commits himself to live according to divine truth and holiness. As noted above, Paul in Romans is addressing those who accuse him of teaching that, according to grace, sin is irrelevant. Christians can participate in sin, for then they will merely receive more grace from God to His glory. Paul points out the inconsistency of such notions and stresses

### ***Questions for Discussion***

1) How is the world contrasted with God in Jas 4:4?

2) In Matt. 15:10-20, what does Jesus mean when He refers to things that "proceed out of the mouth"? What is the origin of such behavior?

3) 1 Cor 3:3 - How were the Corinthians still "carnal?" How does a carnal mind act?

the spiritual obligation of the Christian to "live according to the (s)Spirit" (Rom 8:5 - Whether the translation should be Spirit or spirit is debatable; the context must help decide.). Why is there no condemnation to those in Christ (8:1-2)?

Since Christ "condemned sin in the flesh," by His perfect life showed the folly of sin and by His death provided atonement for it, what should be the Christian's mindset according to:

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| a. 8:1 - | e. 8:10 - |
| b. 8:5 - | f. 8:12 - |
| c. 8:6 - | g. 8:13 - |
| d. 8:9 - | h. 8:14 - |

2 Cor 10:3-5 - As Paul contemplates the spiritual struggle between evil and righteousness and his role in defending righteousness, he states that he fights not with carnal (evil) tactics but godly ones. But he also states his objective: "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (10:5). This is where the battlefield lies: in the mind of each and every person. Our attitudes will draw us in one direction or another: toward obedience or away from it. It is vitally important that we examine our hearts and govern our thinking so that the principles of godliness hold sway and direct our actions properly. Why do you think "every" thought is of such importance?

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- 4) Rom 8:6 – Contrast the outcome of the carnal mind vs. the spiritual mind.
  
  - 5) What attitudes of Christ are urged upon us in the following passages? Ph 2:5-8 – “Let this mind be in you ...”: 1 Pet 2:21 – “Leaving us an example ...”: 1 Pet 4:1 – “Arm yourselves with the same mind ...”: Rom 13:14 – “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ ...”: Heb 12:2 – “Looking unto Jesus ...”
  
  - 6) What figurative images have been used in the passages in this lesson to describe the Christian’s deliverance from sin and moral obligation to live obediently and righteously?
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### *Lesson 3. The Christian's Attitude toward God*

#### **1. A Comprehensive View of God**

The mistake of the atheist is not to believe in God at all. Being indifferent toward God, any agreeable attitude of the atheist is only accidental. But the mistake of the believer is to have a one-sided or incomplete view of God. Some stress God's grace to the exclusion of His intolerance of willful disobedience. Others see God only as an exacting taskmaster who can never be satisfied, rather than a loving, patient Father. Yet to others God is merely a reflection of their own attitudes rather than a personal Being with a will of His own.

Thus, one element of spiritual growth is to become acquainted with God's various characteristics and to let those shape our attitudes toward Him.

#### **2. God: Our Creator**

When one considers the raw power of God to create "ex nihilo" ("out of nothing" – Heb 11:3), when one ponders the complexity of the universe from the sub-atomic to the galactic level and the knowledge behind its design (Ps 104:24), when one reflects upon the power to create human personality, certain attitudes will be forthcoming from the proper heart.

**Humility:** *"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?"* (Ps 8:3-4). All study of the physical universe is merely an attempt to understand what God has already done. Scientists are constantly discovering new things that stretch their credulity and overturn previous theories and assumptions. Proper regard for the creative power of God should deflate our pride.

**Reverence:** *"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth ... Let all the*

*earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"* (Ps 33:6, 8-9).

The term "fear" carries a powerful, negative connotation in the English language. It may conjure the idea of a horrible creature from which we must flee in terror. But the fear and reverence we are to have of God is a deep respect that drives us **to** Him and seeks to please Him in every way.

*"Do you not fear Me?" says the Lord. "Will you not tremble at My presence, who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass*

*beyond it ... but this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; they have revolted and departed. They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the Lord our God, Who gives rain, both the*

**phobos:** ... reverential fear of God as a controlling motive of the life, in matters spiritual and moral, not a mere fear of His power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him, a fear which banishes the terror that shrinks from His presence, Rom 8:15, and which influences the disposition and attitude of one whose circumstances are guided by trust in God ... (Vine, Vol. 2, p. 84).

*former and the latter, in its season ..."* (Jer 5:22-24).

**Submission:** Judah had no excuse for its defiance and rebellion, for they had witnessed the power of God throughout their history. But the human will has a limitless capacity for stubbornness and selfishness. These need to be replaced with submissiveness. Submission is the attitude of compliance, obedience and meekness. It does not look for loop-holes; it does not dig its heels in; it does not make excuses. Submissiveness eagerly surrenders to the will of God out of respect for who and what He is.

*"Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?"* (Heb 12:9).

### **3. God: The Source of Our Blessings**

In a very real sense, everything good and beneficial to us in this life finds its root in God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (Jas 1:17). "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good ... there is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing" (Ps 34:8-10). Everything God created was "good"; i.e., it was properly made to satisfy the purposes of God. From the food we eat to the clothes we wear, from fire that warms us to the stars that inspire us, from medicine to sunlight, from rain to microbes, from mates to gainful labor – all good and honorable blessings are made possible by the planning and provision of God. What, then, should be our attitude toward the One who exercises such great power to our good?

**Gratitude:** Just as we should exhibit thankfulness toward our fellow man who grants us favor and blessing, so we should be profoundly grateful to God for all He has provided.

Many of the Psalms enjoin thanksgiving. Among them are: 50:12-15; 69:30-33; 100:4-5; 107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31. Likewise the NT exhorts thankfulness: Ph 4:6; 1 Th 5:18; 1 Tim 2:1-3. Constant thankfulness reminds us of how good God is, how fortunate we are to be recipients of His benevolence, and that the good things of life far outweigh the bad.

**Confidence:** If God has consistently demonstrated such goodness and generosity to man down through the ages, and if we can examine our own lives and see evidence of His benevolence to us, should it not instill confidence in us as we face the uncertainties of the future? We may suffer doubt about many things in life, but we must not allow doubts to arise in our hearts about God's care for us and His willingness to help us. The truth is that even in our darkest hours, we are surrounded by more blessings than our senses can detect. God is always working behind the scenes to create a path that we can safely tread. Granted, that path may not always take us where we want to

go, but we must trust in God's overriding providence.

### **4. God: Our Redeemer**

The ultimate goodness of God is seen in His redemptive activities spanning the history of time. The entrance of Jesus into the world was not the beginning of the redemptive process, for thousands of years of preparation preceded His coming. God has demonstrated longsuffering, mercy and selflessness in providing a way for us to be saved from our sins. What attitudes should spring from the knowledge that we have been so richly blessed by our Heavenly Father?

**Peace:** We are assured time and time again that, having been redeemed from our sins, we have peace with God (Rom 5:1; Ph 4:7; Col 1:20). Yet I suspect that many Christians continue to look at God in an adversarial way. Perhaps we see Him as implacable, a taskmaster that cannot be satisfied. We stress His expectations, His rules, His demands, His punishment of offenders. Certainly God is not someone to be trifled with. But to the responsive soul who respects God, who grieves over his sin, who loves and appreciates righteousness, and who trusts in God for salvation, God is an ally, a friend, a Father.

*"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"* (Rom 8:31-32).

**Love:** While we have not seen God with our eyes or "met" Him in the sense of being in His immediate presence, we can understand what He has done to save our lives. And we can understand the cost to Him of providing that salvation – the death of His innocent, benevolent Son. There is only one response that is right to such action on our behalf: *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength"* (Mk 12:30). [Keep in mind, this passage was written long before men completely understood the redemptive purposes of God. How much more should we love God above

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those who served Him under the Law of Moses, a system of types and shadows?]

It is this deep, abiding love for God that overcomes fear and trepidation (1 Jn 4:17-18). Even human relationships that are

based upon dread, uncertainty and terror aren't really relationships; they are bondage and misery. God wants us to grow in our love for Him, and the gradual growth of that love displaces fear.

### ***Questions for Discussion***

- 1) Explain this Bible statement: "It is hard for you to kick against the goads."
  
- 2) How did the Israelites come to view their blessings (Dt 8:11-17)? How might we repeat this mistake?
  
- 3) Cite an example when Jesus offered thanks to God. What does this teach us?
  
- 4) Discuss how a Christian might lose his sense of reverence for God.

