

FROM DARKNESS

To light



PROJECT 20/20 | PART ONE

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Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

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Darkness Lesson 1

Introduction: Join Us in 2020

by T.S. Stephens

As an optometrist, I think about eyes and vision as I try to help others see better. Because of the 20/20 Snellen visual acuity chart, Americans associate 20/20 with good vision. As a result, the year 2020 has sparked a desire to develop biblical material centered around “Enlightening the Eyes.” In specific, this year-long study called “From Darkness to Light” is the title phrase from Acts 26:18.

The year 2020 seemed like an opportunity to develop material for a classroom setting, as many are already thinking about the year of the eye in the United States. The goal of this project is to help “Children of the Light” see the eternal; things not seen with the eyes but seen by faith. As an optometrist, I and others have written articles/lessons on eye-related topics with spiritual applications.

God’s word teaches many spiritual concepts using the eyes. Sometimes, it is the contrast of walking by faith and not by sight, the call of humanity from darkness to God’s marvelous light. It is also the need to keep our eyes on Christ, lest like Peter, we misfocus on the waves of the sea. Other times, it is how Christians must look to the eternal rather than the temporal things Satan uses to blind us from the eternal promises.



Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

The study materials are for two classes with 25 lessons each. The two-class halves are “From Darkness” and “To Light.” In “From Darkness,” we start with a section on spiritual blindness followed by a section called “Eyes Full of Adultery,” The next section is the “Devil’s Dark Distortions” exploring many problems Satan uses to change our view. The last section is called “Lust of the Eyes,” and generally looks at covetousness in several forms. In “To we start with a section called “God is Light.” We continue in a section called “Children of Light.” The next section is called “Seen and Unseen.” The last two sections are “Walking in the Light” and “Visual Perception.”

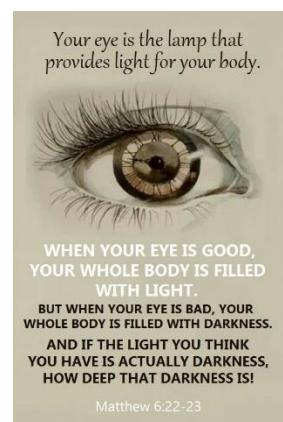
If we think about eyes, light, perception, vision, darkness, or light, many scriptures might come to mind. By way of introduction, consider some of the more commonly known passages around this theme from God's word.

Light Versus Darkness

God's intent is to open our eyes to the Light and be holy by faith in Jesus. 1 John 1:5b instructs, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” God sent the Christ and Apostles such as Paul “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:18). God will enlighten the eyes to all He has done for the children of Light. Ephesians 1:17-19 teaches, “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.”

Understanding and Perception

The eye is a place of understanding and perception. Matthew 6:22-23 teaches, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” Humans get to choose to seek God or to be enslaved by Satan. This text is about being single or focused on God.



Darkness and Distortion

Satan, the father of lies, has many snares and distortions to darken human perception and cause spiritual blindness. 1 John 2:16-17 explains some of those tools Satan uses to detour, distort, and darken humanity's view. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." These darkening distortions may come in many alluring forms but should be guarded against.

One such darkening distortion of the devil is hypocrisy. Rather than focusing on growing ourselves spiritually, we can be improperly concerned for our brother in hypocrisy. Matthew 7:3 illustrates, "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

Satan's false teachers and lie spreaders have eyes full of adultery. 2 Peter 2:14 remarks, "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: a heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children." Another example pervasive in American culture would include the lust of the eyes and the flesh such as the sins of pornography and fornication. Habakkuk 1:13 refers to God's purer eyes or holiness which Christians are called to when he remarks, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"



In a culture like the one described by Romans 1, sections of our culture have darkened, becoming foolish in their profession of their wisdom. The minds of that cultural section becoming reprobate, often moved beyond feeling in their iniquity.

Eyewitness and Identifying the Christ

The eyewitnesses of the Bible record the teachings and miracles of Jesus. John expressed in 1 John 1:1, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life."

Many today are like the Jews in John 9 who tried to persuade others that Jesus was a sinner even when He performed the miracle of restoring the man's sight while the Jews remained blind in their sin. John 9:30-33 reads, "The man

answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.”

Jesus was declared as the Messiah in His healing of the blind as Isaiah had foretold. This healing of the blind was part of what Jesus told John's disciples to observe and report back to John. Matthew 20:33-34 illustrates, “They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.” There is no doubt Jesus was identified by His miracles and by many eyewitnesses. He healed the blind then and still is healing the spiritually blind now.

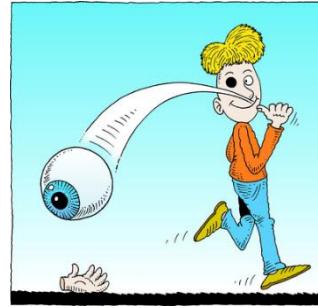
Satan, with his lies and distortions, has sought to keep folks blind and enslaved to sin. God wants his children to escape the corruption in the world through lust and become partakers of the divine nature and His holiness. Many times, there is a failure to see what has been told. Jesus remarked in Mark 8:18, “Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?” Spiritual blindness is still a problem today. The senses are often blinded and dulled by Satan.

Now, we have a chance to see and hear Jesus and be blessed. Matthew 13:15-16 reads, “For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”

Today, we must look through an eternal prism rather than through the distortive lens of sin. This requires us to see with faith rather than our eyes. Hebrews 11:1 teaches, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Eye Plucking

Jesus even instructs plucking out one's eye is better than going to hell. Matthew 5:29 reads, "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell." This teaching is much harder for most people than the "eye for eye" of Exodus 21:24.



Focusing on The Spiritual and Eternal: Walking in The Light

We must focus our eyes on Jesus as the author and finisher of the faith. Hebrews 12:2 instructs, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." We cannot take our eyes off Jesus to look at the storms of life as Peter did. Jesus has told His followers to walk in the light of faith and holiness.

The scriptures instruct Christians on how to grow and avoid blindness, so they walk as children of light. 2 Peter 1:9 details virtues of adding to one's faith then remarks, "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." One can forget and be blinded by sin.

Christians must learn to view the eternal rather than the temporal by walking as children of the light. 2 Corinthians 4:18 encourages, "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal."

