



Honesty

Joe R. Price

The need for honesty reaches every area of our daily lives. The justice and integrity of an honest life is a great treasure from childhood to old age. Both men and nations show themselves wise when adorned with honesty. Thomas Jefferson observed, “Honesty is the first chapter in the Book of wisdom. Let it be our endeavor to merit the character of a just nation.” More importantly, divinely inspired men praise the virtues of wisdom. The apostle Paul exhorts children of God to meditate on things that are “true,” no doubt because it is from the heart that both honesty and deceit proceed (Phil. 4:8; Mark 7:20-23). God calls upon us to make a deliberate choice to be honest in heart and conduct in every area of life.

To man’s shame, honesty is in short supply in this world. Dishonesty is the consistent course taken by those who follow the devil (the father of lies and deceiver of the whole world, John 8:44; Rev. 12:9). As surely as the devil “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” “in the lake of fire and brimstone,” even so “all liars” will have their part in “the second death” (Rev. 20:10; 21:8). Tragically, the god of this world blinds the minds of liars to the truth of their impending judgment (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

On the other hand, the Christian’s life is to be an example of honesty: “. . . having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12). A Christian cannot expect to enter the heavenly kingdom if dishonesty has characterized his life on this earth. For, just as surely as there will be no tears in heaven, neither will anyone who causes a lie obtain a heavenly welcome (Rev. 21:4, 27).

Honesty is an essential trait of the Christian’s life. It is the uprightness of character and conduct that is free of fraud or deception. It is a mark of integrity that is genuine, sincere, and free of subterfuge. Truth is its trademark; honor and trustworthiness are its companions. The Christian should always be careful to provide “for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21). Our words as well as our deeds must reflect the imbedded gospel traits of honesty and truthfulness.

Honesty is a fruit of the Spirit that is produced by learning of and being converted to Christ: “. . . and be renewed
see “Honesty” on p. 247

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No Filthy Language

David Halbrook

As children grow, they have to be taught what belongs in their mouth and what does *not* belong in their mouth. When the child puts something in his mouth that doesn't belong, the parent quickly tells the child, "Take that out of your mouth!" After examining the object the parent may ask, "Where did this come from?" in hopes of preventing this from happening again. This correction is necessary for the sake of the child so that he is not in any way harmed by that which does not belong in his mouth.

Every Christian has been or is now in the stage of spiritual infancy (1 Pet. 2:1-3). Prior to that time, many people allowed things to be in their mouth which did not belong. Paul addresses that problem in Colossians 3:8 when he says, "You yourselves are to put . . . filthy language out of your mouth." Spiritually, Paul is putting his hand at the mouth of some of these Christians and saying, "Spit it out, that doesn't belong in your mouth." Paul would not have to ask, "Where did this come from?" however, because Jesus revealed the answer to that in Mark 7:20-23 where he states that our evil deeds come from within ourselves, out of the heart. Unless Christians remove filthy language from their mouths, they cannot grow and develop as God desires that they would (2 Pet. 3:18).

The two words "filthy language" are translated from one Greek word *aischrologia*. The prefix *aischro* pertains to that which is base, low, obscene, or dishonorable (Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* 17; these synonyms were found by examining other words which share this prefix). It is language that either refers to or directly speaks of things which appeal to those who are of a low moral mind. Does our language *ever*, whether rarely or often, consist of words which draw the mind of the hearer to dwell on their base, amoral desires? How can it do so?

1. Taking the Lord's Name in Vain. A lack of respect for God was one of the perverted ways of the Gentiles (Rom. 1:25, 28, 30). All that is "filthy" is such because there is a standard of right and wrong. What happens when the standard, or the one who designed the standard, is devalued? Do our words show that we hold God in high regard?

References to Jehovah which mirror the respect that we have for the name of our pet hamster, make God, in the mind of men, no more worthy of thought, consideration, and obedience than anyone else. Most any Christian who has watched "network TV" over the last ten-twenty years has probably lost *some* degree of disgust with the abuse of God's name. Disagree? How many times will we tolerate hearing God's name taken in vain versus other

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A Work Ethic

Brian Price

The word “work” brings a variety of responses by different individuals. Unfortunately, some automatically respond negatively to anything that even resembles work. In our disdain for some responsibilities we might even say, “That’s too much like work.” In this article we’ll examine the importance of work, as well as our attitude towards work. As the title of the article suggests, let us examine our “work ethic” based upon the principles of God’s word.

The responsibilities of work can be traced back to man’s beginning. There are several facts that entered into man’s existence when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree. One such consequence is the obligation to work. God said, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” and “God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Gen. 3:19, 23). Before we jump to conclusions that hard work was left only for men note what God said concerning women. “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3:16). Though the roles and obligations of men and women are different, there is no question that both roles require work and effort. If you have any questions concerning our obligation to work, examine these passages: Proverb 31; Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11.

With those facts established, it is important that we also recognize that God not only obligates us to complete our given tasks but he also governs our attitude towards our responsibilities. When the apostle Paul spoke to those in Ephesus who were servants, he commended them to do their work “as to the Lord and not unto men” (Eph. 6:7). He continued the thought by encouraging “any man,” “bond or free,” to conduct his efforts knowing that God will reward him accordingly (v. 8). Paul shared the same basic thoughts in Colossians 3:22-25. In these passages Paul uses what we would consider an extreme relationship (servant to master). However, I believe we can easily understand the principles as they apply to our modern times. Paul wants every Christian to conduct his life as though every act of service was being rendered directly to the Lord. When we bear the name Christian, we must also accept the fact that every action is a reflection upon our Savior (Col. 1:10). In simple terms, when we act dishonorably towards men, we have acted dishonorably towards our God.

In Colossians 3:22 Paul explains the manner in which we can act dishonorably. He speaks of those who offer “eyeservice, as men pleasers.” He’s speaking of those whose work ethic is affected by whether or not they are being watched at the time. While the boss, foreman, teacher, manager, supervisor, parent, etc. is observing our actions, we conduct ourselves to please them.

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However, the moment we believe we are no longer under the watchful eye, our actions change and our effort wanes. Paul further described this attitude as without “singleness of heart” or insincere. The Christian’s work ethic is defined more by his conduct when no one is watching, rather than while he is under observation. Without question it is an act of dishonesty to give the appearance of diligent work when in reality our efforts are far from diligent. We may never even consider stealing property or things of value from an employer or other authority figure. Yet, are we willing to rob them of the time and effort that we should be offering? We may never steal from another man’s wallet but are we willing to receive wages for services not rendered. No matter how trivial our responsibilities may seem, as Christians we are obligated to render that service as “unto the Lord.”

We move our thoughts now from the one who needs to elevate his service to a more sincere level to the one we would simply call “plain lazy.” The Bible speaks of this one as the “ sluggard.” There are several references in the book of Proverbs to this individual. Notice the description in Proverbs 10:26. “As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.” Have you ever been in a position where you had to rely on someone who was completely unreliable? It is as distasteful as smoke in your eyes. Christians must avoid causing this kind of discomfort that is a result of laziness. The good influence of other Christians is often diminished by the sluggish efforts of a brother or sister in Christ. It’s as “vinegar to the teeth” when a co-worker reminds you that the laziest guy on the job, in his words, “goes to your church.” The Proverbs tell the sluggard to go look at the ant (Prov. 6:6-9). With no guide, ruler, or overseer the ant fulfills his obligation completely. The Christian should strive to be the kind of person that is completely reliable. Without the need of constant reminders and oversight, the Christian should be trusted to get his job done. The Christian should be the most reliable and trusted individual on the job, in the classroom, in the neighborhood, or wherever his obligations may take him. There is a peculiarity about the way we operate because we serve the “king of kings” and all that we do is a reflection upon that relationship.

With all this said, the one area that often suffers the most when it comes to our lack of work ethic is our service to the local church. Brethren and friends there is something wrong when our employer can count on us more than our local congregation can. Many abhor the thought of being considered lazy at work and they certainly want to give an “honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay.” However, when it comes to putting forth that same kind of effort towards spiritual matters something changes. When was the last time you came home from your employment completely exhausted? Today, yesterday, everyday? When was the last time you exhausted your energies in the work of

the local church? If God expects our best in matters that indirectly reflect on him, does he not also expect the same when it comes to matters that directly affect our work and service in the kingdom? I am reminded of Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:12-13: “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.” Notice that Paul stated that their service was not the kind of eye service that we spoke of before. Paul was encouraged by the fact that they were diligent in the kingdom whether he was there or not.

If we received word that the apostle Paul was going to visit our congregation would we have to make a mad dash to try to put things in order that we have been neglecting? Would he be encouraged to find that the work is being fulfilled without the necessity of his immediate presence? Would we have to embellish the record a little in order to not be embarrassed as to how little we are doing? We’re not talking about that coat of paint we’ve been meaning to put on the building or the cleaning up the grounds that have been neglected. Although those things will certainly reflect upon the community’s view of our work ethic it is the spiritual work of the “pillar and ground of the truth” that concerns me the most. When the world around us seems to be completely disinterested in the gospel of Christ, we must remind ourselves that God rewards the efforts put forth. When lost souls seem to be more difficult to reach we must work harder. It is simpler to just throw up our hands in disgust and say “no one will listen anymore” and just quit. The fact is that no matter how hard we work we do not know how many we may or may not reach with the gospel. However, we do know this, if we quit, we will not gain any for Christ. Let us always, with all diligence, plant and water the seed of the gospel and let God add the increase.

May it never be said that the Lord’s church is filled with sluggards and unreliable people. Let us strive always to be honest, hard working, and honorable. As we conduct our daily lives let us never cause a negative reflection on our Savior. When our Lord returns it is my hope and prayer that he will find us all working hard in the vineyard. Our Lord will return unannounced. There will be no time to get busy with the things we have been neglecting. Jesus understood the need for a work ethic when he stated, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). Let us work the works of him that was sent, while we have opportunity, for night will soon come and the opportunity to fulfill our service will be over.