## ***Lesson 4. The Christian's Attitude toward Worship***

### ***1. A "Going to Church" Mentality***

By the way we refer to worship we often promote the idea that it is something we periodically go to a designated place to do. That is, we confuse the broader concept of worship with the "assembly." At its most basic level, worship is an act of reverence toward God in recognition of His divine glory and power. This is something that can be offered by an individual anytime, anywhere. Having said that, there *are* certain occasions which we have set aside to worship *corporately*. How we view those occasions will in large measure be determined by the value we place upon worship to God on a personal level.

### ***2. Reverence for God***

As these lessons are addressing a *Christian's* attitude toward things, we must assume a degree of reverence for God *already exists* within the believer. But the human capacity to take things for granted, even miraculous things, is well demonstrated throughout history. For example, the Jews persisted in irreverence when God's presence among them was daily demonstrated by a column of fire and smoke. They continued to berate Moses even after God opened the ground and swallowed Korah.

Likewise, even after coming to the Lord in genuine penitence and gratitude it is possible for the Christian to flag in his fervor toward God. We must make constant effort to not let our appreciation of God go stale and wane in our desire to demonstrate our adoration for Him.

### ***3. Losing the Joy of Worship***

God faulted Israel for allowing worship to become a hated drudgery. They said things like, "When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade our wheat?" (Am 8:5). God rebukes them: "And you have been weary of Me, O Israel. You have not brought Me the sheep for your burnt offerings, nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices ..." (Is

43:22-23). Through Malachi He says, "But you profane it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it ... Should I accept this from your hand?" (1:12-13). Thus God accuses Israel of despising His name (Mal 1:6-7). Our attitude toward God will most definitely be manifested in our worship.

### ***4. The Quality of Our Worship***

When our enthusiasm for worship fades, the quality of our worship will suffer. With little true desire to commune with God, our prayers will be shallow and brief. Jesus, on the other hand, engages in frequent and lengthy prayers (cf. Lk 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 11:1). Indeed, it is hard to imagine Jesus lamenting, as some among us do, "I just don't have that much to say in a prayer."

Singing is another act wherein we can directly state our praise to and adoration of God ("*singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*" – Eph 5:19). Regardless of the musical expertise one may possess, the heart that is overflowing with respect and gratitude toward God will be enthusiastic. We betray ourselves by robustly singing with the radio but muting ourselves in worship.

"In Jn 4:20 ... Jesus says that there is no one place to worship. The concrete act is lifted up into the sphere of spirit and truth which now controls it. This does not mean a total spiritualizing of worship but the possibility of true worship at all times and in all places."

[*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 949]

In reference to the observance of the Lord's Supper, Paul directly admonishes us to examine our attitude lest we fall into condemnation: "*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body*" (1 Cor 11:28-29). The element of worship is not in the eating and drinking

*per se* but in the inward appreciation for the sacrifice and its significance.

### **5. Attitude toward the Assembly**

If we have a proper view of God and the privilege of worshiping Him, this will necessarily carry over into our view of the periodic gatherings of the church. A lack of enthusiasm and interest searches for excuses not to attend. Spiritual immaturity allows activities of lesser importance to interfere. When we absent ourselves from worship by using excuses that would not fly with the boss or even get one excused from jury duty, then we are demonstrating something about our deeper feelings toward God.

But even one's diligent attendance does not ensure that his worship is acceptable. Some have a purely social interest in attending worship; others are motivated by guilt and a fear of reprisal for being absent.

It is easy to allow the social elements of worship to overshadow the divine elements. We must constantly remind ourselves that the assembly of the saints is an opportunity to go before the Lord as a group and draw strength from each other in so doing. Corporate worship is not a Biblical "Dating Game," nor is it a fashion show, a sham for visiting relatives or a prelude to eating at Mama's.

Perhaps one of the worst things we have done to undermine a sense of reverence in worship is to put a clock in the auditorium (actually, the *worst* thing is wearing those infernal beeping watches). While I am not in favor of open-ended worship periods or hour-and-a-half sermons, I do think too many are much too conscious of the clock. Various elements of our worship are superficial or rushed so that we may complete everything by the end of the magical hour that we devote to the Lord.

Our hurried, harried, clock-watching way of life makes me wonder whether we would even desire a lengthy, leisurely opportunity of worship. Long concerts or movies, overtime sports events, hours in boats, tree stands or on golf courses, i.e., spending a lot of time *doing things we enjoy*, testify against

our impatience when worship runs a little long. Eternity is an awfully long time to worship God for people who get antsy after an hour.

### **6. Worship vs. Service**

There has been considerable discussion on the subject of what constitutes worship and whether it is to be distinguished by general acts of service and obedience unto the Lord.

Some have maintained that anything and everything a Christian does is worship, for all should be done out of respect for the will of God. They may ridicule a church for differentiating "worship" from "Bible study" on their sign or in advertising. "As if 'Bible study' isn't worship," they scoff.

But it does seem that the term "worship" (Gk. *proskuneo*) is reserved for overt acts of praise or reverence offered to God (or to Satan or to men, for the same word is used in each context).

For example, the wise men traveled far to see the infant Jesus. They told Herod, "For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him" (Mt 2:2). "And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him" (Mt 2:11). Likewise, the leper came and worshiped Jesus (Mt 8:2); the ruler worshiped Jesus as he begged for the life of his deceased daughter (Mt 9:18); the disciples worshiped Jesus in awe after He walked to them on the sea (Mt 14:33).

Many other examples indicate that worship is a specific act of homage to God. It is true that everything we do must be motivated out of respect for God, but strictly speaking I am not worshiping when I discipline my children or go to work. This erroneous idea of worship has led to the corruption of the assembly into gymnastics meets, drama productions, feats of strength and other carnal entertainment. They reason, "Since God gave me this ability, and I am glorifying Him through it, it is an act of worship."

May we cultivate an attitude toward God which is worthy of His great majesty:

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"... let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and

godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29).

### ***Questions for Discussion***

- 1) Look up "worship" in a Strong's Concordance. Which number is found most often in the New Testament? Write down this word and its definition as found in Strong's.
  - 2) How would you answer someone who says, "I don't think it's important to go to church. I don't have to be in a building to worship God." How is he right? Wrong?
  - 3) Discuss some social elements of worship that might interfere with a reverent attitude.
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## *Lesson 5. The Christian's Attitude toward the Scriptures*

### **1. Treasured Correspondence**

Have you ever gotten a letter from someone that had particular significance? Perhaps it was a love letter from your sweetheart or maybe a letter of reconciliation from an estranged friend. We read such letters over and over again, each time reliving the emotions generated by the words.

The Scriptures are a special, detailed correspondence from the mind of God. Those who are Christians acknowledge both the divine origin and inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21) as well as the human agency of the writers. *"But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God ... Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God"* (1 Cor 2:10, 12).

It is not the book itself – the cover, pages and ink – that is special but the very thoughts and principles contained therein. In the Scriptures God has revealed the redemptive threads which gather human history into a coherent purpose. God has revealed the nature of man – his thought processes, ambitions, weaknesses and the divine imprint upon his soul.

In the Bible God speaks of eternal destiny, a matter that consumes our thinking as our life relentlessly speeds toward its end. *"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law"* (Dt 29:29). There is no sense engaging in baseless speculation and guesswork about things which God has not revealed. We can fill our lives with reflection and concentration upon what He *has revealed* and never fully grasp it all. What should our attitudes be toward the correspondence of our Creator to us?

### **2. Hunger and Thirst**

The Scriptures are sometimes spoken of in metaphors related to food such as milk/meat (Heb 5:12-14; 1 Cor 3:1-2). Thus, the corresponding appetite – hunger and thirst – is used to describe one's desire for the Scriptures: *"... as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby"* (1 Pet 2:2). While physical hunger is "built in," spiritual hunger must be created. It comes from the realization that we need resources from outside ourselves if we are to be perfected in faith.

Just as our bodies are fueled and fortified by food, so our spirits are nourished by the insight and instruction of God's word: *"If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed"* (1 Tim 4:6).

Hunger and thirst imply eagerness to eat, not reluctance or apathy. Christians should not have to be coerced into feeding upon the word of God, and those who have little spiritual appetite are yet immature. They are like the young child out playing and having too much fun to come in and eat.

### **3. Love for Truth**

If we genuinely love and appreciate the author of the Scriptures, we will have a corresponding affection for what He says. In response to everything God has said, Satan and his allies have issued denials, distortions and disinformation. There is hardly any aspect of God's word that has escaped perversion of some sort.

False prophets and idolaters in the Old Testament opposed truth. The New Testament is likewise replete with warnings against perversions of truth.

**Ac 20:30** – *"Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."* "Perverse" is from the Gk. word *diastrepho*,

"to distort, twist" (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 180). Even some among the elders in Ephesus, taught faithfully by Paul, would twist the truth out of shape.