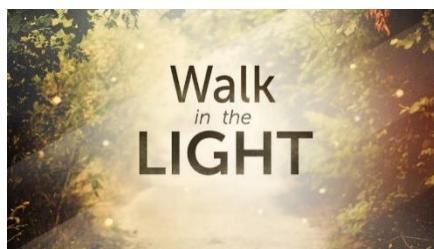
Christians are called to walk in the light and grow as image bearers of God in reflecting His light, His love, and His holiness. God instructs the children of light to be transformed in His service. Humans are so visual in practice that Paul reminds the child of God, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" in 2 Corinthians 5:7. This requires diligence on the Christian's part. The servant of God is looking to eternity and that day of the last trump. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Cor 15:52).

The material was developed with the help of many people, so you will encounter stylistic differences. The team of people involved in developing and writing this material hope the reader will enjoy and learn while focusing on the

Christ and the eternal instead of the devil's dark distortions. I would like to express my appreciation for their work, especially our editor, who refuses to be named. She has spent many blurry-eyed hours editing the lessons along with me. Further, I also wish to thank our proofreaders, Angela Fluharty, Terry Johnson, and Carl Mace. I would also like to thank Caleb McHenry and John Alford for help with the website

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In the year of the eye, in 2020, what can Christians do to battle Satan's darkness and enlighten their eyes of understanding to the hope of Christ's calling?



Darkness Lesson 1 Questions

Introduction

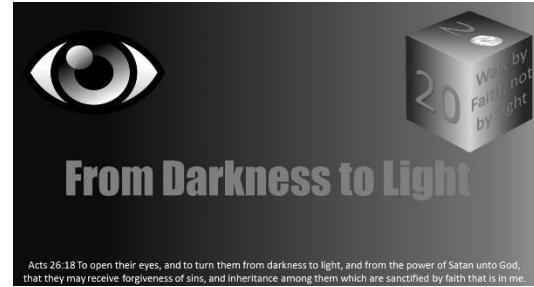
1. How does Satan blind humans to the eternal?
2. How can we seek to let God enlighten our eyes?
3. What is your favorite scripture about vision/eyes/blindness/light/dark? Why? What does this passage teach that impacts you?

Darkness Lesson 2

Spiritual Blindness:

Causes of Spiritual Blindness

by T.S. Stephens



Introduction

The idea of going blind terrifies most people, even though many take their vision for granted. It is estimated there are over 10,000 diseases of the human eye; about 1,000 can be effectively treated or managed. Some of these diseases lead to blindness such as diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration, toxoplasmosis, glaucoma, and retinitis pigmentosa.

Too often, early in the disease process, the disease slowly creeps up on a person; they do not even notice it slowly taking their eyesight. The longer they go without identifying the cause and treating the disease when treatable, the more likely they are to wait until such treatment is not effective and blindness results.

The eye as a point of understanding indicates how humans are generally sight dependent for everything. It is estimated 75-80% of learning is visual. Human language also illustrates this. Consider phrases such as Missouri's "Show me" slogan or "I will believe it when I see it."

What if one could know the cause of blindness and avoid it? Like physical blindness, Christians and people, in general, are often in denial about sin and the impact it has on them. Sin spiritually blinds. When the eye becomes focused on self and carnal things, there is no eternal viewpoint or focus on the eternal. There is no keeping one's eye on Christ.

Spiritual Blindness Defined

Spiritual blindness is the inability to comprehend spiritual truths. The eyes are indeed useless when the mind is blind. Mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal of the 1600s expressed it this way, "In faith there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don't."



Jesus helps one see the relationship between sight, faith, and spiritual blindness. Jesus taught in John 9:39-41, "For judgment I am come into this world,

that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And *some* of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.”

This relationship was also noted in Isaiah 42:16-20: “And I will bring the blind by a way *that* they knew not; I will lead them in paths *that* they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them. They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye *are* our gods. Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who *is* blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger *that* I sent? who *is* blind as *he that is* perfect, and blind as the LORD'S servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not.”



Paul identified spiritual blindness as when one's mind is darkened in Ephesians 4:17-19. “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

Many remain spiritually blind despite Jesus wanting to give them their sight. Jesus (quoting Isaiah) taught in Matthew 13:14-16, “For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous *men* have desired to see *those things* which ye see, and have not seen *them*; and to hear *those things* which ye hear, and have not heard *them*.”

The world has been pulled over the eyes of many. Satan has polluted their minds and tainted their view, darkening their thoughts. Instead of escaping the corruption of the world and becoming partakers of the divine nature as God has offered, many are spiritually blind. So, what causes spiritual blindness?

Some Causes of Spiritual Blindness

Pride causes spiritual blindness. Pride prevents one from seeking God's truth and remaining ignorant. Christians are not immune from this "I" problem. Proverbs 21:2-4 teaches, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin." Proverbs 6:17 summarizes "Haughty eyes are an abomination to the Lord." Proverbs 30:11-13 encourages, "There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness. There is a generation— oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up."



Pride easily blinds humans to the truth in their own lives. The Big-Me-Little-You syndrome of pride causes one to miss so much. Because their perception of reality is so skewed, they are often blind to reality, not only in this life but especially from an eternal perspective. The wisdom of God for those who are spiritually blind may seem like foolishness. But in the end, God will demonstrate His wisdom (1 Cor 1:18-21).

Self-righteousness causes spiritual blindness. Paul writes how Israel was ignorant of God's righteousness and sought their own. Romans 10:1-3 reads: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." They failed to see their self-righteousness as filthy rags (Isa 64:6).

Righteousness trusts in the Lord, not in one's own understanding. Righteousness is not confidence in self-wisdom but acknowledges and fears God (Prov 3:5-7). In Luke 18:9, Jesus uses a parable to teach about self-righteousness. "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." In verses 10-14, Jesus teaches about the Publican and the Pharisee. He challenges in verse 14, "...for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Self-righteousness is associated with pride and a failure to know God's word. Self-righteousness is self-centered and treats others with contempt. The legalism of the Pharisees is a good example of self-righteousness. Christ challenged them to the weightier matters of the law such as judgment, mercy, and faith without leaving the details of mint, anise, and cumin. Self-righteousness blinds one's heart with self-approval and false confidence.

Lust causes spiritual blindness. 1 John 2:15-17 teaches, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."



Lust is an inordinate desire, such as covetousness or greed. It is an excessive desire for a possession or consumption of something, often sexual. As a result, lust frequently skews one's vision of reality to the point of spiritual blindness.