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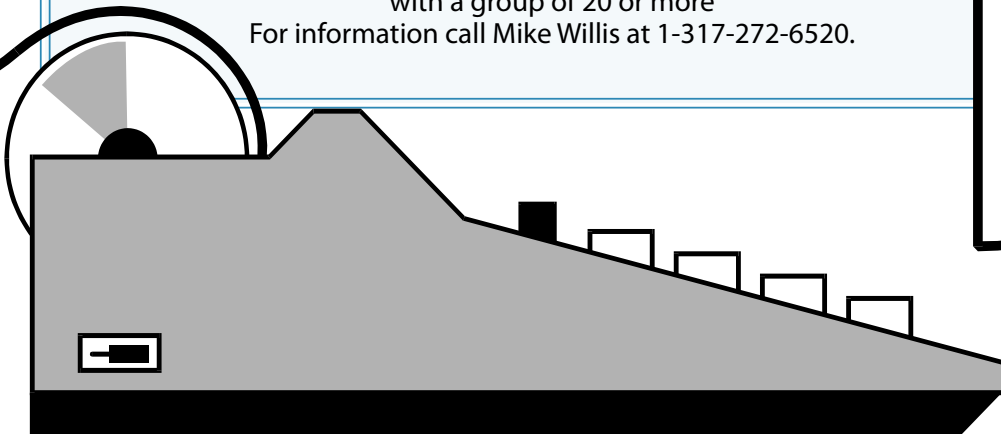
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Be Sober

Steve Deaton

We are to live soberly (Tit. 2:11-15). It is part of a godly, righteous life and contrary to ungodliness and worldly lusts. “Sober” is translated from two different word groups in the New Testament. Both essentially mean “to be of sound mind, to be in one’s right mind” and “to be sober, to be calm and collected in spirit, to be temperate, dispassionate, circumspect” (see Thayer). Alcohol and other drugs eliminate man’s ability to live soberly and therefore lead man to violate God’s command to be sober.

A violation of God’s command will cost a man his soul (2 Thess. 1:7-9). The euphoric feeling you receive from alcohol and other drugs is not worth your soul. The popularity you experience, because you are like the others, is not worth losing your soul. Any gains you may receive in the business world, because you go to the bar or entertain clients with alcohol, is not worth an eternity in hell.

In this article we want to notice three things: (1) Society and God have a different view of intoxicants, (2) God commands man to be sober, (3) There are many devastating consequences that result from the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Intoxicants: Society’s View vs. God’s View

Society has a lax attitude toward sobriety. In fact, it is often the focus of ridicule. If you do not drink alcohol, you are considered odd (1 Pet. 4:3, 4). If you object to the sale or consumption of alcohol, you are a radical and an extremist in the eyes of some. The Narcotic Educational Foundation of America, as quoted on MADD.org, may give the reason for this, “Alcohol is society’s legal, oldest and most popular drug.” Thus, it is widely accepted.

There are some whose faith is not strong enough to bring them to services, but they expect it to take them to heaven.

The Center For Disease Control gives the following figures for alcohol consumption in the United States for 2001. These are from non-institutionalized citizens, that is, those not in prison.

If we estimate the US population at 270 million, then 168,750,000 people are current drinkers. If you are in the 25 to 44 age bracket, then more than two-thirds of your generation drinks, socially or otherwise. No wonder many people think everyone drinks and do not care.

God takes a radically different view of alcohol and other intoxicants. Through the wise man he said, “Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Prov. 20:1). If you are “not wise,” you are foolish.

God called certain behaviors, including drunkenness and revelries, “works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-21). He also included “sorcery” (Gal. 5:19-21). “Sorcery” is translated from the Greek word *pharmakeia*, the word from which we get pharmacy. It is defined by Thayer as “1)the use or the administering of drugs; 2) poisoning; 3) sorcery, magical arts, often found in connection with idolatry and fostered by it. . . .”

The word is, therefore, related to false religion to describe the religious charlatan who used drugs to produce drunkenness, give feelings of euphoria, practice “black magic,” and otherwise to pretend that he was someone great (Willis, 259).

Society may approve of and glorify inebriation from

alcohol and other drugs. God does not. He condemns it in the clearest language: “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Sobriety is Enjoined By God

God commands man to be sober. We must do this to guard against Satan (1 Pet. 5:8). Sobriety allows us to be ready for the Lord’s return (1 Thess. 5:1-10). It also helps us to maintain a proper perspective of ourselves (Rom. 12:3). We must be sober to pray (1 Pet. 4:7). Alcohol and other drugs destroy man’s ability to do these things. How can an intoxicated person watch for the devil or anxiously await the coming of Christ? What drunkard has ever maintained a correct understanding of himself or herself? And, does anyone honestly think a proper prayer can be offered to God while a person is intoxicated?

Remarkably, some will argue that “moderate” use of alcohol does not lead to a lack of sobriety. This argument is made by many in the world and some Christians. Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, said that “moderate” use of alcohol is sinful. He classified “drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties” as the “will of the Gentiles” (1 Pet. 4:3). Why did he give three references to alcohol? The reason is, he did not want to leave doubt about the sinfulness of intoxication on any level. “Drunkenness” is typified by the wino. “Revelries” are what happen at a college fraternity party. Social drinking, at a cocktail party, the bar, or a friend’s house watching the game is covered by “drinking parties.”

Secular writings show alcohol affects the brain beginning with the first drink. A publication put out by the American Automobile Association (AAA), *Sportsman-like Driving*, states, “The effects of alcohol begin with the first drink.” The California Department of Motor Vehicles gives a chart in one of its pamphlets relating blood-alcohol concentration (BAC) to body weight, number of drinks, and time. Within the first hour a person weighing between 110 to 129 pounds will have a 0.05-0.07% BAC with one drink; 130 pounds and up will have 0.01-0.04% BAC. The bottom line is, one drink affects judgment.

Someone who drinks and thinks he has control is fooling himself. Again, the wise man said, “Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Prov. 20:1). It knocks down barriers in the conscience, causing a person to exercise poor judgment or none at all.

Still, some say, “Jesus turned water into wine, so I can drink it” (John 2:1-10). This is easily refuted. First, the Bible uses wine to refer to fermented (intoxicating) or unfermented (non-intoxicating) grape juice. In Isaiah 65:8, it mentions “wine” in grape clusters. Obviously, there is no fermentation of the juice while it remains in the

cluster. Thus, context determines whether or not “wine” is fermented. Second, notice that Jesus turned 120-180 gallons of water into “wine.” If it was fermented, then the wedding party had to be huge for the people not to be intoxicated already. The master of the feast declared they were already “well drunk” (John 2:10). He is not saying they were intoxicated, he is saying they had drunk a lot of “wine” already. If Jesus made fermented wine, then he was guilty of promoting drunkenness — something that is not possible.

Consequences of Intoxicants

There are many consequences to the use of alcohol and other drugs. They often result in bodily harm. Isaiah mentions the priests who erred through intoxicating drink and had tables filled with vomit (Isa. 28:7, 8). Many times a drunk will wake up the next morning and not realize why he has injuries (Prov. 23:29-35). Some men become violent when intoxicated. They either fight another man or abuse their wife and children. Too, death is not an uncommon end for those who partake of alcohol and other drugs. The *Wall Street Journal* recently noted a Center For Disease Control statistic that 81,000 people die annually from alcohol. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) states on their Web site that drunk-driving wrecks are the most frequently committed violent crime, killing someone every thirty minutes. They also say that 500,000 injuries occur every year in alcohol-related accidents.

Many sexual sins are committed under the influence of alcohol. Lot’s daughters got him drunk and then committed incest (Gen. 19:33, 34). How many women are raped by a drunken man or because they are drunk and cannot defend themselves? Fornication and adultery increase with alcohol use as well. A businessman on a trip goes to the bar to “relax” after work, ends up meeting a woman and then sleeps with her. If he is single, its fornication, if he is married, it is adultery. Alcohol removes inhibitions and leads people to do what they otherwise might not ever do.

Further, alcohol has a devastating impact on finances. The wise man said, “He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not be rich” (Prov. 21:17). Many people lose their jobs because of addiction to alcohol or other drugs. Some break into homes to pay for a drug habit. Others, women especially, are known to go into prostitution to support an addiction. How many people have divorced because of alcohol and what kind of financial impact has that had on them and/or their children?

Finally, the biggest consequence of alcohol and other drugs is eternal damnation. As we noted at the beginning, the Bible tells us to live soberly (Tit. 2:11-15). This cannot be done by those who use intoxicants. Thus, they violate the will of God and jeopardize their soul (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Jesus said:

Gambling

Jeremy Sweets

Gambling has been a scourge upon every culture that has embraced it. Economically and morally, gambling is a detriment to the whole of society by negatively affecting the lives of individuals. Yet our society has embraced this vice with open arms. Gambling is no longer only sponsored by a few financiers in Las Vegas. It is supported by various state governments in the form of the lottery with Tennessee recently becoming the forty-eighth state to legalize gambling. Raffles are offered by organizations from schools to churches! Open support by various societal institutions has led to approval and participation by many in the public. A Gallup poll released in 1999 said that nearly two-thirds of Americans approve of legalized gambling and seventy-five percent approve of gambling as a means of collecting taxes.

A Definition of Gambling

A clear definition will properly illustrate what constitutes gambling. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines gambling as “to bet on an uncertain outcome, to play a game of chance for stakes.” *The World Book Encyclopedia* says, “Gamblers usually bet money or something else of value as a stake on the outcome they predict. When the outcome is settled, the winner collects the loser’s stakes.” From the above definitions gambling involves three key elements: a predetermined chance, a stake or a bet, and a winner and a loser.