**Gal 1:7** – "... *but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ...*". This refers to the Judaizers who did so much damage to Paul's influence. "Pervert" is from the Gk. word *metastrepho*, "to transform into something of an opposite character" (ibid).

**1 Tim 4:1-2** – "... *in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy ...*".

**1 Tim 6:3-5** – "*If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wrangling of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth ...*".

**2 Tim 4:3-4** – "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*"

#### **4. Balancing Love for Truth**

Since the Scriptures reveal the very thoughts and will of God, our devotion to Him will elevate our respect for His word above all else. If we love someone else more than we love the truth, then we become idolaters.

Some put their family ties above the truth. When some family member becomes unfaithful, they resist and criticize congregational efforts to discipline. Others deny plain words of Scripture because they know their loved one did not believe and practice what the Scriptures taught. Some may condone a preacher or teacher who fosters error because they feel so attached to him.

Our personal feelings can interfere with loyalty to the truth. Paul saw this principle at work in Peter, who fell into hypocrisy along with Barnabas (Gal 2:11-13). His assessment: "*But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the **truth of the gospel ...***" (2:14). Paul saw a much deeper, more serious problem in the shunning of the Gentile brethren than just hurt feelings; he saw a sinful compromise of the truth.

On the other hand we must not let blind zeal turn us into nitpickers, cranks and zealots who create suspicion and foment controversy. The New Testament condemns this mindset as well as cowardly compromise:

**1 Tim 1:4, 6-7** – "... *nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith ... from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.*"

**Tit 3:9** – "*But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.*"

We must channel our love for God and respect for His word into being good *students* of the Scriptures. We must know our own beliefs and the basis for them; we must prepare ourselves to competently defend the truth against detractors; we must examine ourselves in light of the Scriptures to see our flaws and shortcomings.

**Conclusion:** It is our attitude toward the truth more than anything else – formal education, feeble memory, length of time as a Christian – that will determine how much we know, retain and can utilize. May we all say with the Psalmist:

*"My heart stands in awe of your word. I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure. I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law. Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments. Great peace have those who love Your law, and*

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*nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps 119:161-165).*

### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) What can we learn from the Jews regarding Bible study (Jn 5:39-47; Ac 13:27)?
  
  - 2) How can our emotions interfere with our acceptance of the truth?
  
  - 3) What factors lead to a genuine appetite for God’s word?
  
  - 4) Discuss the balance between patience with a young Christian with imperfect knowledge and rebuke of a contentious brother. How can we distinguish between them?
  
  - 5) What must accompany the hearing of the word (cf. Jas 1:22-25; 1 Jn 3:18)?
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## *Lesson 6. The Christian's Attitude toward Satan*

### **1. Why This Study?**

On first glance this lesson may appear to be superfluous because the issue seems so obvious. Except for the deranged Satanist (of which there are not a few), most everyone would automatically say that Satan must be regarded as abhorrent and should be resisted.

But if the issue is so clear, why do so many succumb to his influence? Perhaps the Great Adversary is more powerful and elusive than we generally think.

### **2. The Adversary of Man**

The Biblical terminology and description of Satan should naturally evoke revulsion from every thinking person. Vine notes that "Satan is not simply the personification of evil influences in the heart, for he tempted Christ, in whose heart no evil thought could ever have arisen" (Vol. 3, p. 320). Rather, Satan is a personal being, of uncertain origin, which is intent upon the destruction of man.

**Satan:** This is a transliteration of the Gk. *satanas* which means "adversary." It was Satan who tempted Jesus (Mt 4:10); it was Satan who entered Judas to provoke betrayal (Lk 22:3); it was Satan who asked to sift Peter like wheat (Lk 22:31); it was Satan who influenced Ananias and Sapphira to lie (Ac 5:3). It is clear from such references that Satan's purpose is to lead men astray from God.

**The Devil:** The meaning of *diabolos* is "an accuser, a slanderer" (Vine, Vol. 1, p. 306). Vine further notes: "From it the English word "Devil" is derived, and should be applied only to Satan, as a proper name. *Daimon*, a demon, is frequently, but wrongly, translated "devil;" it should always be translated "demon" ... There is one Devil, there are many demons. Being the malignant enemy of God and man, he accuses man to God" (ibid).

John said "the devil has sinned from the beginning" (1 Jn 3:8). Jesus concurs: "He

was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him" (Jn 8:44). Those who sin have been "taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Tim 2:26).

We should picture the devil, not in a red suit with horns, cloven hooves and a pointed tail but a horribly evil being that is intent upon our destruction. What he *looks like* is of no consequence; we must be acquainted with his activities, his methods and his motives.

### **3. A Being of Great Power**

Satan is also identified as "prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2). Paul describes our struggle against him and his minions: "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Eph 6:12).

Satan has *never failed* in his attempts to incite rebellion and disobedience against God. Every person (of responsible mental capacity) who has ever lived has been swayed by him. In fact, so total and complete is his influence in the world that the New Testament speaks of him as its "ruler" (cf. Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

Some have supposed that demons fill the literal air around us ... It seems rather, that Paul is speaking of the existing moral atmosphere rather than the literal air that we breathe. He is metaphorically saying that the Devil and his subordinates have caused human society to be so filled with their evil that to live among men is to breathe their evil. The prevailing mood or moral affinity of man is sinful and we are all surrounded by it.

[C.G. Caldwell, *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 71]

But just how powerful is Satan? It is obvious that he is intelligent, but is he omniscient? While he seems to know us and our weaknesses, he apparently did not realize

that his destruction of Jesus would provide redemption for sin. Thus he brought ultimate defeat to himself in his all-out effort to destroy the Son of God (cf. Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8).

How pervasive is Satan? Is he omnipresent like God – everywhere all at once? When Jesus resisted him, "*the devil left Him*" (Mt 4:11). Evidently, he was not where Jesus was; thus he is not omnipresent. Further, we are told that if we resist him he will flee from us (Jas 4:7).

While it appears that there are certain things that Satan cannot know and do, he remains very potent and dangerous. Paul even accuses him of hindering his travels (1 Th 2:18).

#### **4. The Devil Is Not a Joke**

Satan is not to be trifled with; he deserves more credit than to be made the butt of a joke. He is a formidable, homicidal enemy deserving of the greatest respect. We should study him and our own weaknesses and anticipate where he will attack. So many parallels can be drawn between Satan and the terrorist attacks that occurred in our nation last year. We took terrorism for granted; we underestimated how far hatred was willing to go in harming us; we let our guard down. And we paid for it. So it is with Satan. He deserves our utmost caution and attention (1 Pet 5:8). We will discuss his "wiles" in the next lesson.

#### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) What did Satan suggest about Job's faithfulness to God (Job 1:11; 2:5)?
  - 2) How did Satan represent the commandments of God to Eve (Gen 3:4-5)? How does Paul characterize his action in 2 Cor 11:3?
  - 3) In what sense do you think Satan "entered" Judas (Lk 22:3)?
  - 4) What is the significance of everlasting fire in Mt 25:41?
  - 5) Cite a passage which indicates that Satan uses human agents to do his bidding.
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## *Lesson 7. The Christian's Attitude toward Sin*

### **1. Sin: What Is It?**

In order to become a Christian in the first place, each individual must be confronted by the enormity of sin. It is a heart broken by

Whereas the guilt of sin clearly falls upon that one who commits the sin, the direct and sometimes devastating effects or consequences of sin may ravage sons, daughters, and later generations of the sinner ... Contemporarily, children of a heavy drinker of alcoholic beverages may be born with severe handicaps, mental and/or physical. And few sights are as pathetic as newborn infants whose father or mother was addicted to drugs, or infected with AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhea, or any of many other social diseases. But the consequences are not to be confused with guilt. And any parent worthy of the name should be more than willing to avoid any indulgence whatever which might bring dire results to the offspring.

(Brant Lee Doty, *What the Bible Says About Sin*, p. 69.)

sin that casts aside pride and humbly, penitently comes to God (Ps 51:17). It is the feeling of futility when one's sinfulness is compared to the power and grace of God (Lk 5:8). It is the anguish heard in the murderers of Jesus: "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" (Ac 2:37). It is the resignation of Saul of Tarsus who, realizing the magnitude of his crime, simply asks, "*Lord, what do You want me to do?*" (Ac 9:6).

The source of such devastation to a man's soul is the knowledge that one has violated the laws and precepts of God Almighty. "*Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness*" (1 Jn 3:4). Rebellious behavior is bad enough, but it is magnified by the goodness of God. When we sin we insult our Creator who has loved us and blessed our existence with "*every good gift and every perfect gift*" (Jas 1:17).