King David's experience with Bathsheba is a strong example. David saw Bathsheba bathing and allowed his lust of the eyes and flesh to take root. As a result, he committed adultery. He then tried to cover Bathsheba's pregnancy and had her spouse murdered to take her as his wife (2 Sam 11-12). David's lust seemed to have blinded him to his sin until the prophet Nathan told him the story about a rich man who took a poor man's only lamb. The story of the man with one lamb made David indignant in judgment. He was so blind to his own sin that he failed to see that Nathan was speaking of him until Nathan tells him, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam 12:7). David was hit with his spiritual blindness and sin. His inordinate desire for Bathsheba led to many sins, and Nathan finally helped David see his sins as repugnant.

Many a man or woman has so desired another sexually that they lost all clear thinking, willingly throwing away reputation, a marriage, or a life they had worked hard to construct. Proverbs 6:25-29 warns, "Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" (See also Prov 7:7-23.) The enticement to sin because of lust seems to place blinders on its sufferers.

Everyone, specifically Christians, needs to guard their heart. They must avert their eyes and redirect their feet from the environments where they are enticed to lust. For what one puts in their heart will take root and grow. One cannot avoid all exposure to tempting environments, but too often one looks, lingers, lounges, and is ensnared by sin (Psa 1:1-2). Thus, one must avoid places and media that lead to a path of lust.

God has provided a plan to meet a person's need with all its benefits and protections. In terms of sexuality, God has created a covenant relationship of marriage between a wife and a husband (Gen 2:24). Ultimately though, when the Gentiles failed to recognize God, eventually they became depraved minds, and they are given over to their lusts. Noticed how Paul expressed it in Romans 1:19-32:

“Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a **reprobate mind**, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without

understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”

The minds of such folks have become blind as their understanding is darkened, ignorant of God’s promises. Their hearts are so blinded beyond feeling; they are given over to lasciviousness, uncleanness, and greediness.

In America’s current culture, sexuality and lust of the flesh are used to entice. Women’s and men’s bodies are used to sell clothes, music, cars, and everything under the sun. Women are culturally sold on the idea of sexually presenting their bodies to the world around them. Be honest, the skimpy bikini is not for comfort. It is designed to “hang out the sign.” Men are supposed to not react or be provoked in a politically correct culture, but they are reacting. This does not justify one who would rape or lust. But clearly, there is a creation of tension by intent. Thus, pornography is rampantly consumed. This consumption cheapens the sexual relationship, such that American culture has become the Romans 1 culture. In time, one is stumbling in darkness. Proverbs 4:19 explains, “The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble.” Children of God must guard their hearts and avert their eyes when possible.

In American society, much like the culture described in Romans 1, one can hardly pass through the day without plenty of lust of the eyes temptations. We are bombarded by possessions, advertisements, billboards, and even folks just immodestly dressed all around. As a result, we must learn to avert our eyes and not let lust take root. Consider the adage. “You cannot prevent birds ...from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair.” Christians must not focus on nor entertain the notions of fleshly desires.



Alcohol (and other drugs) causes spiritual and even physical blindness.

Proverbs 23:29-35 warns, “Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.”



Blinded of understanding, alcohol and other recreational drugs have caused many to behave in a way that has led to shame, loss, destruction, prison, and physical death. There is no shortage of current examples of how alcohol and drugs have destroyed lives and families – from the celebrity to the child killed by a drunk driver.

Alcohol can skew the physical senses, but it dims the mind to blindness when abused. It is estimated by some in the AA community that 1 in 13 who take their first drink will become alcoholics!

Drug laws and use continue to change in the U.S. Several states have moved to legalize drugs, such as marijuana. It may be legal, but the effects are still a loss of understanding pulling one into the pit. According to the 2018 Centers for Disease Control National Center for Health Statistics, life expectancy in the US dropped for the second year in a row. The opioid epidemic and increased suicide rate in our country are indicated as causes by experts looking at the data.



Indeed, this generation of Americans is the most medicated, counseled, drunk, drug abusing, in debt, and obese generation of American history. Yet, they are also one of the unhappiest generations. (The newest generation is called the I-generation. Raised in a Post 1997 world, they never knew a world without the iPhone. Today, people are addicted to their phone often because of social media. Yet, they are more suicidal and more unhappy than earlier generations. Such phone overuse creates dopamine addicts. Today, people live in the most connected world of unconnected people).

Disobedience and rebellion are causes of spiritual blindness. God would hold the hand of his people and light their path if we would only let Him. Isaiah 42:6-10a explains, “I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house. *I am* the Lord, that *is* My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images Behold, the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them. Sing to the Lord a new song, *And* His praise from the ends of the earth.”



The Lord wants His servants to open their eyes and see through their blindness. Isaiah 42:14-20 reads, “I have held My peace a long time, I have been still and restrained Myself. Now I will cry like a woman in labor, I will pant and gasp at once. I will lay waste the mountains and hills, And dry up all their vegetation; I will make the rivers coastlands, And I will dry up the pools. I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, And not forsake them. They shall be turned back, They shall be greatly ashamed, Who trust in carved images, Who say to the molded images, ‘You *are* our gods.’ Hear, you deaf; And look, you blind, that you may see. Who *is* blind but My servant, Or deaf as My messenger *whom* I send? Who *is* blind as *he who is* perfect, And blind as the Lord’s servant? Seeing many things, but you do not observe; Opening the ears, but he does not hear.”

The battle between the spirit and the flesh continues as many who are spiritually blind are willing captives in spiritual warfare (Rom 8:8-9). Ezekiel 12:2-3 warns a rebellious house who has eyes that do not see to prepare for captivity, “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has

eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. It may be that they will consider, though they are a rebellious house.” Satan leads this rebellion as he seeks to devour others through his scheming while masquerading as an angel of light. (See John 8:44; 1 Pet 5:8-9; 2 Cor 4:4; 2 Cor 2:11; Eph 6:11; 2 Tim 2:16; Luke 4:2; Heb 4:15; 1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 11:4.)