If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire (Matt. 18:8-9).

Therefore, if you are mixed up in alcohol or other drugs, stop now! If you need help, get it now! No amount of pleasure, popularity, or prosperity is worth losing your soul.

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Approved Methods of Acquiring Money

As in everything that we do, we should only use methods of acquiring money that are approved by God (Col. 3:17). God has given us everything that we need to know to live this life in a godly way (2 Pet. 1:3).

Honest labor is approved in Scripture. Ephesians 4:28 states, “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good.” God wants man to work with his hands. Laboring in an honest, upright way is commended.

Selling something of value is approved in Scripture. Early Christians individually acquired funds by selling their property (Acts 4:34-35). Their proceeds were given to the apostles for distribution among the poor. A legitimate sale of an item of value is approved by God in Scripture.

Investing money is approved in Scripture. The Bible commends the ant because she “prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest” (Prov. 6:8). We must work today in order to reap the harvest later. Part of the process for preparing for the future may involve investing. Jesus also gave an approved example of wisely using money so as to accrue interest (Matt. 25:27). Although the point of emphasis was spiritual, the use of monetary funds would still be appropriate.

Receiving a gift or inheritance is approved in Scripture. The parable of the lost son tells of an inheritance that is divided between two sons (Luke 15:11-32). The prodigal son wasted his inheritance, a practice that showed his foolishness, but the inheritance itself was a valid way of obtaining money. Spiritually, our Father in heaven has promised the Christian an inheritance of greater value than money (Acts 26:18). Furthermore, a gift is approved of God. Paul commends labor so that the Christian “may have something to give him who has need” (Eph. 4:28, NKJV).

Gambling is Not Approved

Understanding the definition and divinely approved methods of acquiring money will remove confusion on the activities that some define as gambling.

Life is not a gamble. Gambling is not merely participating in something that involves a chance. Some have touted that life is a gamble. They say that everything we do is a gamble, therefore gambling must be justified. Life lacks a stake, a winner and a loser.

Engaging in a business venture is not gambling. Others have claimed that farming or other business ventures can be classified as gambling. “After all,” the gambler says, “there is a chance that the business will fail.” Many things in life are uncertain, including business ventures, but that does not mean they constitute gambling. Engaging in business and working with our hands is approved by God.

Playing the stock market is not gambling. Many attempt to categorize the stock market as gambling. The Bible says that it is lawful to buy or sell something of value — in this case, a share of a company or business. There is a chance that money will be gained or lost, but the profit does not come at the expense of another based upon a predetermined chance. The factor determining the prices in the stock market is basically the performance of a particular company. The stock market is ownership in a company.

Buying insurance is not gambling. Buying insurance is gambling according to some, but insurance is simply a service that is bought and rendered based upon predetermined contingencies. Profit is not made at the expense of another.

The Associations of Gambling

An individual can be known by his associations. The same is true for a particular activity. Note the following associates of gambling that are identified in Scripture.

Gambling promotes greed. A strong desire or lust is not sinful by itself; it depends upon the object of desire. The Bible states that we are to strongly desire the righteousness of God (Ps. 42:1-2; Matt. 5:6; 6:33). Greed, literally “a desire to have more,” stifles our desire for spiritual things and turns our lust to physical things. The gambler is incessantly striving to strike it rich. His desire is not directed toward God but toward money. Gambling takes from man what rightfully belongs to God: a strong desire and yearning. Greed, promoted by gambling, should never be found in the Christian (Eph. 5:3). Jesus rightly stated, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt 6:24).

Gambling ruins contentment. Greed and contentment cannot reside in the same heart. The gambler, fueled by greed, always wants more of this world’s riches — always wanting, but never satisfied. The Bible says, “And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content”

(1 Tim. 6:8). Money is not sinful. It is essential in this life and should be used for necessary provisions (1 Tim. 5:8; 2 Thess. 3:12), but it must be kept in its proper context. Satan says that money will make you happy, but God says that “godliness is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment” (1 Tim. 6:6). Our treasures need to be in heaven rather than on earth (Matt. 6:19-21; Col. 3:2).

Gambling is addictive and destroys self-control. The fact that gambling is addictive should be readily apparent. Two million Americans have fallen to the addictive nature of gambling and gamble uncontrollably (www.ncpgambling.org). Addicted mothers will gamble baby food money. Fathers squander money that would otherwise support their family. Homes and full retirements are lost. Gamblers Anonymous was an organization created to address the problem. Their website, www.gamblersanonymous.org states, “Our primary purpose is to stop gambling and to help other compulsive gamblers do the same.” Gambling is a tool of Satan that leads people away from Christ. Notice Paul’s admonition to the young evangelist in 1 Timothy 6:9-10, “But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many griefs.” The desire to get rich has

led many down a dishonest path. Those that crave riches will do anything to attain their goal. It is no wonder that crime rates in casino communities are 84% higher than the national average (*U.S. News & World Report* [1/15/1996]). Gambling, along with any type of addiction, destroys a person’s self-control and leads him further into ungodliness (1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Pet. 2:19).

Gambling promotes selfishness. One can not practice the golden rule and gamble at the same time (Matt. 7:12). The gambler does not have his neighbor’s best interest in mind. Rather, the gambler wants others to lose. He wants to profit at the expense of others. This attitude is inexcusable in the sight of God.

Conclusion

Gambling is not specifically mentioned in the Bible by name, but when you read and apply the commands and principles of God’s word, gambling is plainly condemned as sinful. Gambling does not fall under the category of approved methods of monetary acquisition. Gambling promotes and engenders a worldly mind set. The definition of gambling states that there is a winner and a loser. Monetarily, there are many losers and very few winners. Spiritually, all gamblers are the losers. It has been rightly stated that in gambling, the only real winner is the devil.



Called Unto Sanctification, Not Fornication

Steve Curtis

Like the days of the Thessalonians, our culture is saturated with fornication in all its forms. Comedy finds humor in it. Pornography is a billion-dollar industry. Dancing, mixed swimming, and going to the beach are commonly accepted even among children of God. Movies and television shows are filled with more and more nudity. The Internet and cable programming brings all these right into our homes.

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3). The word sanctification means “separation” or “set apart.” It is closely associated with the idea of being holy. God is holy and he calls Christians out of the world unto holiness (1 Pet. 1:15-16). A Christian is not only separated or set apart from the world, but also separated or set apart unto God.

The word “saint” is used in the New Testament to describe Christians. All Christians are saints because God chose all Christians “for salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:12). When referring to the Christians at Corinth, Paul identified them as those “who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor. 1:2). They were not dead. They had not been appointed as saints by a vote of the Catholic Church. They were saints because they had been sanctified when they obeyed the truth of the gospel (1 Cor. 6:11). As such, they were separated or set apart from the works of unrighteousness which would prevent them from inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). This is how God sanctifies one today.

Everyone who has obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ today has been called unto sanctification. Those who are sanctified have a great responsibil-

ity to please God. A saint must “walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12). Abstaining from fornication is a challenge each saint faces who seeks to please God.

Paul’s Admonition to the Thessalonians

From Paul’s letter to the church of the Thessalonians, we find many commendable things said about these young converts. Paul remembered them for their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope (1 Thess. 1:3). They had received the word in much affliction and had become examples to others (vv. 6-7). They received the apostles teaching as the word of God, not as the word of men (2:13). Paul received a good report of them (3:6). Despite these good characteristics, Paul still admonished them to abstain from fornication (4:3).

Paul knew the dangers that threatened them regarding fornication. Being Gentiles, they came from a culture saturated in idolatry and fornication. The apostles knew when going into this culture that those who would be sanctified would have to be taught to keep themselves from fornication (Acts 15:29). The Bible teaches us in Acts 17 that Paul’s visit to Thessalonica was brief. However, Paul had taught them to abstain from fornication when they had obeyed the truth. He reminded them, “for you know

what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:2). Paul knew the Thessalonians could fall back into their old sins even though they had been separated from them and set apart unto God.

Another danger they faced was living in a culture that viewed fornication as innocent, moral, and even expected. In Romans 1:22-32, Paul gives commentary on the Gentile culture. The foolishness of idolatry created a culture that was “filled with all unrighteousness,” including every form of sexual immorality (Rom. 1:29). Like Lot in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Thessalonians would be tortured and tormented from day to day seeing and hearing the lawless deeds (2 Pet. 2:8). Such an environment can weaken even the strongest Christians. Paul knew this could discourage the Thessalonians, cause them to become tolerant of the sinful activities, or even participate in fornication.

There are many lessons for us to learn. First, no matter how many good characteristics a congregation might have there is always the need to admonish the saints to abstain from sexual immorality. The sin of fornication in its various forms has caused great damage to the cause of Christ in many areas. Many congregations that were growing and united have been destroyed and divided by the sin of fornication among its members. Second, many who have obeyed the gospel have been sanctified and separated from the sin of fornication. Because of the danger of going back to those old habits of sin, they need to be admonished to abstain from fornication. Christians need to be taught today as Paul taught the Thessalonians that “you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God” (1 Thess. 4:1). Third, because we live in a culture where premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, and other forms of fornication are openly accepted, we need to admonish the saints to abstain

from fornication.

Why Should a Saint Abstain From Sexual Immorality

Within the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Paul gave several reasons that would encourage the young church of the Thessalonians to abstain from fornication. Let us consider those reasons.

1. They had received how to walk and to please God (v. 1). There is only one place where the God-given sexual desire is permitted to be satisfied. “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed is undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). Christians separated from sin and set apart to God can only walk to please God when they honorably satisfy their God-given desire in the marital relationship of one man and one woman.