When David sinned with Bathsheba, God questioned him: "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you

despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His *sight?*" (2 Sam 12:8-9). David had repaid the goodness of God with gross selfishness and disobedience.

More than merely being an affront to God, violating the will of the Sovereign Almighty is an act that severs the sinner from God and, thus, eternal life. "*The wages of sin is death ...*" (Rom 6:23); "*the soul who sins shall die*" (Ezk 18:4, 20); "*you ... were dead in trespasses and sins*" (Eph 2:1). Whether we wish it to be so or not, whether we sense it or not, God's word assures us that transgressing the law of God results in eternal destruction.

### **2. Sin and Coming to Christ**

When a man is truly stricken by the nature and consequences of his sin, he comes to Christ with gratitude and relief that the effects of sin can be reversed. Not only does he enjoy the unburdening of his conscience and the banishment of unreasonable fear, there should be a corresponding desire to avoid the attitudes and behavior that endangered him to begin with.

Paul addresses this as he answers his critics who charge him with a perverted view of grace. They accused Paul of encouraging sin by teaching that man is saved by grace through faith: "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!*" (Rom 6:1). Paul answers with several points:

1) We should no longer be slaves of sin (Rom 6:6). Paul is not here denying that Christians will sin, he is dealing with the *attitude* of the sinner. We are not to present ourselves as "*slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness*" (6:19). We are not to indifferently remain in sin but continually pursue righteousness and holiness.

2) We should reckon ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God (Rom 6:11). As a dead person is no longer responsive to the physical environment, even so we should "deaden" ourselves to the allurements of sin. "Our old man was crucified with Him" at conversion (6:6); that is, in view of the great price that was paid by Jesus at the cross, we should strive to sever all ties with sin, thus figuratively dying to it.

3) We should not obey sin and the lusts which give it its power (Rom 6:12). When we come to Christ we are called upon to render obedience to God in order to escape from sin: "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (6:17-18). As we begin a life of deliberate, decisive obedience to God, we begin to break the bonds which have so long held us captive. We are constantly reminded of the "things of which you are now ashamed" (6:21).

### **3. Continually Battling Sin**

If sin is a terrible scourge on our soul and places us in eternal peril, why are we continually drawn back to it? Though we may hate and be repulsed by sin on an intellectual level, why are we attracted to it on an emotional level? This is one of the greatest frustrations that a Christian will ever face, and the failure to resolve it can drive one away from God in disgust and self-loathing.

Our existence in this world is lived in the context of sin. We live in sin for varying periods of time before we become Christians, thus conditioning ourselves to sinful habits and desires. We live in fleshly bodies with godly appetites that can be satisfied in so many unlawful ways. And, for some reason, we seem to be strongly attracted to what is forbidden. Just ask Eve about the fruit, Lot's wife about looking back at Sodom, Achan about the treasures of Jericho and David about Bathsheba.

Further, we often gravitate toward behaviors and attitudes that inflate our sense of self-importance. This was noted in Lesson Five. We can even become more concerned with our own exaltation that we place ourselves above God. Some live by the maxim in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "To reign is worth ambition though in hell: Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Dealing with sin is ultimately a battle of submission between God and Self.

James makes it clear that our own weaknesses make us susceptible to Satan's whisperings: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 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 1:13-15).

Make no mistake: sin is pleasurable. We are drawn to it in part by empty promises and false expectations fostered by Satan. Sin is never as good as temptation makes it look. On the other hand, there *are* certain exciting, euphoric and stimulating aspects to sin. They may be temporary and fleeting, but they are powerful nonetheless. There may be devastating consequences to enjoying these unbridled pleasures, but we will rationalize them nonetheless. Humans by the millions forfeit eternity for the sake of the "passing pleasures of sin" (Heb 11:25).

### **4. The Bottom Line**

Satan is shrewd, clever and very persuasive. Our attitude toward sin should be to avoid it at all costs, to give it a wide berth. But all too often we are drawn to it like moths to the flame. We must constantly remind ourselves of the fatal, intoxicating and corrosive nature of sin and be aware of Satan's "devices" (2 Cor 2:11). **Remember:** *You don't have to have a college degree to go to heaven, but you'd better be smarter than the devil!*

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### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) Look up the word "device" in Vine's dictionary, definition #2, NOEMA. What is the main thought of the word? What does this suggest about "Satan's devices"?
  - 2) List three Bible synonyms of "sin" (a synonym is a word that means the same thing).
  - 3) How might Christians neutralize or offset the pleasurable aspects of sinful behavior?
  - 4) How should we counteract a desire to transgress?
  - 5) Though the consequences of David's sin with Bathsheba were broad, what was his main thought as he reflected upon his transgression (Ps 51:4)?
  - 6) How did Jesus respond to Satan's temptations in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11)?
  - 7) How does naiveté affect younger Christians in regard to temptations they face? How can older Christians help them?
  - 8) How might temptations change as we age?
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## ***Lesson 8. The Christian's Attitude toward Death***

### ***1. Death: The Natural End of Life***

Ideally, the end of earthly life is the beginning of eternal fellowship in the very presence of God. It is not an end but a transition from a lower form of existence to a higher form. As such, death should not be feared but eagerly anticipated.

So, what's the problem? What makes death the horrible, dreaded event that it is?

Several factors make it so. First, God has instilled within each of the instinct of survival. We simply are programmed to live, and we will fight to preserve ourselves at almost any cost. If not for this strong instinct, we would surrender too easily to the hardships of earthly life.

Second, the physical process of expiring can be arduous and unpleasant. We fear the pain and suffering we may have to endure as life draws to an end.

Third, dying is a new experience; you can't "practice" it. Anything new carries the anxiety of the unknown. Also, we only have a sketchy explanation of the nature of existence beyond death. We "cross the Jordan" totally on the basis of faith.

Fourth, death is the ultimate goodbye. The dying leave loved ones behind, and the living must say a painful farewell to those who have meant so much to them in this life. For these and other reasons, death is a grievous reality of life.

### ***2. Death and Sin***

But the greatest source of dread when contemplating death is the existence of sin. Paul said, "*The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law*" (1 Cor 15:56). Paul here says that the "sting" of death, the element that is most painful and hurtful, is due to sin. Sin is what puts our eternal welfare in jeopardy; it raises doubt, makes us feel unworthy, causes us to fret over and be repelled by the prospect of dying. If not

for sin, we would welcome death as a reunion with our glorious Creator.

But how is law the "strength of sin"? "*Sin is not imputed when there is no law*" (Rom 5:13). Conversely, *sin is imputed* when there is law, because all men will violate law (Rom 3:9, 23). Thus "*as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse ... But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident*" (Gal 3:10-11).

On the basis of *law only*, all men are sinners and the death of each one registers a victory for Satan. Consequently, fear of death held men in bondage so long as law alone ruled over man (Heb 2:15).

### ***3. Free from Law; Free from Sin***

The "good news," the gospel of Jesus Christ, is summarized in this: God has made available *another way besides law alone* for man to be in fellowship with Him. This way is the way of faith, the attitude of love and submission to God that secures forgiveness for the transgressions of law. It is expressed in the recognition of His Son as Savior, in conforming to His character, in devotion of life to the One who died for us.

The problem didn't begin with death. It began farther back than death. It began with sin which injected into us, *death*. But sin has been dealt with. And the law which was used by sin to kill us (Rom. 7:8, 13) has been satisfied by the finished work of Jesus Christ. And while sin was powerful and death was universal, the Lord God was on our side! And his lovely Prince, the Lord Jesus Christ, was representing us. We weren't left alone to wrestle with what turned out to be too powerful for us. We were *given* the victory, we didn't earn it!

(Jim McGuiggan, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, pp. 204-205)

It is this all-encompassing word "faith," which stands in opposition to "law," that removes the dread of sin and of death.

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1) "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed ... even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe" (Rom 3:21-22).

2) "*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law*" (Rom 3:28).

3) "Christ has re-deemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us ... For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law" (Gal 3:13, 21).

4) "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb 2:14-15).

5) "*The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.* But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:56-57).

#### **4. The Christian's Perspective on Death**

For those who come to have genuine confidence in salvation by grace through faith (Eph 2:8), the fear of dying that comes from uncertainty and guilt is conquered.

Paul is the most inspiring example of this attitude: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you" (Ph 1:21-24).

Further, the Christian cultivates a desire to be in heaven and away from the pain, suffering, loss, disappointment and all the other unsavory characteristics of living in a world dominated by sin.

Thus Paul says, "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8).