Failure to recognize God causes spiritual blindness. In most of the Old Testament, Israel failed to recognize God and turned to idolatry. Today, some folks educate themselves away from God, failing to recognize God's wisdom and righteousness. Besides worldly wisdom, there are many other idols today, such as covetousness. Idolatry really is covetousness. These idols blind and cause one not to recognize God. Isaiah 44:18-20 speaks of such a time, “They do not know nor understand; For He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, *And* their hearts, so that they cannot understand. And no one considers in his heart, *Nor is there* knowledge nor understanding to say, ‘I have burned half of it in the fire, Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten *it*; And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?’ He feeds on ashes; A deceived heart has turned him aside; And he cannot deliver his soul, *Nor* say, ‘*Is there* not a lie in my right hand?’ ”

Idolatry is still just as prevalent today; however, it presents itself in a different form. For example, the worship of sports, work, technology, money, or sexuality can be forms of idolatry. As Paul wrote in Romans 1:22-23, “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, *And* changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man....” Educated circles are often strong fields for showing contempt for recognizing God. Too many have “educated” themselves away from God. Their wisdom has blinded them from an eternal perspective. This is not a slam against education but upon on those who manipulate the education system to teach a different philosophy often born out of carnality or materialism.

Greed or unjust gain causes spiritual blindness. The way of Balaam remains one of the most powerful influences in our time. Christ taught in Matthew 6:22-25, “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love

the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Mammon is wealth or possessions that exert an evil influence or a false object of worship and devotion.

The Laodiceans serve as an excellent example because they were apparently known for their eye salves. Revelation 3:15-19 tells us about their example: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. “So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.”

The Laodiceans failed to be fully committed to God. Their tepid service to God was due to their confidence in their wealth and mammon instead of Jehovah. They failed to see their status as miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Nor, did they heed counsel to use their wealth to serve God having their blindness removed and become spiritually rich. Adam and Eve had their eyes opened to the shame of their nakedness in the Garden of Eden because of Satan’s lies. The Laodiceans were blinded by carnal riches and were not able to see their own nakedness. Unfortunately, this is still all too common.

Christian must understand God does not need their wealth, but they need Him to receive their efforts in service to Him. We must first give of ourselves and then our possessions with a cheerful heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, but with purpose. We need to guard against wealth and greed as spiritual blinders.

Pride of life causes spiritual blindness. Spiritual blindness is also caused by a combination of different conditions that has pride of life at the core. Those who seek men’s approval, practice hypocrisy, or have an uncommitted heart suffer from spiritual blindness.

John 12:43 speaks of those who love the praise of men more than the praise of God. Such pride blinds one to seeking God. Also in this category, hypocrisy is a spiritual blinder. Jesus refers to Isaiah speaking of those who draw to the Lord with their words but not their heart. In essence, they believe but do not obey; they are hypocrites. Matthew 15:7-9 reads,

“ ‘Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with *their* lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men.’ ” Matthew 15:14 continues: “Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”



In the same category are those who fail to do as deluded hearers. Matthew 23:16-17 instructs, “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged *to perform it.*’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?” Matthew 23:23-28 continues, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. “Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. “Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness. “Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

Too often, in hypocrisy, people fear humans more than God. Solomon warns in Proverbs 29:25, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.” Christians must seek not what is right in their eyes, but what is righteous in God’s eyes. We need to put away hypocrisy as caused by the pride of life, stop seeking men’s approval, and fully commit our hearts to God.

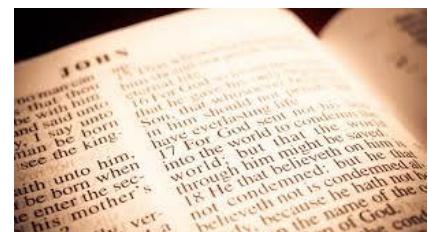
Prejudice causes spiritual blindness. A few generations ago, many under the banner of Christ and the church carried on the cause of racial prejudice failing to see others as children of God and fellow souls. As a result, they neglected to carry out the golden rule as Jesus instructs in Luke 6:31. “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.” Prejudice is wrong.



James 1:17 teaches “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” God is no respector of persons. In the New Testament times, the fleshly division was the Jews and the Gentiles (Acts 10 and 22). Even today, people often have preconceived judgments or opinions of others without grounds and base their opinions on race, birthplace, or bank accounts instead of experience with the person. Again, this is wrong.

Prejudice blinds who a person truly is. Hebrews 2:9 notes, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for **every man**.” Christians must guard against prejudice because it is spiritually blinding carrying hatred and pride as accompaniment.

Failure to know God’s Word results in spiritual blindness. We cannot be directed by what we do not know. God lamented in Hosea 4:6a, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” Jeremiah 5:4 observed, “Therefore I said, Surely these *are* poor. They are foolish; For they do not know the way of the Lord, The judgment of their God.” Jeremiah 5:20-22a continues, “Declare this in the house of Jacob And proclaim it in Judah, saying, ‘Hear this now, O foolish people, Without understanding, Who have eyes and see not, And who have ears and hear not: Do you not fear Me?’ says the Lord.” Today, even with eyes, we can be blind due to lack of knowledge of God's word.



Sometimes we can also easily fail to see what is right in front of us. As a parent, I have been at that place with my children. After having instructed my children something repeatedly, they still do not seem to get the idea. I wonder how they do not see it. Similarly, many have re-read or re-examined something

wondering how they missed it the first time around. Perhaps one of the more common illustrations is when we informationally know the truth of God's word but fail to be a doer of the word. One might call this the difference between informational and transformational status in an individual.

A lack of vision or direction based on God's word can yield a spiritual nearsightedness. In Mark 6:52, the disciples failed to understand about the loaves because their heart was hardened. The child of God's vision must be on the eternal. Proverbs 29:18 instructs, "where *there is* no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy *is he*." Christians can be happy by obeying God's righteousness, keeping their eye on Jesus, looking to heaven, but we cannot help but be blind without knowing the light to guide our feet.