2. They were commanded through the Lord (v. 2). The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation and demands that men and women abstain from fornication (Rom. 1:16, 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Christ was put to death and shed his blood that we might be sanctified (Heb. 10:10; 13:12). Those sanctified in Christ are to set their mind on things above and put to death fornication (Col. 3:1, 5). If we love the Lord, we will keep his commandments (John 14:15).

3. They were to know how to possess their own vessels in sanctification and honor (v. 4). Christians are sanctified through Christ by the directives of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 13:12, Rom. 15:16). Fornication is not a fruit of the Spirit, but a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:16-26). Christians are set apart to God for his service. Their bodies are not to be used as instruments of unrighteousness (Rom. 6:11-14). Christians should flee sexual immorality because their bodies belong to God (1 Cor. 6:18-19). “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20).

4. They were not to walk as those who did not know God (v. 5). The Gentiles did not know God. As such, they gave themselves over “to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Eph. 4:19). Not knowing God, they were “alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). To be alienated from God is directly opposed to being sanctified unto God. It is impossible to be guilty of fornication and to be sanctified unto God.

5. They were not to take advantage of and defraud their brother in the matter of fornication (v. 6). When two individuals consent to fornication, it disrupts not only their lives, but the lives of others as well. Virginity lost in premarital sex defrauds future spouses when entering into marriage. Adultery defrauds the innocent spouse and the children in the family. Fornication defrauds fellow Christians. Few things can destroy lives, marriages, homes, and congregations like the destruction fornication brings when those committing fornication defraud innocent individuals. One sanctified to God should never be guilty of bringing such destruction.

They were forewarned that the Lord is the avenger of all such (v. 6). Paul pointed out that those who knew God, knew the commandments of the Lord, knew how to walk and to please God, and knew how to possess their vessels in order to abstain from fornication. He also pointed out that those guilty of fornication do not know these things. This knowledge or lack of knowledge has great bearing in the Day of Judgment. Concerning those who do not know God when the Lord returns, “these shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Fornication may bring the pleasure of sin for a season, but it brings the punishment of sin for an eternity.

6. They were called by God unto holiness (v. 8). Paul preached the

Avoid Envy and Strife

Steve Monts

How many times have you seen it? Two people you thought would never part, then the unimaginable happens. A relationship is smashed to pieces on the rock of envy and strife, devastated virtually beyond repair. Whether it be the closest of friends, brothers, sisters, parents, brethren, preachers or churches, the devil could care not, he wishes to see them all infected with this deadly disease. A disease where there remains no cure except deep repentance. If the disease is allowed to go unchecked it will most certainly fester rooting itself deeper and deeper into the soul, becoming more grounded with every evil thought against the person. Have you seen it before? The fire that lights up in the eyes of another. Or, have you been the one to look out from eyes of red? In time, it manifests its self in ugly speech and hateful deeds. This, my friends, is envy and strife. “Jealousy as cruel as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame” (Song of Sol. 8:6).

The above verse talks of jealousy and no doubt, it has its part in the wickedness of envy. *New Unger’s Bible Dic-*

tionary defines envy as such: (1) That discontented feeling that arises in the selfish heart in view of the superiority of another, nearly tantamount to jealousy (Pss. 37:1; 73:3; Prov. 24:1, 19; Phil. 1:15; etc.). (2) That malignant passion that sees in another qualities that it covets, often resulting in hate for their possessor (Matt 27:18; Rom 1:29; etc.). The *American Heritage Dictionary* declares that “envy is the combination of discontentment, resentment, and desire.” How true that is! It also defines strife “as heated, often violent dissension, bitter conflict.” Vines says that strife “is the expression of enmity.” The secret envy contained in the heart is often made public to all by the means of strife. Thus, we see that they often go hand in hand. For this reason, it is profitable to discuss them in conjunction with another. For when one is present, the other is very likely to be found.

Dear friend, the Bible is clear on this real and present danger. “Who is able to stand before envy?” (Prov. 27:4). And I ask you again, who can? Yet, we often tamper with

gospel and wrote this letter to the Thessalonians that they might “walk worthy of God who calls you” (2:12). Fornication is against the calling of God. God calls those sanctified through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). Since the gospel of Christ condemns all forms of fornication, it is impossible to be holy while participating in this sin.

Conclusion

Like the days of the Thessalonians, our culture is saturated with fornication in all its forms. Comedy finds humor in it. Pornography is a billion-dollar industry. Dancing, mixed swimming, and going to the beach are commonly accepted even among children of God. Movies and television shows are filled with more and more nudity. The Internet and cable programming brings all these right into our homes. Homosexuality is past the point of being tolerated. Some in the government endorse it. Already our government facilitates adultery by laws passed regarding divorce and remarriage. Immodest dress is the fashion of our culture

and many Christians are dressing immodestly.

As those sanctified, we must abstain from fornication. We must completely separate ourselves from it. This involves fleeing from the act of fornication like Joseph did (Gen. 39:12; 1 Cor. 6:18). It also involves not participating in pornography, dancing, immodest apparel, and those things that contribute to it. Fornication is a sin which is preceded by lust (Matt. 5:28). Lust starts in the heart (Matt. 15:19). “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

We need to be as concerned about fornication today as Paul was for the Thessalonians. It is a wonderful privilege and blessing to be sanctified by God, in Christ, through the Spirit. What a tragedy to let the sin of fornication destroy one’s sanctification.



it without noticing the fuse being lit! What do we do when we harbor feelings of envy towards another, whether it be their possessions, friends, wife, or faith? Envy first starts as a fleeting thought, but day after day, night after night, you feed it, you cultivate it, until you wish the person would fall dead. What happened? How did you get to that point? “A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rotteness to the bones” (Prov. 14:30). If only we would heed such counsel! All the hours we could add to our lives, perhaps years. Envy and strife will kill you both spiritually and physically, but in this article we are concerned about the spiritual implications. We need to realize all the masses that have fallen from this cancer. The church seems, at times, to be torn asunder by brethren who harbor ill towards other brethren. Will there be no “heart to heart”? No, not in this day and age, toughness is the key we are told. And, while the church flounders, it gives an opportunity for the lost to ridicule. *Why would they want the peace of God that surpasses all understanding when they see what that peace is like in his people?* Are we so bent on envy and strife of one another that we care not that one may ask, “What must I do to be saved?” The Bible says, “*Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy*” (Rom. 13:13).

The apostle Paul put both envy and strife in the same list that contains murder, adultery, hatred, wrath, and drunkenness. We would never do some of those things, would we? Yet, why is envy and strife so easy to conjure up for us, knowing that they are among this list called the works of the flesh? These are all put in contrast with the fruits of the spirit. Envy and strife are contrary to love, joy, and peace. Envy and strife are contrary to longsuffering, kindness, and goodness. Envy and strife are contrary to faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:16-26). All of the fruits of the spirit are necessary in order to see Heaven’s pearly gates. All take practice and work, and when envy rears its ugly head in your life you must squash it with works of kindness.

We often see envy and strife happen when matters of indifference come up. This was true in the first century. Paul said, “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.” On these matters he said, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food” (Rom. 14:1-2, 19-20). Some could have been destroyed spiritually if one had become contentious on this matter one way or the other. That was not supposed to happen; this was a matter of indifference to the Lord (Rom. 14:3). Some of the ugliest fights I have seen have been over some of these things. For example, some throw a fit on how often to mow the church lawn! Some are willing to sever ties with each other if the church lawn

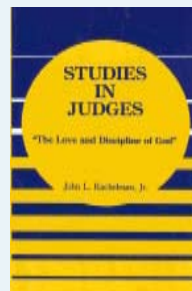
is mowed on Sunday! Brethren we need to remember this simple point: Christ doesn’t care if we have a church lawn! And this line of thought can go along with the “church” air conditioner, water, pews, carpet, etc. We should never have a falling out with another over such silly things! Rather, let us pursue peace with all men in regards to these things. When will we learn from the many, many Bible lessons that envy and strife will not work in a church? There are several examples of envy throughout Scripture: Cain’s envy of Able, Sarah of Hagar, Joseph’s brothers of Joseph, Saul of David, Haman of Mordecai, the priests of Jesus, the Jews of Paul. The further we cast away envy and strife, the better God’s people will be.

I want to take a moment to address a popular charge levied against God’s preachers. Some will say today that, if one denounces false doctrine and names the teacher of that doctrine, he is guilty of envy and strife. Let us remember that both Jesus and Paul did such and still preached against the sins of envy and strife (Matt. 23; 2 Tim. 2:17). We should not confuse militant preaching with envy and strife. No doubt there may be some who speak in an ugly manner with no desire to see his brother repent, but I do not personally know of such. Notice some things with me in the Bible. Paul said, “It has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are *contentions* among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ’” (1 Cor 1:11-12). Paul points out that there was strife (contentions) present at the Corinthian church. They were people who said, “I am of Paul” and “I am of Apollos” and “I am of Cephas.” What about those that said, “I am of Christ”? Were they guilty

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of contentions too? No, they were not in the mind of God, they were doing what is right, they were standing on the side of Christ. And, we too, when we stand on the side of Christ on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, fellowship, the church worship and organization, etc, we are not full of envy and strife. Rather, we are just like those who said, "I am of Christ," we are trying to call our fellow brethren back to the side of Christ. Notice with me once again in 1 Timothy 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 accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself." Now, who is the one guilty of envy and strife? Those who warn of apostasy or those who teach and fellowship error? Paul says that those that teach "otherwise" and do not abide in "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" they are the ones guilty of "envy, and strife." If you look carefully you can see it too. Those that uphold error or those who espouse error become so full of envy and strife. They hate those that "name names" so much that they go on to name the names of those that name names. They refuse to talk about the differences from a biblical point of view, they just cast their brother in the box of "church troublemaker."