#### **5. Death Is Not To Be Chosen**

Someone might accuse Christians of being less than committed to earthly life because of their heavenly hopes. Some mentally unbalanced people have even killed their children on the pretense of "sending them to heaven." But Christians, though looking forward to life hereafter, are fiercely devoted to the preservation of life. This grows out of our respect for God who gives life and who alone has the prerogative to take it away. Christians should be opposed to euthanasia, assisted suicide, abortion and other forms of unlawful death.

When death comes, we have every reason to be confident and assured of God's providential care. But we are not to seek death or a premature end of life. We should not recklessly court death on the mistaken notion that we can "go live with Jesus." Jesus expects us to live according to His purposes and serve Him faithfully. If God decides that our life not run its full course, as in the case of the prophet John or Stephen or the apostle James, then that is *His end of the stick*. May we humbly and confidently accept His will whatever it may be.

#### **6. The Hope of Resurrection**

As time and circumstance slowly but inevitably erode earthly hopes and dreams, the child of God embraces more strongly the prospect of resurrection from the dead. The idea of continued existence coupled with the raising and transform-ing of the body runs counter to all our earthly experience. At this point we must lean most heavily upon the revelation of God.

Paul said, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). Part of that daily renewal is the growing confidence that death is not the end but the beginning of our existence, for nothing in this world can possibly compare to eternity in the presence of God.

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## *The Heart of the Matter*

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### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) How did Jesus express Himself concerning death when it was drawing near?
  - 2) What moral principle results when the idea of resurrection is rejected (1 Cor 15:32)?
  - 3) In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, did David say he would not fear death? Where did his strength lie?
  - 4) Explain how the strength of sin is the law (1 Cor 15:56). How has this been resolved?
  - 5) Describe Paul's confidence when facing death in 2 Tim 4:6-8.
  - 6) Discuss some wrong ways in which people try to deal with the possibility of dying.
  - 7) What hope enabled Paul to endure the rigors of apostleship (Ph 3:10-11)?
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## *Lesson 9. The Christian's Attitude toward Others*

### **1. We Are Not Alone**

We share this planet and our very lives with others. No man is an island; few among us are total orphans. We are usually nurtured in families; we grow up to have families of our own. We will be educated among people; work among people; enjoy leisure time and activities among people. This is what God intended, for He made us social creatures.

Even as we are endowed with free will, so are others. As we hold certain very definite opinions, so do others. Our perspectives, convictions and values will differ with others from childhood through our golden years. How we come to view other people, and what our attitudes toward them are, will in large measure determine where we spend eternity.

### **2. Made in God's Image**

In spite of the many differences between individual people, the great equalizer is that we are made by a common Creator.

**Job 31:13-15** – *"If I have despised the cause of my manservant or my maidservant when they complained against me, what then shall I do when God rises up? When He punishes, how shall I answer Him? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?"*

**Ac 17:26** – *"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation ...".*

**Jas 3:9** – *"With it (the tongue, jj) we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God."*

Whatever the failures of others (and they can be significant), we must not adopt a sub-human view of our fellow man. All men are created in the image of God, though that image may have become tarnished. But

even sinful men who so faintly resemble God are objects of His love.

### **3. God So Loved the World...**

The most well-known Bible verse speaks of God's love for a corrupt world (Jn 3: 16). If He is the creator, lawgiver and ultimate judge and He continues to love those in sin, how can we who are other fellow-creatures do less?

Jesus, Paul and James all summarize the law as the obligation to love our neighbor: Mk 12:30-33; Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:13-14; Jas 2:8. As members of the human race, we are called to support and serve each other. The lofty esteem in which we naturally hold each other is seen when a person's life is in jeopardy. It is not uncommon to see people risk their lives to save another and then reject praise as a hero. In such inspiring events we see the true esteem we should hold for one another as members of the same human family.

### **4. The Spiritually Lost**

But if concern for the physical well-being of our fellow man is apparent, how much deeper should be our interest in his spiritual condition?

Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all, Rom. 15:2, and works no ill to any, 13:8-10; love seeks opportunity to do good to "all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith," Gal. 6:10. [W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Vol. 3, p. 21]

Think of what Jesus gave up to "come to save that which was lost" (Mt 18:11). As people volunteer their medical skills in impoverished countries, so Jesus likens His association with sinners to a physician tending to the sick (Mt 9:12). As a man who lost his sheep, a woman her money and a

man his son, so God has made efforts to find and restore men who have wandered from Him (Lk 15).

We are perhaps frustrated by sinners' lack of interest in their own alienation from God. Blinded by Satan and filled with selfishness and greed, those who are lost often don't feel lost. Perhaps there are fleeting moments when an event reminds them of their mortality or pricks their conscience, but our society is increasingly insensitive to its own sinfulness. We must not let this make us indifferent to their spiritual condition. We must always be filled with loving concern for those who are willing to let us help them. Leading someone to Christ is the most significant achievement one can enjoy in this life.

### **5. Others in the Family**

The people we will have the most in common with in this life will be those who share our spiritual outlook and heavenly goals. All that God has done throughout history has been unto the purpose of culling from the masses of humanity a spiritual family of believers. When we come to appreciate God as our heavenly Father, and the love and mercy that He has shown for us, then we will have a natural affection for others who likewise share in our salvation. Thus the Scriptures abound with passages commanding due regard for our brethren:

**Phil 2:1-4** – “... fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind ...”.

**Eph 4:32** – “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.”

**1 Th 3:12** – “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you.”

**1 Th 4:9** – “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”

**Rom 15:5** – “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded

*toward one another, according to Christ Jesus...”.*

Many other exhortations to brotherly love are sprinkled throughout the New Testament. But this love is not automatic; it must be cultivated and developed.

We may be more frustrated and disappointed by the failures and foibles of our brethren than people in the world. First, we spend more time together and are more intimately acquainted with each other. “Familiarity breeds contempt,” says the old adage, and our feelings for each other can become frayed because of our constant associations. Secondly, it is natural to have higher expectations of each other because of our shared values and insights. Thus when someone falls short of our expectations, we can react with a lack of patience and sympathy.

### **6. The Failure to Love**

It is tragic when God's people do not love each other as they should. First, lack of due regard mars the image of Christ. Local churches can divide into cliques or be split asunder entirely. Much spiritual energy and vitality is drained from the community, and instead of working diligently for the Lord brethren work against each other.

The Corinthian brethren were plagued by petty jealousies and carnal bickering. James asks his readers: “*Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask ... Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?*” (Jas 4:1-4).

One thing is certain: If we are the cause of such animosity and discord, we cut ourselves off from God: “*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him*” (1 Jn 3:14-15).

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### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) Discuss the "instinct" to save another human being's life at all cost.
  
  - 2) How did Paul see his personal liberties in light of saving souls (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23)?
  
  - 3) What is the highest display of love for a brother (1 Jn 3:16; Jn 15:13)? If we are not called upon to die for our brethren, how else can we show our love for them?
  
  - 4) Discuss how we can restore our love for someone who has hurt us deeply.
  
  - 5) How should we react to our enemies' needs (cf. Rom 12:20; Mt 5:44)?
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## *Lesson 10. The Christian's Attitude toward Self*

### **1. Instinctive Selfishness**

We enter this world with a powerful sense of self-concern. Babies are "programmed" to loudly and insistently broadcast their needs so that they will be addressed. After all, the infant can do nothing for itself; it is totally dependent upon others for its care.

But the maturing process should move a person away from self-absorption toward an awareness of others around him. If this change does not occur or is stunted and a person's focus remains primarily upon himself, that life will never fulfill the purposes of God for it.

### **2. Legitimate Personal Needs**

The prospect of survival in this world – to eat, to be sheltered and clothed – demands a great deal of effort and a corresponding amount of rest. Other activities of self-interest are also normal and permissible within reason.

But one of man's greatest personal needs that often go unrecognized is to be valued by others. The person who isolates himself from his fellow man and concentrates only upon himself will be a very lonely and unfulfilled man indeed.

### **3. Self-Love and Self-Esteem**

We hear on every hand by the purveyors of pop psychology that we should love ourselves and esteem ourselves highly. There is certainly a legitimate and healthy realm of self-respect. *"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church"* (Eph 5:29). It is natural for a human being to care for himself physically, and self-harm is abnormal and demented.

Further, a proper love for oneself becomes the basis of our treatment of others. Jesus said, quoting the Law of Moses, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself ..."* (Mk 12:31). His own universal ethic also implies healthy self-regard: *"Therefore, whatever*

*you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets"* (Mt 7:12). Such standards assume that we properly esteem ourselves and seek good things in life. It is true that much physical and emotional harm is done to others by people who hate and despise themselves.