Conclusion

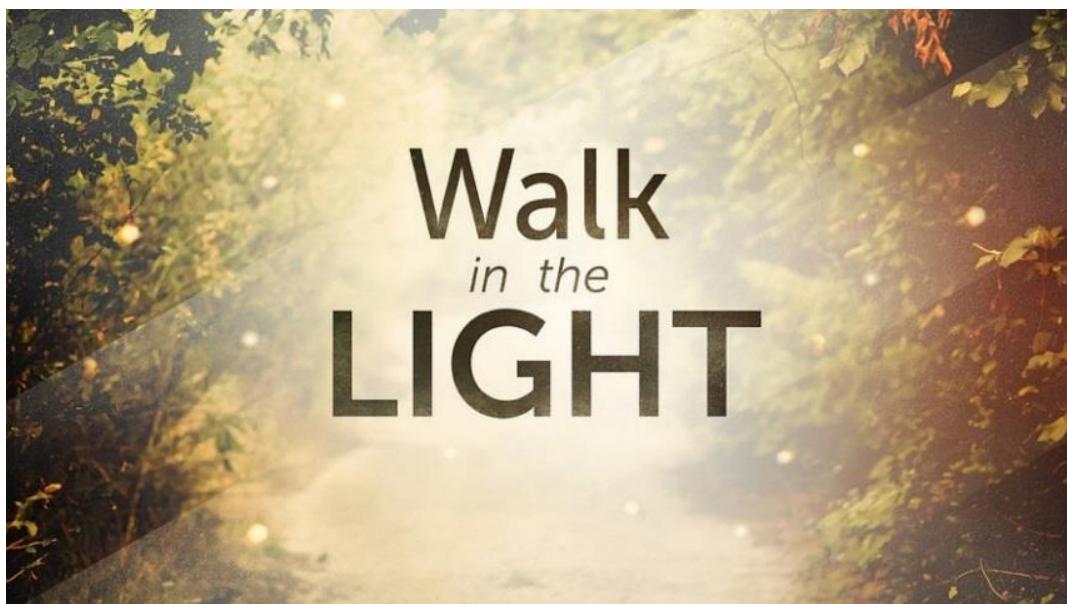
Spiritual blindness allows us to lie to ourselves. Zephaniah 1:17 warns the blind, "And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung."

There are many causes of spiritual blindness. Some include the following: the pride of life, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes. In addition, there are self-righteousness, alcohol, drugs, disobedience, rebellion, greed, mammon, hypocrisy, and prejudice. Seeking men's approval, refusing to recognize God, and failing to know God's word can also lead to spiritual blindness. It is easy to delude ourselves into just being a hearer and not a doer of the word leading to a state of spiritual blindness.

This begs an important question: How does one combat spiritual blindness setting aside the sin that so often sidetracks everyone? Luke 4:18 records that Jesus came to give sight to the blind. However, Satan's goal is the opposite. Satan's crafty schemes to keep humans blind spiritually are very real.



We must properly diagnose our blindness and make a conscious effort to seek out the light for spiritual healing. Jesus encourages in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” To guide us in our path to light, God has given Christians powerful weapons to combat blindness in our everyday battle. You have been given a choice. Will you recognize your spiritual blindness and choose to set your path toward the light by putting on the whole armor given to us by God (Eph 6:10-18)?



Darkness Lesson 2 Questions

Spiritual Blindness: Causes of Spiritual Blindness

1. Define spiritual blindness. Illustrate from the scriptures.
 2. List 7-10 causes of spiritual blindness. How does one of these sins spiritually blind a person?
 3. Diseases have risk factors. Certain people are more likely to contract a disease than another because of genetics or risk factors. Which of the causes of spiritual blindness are a bigger risk for you? Why? Who can help you? What can you do to avoid this sin from spiritually blinding you?
 4. How is the culture of Romans 1 described? How does it compare to modern American culture?

Darkness Lesson 3

Spiritual Blindness:

Combating Spiritual Blindness

by T.S. Stephens

Optometrists spend their professional careers thinking about how to combat vision problems and blindness. Often glasses or a contact lens prescription addresses the concern. Other times, a medication to combat a disease like glaucoma is required. In the previous lesson, a myriad of causes of spiritual blindness has been discussed. Some examples included the pride of life, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes. Character traits such as self-righteousness, alcohol/drug abuse, disobedience/rebellion, greed/mammon, hypocrisy, and prejudice can lead to spiritual blindness. And finally, certain actions like a failure to recognize God, seeking men's approval, and a failure to know God's word can be a contributor.

When suffering from spiritual blindness, can one combat it to help improve one's vision? The Christian must use their eternal prism or lens of faith to look not at the temporal, but at the eternal. So, how do Christians combat spiritual blindness?

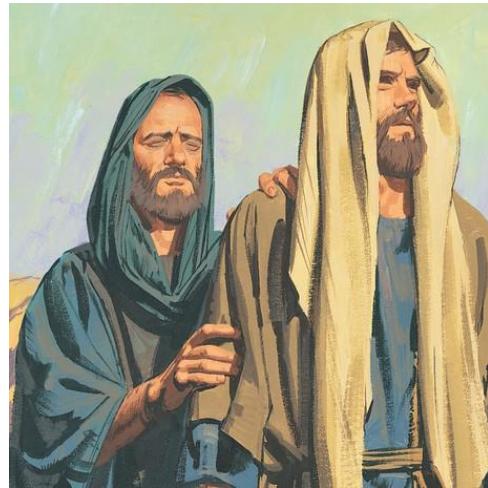
Use the Light

The Christian must be careful not to think of themselves more highly than they ought. **To combat spiritual blindness, the Christian must open their eyes to God's instruction.** Psalms 119:18 encourages, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." It is the Christian who must shine **forth as a light to those in darkness and spiritual blindness.** Matthew 5:15-16 reads, "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." The smallest of lights are incredibly bright and powerful when surrounded in darkness.



Paul's Example

Paul is an example to Christians in combating spiritual blindness. He was struck physically blind on the road to Damascus. Acts 9:8-9 reads, “And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.” Of course, Paul did as instructed and waited. Once he was told what to do, Paul responded as one reads in Acts 9:18, “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.” Not only had Paul been physically blind, but while persecuting the church, he was not seeing what God wanted him to do spiritually. Paul acted upon understanding what he was supposed to do. He waited three days without sight or eating or drinking. Paul obviously prepared himself in that time to do whatever he needed to do. God returned his sight physically and repurposed Paul spiritually. Paul would go on to carry the gospel light to the Gentiles. Acts 26:17-18 reads “Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” Paul gives the Christian an example of obedience from when he was spiritually blinded.



Jew's Example

The Jews were also veiled or blinded to truth. Paul wrote how their spiritual blindness had existed since Moses. 2 Cor 3:14-15 reads, “But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.”

Now, Christians must carry the gospel light to others that are blind in darkness. The question is: Are Christians seeking the lost with the light of the gospel? 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 warns, “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to

shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus.”