They refuse to have a cordial public discussion on the differences, but would rather crush their brother's reputation as one who does not "love the brotherhood." I have come across some people who are disgruntled with this magazine and its writers, and they can't say exactly why. They just know the dark shadow of disapproval has been cast upon us, thus the wall has been raised and the mind closed. They are confused and know not the issues, such is the result of preaching that is full of envy and strife. "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there" (Jas. 3:14-16). Preachers full of such strife have done their damage; they have succeeded in causing great harm to the cause of Christ.

Let us all have a renewed spirit to "let nothing be done thorough strife or vainglory" (Phil. 2:3). Let us walk in the fruits of the Spirit, let us practice the "golden rule" and let us all "esteem others better than themselves." With this mind we will be able to cure the deadly disease of envy and strife.

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It is common to hear brethren express concern for lack of growth. Do you ever wonder why so many churches are not growing? Could it be that we are just not putting the seed, which is the word of God (Luke 8:11), in the soil? Too many are content to leave the seed in the barn (Hag. 2:19).

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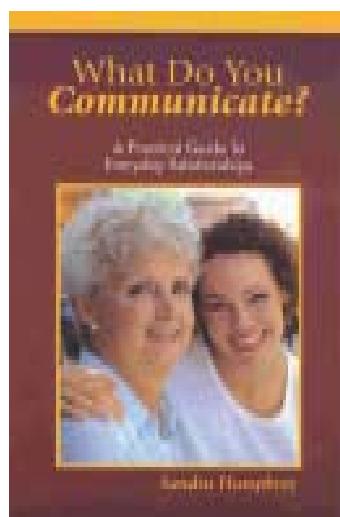
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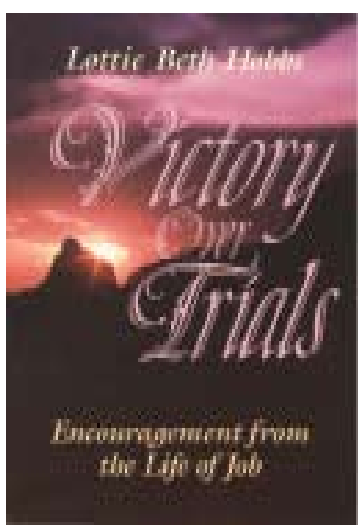


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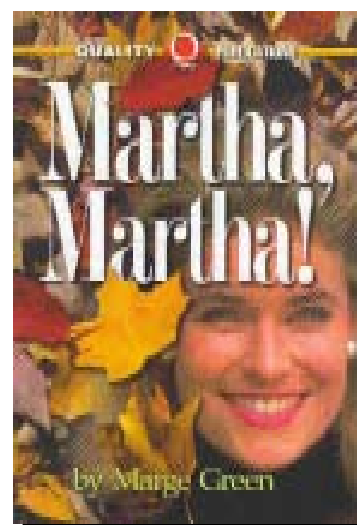
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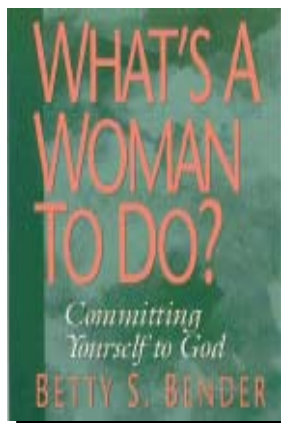


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Avoid Gossip and Slander

Jarrood Jacobs

Sadly, rather than avoiding gossip and slander, we are often witnesses to folks *perpetuating* gossip and slander! How does this happen? This happens not only as someone speaks things he ought not, it also occurs when folks are *listening* when they ought not!

One of the sins God frequently warns us about is sinning in our speech. In the book of James we learn that sinning in our speech (or with the tongue) “defiles the whole body” (Jas. 3:6). He goes on to say that it “ought not be” that the same tongue that blesses God will then curse men, the creation of God (Jas. 3:9-10). Some 1000 years before Christ came to this earth, David said, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3). These, and many similar passages in the Old and New Testaments, place a premium on folks controlling their speech and speaking only what is true and right. Peter told the Christians scattered throughout different parts of the world, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11a). In other words, the words of our mouth need to reflect the very utterances of God! Would God gossip and slander others? Of course, not. Did Christ gossip and slander others while he was upon this earth? He did no such thing! Then, let us, the disciples of Christ (John 8:31-32), avoid gossip and slander!

Defining Our Terms

Many folks get themselves into trouble because they use words for which they do not have the definition, and as a result, use those words in a wrong way. In order to appreciate what it is to gossip and slander, let us define these terms. Many times, a word well-defined will explain much.

“Gossip” is defined as “idle talk about others, regardless of fact; idle

talk or writing” (*Webster’s Dictionary*). “Slander” is defined as, “the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another’s reputation . . . a false and defamatory oral statement about a person” (*Ibid.*). While the KJV does not use the word “gossip,” the NAS and similar versions do (for example, Prov. 20:19; 2 Cor. 12:20). However, within the KJV and NKJV, statements such as “flatters with his lips,” “whisperer,” “whisperings,” and similar terms make clear what gossip is all about! The word “slander” (and its derivatives: slanderers, slandering, slanderously, etc.) is found in the KJV, NKJV, NAS, and other versions. W.E. Vine says a slanderer is one who is “given to finding fault with the demeanor and conduct of others, and spreading their innuendos and criticisms in the church” (*Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* 580).

Consistently, the Bible tells us to avoid such behavior. To “avoid” something is “to depart, withdraw from, leave” (Webster). A synonym of “avoid” is “shun.” Therefore, this article will encourage all of our dear readers to shun, depart, or leave the sins of uttering false charges, idle talk, and rumors against folks. We need to shun or avoid spreading innuendos and criticisms of others. Such speech ought not have any part in the life of a Christian.

Warnings Against Slander and Gossip

As with other sins related to our speech (lying, cursing, etc.), God

warns us about the danger of gossip and slander and shows us that such is sinful in his sight. In fact, the practice of slandering and gossip has always been repugnant to God. Please consider the following Bible examples which declare this truth.

Part of the reason the Israelites did not enter Canaan the first time was because of the “evil report” ten of the twelve spies brought back (Num. 13:32). When God punished the folks for their unbelief, he said, “I the Lord have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die. And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord” (Num. 14:35-37). God called what those ten spies did “slander.” These folks had spread “innuendos and criticism” against God, denying his power to deliver them from the giants and others who inhabited the land (Num. 13:31-33). The result was that this generation wandered for forty years, not being allowed to enter the Promised Land! Therefore, we can see quite clearly that the end result of slander is not a “minor” thing! The Israelites lost a generation of people in the Wilderness because of slander! How tragic.

David wrote in the long ago: “All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt” (Ps. 41:7). It ought to be clear to us that folks who wish to engage in gossip and slanderous talk do such because they hate the one they are talking about! When someone says, “Don’t get me wrong, I love _____, but did you hear about . . . ?” This one is adding lying to the sin of gossip!

David understood that whispering, and talking behind folks’ backs comes from the mouth of hatred, and not love! David once wrote that the one who would abide in God’s tabernacle, or dwell in his holy hill would be the person who does not slander (Ps. 15:3)! Are we guilty of slandering folks? Are we guilty of showing hatred toward our brethren because we have been gossiping against them? If so, this is the time to repent!

Are you tired of your friends and companions? Are you ready for some new ones? Solomon declares that the way to “separate intimate friends” is to gossip about them. Please read Proverbs 16:28: “A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.” Later in the same book,



Solomon wrote, “He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips” (Prov. 20:19). The New American Standard’s rendering of this passage ends by saying, “Therefore do not associate with a gossip.” Truer words were never said!

In the New Testament, among the many “sins of the Gentiles” listed, Paul said these people had been guilty of “whisperings” (slander, NAS)! In Romans 1 it is made clear that those who did not like to retain God in their knowledge (v. 28) were also guilty of slander! These folks, Paul said, were “worthy of death,” as well as those who stood idly by and allowed such sins to take place without rebuke (Rom. 1:32)! Later on in the book of Romans, Paul called it “slander” when some said that he had taught “situation ethics” to the people (“*Let us do evil that good may come,*” Rom. 3:8). Paul had never taught anything like this, and he considered it “slander” when folks suggested to the Roman Christians that he had taught such.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth for the second time and made it clear that he worried that upon his arrival among them, he might find them “such as ye would not” (2 Cor. 12:20). He wanted them to shape up and correct some things before he got there personally. Among the things listed that they need to correct was gossip among them!

The above references, as well as many other biblical passages make it clear that God does not sanction gossip or slander in any form! Therefore, if God does not approve of it, we need to stay away from it. If, while Christ lived, he did not engage in such activities, and he is our example (1 Pet. 2:21-22), then we need to stay away from it, too!

Perpetuating Gossip and Slander

Sadly, rather than avoiding gossip and slander, we are often witnesses to folks *perpetuating* gossip and slander! How does this happen? This happens not only as someone speaks things he ought not, it also occurs when folks are *listening* when they ought not! In other words, when it comes to gossip and slander, not only are “loose lips” necessary for one to be guilty of sin, but a “listening ear” can also produce sin! If you do not believe this, return to Numbers 13:31-14:1 and remember that the “evil report” the spies brought back was only half of the equation! Had the nation of Israel told those spies to shut their mouths, and then listened to Caleb and Joshua, that generation of people would have enjoyed the Promised Land as God had intended! If these folks had rallied around Caleb and Joshua, rather than trying to kill them (Num. 14:10), we would have read an entirely different outcome! Sadly, since the people listened to the slander and rebelled against God, that generation died without entering the Promised Land!

Later on in history, there were folks who spread the rumors that Christ had a devil, or that he was a sinner (Matt. 12:24; John 9:16, 24, 10:20-21).

Some spoke of Christ being a deceiver, etc. (John 7:12). These were slanderous statements, and statements which needed a receptive hearer in order for them to spread. Unfortunately, there were those who believed the statements, and they rejected our Lord because of it!