Those with a proper self-image will have healthy relationships with others, and they will seek an eternal relationship with God. To love oneself as a creature of God, wondrously made in His image and likeness, and recognize our worth and value on that basis is not improper.

### **4. Vanity and Pride**

On the other end of the spectrum lies the person who has an inordinate amount of interest in himself and often shows it by attitudes of arrogance or pompousness. Such can arise either through a genuine sense of superiority to others or over-compensation for feelings of inadequacy or insecurity. Whatever the underlying cause, the arrogant person resents anything or anyone that draws attention or acclaim away from them.

Paul exhorts: *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit ..."* (Ph 2:3).

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful; all things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.

[1 Corinthians 10:23-24]

"Conceit" (vainglory, KJV) is a compound word *kenodoxia*, "from *kenos*, vain, empty, *doxa*, glory" (Vine, Vol. 4, p. 182). The adjectival form of the word is found in Gal 5:26: *"Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."*

Haughtiness or pride is condemned as a fleshly and rebellious attitude. Of "haughty" (*huperephanos*) Vine says: "showing oneself above others (*huper*, over, *phainomai*, to appear), though often denoting preeminent,

is always used in the N.T. in the evil sense of arrogant, disdainful, haughty ... Rom 1:30, 2 Tim 3:2, Jas 4:6, 1 Pet 5:5; in the last two it is set in opposition to *tapeinos*, humble, lowly" (Vol. 2, p. 198).

Another word translated "lifted up with pride" (KJV) or "puffed up with pride" (NKJ) in 1 Tim 3:6 and 6:4 means "to wrap in smoke," i.e., to have one's vision obscured by self-importance. Yet another word translated "puffed up" means to inflate, as a bellows (1 Cor 4:16, 18-19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; Col 2:18).

These words all describe attitudes that *go beyond* what is normal self-interest. Such attitudes are not merely self-centered but interfere with the legitimate concern we should have for others.

### 5. Keeping Self in Perspective

Paul exhorts us to "*look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*" (Ph 2:4). Our genuine love for others will lead us to use our resources – time, money, wisdom, etc. – for their good. We are to be stewards, not hoarders, of the blessings God has given to us.

Paul told the Corinthians, "*I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls,*" though he poignantly adds, "*the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved*" (2 Cor 12:15). Jesus certainly wasn't appreciated by the multitudes for which He was dying.

### Questions for Discussion

- 1) Cite a clear example where Satan tried to persuade Jesus to focus upon Himself to the detriment of others.
- 2) What makes some people so sensitive to the real and/or imagined slights or disapproval of others? How can we overcome such debilitating sensitivity?
- 3) Evaluate your own daily routine and identify how much time you have in the course of a day to serve others. Discuss in class how to best use these opportunities.

What is the motivation for subordinating one's needs for the sake of others? It is not because such is always appreciated, but rather it is the very nature of the God we serve. God's selfless love and concern for us surpass any response of our gratefulness or any sense of our intrinsic value.

Jesus often spoke in terms of selflessness:

**Mt 19:30** – "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (cf. 20:16).

**Mt 20:27** – "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave."

**Mt 23:12** – "And whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (cf. Lk 14:11; 18:14).

### 6. What Are We?

The truth is, we are flawed, fallible human beings who have little reason to think that the universe revolves around us. We struggle with sin and temptation; we battle ignorance; we fail others around us through callous indifference or unintentional distraction. We are people in need of grace, mercy and forgiveness. If we truly come to see ourselves in this light, we will find the love and compassion for others that God expects us to have.

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- 4) Discuss the phrase “men will be lovers of themselves” (2 Tim 3:2). To what degree of self-love is Paul speaking?
  
  - 5) In whom should we glory (1 Cor 1:29-31; 10:31; 2 Cor 10:17)? Does this mean we cannot tell others of our achievements?
  
  - 6) Discuss an unhealthy appetite for the approval of men. Consider passages like 2 Cor. 10:12; Jn 5:44; 12:42-43. Whose approval is most important (cf. 2 Cor 10:18; 1 Cor 4:5)?
  
  - 7) How would you reason with a man or woman who hesitated to obey the gospel because they didn't feel worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus?
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## *Lesson 11. The Christian's Attitude toward Employment*

### **1. Work: Activity Ordained of God**

The nature of this world is such that it takes a significant amount of time and effort to sustain life and provide for our needs. While this often appears negative and we might complain about the necessity of labor, God has graciously turned this curse into a blessing.

As punishment for sin, God had ordained that henceforth man would sustain himself "in the sweat of your face ... till you return to the ground" (Gn 3:19). Yet God infused this laborious process with elements of joy and satisfaction: "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God" (Ecc 2:24; cf. 3:12-13; 5:18).

Gainful, productive employment brings structure and focus to life; it occupies attention and energy that might otherwise be directed toward evil designs. And there is a sense of warm fulfillment in having completed a task, in creating something

increasing salary, perks for the privileged and other temporal rewards become the end within itself. Career achievements take precedent in their lives to the detriment of relationships with family and God.

To these people Solomon wisely said: "Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven" (Pr 23:4-5). So many other Biblical admonitions are found to keep work and materialism in balance, yet the warnings often go unheeded.

**The Sluggard.** The other extreme is to lack industry, to be lazy and slack in supporting oneself. Many are the proverbs confronting this attitude: "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise ... How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? ..." (Pr 6:6-11; cf. 24:30-34; 26:13-16).

Some brethren in Thessalonica erroneously believed that the Lord was soon to return, so

"It is necessary to grasp the deep root of this labor-philosophy. As we see it, the apostle is ... proceeding from the idea that, in imitation of Christ's example of self-sacrificing love for his own, those who were saved by grace should become so unselfish that they will loathe the very idea of unnecessarily becoming a burden to their brothers, and, on the other hand, that they will yearn for the opportunity to share what they have with those who are really in need."

(Hendriksen, *Commentary on Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus*, p. 202).

useful, in providing a service for others – a job well done.

### **2. Getting Work Out of Focus**

**The Workaholic.** There are some who spend an inordinate amount of time on their work. This can occur for a variety of reasons. For some, work is escapism: they can escape family responsibilities, spiritual obligations or other tasks deemed undesirable by going to the office or traveling unnecessarily. For others, the goal of work is not providing for needs but a way to define themselves. For these people, promotions,

they quit working (2 Th 3:6-12). Paul calls such a freeloading, welfare state "disorderly" and condemns the "busybodies" who use their idle time to snoop and pry into the affairs of others. The church is not a commune in which all share the fruits of their labor equally. Rather, each is to do his or her part to supply their needs.

### **3. Attitudes toward Labor**

Christians should always honor the agreements upon which they were hired. If the agreement is to work so many hours per

week for so much pay, then to do less is tantamount to stealing from our employer.

Paul raises common labor to a sublime level by equating one's boss with Christ, Himself: "Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph 6:5-6). This means to give the proper effort whether the boss is looking or not, or if one is working out of town and his progress cannot be overseen.

Note 1: It is not just the preacher who is "working for the Lord"! Yes, his salary may come from the collective funds of the local church, but *all work for the Lord* in terms of giving honorable effort.

Note 2: This principle not only applies outside the home but inside as well. Is a homemaker held to a different standard of industry than others who work outside the home? Women bristle (and rightly so) at the suggestion that home-making isn't a "real" job. It certainly is, and homemakers are subject to the same standards of industry as others. A lazy, undisciplined keeper of the home is no more justified by her "natural tendencies" than a mill worker or accountant who naturally tends toward indolence.

There is ebb and flow in everyone's employment, times when work is fast and furious and times when things are slow. These cycles are part of the unstable nature of life and should not be matters of concern. On the other hand, a Christian may have to grapple mightily with his conscience if he is pressured by other employees not to work too hard lest they be made to look bad. We must answer to God first, and sometimes this places us in a precarious situation with our fellow man.

#### **4. Attitudes toward Our Employer**

God is certainly aware that we will at times be overseen by unjust bosses. In fact, we may be overtly harmed financially or otherwise by wicked, unscrupulous coworkers. But several of our admonitions of employees originally come from exhortations

to slaves regarding their masters, many of whom were brutal and inhumane.

Peter adds: "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully" (1 Pet 2:18-19). In times like these we are challenged in our beliefs about God's providence and care. Too often we feel we are just on our own and we must deal with such people and situations with "business savvy" or other worldly tactics. But Christian ethics are not principles we can employ only when convenient. We are to treat our enemies in accordance with the principles of Christ, even if our enemy is our boss.