Christians have the work of carrying the light of the kingdom of God into the darkness of the world! 1 Thes 5:4-8 reads, “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” The Christian must make sure they are not blinded to the truth or veiled in their sight of the mission God has given them to bring others to His grace and righteousness.



Walk as Children of Light

Christians build their lives on the promises of God. Those promises allow Christians to cleanse themselves from the corruption of the world and abstain from lust, pride, sin, and hypocrisy. This allows the Christian to become partakers of the divine nature of God’s holiness through Christ.

1 Peter 2:9-11 teaches, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”

Christians are to put away sin and walk as children of light.

Ephesians 4:17-18 explains, “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Similarly, Ephesians 5:7-8 instructs, “Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” Are Christians endeavoring to avoid sin as they should or do they see how close they can be like the world?

Christians must also love one another to walk in the light.

1 John 2:9-11 teaches, “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.” Too often, people are blinded by hate toward others, failing to remember the other person was created in the image of God and failing to act in love (Gen 1:27 and Matt 5:38-48).



Christians should understand their worship and service may help and even entertain them, but **worship is about God and His glory**. Worship is not about what the worshipper gets but is about serving a Holy, Holy, Holy God. The scriptures teach that the Christian’s good works should shine forth. In Revelation 3, one can consider the lukewarm Laodiceans. Why are folks lukewarm today? How do Christians show their faith by their works? Love and the resulting works in the name of Christ done in faith allow all to see. Good works are understood without translation of language and are seen by the blind.

Christians must grow or become blind.

In the human visual system, amblyopia is a lazy eye, either because the eye turns (strabismus) or has a large refractive error. Refraction measures the power needed in glasses to let an eye see well. Sometimes, an eye fails to develop properly when it is significantly underutilized compared to its fellow eyes because of the difference from its fellow eye, such that no matter what power is placed in the glasses, the eye will not see well. It is no longer neurologically “wired” to see normally. This is amblyopia. In comparison, one might imagine how this might work with another body part. For example, if one's right arm were tied behind their back such that only the left arm was used for an entire year, the left arm would gain in strength while the right would wane in strength.

Growth and use are important in combating spiritual blindness. Christians must exercise God’s promises to escape lust and become partakers of God’s holiness. 2 Peter 1:3-9 instructs, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and

precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

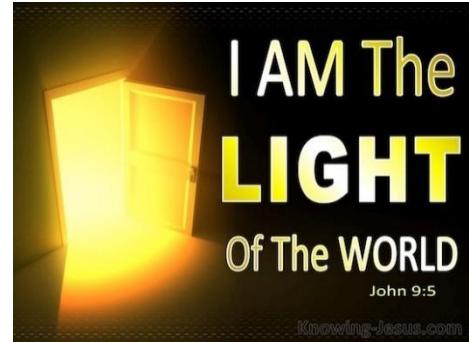
If Christians fail to exercise God's promises in their life, then they have a form of spiritual amblyopia. Then, a person is vulnerable to the corruption that is in the world through lust. If they do not escape it, it will take control of their life. Christians instead must seek to grow in God's promises so they can become partakers of God's divine nature and holiness. Christians need to exercise their faith recognizing their dependence on God. This cancels pride. Failure to grow or use what God has given can result in a form of spiritual amblyopia or spiritual blindness.

Another corruption that is in the world through lust is materialism and greed. **While avoiding the snare of greed, Christians need to be seeking to help others in need.** Proverbs 23:4-5 teaches, "Labour to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." In the same fashion, the parable of the sower and soils in Matthew 13:22 warns that riches often act as thistles to choke Christians with the care of the world. (See also Heb 6:8.) Proverbs 28:27 encourages, "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse."



Christ Cures Blindness

In John 8:12, Jesus encourages His followers, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Combating spiritual blindness involves many things. Some things the Christian can do include: seeking God's instruction; shining as a light to the world while reflecting God's light and love; walking as children of light; and abstaining from lust, pride, prejudice, sin, and hypocrisy; and demonstrating love to one another. The smallest light of love in the darkness of this world shines as a beacon to those who do not have that light. The process of growing in the promises of God allow the Christian to be fruitful in His kingdom. Lastly, Christians seek to escape the corruption in the world through lust including putting away materialism and greed.



Christ cured blindness physically during his ministry, but now He cures spiritual blindness.

Many wanted to see Jesus in His time on earth as His fame for curing blindness (and disease) had spread. Mark 8:22-25 records such an event on the blind man of Bethsaida. These miracles allow us to recognize Jesus as the Christ. Jesus draws a parallel to those who could not see spiritually. Matthew 13:14-19 records, "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." Christians must be certain their eyes are not closed and their heart waxed gross by the carnal, but instead are focused on Christ and the eternal. Luke 4:18 tells that Jesus came to give sight to the blind. Jesus cures spiritual blindness today.

Jesus is the light unto the world. He is the cure to darkness and spiritual blindness.

John 1:5-10 instructs, "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.”

Similarly, John 3:16-21 reads, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” Jesus is the Light that Christians must focus on as taught in Hebrews 12:2. Jesus is the Light that Christians must reflect in their lives. Jesus is the light that Christians must share with those who are suffering from spiritual blindness.

The Blind MEN of John 9

In John 9, Jesus’ disciples asked Him if the blind man they passed had sinned or his parents because he was born blind. Jesus responds that it was not this man that sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. Jesus goes on to say we must work when it is day and not night. Jesus then says, “As long as I am in this world, I am the Light of the world.” He then spat and made mud to apply to the man’s eyes and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He was cured of his blindness. The man was called to appear before the Pharisees. The Pharisees did not marvel at the miracle but instead said Jesus was not from God because He did not keep the Sabbath. Others asked how can a man who is a sinner do such signs? The formerly blind man stated Jesus was a prophet. The Jews even disputed it was the blind man until they interrogated his parents. The formerly blind man’s parents even told the questioners their son could speak for himself because they feared the Jews. The Jewish questioners told the man the answer they wanted: Jesus was a sinner. The formerly blind man’s response was, “Whether he is a sinner, I do not know. One



thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They pressed the man further to deny Jesus.

After being cast out, Jesus talks to the formerly blind man again. John 9:35-41 reads, "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. And Jesus said, **For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.** And *some* of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."