Moving forward in history, we read of occasions when the apostles and early preachers were in a town, and the people were “stirred up” by different ones (Paul experienced this often, Acts 13:45; 17:5, 13-14; 18:6a; 19:9, 24-32). How were they “stirred up”? They were “stirred up” because they listened to the gossip and slander that were being spread by the enemies of the Lord! Some, rather than giving Paul and the others a fair hearing (as they did in Berea, Acts 17:11-12), listened to the liars and persecuted Paul and the other apostles and preachers. Sadly, the enemies came to Berea, and Paul had to escape from there as well (Acts 17:13-14).

Gossip and slander are a two-way street! You have to have someone willing to talk and then someone willing to listen for them to be successful. Sadly, we see all too often the “success” of gossip and slander among brethren. Gossip and slander are perpetuated daily as a result of folks giving the liars their “listening ears.”

Ways To Avoid Gossip and Slander

Having learned God’s attitude toward these sinful practices and how such sins are perpetuated, let us learn to avoid gossip and slander. One who would please God ought to have nothing to do with such sins. Unfortunately, gossip and slander are but symptoms of bigger problems. Therefore, if we are going to avoid gossip and slander, we need to address the root problems behind these sins of the tongue. In order to avoid gossip and slander . . .

1. Let us have a heart of humility. The humble of heart, the one who thinks less of himself than others (Rom. 12:3), will not make it a practice to talk about others in a

slanderous way. The humble of heart who put God first, others second, and oneself last could not very well speak slanderously against God’s creation (Jas. 3:9)! The Bible records the events of many great men and women so that we can see how these heroes of the faith conducted themselves while upon this earth. Many of these people are great examples of humility. May we follow the examples of such worthies as Christ, Moses, Daniel, Timothy, and others, who humbly served God and guarded their tongue from speaking in proud, boastful ways. When humility is absent in folks, gossip and slander are soon to follow. This is because the proud person often belittles, or “digs up dirt” on others, in order to make himself look better.

2. Let us avoid hatred of others. David said the ones gossiping about him were those who hated him (Ps. 41:7). Isn’t this still true today? Generally, we do not gossip about our friends, do we? Yet, we may try to spread some “whoppers” about those whom we do not like! Yes, hatred is a strong motivator for gossip and slander. Often, such sins of the tongue occur because a person hates the one he is talking about, and wishes them harm. We need to remember the words of Christ who told us to love our enemies and pray for them (Matt. 5:44). Have we been doing this? It is too easy to allow emotions and wrongs done (real or imagined) to cloud our judgment. Don’t act like that!

3. Let us keep the words we speak to a minimum! How many times have people gotten into trouble for “engaging their mouth before their brain was in gear”? Let us not be hasty to speak. Rather, let us heed the words of Solomon who said, “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. . . . Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin” (Eccl. 5:2, 6). Solomon taught, “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise” (Prov. 10:19). I know of folks who have spread gossip about fellow Christians (including preachers), whom they have never met, nor have even heard them speak (on tape, “live,” etc.). Friends, how can one in good conscience speak negatively about folks when they have never even *heard* them? Would such actions be following what was expressed by Solomon so long ago? Isn’t it amazing what some folks will do? How wise were the words of Solomon that remind us to keep our words to a minimum! May we echo in our lives the words of David who said, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3).

4. Let us reserve our ears for listening to the truth. As we learned earlier, gossip and slander are perpetuated by the “listening ear.” Since this statement is true, the reverse is also true! Specifically, gossip and slander are rendered impotent and useless when folks refuse to listen! Let us keep our ears open to the truth, and let us not give any

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A Godly Home

Steve Niemeier

The story of creation found in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis contains many lessons for us. From the earth being without form to a completed earth with two great lights, living creatures from the water, birds flying above the earth, and cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth — all summarized by the statement from God the Creator “it was good.” The thought of this brings one to his knees in humility. As humbling as this is and as awesome as this is it is overshadowed by the love of God in creating man (both male and female) in his image (Gen. 1:27). He gave them dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, over the cattle of the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth (Gen. 1:26). This is such an overwhelming lesson of how God thinks of man and how man ought to respect the power and authority of God.

This story of God’s love and desire for man sets the basic guidelines for the relationship we call “family.” After God formed man from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7) and breathed into him the breath of life, he commissioned man to name each living creature (Gen. 2:19). However in the supreme knowledge of God, he knew that it was not good that man should be alone; man needed a helper (Gen.

2:18). As a result he took a rib from man and made woman. Why a rib? Many have speculated that it was a rib because of the location of the rib of man that would constitute a helpmeet instead of a servant or a lord if a part of the feet or the head were taken. The words found in Genesis 2:24 will forever ring of God’s plan for marriage, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Thus the plan for marriage, one man and one woman for life form one flesh where God is present (Matt. 19:6). This is our start for our discussion of “A Godly Home.” A qualified man for marriage and a qualified woman for marriage who come together as one flesh (joined by God) form the foundation of what God desires a home to be built upon.

We find that the man or husband, as we call him, has the responsibility to lead his household in building a “A Godly Home.” This man must be willing to leave his mother and his father (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5) and become the head of his own wife and ultimately any children who become a part of his household. Being the head of his wife is an awesome task. This is compared to Christ being the head of every man and God being the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). Matthew 19:5-6 also gives us the instructions that

ground for gossip and slander. Our minds need to be filled with that which is lovely, pure, truthful, virtuous, praiseworthy, etc. (Phil. 4:8). The sins of gossip and slander are nothing like that. Let us avoid them!

If this is not enough to convince us to avoid slander and gossip, please read Romans 1:32 again. Remember, if we provide a listening ear to those who gossip and slander, God will not find us guiltless! We should not be slanderer or gossip, and we ought not waste time listening to this garbage! Just imagine how gossip and slander would be severely diminished if the “listeners” just stopped listening!

Conclusion

Slander and gossip are insidious problems we face.

Therefore, let us avoid these sins with all we have! As James says, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Jas. 1:19). If we are going to please God in *word* as well as in deed, gossip and slander must never cross our lips! Let us hear the truth from the Bible concerning these things. Let us put into practice the rules we have learned for avoiding gossip and slander so that we will be the kind of people God would have us to be — pure in thought, word, and deed! Be warned: “*He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool*” (Prov. 10:18).

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the husband must cleave or be joined to his wife in such a way that they become one flesh. It is obvious here that this is not meaning to be “taped” together but to be permanently “welded” together. A man must understand that he is not the “dictator” or “lord” over his wife and children but that he is the leader and guide for their physical and, more importantly, spiritual well being.

A godly husband will dwell with his wife with understanding giving her honor according to 1 Peter 3:7. Giving honor means to respect her, value her opinions, and esteem one’s wife remembering that, of all the men in the world she gave her love to him. According to Galatians 3:28 we are all one in Christ Jesus, so a husband must value the position of being an equal spiritual heir with his wife as they both strive to be obedient to the Lord. A godly husband must recognize the physical needs (1 Tim. 5:8), relationship needs (1 Cor. 7:1-4), and spiritual needs (Heb. 5:12-14) of his wife and be prepared to provide for her.

Last but certainly not least, we need to mention that a godly husband will love his wife just as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25-29). John mentioned in 1 John 3:18, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Certainly a godly husband would prove his love for his wife by the deeds that he does. These deeds would never be of a nature to harm her but would be deeds to uplift her just as the deeds that Christ has done for the church. Telling our wives of many years that we love her, opening doors for her, communicating with her about her day and her faith in the Lord are needed from every husband who wants to be the head of “A Godly Home.”

The woman or wife, as we would recognize her, also has responsibilities in making a family “A Godly Home.” She is to submit (yield) to her husband (Eph. 5:22). This certainly does not imply that she is inferior or “second-class” to her husband. She is a help meet who must be treated with the highest respect as she goes about her responsibility of submitting to her husband (Eph. 5:33). Peter gives us the example of holy women such as Sarah in explaining about submissiveness in 1 Peter 3:5-6. These women trusted in God and so should a godly wife today. Unfortunately our society today tempts a woman to step out of the role God has for her into a role that God has condemned and that is the role of usurping authority over the man. A godly wife will recognize her role as one who reverences or respects her husband and be satisfied with God’s plan for her in that role.

Being a keeper at home is a part of being a godly wife that has been challenged for many years. Paul gave instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:14 that young widows were to manage the house. He also instructed Titus that the older women were to teach the younger women to love their husbands, love their children, and be homemakers among

other things (Tit. 2:3-5). Certainly these examples would lead us to believe that a wife is to be a keeper or manager of the house. A woman who keeps her home as God would have her to do needs not to be ashamed or embarrassed as this is an important responsibility given to her by the Creator. We must not forget that a woman is also to love her husband as mentioned in Titus 2. Love’s qualities found in 1 Corinthians 13 are displayed by action and not only by word. A godly woman will love her husband and render unto her husband providing for her husband’s physical (1 Cor. 7:1) and spiritual needs (Acts 18:24-26) to assist him in his role of being a godly husband. Proverbs 31:10-31 is a passage that every godly wife should read over and over as it is an excellent guide for a virtuous wife.

In Genesis 1:28 we find God giving instruction to the man and woman he had just created. This instruction was for them to be fruitful and multiply. Children then are often a part of “A Godly Home.” While it would be easy to start discussing “how things have changed since I was a child,” we would spend our time better discussing what God states his responsibilities for children are.