At the end of the day, may we consider our employer as a benefactor. We have no constitutional right to a job, and the vast majority of the world's population ekes out a living under the harshest, most oppressive conditions. The fact that we can work in an environment of relative comfort, safety and prosperity is a unique blessing – and we must be thankful for it.

#### **5. Working and Worship**

For various reasons, work in America is being done by fewer people working longer hours. We are a nation of industry and prosperity, a 24/7 machine turning out goods and services to be consumed by a voracious society. Sometimes employment clashes with worship, and we are forced to make a decision: shall I work, or shall I worship?

It should go without saying that the genuine child of God will fret and agonize over any missed opportunity to worship. Only the tepid in faith will casually dismiss such concern. But is one fundamentally disobedient to God if his work schedule causes him to miss worship?

The problem in answering this question is not providing excuses for the unfaithful to miss worship.

Several points seem pertinent:

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1) Even Jesus admits in principle that some other activity may supercede a formal occasion of worship. In Mt 5:23-24 Jesus indicates that reconciliation with an estranged brother is more important than offering a gift at the altar. "*First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*"

2) Not every chosen absence from worship is an affront to God. We may on occasion stay home with a sick family member. Should we have hired a sitter? Should we have left the ill alone for the hour or so it takes for worship? Or perhaps we stayed home when sick so that we wouldn't make others ill. Do these choices *necessarily* mean that we have put someone else before the Lord?

3) Like attending a sick family member, one's labor obligations are divinely ordained activities. This is fundamentally different from deliberately choosing to miss worship for a frivolous activity that we simply find more attractive.

4) It may rank in the category of "tempting God" to quit every job that presents a conflict and then expect for God to provide for our needs. I dare say there are certain parts of the country and world where men and women have no work options that would allow *every* worship service to be attended. Thus, it seems unrealistic to me to hold that a man or woman who honors their

employment obligations and misses a worship service necessarily sins by dishonoring God.

Having said that...

1) Perhaps more thought needs to be given to avoiding career choices and work options that will inevitably interfere with our spiritual duties.

2) Might we reasonably distinguish between *occasions* of missed worship and a career which *rarely* allows the Christian employee to worship or attend Bible study? Is there not a point at which we must ask, "What is the outcome of such an arrangement? What will spiritually become of the man who infrequently assembles due to an oppressive work schedule?"

3) The man who misses worship due to voluntary overtime, the woman who does not press her employer for religious assembly rights, the Christian who stays home from worship to be fresh and rested for the work week needs to do some serious soul searching regarding their priorities.

Remember: We work to live; we should not live to work. God knows our deeper motives, and I trust He can distinguish between the one who uses work as an excuse not to worship and the one who is distressed over a job that keeps him away from his brethren.

### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) What motive for working is given in Eph 4:28?
  - 2) Discuss how modern attitudes toward work are at odds with the Biblical concept.
  - 3) What are some signs that a person may be placing too much emphasis on work?
  - 4) What are some of the special challenges faced by women in the work world?
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- 5) What are some non-material benefits and rewards to productive labor?
  
  - 6) What problems are raised by slothfulness and lack of industry?
  
  - 7) List seven professions that have their counterpart in the work of the home maker. (Example: chef)
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## *Lesson 12. The Christian's Attitude toward Material Things*

### **1. Two Worlds**

The human being is related to two worlds. First, he is a spiritual being, connected with an unseen world of spiritual powers and principles that can only be perceived by faith. Secondly, he is a physical being, connected with the present but shorter phase of earthly existence. The challenge is to live properly in a material world without losing sight of the spiritual dimension that is no less real but harder to comprehend.

### **2. The Necessities of Life**

God has so ordered human life that it requires much maintenance to function properly. Food is a constant necessity; the harshness of the climate demands adequate shelter and clothing. Specific cultures may demand other material necessities, like transportation. Here in the U.S. it is difficult to adequately function in society without personal transport. A great amount of time and effort is needed to provide ourselves with the things that sustain life.

If we are not careful, these necessities of life can subtly change status. That is, we can emphasize them to the point that they take on an importance beyond that of necessity. Clothing is a necessity, but it can become a matter of fashion and thus challenge our finances and sense of modesty. Shelter is a necessity, but size, style, appointments and furnishings of a home can overshadow the need for shelter. Food is a necessity, but we can become enamored with it to the point of gluttony.

Further, we can begin to relate so closely with the material aspects of life that we begin to define ourselves by them. We might judge our importance, self-worth or success in terms of the home we live in, the car(s) we drive or our annual income. When we do this, we will inevitably be thrown out of spiritual kilter. It may be difficult to determine the source of our unease, but so often in life our troubles begin with an overemphasis upon material things.

### **3. Keeping Things in Balance**

God counsels us to keep material things in perspective. This demands a realistic assessment of these things, for our affection for them comes from a distorted view of their importance.

- 1) Riches are unstable (Pr 23:4-5).
- 2) Material things decay. Moth and rust destroy; thieves steal (Mt 6:20).

*Money has power out of all proportion to its purchasing power. Because the children of this world understand this, they can use money for non-economic purposes. And use it they do! Money is used as a weapon to bully people and to keep them in line. Money is used to "buy" prestige and honor. Money is used to enlist the allegiance of others. Money is used to corrupt people. Money is used for many things; it is one of the greatest powers in human society. [Foster, Money, Sex & Power, p. 54]*

- 3) Affection for money and what it buys is the springboard for a multitude of evils (1 Tim 6:10).

- 4) Material things will not be part of our eternal future. "You can't take it with you" (1 Tim 6:7; Ecc 5:15).

- 5) Possessions can be spiritually blinding as the rich young ruler painfully learned (Mt 19:21-22).

### **4. The Antidote for Materialism**

An overemphasis upon material things leads to chronic anxiety and dissatisfaction. Their uncertain, unstable nature means the covetous person never has enough, for in the back of his mind he is always aware that it can be lost. Maintaining and maximizing one's investment takes constant vigilance and effort. Markets go up and down with the most subtle nuances and whims. No amount of money or things will ever make our lives predictable, safe and secure.

*So, God counsels contentedness with the basics and satisfaction with our present material status.*

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- 1) "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Tim 6:8).
- 2) "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col 3:2).
- 3) "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Mt 6:31-32).
- 4) "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Ph 4:11-12).
- 5) "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Mt 6:33-34).

These verses stress the spiritual connection we have with heaven. When we take our eyes off God and begin to focus upon the material things of life, anxieties and frustrations creep in. We must learn to be content with what God has let us use for His sake, for truly we do not "own" anything in the ultimate sense.

### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) How does our society encourage us to overemphasize material things?
  - 2) How might we unwittingly pass on materialistic values to our children?
  - 3) Discuss the implications of Lk 16:10. What can we learn from this statement?
  - 4) According to 2 Cor 4:18, what is the duration of "seen" and "unseen" things?
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While greed and covetousness grow in the vacuum of what one does not possess, thankfulness springs from an awareness and appreciation for what one has. Passages encouraging thankfulness abound, but note the following:

- 1) "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Ph 4:6-7).
- 2) "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Th 5:16-18).
- 3) "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving" (Col 2:6-7).

As we learn to live with an ever-present appreciation for our spiritual blessings, and as we cultivate a contentedness with our present material state, our attachment to material things will lessen. True happiness is not here; it is not in material satisfaction; it cannot be bought and stored. True happiness springs from a heavenly attitude that puts material things in their place.

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- 5) What challenge/promise did God lay before Israel in Malachi 3:8-10?
  
  - 6) What did Jesus offer the rich young ruler if he would sell his possessions and follow Him? How did the young man react to this offer?
  
  - 7) What does Jesus promise those who suffer deprivation for His sake (Mt 19:29-30)?
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## **Lesson 13. The Christian's Attitude toward Civil Government**

### **1. The Importance of Civil Rule**

Recent world events illustrate a Biblical principle: man needs civil rule to combat violence, treachery and anarchy. To this end, God has not mandated any particular form of government such as democratic, monarchical or socialistic. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, organized crime has run rampant in Russia, for a powerful central government does not exist to curtail such enterprises.

While certain constraints, abuses and intrusions of government may aggravate us, we remember its overall value: "For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil" (Rom 13:4).

Do we really want to live in a country without civil rule? Do we want to dilute the government's power to apprehend and prosecute the guilty in the name of "civil rights"? Would you rather trust in yourself alone to provide daily protection for you and your family? God knew we would not be up to the task: "For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God ... for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil" (Rom 13:1, 3).