One man was cured of physical blindness in John 9. The spiritual blindness of the Jewish leaders remained. Clearly, the man's physical blindness was for God's purpose, not his or his parent's sin. The events demonstrated Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The Pharisees failed to recognize the Christ despite the miracle. Their own lust for power and pride caused them to continue in spiritual blindness.

Christians can share Jesus as a cure to spiritual blindness, but some do not want the Cure. They remain in darkness and on track for eternal condemnation. Some choose to remain blind. Such folks love the darkness and the things of this world. The Jews remained with a veil on their vision for a long time. Children of the Light, by contrast, must put away sin and avoid spiritual blindness. God's instruction can help His children grow rather than deteriorate into amblyopia and blindness. Christ will cure their blindness.



Darkness Lesson 3 Questions

Spiritual Blindness: Combating Spiritual Blindness

1. How should the Christian's light shine? What is the result?
2. In Acts 26:17-18, how did Paul understand God's purpose for him?
3. How had the Jews been blind or veiled since Moses? Why did Moses veil his face?
4. What does 2 Corinthians 4:5-6 warn about the light?
5. What is the process of darkness to light in 1 Peter 2:9-11?
6. How do Christians walk as children of light according to Ephesians 4 and 5?
7. Can one hate their brother and walk in the Light?
8. What happens to one's spiritual vision if one fails to grow and exercise God's promises?
9. What can riches do to a person's focus? When does one have enough to have "riches?"
10. Who is the cure for blindness? How?
11. In John 9, who was cured of blindness? Who remained blind?
12. In John 9, who did Jesus come to make see that was blind? Who did Jesus come to make blind that sees?

Darkness Lesson 4

Eyes Full of Adultery:

False Teachers

by Randy Yerby and T. Shawn Stephens

Key Test: 2 Peter 2:1-22

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. 3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; 5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; 7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: 8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)

9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: 10 But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. 11 Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. 12 But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; 13 And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; 14 Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: 15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the

madness of the prophet. 17 These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. 18 For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. 20 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. 21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. 22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

Introduction

In the first part of 2 Peter 2, Peter points out just as there were false prophets, there would be false teachers. He links these two. Prophets were messengers of God through direct inspiration, while teachers are messengers of God's word through the inspired scriptures. Since Romans 15:4 instructs that the Old Testament was written for our learning, students of God's word might consider false prophets in the Old testament when thinking about false teachers.



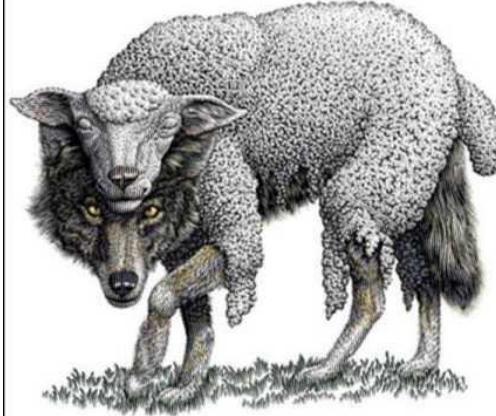
False Prophets and False Teachers

In Deuteronomy 18:9-22, Moses discusses false prophets who seek the invisibility of God without divine revelation. Moses calls these diviners "an abomination unto the Lord." Moses continues to contrast the false prophets who claimed knowledge they did not have because it did not come to pass. Later, the nation of Israel persecuted the true prophets because they did not want to hear the word of God (Matt 5:12ff).

As God has used teachers and prophets, there have been false ones. Jeremiah complained about false prophets in Jeremiah 5:31, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" Similarly, Paul had to deal with those who bound the Old Law in Acts 15:1-2. In the same way, Jesus foretold

there would be false prophets in Matthew 24:9-11. Lastly, Peter warns the church in 2 Peter 2:1-3 that **false teachers will exist among brethren**.

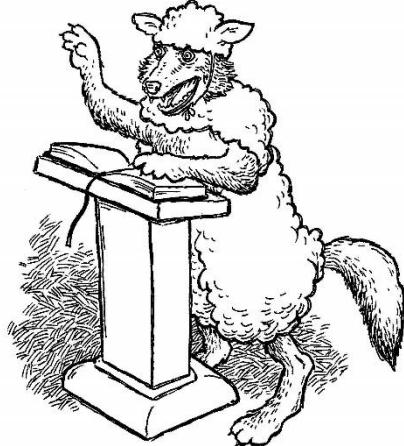
Today, children of God **still live in a time of false teachers**. In Matthew 7:15, Jesus warns “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Likewise, Paul warned the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:29-30, “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” 2 Timothy 4:3-4 further explains, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” Yes, people will seek to answer their lust rather than endure sound doctrine. The nation of Israel did not want to hear God's prophets, so they sought false prophets and persecuted God's prophets.



The key difference between a prophet and a teacher is the origin of the source. Prophets are inspired by God to speak for Him. Teachers instruct others from God's word. The false prophet is one who is not speaking for God because his words do not match the truth of God's word (Deut 13:1-4). Likewise, false teachers can be recognized by false doctrine, but not all false teachers teach false doctrine. For example, in Jeremiah 14:14-15. Prophets were prophesying in God's name when He had not sent them. In Philippians 1:15-17, some preached Christ from impure motives. False teachers are not those who because of lack of understanding or immaturity need correction as Apollos illustrates in Acts 18:24-28, but those who keep to their error when corrected. **False teachers act out of impure motivations.**

Motivations of False Teachers

False teachers often act out of popularity and power, saying whatever gains them an advantage. Folks want teachers who tickle their ears, and false teachers are very willing. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 warns, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” Similarly in Jeremiah 5:30-31, the soundness of doctrine was not important as long as the hearer felt good.



False teachers are motivated by money. They typically see the gospel in terms of money. 1 Timothy 6:5-6 explains, “Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.” These false teachers are like the prophet described in Micah 3:5: “Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him.” These false teachers are motivated by greed or covetousness, which is idolatry. Titus 1:10-11 teaches, “For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.” In 2 Peter 2, Peter is emphatic about these false messengers who out of their self-will merchandise the brethren. They are like Balaam who loved the wages of unrighteousness.



False teachers are motivated by their pride. In Ezekiel 13:2-3, false prophets speak out of their own hearts. God warns them: “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!” Similarly, Jeremiah 14:14 writes of prophets who teach out of their heart: “Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart.” Jeremiah 23:25-27 further explains their deceit: “I have heard what the prophets said, that

prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. 26 How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart;

27 Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal.”