Honoring father and mother is mentioned several times in the word of God (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Matt. 5:14; 19:19). Yet the most used passage it seems is Ephesians 6:1-3, as we find that honor in this passage has something to do with a child obeying his parents in the Lord. Let us stop here and make mention that while the children have the responsibility to obey their parents in the Lord, the parents have the responsibility (under the guidance of the husband/father) to bring up their children in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

As the parent instructs the child in this training and admonition, then a child must listen and heed this instruction. Proverbs 1:8-9; 4:1-4,10-27; 6:20-29 and other passages give strong instructions that a parent may use in raising their children as God would have them to do. Children then must obey these instructions. Obedience is displayed by one’s actions. A child who heeds or conforms to these instructions will display honor and respect to his parents. As we all know, obedience is not hard when it does not contradict what one wants to do. However, when one wants to do something that is forbidden by godly instruction, obedience becomes more difficult. Satan makes it that way and teaching and training a child to withstand Satan through proper instruction takes time and effort. Unfortunately, many parents fail to dedicate the time and effort for this proper training.

A child should also remember their Creator in the days of their youth according to Ecclesiastes 12:1. Daniel and his friends are an example to all young people to purpose in their hearts to follow their Creator regardless of the circumstances (Dan. 1:8; 3:16-18). Proverbs 10:1 states,

Faithfulness

Phillip W. Martin

Faithfulness should be incumbent to being a Christian. In other words, the two indicators, faithful and Christian, should behave as if they were synonyms of one another in that the very being of a Christian is found in his faithfulness. In Hebrews 10:23 the inspired speaker for God records, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." A good look at faithfulness will of necessity begin with a look at the faithfulness of Jehovah God.

God's Character is Unchanging

The pagan gods of man's invention are often fickle and move on whim and thoughtlessness. In contrast, God's constancy shows in all he does (Mal 3:6). The failings of man, mirrored in the false gods they create, are not part or parcel of the immutable God of the heavens. Christ even

serves to reinforce this when he prays near the end and remarks saying, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

God's Words Always Come to Pass

God "keeps truth forever" (Ps. 146:6). In opposition to God, Satan is a liar (8:44). It is the very nature of God to speak truth, for he cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). God's word is not only true in the facts, it is true in that it has been tested and found sure. Because his word is so indisputably true, we can place our trust in him in all ways.

God Is Always a Faithful Judge

Any judge must hold to a standard of justice. God has been proven to be truly and eternally just in his dealing with man. It is essential that any judge adheres to a standard of

"A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother." Proverbs 20:11 adds, "Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right." A child remembering his Creator and honoring his father and mother will make his parent's glad, assisting in their family being "A Godly Home."

"A Godly Home" has a family that practices discipline just as the church must practice discipline to keep it pure and holy. Discipline can be instructive by teaching and encouraging to prevent a trespass against the authority. Discipline can also be corrective in order to correct or punish when a trespass has occurred. Abuse is not part of the discipline process in a godly home. Discipline practiced according to the word of God will not provoke a child to wrath or discouragement (Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4) but will bring about children who grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord that is required by God's word. We all must understand that people reject the Lord everyday and some of our children will even do so also.

In closing let us make this observation. Many houses and apartments are made up of families not striving to be "A Godly Home." As the home goes, so goes our congregation,

our community, our nation, and the world around us. The deterioration of the home which is to be dedicated to serving the Lord and putting his kingdom first (Matt. 6:33) is no doubt one of the largest contributors to alcoholism, drug addiction, soaring crime rates, children born out of wedlock, divorces, suicides, and many other social problems that lead to spiritual destruction. Following the plan God has laid out for "A Godly Home" is not difficult but requires dedication and commitment to stay the course. However the end result will be worth the effort. The church today is lacking in men qualified to serve as elders, deacons, and gospel preachers. The only way to help ease this situation is for young men and women to dedicate the amount of time and effort to establish "A Godly Home" with a goal of being a family that produces men qualified, willing and able to serve in these capacities.

May we all start today to improve our homes by studying God's word together, sitting down together to pray, sharing our meals together, going to worship services together, turning off the television and computer and conversing one with another. May God bless our homes as we strive to make them "Godly Homes."
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justice and not be partial to certain persons. God, by virtue of his righteous character, is perfectly and eternally just and righteous. This fact of the nature of God is comforting to those who seek him, but can be terrifying to those who spurn him. For all time we can trust that he will always judge with a faithful standard.

God Always Keeps His Word

Inasmuch as God cannot lie, he cannot fail to keep his promises. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). The creation and all that God has accomplished through the ages testify to the realization that we can trust in the promises of God. At no time has God failed to keep his word in any matter. This clear certainty that God will fulfill his promises strengthens the faith of those who follow him.

God Always Finishes His Will

The purpose and plan of God is a sure foundation that we can trust in and live by in all portions of this life. Man may choose to work against the ends of God, but they will not keep God's will from coming to pass. If anyone does not find eternity in heaven it will be a failure of man's faithfulness, not on the part of God (Rom. 3:3-4). "What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, And mightest prevail when Thou art judged." The vigor we find to continue steadfast in our labors for the Lord is built on the confidence that God will not fail to finish in victory. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). During the midst of ever present change, we need

to hold on to the hope that we have that God rules upon his sovereign throne and all his eternal purposes will see the end he has in store.

God Will Never Forsake Us

In all of our efforts and our work God's consistent support for those who seek him continues to build up his faithful servants, "Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you, so that we confidently say, The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?" (Heb. 13:5, 6). God will not abandon us as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

As we strengthen our faith and faithfulness we need to be mindful of our own frailties and foibles. We need the God who is so aptly described by Henry F. Lyte when he wrote,

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away.
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me!

There is nothing powerful enough to separate us from the love of the eternally faithful God (Rom. 8:35-39).

Sadly the nature and crucial importance of faith in the life of the Christian are often misunderstood. As a new person (2 Cor. 5:17), the Christian enjoys a new identity, a new sense of who he is: he is one who has been born again. As he begins to walk in newness of life, he begins to understand that he now belongs to God. As such the Christian seeks to live with a new mind, one that does not walk by sight, but by faith. The Christian faithfully conducts himself as one who follows after Christ.

Set Apart to Christ

Upon a first look, all who are in Christ are consecrated to God from the moment they rose from the watery grave of baptism. Moses said to the people of Israel, "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6). In the boundary of the New Testament the text of 1 Peter 2:9-10 records, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9, 10).

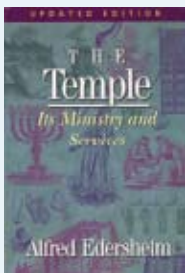
When we reflect on faithfulness of God we can build our own faithfulness in all that we strive to become.

Our God's Character Should Be Steadfast

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Our lives should reflect the strength of God's consistent stability. Tossing to and fro like a ship tossed by rough storms should not be the mind of the one seeking things above. Too often we even allow the failure of others to dreadfully become the excuse for our own unfaithfulness. May it never be so. Let us stand, even if all those who encompass us be drawn away by the lusts of the world and all the things in the world. The Hebrew letter reminds us, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

We Should Use Righteous Judgment

Often we are faced with making choices that will have a lasting effect on ourselves and those we love. Taking the time to consider the spiritual impact on our faith is of the utmost importance. In the workings of God, we can find answers to our own dilemmas if we are willing to pattern our choices and actions after the way of God.

We should Strive to Keep our Word

In our life and our ways, let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no." The twisting of the truth is the work of Satan. God speaks truth in all he does and so should we. Far too few today are those who can be trusted to keep a confidence, hold their tongue, or as they say in court, tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

We Should Strive to Finish the Race Set Before Us

Paul wrote: "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:24-27). Just as the athlete does not stop just before the finish line, we too, in our service to God and our work in life need to be one who sees it through to the end.

We Should Not Forsake God

In the end, faithfulness will be evident in the one who chooses to stay with God. He will endure the trials and testing of life with an indomitable spirit buoyed by the strength that God supplies. When he falls short of the will of God he will humbly seek God's forgiveness and redouble his work to develop the mind of Christ.

(Note: Some points for this article built from an outline by Gary Henry.)

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"Honesty" continued from front page

in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:23-25).

Honesty has a place and an influence on many aspects of life. Please consider some of the areas of the Christian's life where honesty is fundamental and necessary.

Honesty must be obvious in our speech. Jesus said, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Matt. 12:35). The words of our mouth ought to display the honesty of our hearts. God hates "a lying tongue" (Prov. 6:16-17). The Christian's word should be sufficient to verify the truth of what he says. When Scripture says, "Let your 'Yes,' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into judgment," it expresses this trait of honesty (Matt. 5:37; Jas. 5:12). Such things as slander, gossip, and backbiting all display a dishonest treatment of others (Prov. 6:19; 14:5, 25). Something is very wrong with our heart (not to mention our influence) when those who hear us speak doubt the honesty of our words (Matt. 12:34).

Honesty must be obvious when we conduct business.

It is sad, yet true, that many stores should display "Buyer Beware" signs to warn customers of dishonest merchants. It is a sin to misrepresent one's merchandise (such as using inaccurate weights and measures) in order to gain an advantage over the consumer. "Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord. But a just weight is His delight" (Prov. 11:1; cf. Lev. 19:35-36).

Have you ever known of a salesman to tout the benefits of his product in order to make a sale, only to disparage the same product after the sale is made (all the while patting himself on the back for being such a good salesman)? Or, what about the buyer who criticizes a product when he is trying to "get a good deal," only to brag about how good the item is after the deal is done? Both are less than honest: "Getting treasures by a lying tongue is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death" (Prov. 21:6); and "'It is good for nothing,' cries the buyer; But when he has gone his way, then he boasts" (Prov. 20:14). God warned Israel, "You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light" (that is, one for selling and the other for buying, Deut. 25:13). If you sell something, represent it honestly. If the car you are selling needs a brake job, then let the buyer know. It is a matter of honesty and treating others the way you want to be treated (Matt. 7:12). Be willing to pay an honest price that is consistent with the value of what you wish to purchase. "Pulling a fast one" over on an unsuspecting soul may save you money, but it will cost you your soul (Matt. 16:26).