### **2. Submission to Civil Authority**

The Jews chafed under Roman rule, and they were greatly dissatisfied at the idea of a Messiah who wouldn't take up arms and fight. The Jewish leaders tried to use this anti-Roman bias against Jesus, pitting popular hatred for Rome against the obligation to submit to civil authority. The most volatile issue in this regard was the payment of taxes: should the Jew pay

Roman tax, thus acknowledging and even supporting the oppressive regime? Jesus upholds the truth but softens the blow with a spiritual imperative: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21; cf. Rom 13:6-7).

It is our obligation to submit to the ruling authority over us, whether federal, state, county or municipal: "Therefore submit

yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him" (1 Pet 2:13-14). Paul offers two considerations:

1) If we rebel against civil authority, we will be subject to its

penalties: "But if you do evil, be afraid ..." (13:4). If we are guilty of breaking the law, we are obligated to accept the punishment. 2) "Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake" (Rom 13:5). Is it acceptable to break the law so long as no one finds out? Not for the true Christian, for he still must face his conscience.

The Christian cannot be an anarchist; he cannot be flippantly dismissive of laws that exist for the welfare of society.

### **3. Respect for Civil Rulers**

Because government is ordained of God and serves a purpose in keeping with His will, Christians are directed to show due regard for those in power:

"Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Pet 2:17).

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we

*While it is not the function of civil government to legislate morality, but rather what is civil, nevertheless civility is the opposite of incivility, and the civil authority or power enforces certain moral precepts – murder, perjury, theft – not as the commands of God, but as violations of civil relations, as they affect all other members of the civil society.*  
[Foy Wallace, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State*, pp. 145-146]

may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Tim 2:1-2).

Such respect does not nullify criticism of flawed policies or rebuke for immoral behavior. Even civil law permits the first, and God's law demands the second. But at the same time, we must show respect for the office – the authority and power – as ordained of God.

#### **4. Uses and Abuses of Civil Power**

It is permissible to use certain rights granted by the government to protect oneself and further the cause of Christ. Paul, for example, appealed to Roman citizenship to avoid a beating he was about to receive (Ac 22:25-29). Paul also demanded vindication of his integrity by forcing Philippian officials to publicly release him from prison (Ac 16:35-39).

Not every right of civil government can be enacted on one's behalf, however. Paul forbade Christians to take one another to court to settle their differences (1 Cor 6:1-8). Paul says, *"Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another"* (6:7). Such impasses among Christians should not be settled before unbelievers, and to air our dirty laundry before them leaves a very negative impression.

God does not intend to wait until the judgment for all wrongs to be righted. The existence and function of civil government is to punish evildoers who threaten peace and civility among all. On this basis, it is entirely appropriate for Christians to press charges against lawbreakers or to sue in court for restitution and punitive judgments.

#### **5. The Power to Execute Criminals**

What should the Christian's attitude be toward execution? Is it inconsistent with kingdom principles to advocate the death penalty? While some disagree, I believe Romans 13 upholds the right of civil

government to take the life of certain criminals.

As was pointed out in the quote by Foy E. Wallace on p. 43, the civil government does not rule by principles given to the church. Yes, it is expected to be just and moral in the discharge of its duty, but it is a civil, not a spiritual, institution.

Some object to capital punishment: "Vengeance belongs to God, not men. He reserves the right to punish criminals as He sees fit." But this is the very point of Romans 13: God has seen fit to use civil power as the legitimate exercise of His wrath against evildoers. *"For he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil"* (Rom 13:4).

No individual has the right to exact his own retribution for evil done to him (Rom 12:19-21). But civil government reflects the will of the community; it is society acting as a unit. When society's standards recognize certain crimes to be so heinous and reprehensible that the perpetrator must forfeit his life, God permits it to be so. No, this does not justify any miscarriage of justice, for God expects any government to operate upon principles of fairness.

The imposition of a death penalty should not shock us; God incorporated capital punishment into the Law of Moses. The advances of society do not argue against capital punishment; rather, they enhance it. We are better equipped to identify the guilty than ever before. Yes, mistakes can still be made, and the law is enforced unevenly at times. But if the mere existence of human foibles argue against the death penalty, they also argue against all punishment.

The main issue is: Is the death penalty harmonious with God's laws and His principles of the governance of the universe? The answer is "yes" according to Romans 13.

#### **Questions for Discussion**

1) Does Paul object to capital punishment in Ac 25:11?

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- 2) Discuss the right of a Christian to hold an elective office.
  
  - 3) What rationales might a Christian use to justify breaking the law?
  
  - 4) Is it sinful for a Christian to protest against laws they deem unfair?
  
  - 5) Is it sinful for a Christian to vote for a president that is pro-abortion?
  
  - 6) Should a Christian refuse to pay taxes because he feels it supports immoral practices?
  
  - 7) When civil law violates God's law, what should the Christian do? Cite a verse.
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## *Lesson 14. The Christian's Attitude toward Leisure*

### **1. The Age of Leisure**

While most of the world must work long and strenuous hours to eke out a living, America's technological expertise has made life easier for us. Industrialization has largely freed us from the burdens of manual labor, and we have both the time and the energy to pursue other amusing and entertaining aspects of life.

### **2. The Need for "Downtime"**

Actually, the Bible says very little specifically on the subject of recreation and leisure. To be honest, what is said often points out the evil side of self-indulgence and frivolity. Nevertheless, the need for rest and rejuvenation is acknowledged in the Scriptures:

After Jesus empowered and commissioned the twelve to travel about Galilee and preach the kingdom, they "gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while'" (Mk 6:30-31).

The duties of life, whether secular, spiritual or domestic endeavors, are mentally, physically and emotionally taxing. It is self-evident that the human being needs periodic respite from outside demands, and those who cannot or will not pursue such often suffer from unrelieved stress. How one spends his leisure time is a matter of personal judgment, but some guiding principles need to be kept in mind.

### **3. Principles of All Non-specified Activities**

The word of God does not attempt to specify each and every activity in which a human being may be engaged. Such a list would be endless and would need continual updating as new activities are created by men. The Scriptures do, however, present various principles which must be applied to leisure or other activities not specifically covered.

1) Our leisure activities cannot violate principles of morality. Frequenting strip clubs and indulging in pornography would obviously violate principles of purity and decency.

2) Our leisure activities must be kept in perspective: "... exercise yourself rather to godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Tim 4:7-8). Perhaps we need to evaluate how much time we spend on our physical body – toning, tanning, pedaling, lifting, etc. – in comparison with the exercise of our mind and spirit.

3) Our leisure or recreational activity, while innocent enough, must not be allowed to undermine our spiritual health. Competitiveness, especially in men, can be an enjoyment and stimulation. Many like to be challenged to do their best, to face opposition and overcome it through mental or physical expertise. This is the basis for most sports activities. But competitiveness can very easily get out of hand, leading to taunting, disparagement, profanity, and even grudges and hatred. We must be careful that winning and losing does not sinfully overwhelm the joy of competition itself. (How many college programs have been in trouble due to a "win at all cost" attitude?) If we cannot control our passions, any activity that threatens our eternal welfare should be abandoned.

4) Leisure activities must remain a moderate past time, not an idol that dominates our schedule and finances. Family obligations are sometimes neglected because dad spends too much time in the boat, tree stand or golf cart. Mom's favorite past time may be frivolous shopping, forcing dad to work overtime to pay for her sprees.

5) It should go without saying, but say it we must: Leisure and recreational activities are **NOT** within the scope of congregational responsibility. It is not for the church to

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build gymnasiums, provide sports equipment, fund teams, etc. We must not corrupt the spiritual body of Christ with our personal amusements.

### **4. Enhancing Our Relationships**

Rightly engaged in, our games, sports, banquets, travels and other leisure activities can be occasions which enhance our relationships and spirituality. We can enjoy meaningful discussion and reflection while sharing such times together.

On the other hand, great care must be taken that such times of casual enjoyment do not become occasions of unholy attraction. Leisure activities are not occasions to relax dress codes or engage in risqué or suggestive "doublespeak." We may naively deny it, but much heartache has come from Christians sharing too intimate and familiar surroundings. We must always be on our guard, especially when "letting our hair down" and having a good time.

### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) What figures does Paul use in 1 Cor 9:24-27 to encourage self-control?
- 2) To what is our quest for eternal life likened in Heb 12:1?
- 3) How would you answer this argument: "It is sinful for a Christian to play cards, for cards are used in gambling. Playing cards projects the appearance of evil."
- 4) Discuss the view that watching graphic violence in movies or video games is harmless.
- 5) To what degree do I as a spectator at a sporting event support the sponsoring companies (racing has its "Winston Cup" and "Busch Series," golf has its "Johnny Walker Classic," etc.)? Does my patronage automatically make me a partaker of evil?

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Extra Notes