Another form of dishonesty in business is the exacting of usury (charging exorbitant interest rates on money loaned). Loan sharks are dishonest leeches who prey on the weak (Prov. 28:8). Then there are the get rich quick schemes that promise the mother load but only deliver misery. “Don’t promise something you can’t deliver, and deliver what you promise” ought to be the Christian’s motto for every business deal he proposes and pursues. “Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one perverse in his ways, though he be rich” (Prov. 28:6).

Honesty must be obvious when we pay our taxes. Cheating the IRS is another form of dishonesty that is rampant in our society. When it is time to file your taxes, do you honestly represent your income and deductions? Or, do you convince yourself that it will be okay to misrepresent the facts as long as you don’t get caught? Rest assured my friend, the Lord has already caught you! “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). Such dishonest conduct is stealing, pure and simple. Those who obey Christ are to put away lying and “steal no more” (Eph. 4:25, 28).

Honesty must be obvious in the work of the local church. Every church deals with money that is not its own (Acts 4:35; 1 Cor. 16:2). The money in a church’s treasury belongs to the Lord and not men. It must be handled with the respect and honesty it deserves. When the apostle Paul was involved in gathering funds from the churches for benevolent work, he bent over backwards to avoid blame and the slightest suggestion of wrong. Concerning that collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem, he made sure the churches chose their own messengers to deliver their funds so that nobody could blame him and his companions of any impropriety (2 Cor. 8:18-21). Honesty and good judgment suggests similar conduct in every church. For instance, it is wise to have more than one man count and deposit the collection money so there will be no temptation to steal or otherwise misuse the funds. It is no indictment of any man’s character, nor should any be offended, when a church requires two signatures on its checking account. It is a matter of being careful that honesty prevails.

Honesty must be obvious when preachers receive support from churches to preach the gospel. No preacher should be offended to give a complete accounting of his financial support to the brethren who share with him in the matter of “giving and receiving” (Phil. 4:15-16). And, churches should not hesitate to request this information from the preachers they support. To their shame, there have been dishonest preachers who have misrepresented their income and need for support, thus taking advantage of churches. Such dishonesty gives a bad name to the vast majority of honest men who work diligently to provide for themselves and their families as they do the work of an

evangelist. All the more reason for every preacher to willingly account for the support they receive from churches as they “live from the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14). Without a doubt, “getting treasures by a lying tongue is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death” (Prov. 21:6).

Brethren who support a preacher have the right to know what that man preaches (2 Tim. 4:2-5; 2 John 10-11). An honest preacher is willing to give an accounting to any supporting church of what he teaches on any Bible subject. Preachers should not object to such honest inquiry from supporting churches, but be ready to give an honest answer (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). No preacher is above being asked what he preaches.

Conclusion

Of course, there are many more areas of life that call for honesty, including in the home, among our neighbors and toward strangers. Christians abhor the evil of dishonesty in all its forms, preferring instead what is genuine and true (Rom. 12:9). God’s people take the integrity of an honest heart with them every day wherever they go. “The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them,” and again, “A righteous man hates lying, but a wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame” (Prov. 11:3; 13:5).

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“Filthy Language” continued from page 2

“curse words”? Where will you and I stand if judgment begins at the house of the Lord (1 Pet. 4:17)?

2. Sexual References. This has been *en vogue* more explicitly in recent years. Popular sitcoms rarely make it through their twenty-minute show (which is about the length of most shows in consideration of the length of commercials) without a perverted reference, not-so-subtly placed within the show’s dialogue. Have we found such “catch-phrases” appearing in the speech of ourselves and our children? Or, do we find such words and phrases popping into our minds at various times? Though we may admirably have the strength to restrain our tongue, what does this tell us about what is in our mind?

Songs and music videos, in a variety of genres, often refer to parts of the body of males and females in a lascivious way. TV shows are also becoming less restrained, referencing and calling attention to parts of the human body which are not fit for casual conversation. God has made the body of the man and woman to be attractive to the member of the opposite sex, yet our desire is to be bridled. There was

a time when mankind was naked and not ashamed because of the absence of sin (Gen. 2:25). Today, not only are men and women naked and not ashamed, though the former innocence has been lost, moreover they are not ashamed to speak of their own body and the bodies of others in ways which appeal to a base mind. While Proverbs 5:19, among other passages, show God's design within the marriage relationship, there are some things that even "the Gentiles" know should not be spoken. As Christians, does our speech contain filthy language in reference to the bodies of other males and females?

What Can I Do?

1. Be More Aware of What You Hear. In 2 Peter 2:7-8, we learn that Lot "was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)." We are sometimes critical of Lot for deciding to go to Sodom and Gomorrah when he could have known the kind of place to which he was going. To his credit, however, he did not grow accustomed to the wickedness among which he lived. It is ironic that some of us who would criticize Lot for that decision, are guilty of the same by going to movies filled with ungodliness. We, like Lot, go either with the knowledge that the movie is filled with filthy conduct and lawless deeds or we do not care enough to find out before we go. Later, we recommend this movie to someone else who is appalled at the filth that was in the movie that we never even noticed. At least Lot never recommended that others go live in Sodom and Gomorrah! We should not judge Lot, unless we are prepared to be judged by the same standard. (Making use of such tools as a TV Guardian and www.screenit.com are helpful in movie selection. See my article entitled "Guarding Against the 'Art' of Foul Language" *Truth Magazine* [March 15, 2001], Vol. XLV, No.6, 168-169.)

In Psalm 119:104 David writes: "Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way." When God's word convinces us that filthy language is a false way, we can no longer have a passive attitude towards it. How many curse words should we hear before we leave the theater, turn off the TV or radio station? I can't give a number, but when we fail to notice them when they are used — *we have heard too many!* If you will take note when filthy language is used and *let* it bother you, I believe your tolerance will significantly decrease. You may even be surprised at the number of inappropriate words that you didn't realize you were hearing. Instead of just overlooking the filthy language you hear, start taking count — how many times was the Lord's name vainly used during that twenty-minute sitcom? How many shows have there been in which there were *zero* sexual allusions and/or references?

2. Be More Aware of Your Thoughts. Our words are an expression and reflection of our thoughts. In Ephesians 5:3-4 Paul says that filthiness, foolish talking, and course

jesting are not fitting for saints. If we are talking in these ways, then we are thinking in these ways. Paul gives us several things on which we should meditate in Philippians 4:8, none of which will result in us using filthy language. Is your language true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy? If it isn't, then neither is your mind; however when we "meditate on these things" then the things that will proceed out of our heart will be of the same character.

As we use occasional opportunities through the day to think about heaven, hell (yes, we need to think about hell too), God's word, our favorite hymn, etc., we are meditating on the law that we love (Ps. 119:97).

3. Be More Aware of What You Say. "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (Jas. 1:26). While we often appropriately apply this to anger, it is also true that some fail to bridle their tongue by using filthy language. We might use filthy language at times and not even know it. If this is a problem for you, ask others to make you aware when you use words that are not fitting. This will help you to regain the sensitivity to those words that you have lost.

God is trying to help Christians understand that it is a serious matter with him when a Christian is not in control of his speech. He says that "religion" for this person is vain or useless. In Acts 14:15, Barnabas and Paul told men who were steeped in idolatry to turn from these "vain things." If you are not controlling your tongue, then you are just as well off in idolatry, for both result in vain worship in God's eyes.

Conclusion

The problem of a filthy mouth begins with a filthy mind. Mark 7:20-23 makes this very plain. Verse 21 tells us that our evil deeds come from within, out of the heart. If we are struggling with controlling our tongue, it is because of what we have allowed into our mind, in the past or present. This is one reason why Solomon instructed us to "remember *now* your Creator in the days of your youth before the difficult days draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Eccl. 12:1, emp. DH). Yes, living a godly life becomes more difficult when we have trained our mind in sinful ways in the past. In Galatians 6:7 the gospel teaches us that "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." This principle is equally true before we obey the gospel, as it is after we become a Christian.

Sin always brings its consequences, sometimes even after we are trying to turn from them — just ask the drunkard, the gambler, the disease-stricken fornicator. If you are not a Christian, obey the gospel and begin making the needed changes in your life. If you are a Christian and are using

filthy language, begin controlling your mind, your ears, and your tongue before you lose your soul (2 Pet. 2:21-22).

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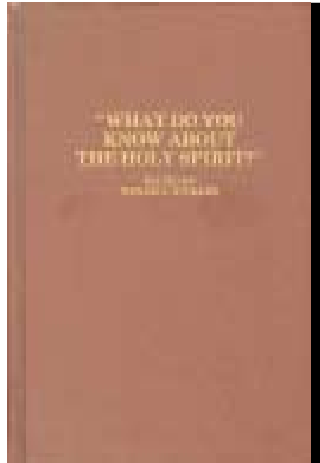
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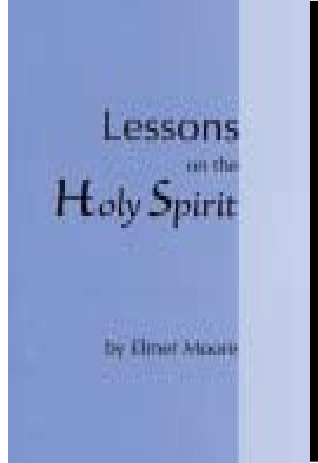


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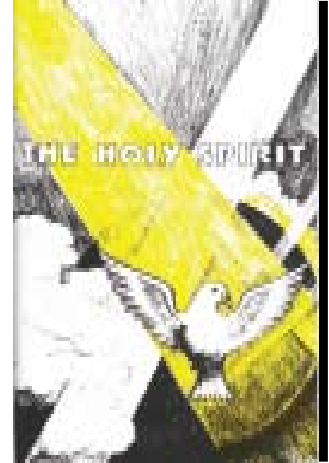


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