False teachers in Jude 8 are similarly described as rejecting God's authority for their own dreams. “Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.”

False teachers are motivated by lust and sensuality.

Often, we might think of sexual sins in this category, but this also includes all the senses from eloquent words falsely comforting, luxury, and fulfillment of fleshly desires. These false teachers are self-willed and sport themselves with deception while feasting with their victims. They use vain words while alluring with the flesh in wantonness. They promise liberty but yield bondage to the flesh. They cause those who had escaped the corruption in the world through lust to be ensnared by it again. The metaphor Peter uses is like a dog returning to its vomit.

False teachers indulge the flesh. Their focus is not on glorifying God but on their faithless adultery. They walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement, having “**eyes full of adultery.**” Ephesians 2:3 describes such as those that live “in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind....” Their eyes, heart, mind, and focus is on unrighteousness. They are either captured in or crave an unrighteous lifestyle. This is often seen in sexual immorality. The religious world of our country continues to see those teaching in Jesus’ name but practices sexual immorality to be later exposed for their immorality.

Sexual immorality often through pornography is a big economic business in the U.S. The sexuality promiscuity is promoted in media from the internet to television to music lyrics filling the eyes, ears, and hearts of people. There is a focused obsession with sex in American culture. Instead of eyes focused on God, their eyes are focused on the flesh. This is truly dark (Matt 6:22). At the same time, these false teachers promise freedom and salvation. Yet, there is constant licentious looking. Perhaps it starts as a look in temptation, but in the end, false teachers and their followers are sitting with the scornful as the temptation is



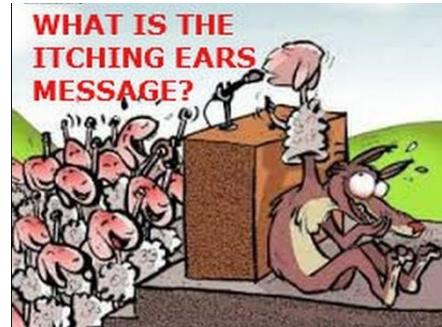
accepted (Psa 1, James 1:13-15). These false teachers do not just allow the birds (temptation to sin) to fly over their head, but instead encourage them to nest on their head.

Hamilton, in his commentary on 2 Peter, expresses the desires and focus of the false teachers by writing:

[As Jesus describes in Matt 5:28,] In some aspect, the desire created by the sense of sight causes them to cast about for an adulteress with whom to cohabit. *Moichalis* is the term from which **adultery** is derived and means “*adulterous ... eyes that are full of (desire for) an adulteress* i.e., looking for a woman with whom to commit adultery 2 Peter 2:14 (AG 527). Thayer comments, “eyes always on the watch for an adulteress, or from which adulterous desire beams forth, 2 Peter ii.14” (416-417). The original text reads literally “having eyes full of an adulteress.” This language is particularly graphic and poignant. When they look at a woman, they view her not as a person of value or worth on the basis of moral character but as a possible object of the act of sexual intercourse. What a depraved picture this is! These eyes that are full of an adulteress are also described as **that cannot cease from sin.**

False teachers speak to please the ear of the hearer rather than to profit the soul and glorify God. False teachers use a false doctrine to serve themselves. They may have a form of godliness, yet their heart is carnal. 2 Timothy 3:2-7 describes these false teachers: “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, **3** Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, **4** Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; **5** Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. **6** For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, **7** Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

The source of the false teacher is not God but their own hearts and lust. Their message is not focused on God but on the self. They bring heresies secretly (“privily” in 2 Pet 2:1 KJV). Their results are also different. The gospel helps us escape the corruption that is in the world through lust, so we can become a partaker of God's holy nature (2 Pet 1:4).



False teachers promise freedom but leave a person a slave of depravity (2 Pet 2:19). The character of the true teacher leaves one seeking faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, self-control, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Pet 1). False teachers leave one seeking the flesh with eyes of adultery while full of arrogance and greed and despising of authority. The true teacher appeals to God's word (2 Pet 1:19) while a false teacher appeals to lustful desires (2 Pet 2:18). The true teacher of God's word produces a clear fruit, but the counterfeit teacher is like a spring without water (2 Pet 2:17). The counterfeit promise much but deliver enslavement to the flesh. The end for true teachers of God's word leads to God and His promise of eternal life (2 Pet 1:11), but false teachers lead to destruction (2 Pet 2:1-3). The difference between false teachers and true teachers of God's word is obvious. They have different sources, results, characters, appeals, fruits, and ends.

Recognizing False Teachers

The child of God must learn to recognize false teachers. Matthew 7:15-20 teaches we will recognize them by their fruit. In Jeremiah 23:21-22, false prophet lead people away from God. False teachers often teach a health and wealth doctrine while whitewashing sin. They revile what they do not understand. 1 Timothy 1:6-7 explains: “From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; **7** Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.” Because they fail to understand, these false teachers engage in controversy and empty words.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 explains: “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; **4** He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, **5** Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.”

1 Timothy 6:20-21 continues: “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane *and* vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: 21 Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace *be* with thee. Amen.” These false teachers are grumblers against God and often employ strife as a form of power to drag down others.

What to Do Regarding False Teachers

False teachers are ultimately in God's hand. Peter expresses their destruction will be swift with the punishment of unrighteousness. What can Christians do? **First**, Children of God can recognize these false teachers are brute beasts who corrupt themselves (Jude 8-10).

Second, Christians can teach God's truth, which triumphs. Jeremiah 23:28-30 explains, “The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. 29 Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? 30 Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.”

Lastly, Christians should mark and try to keep false teachers from among the church. Romans 16:17-18 instructs, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Conclusion

Peter warns there will be false teachers even among God's people. Paul warns the Ephesians elders similarly. Christ describes their end in Matthew 7:21-23: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. **22** Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? **23** And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

These false teachers have eyes full of adultery and darkness. Thus, children of light need to be aware and endeavor to identify false teachers by doctrine and their fruits.

When possible, Christians should seek to protect the church from false teachers who will lead to destruction. False teachers act out of impure

motivations: popularity, power, money, pride, lust, and sensuality to indulge the flesh. False teachers seek to please the ear of the hearer rather than to profit the soul and glorify God. The false teacher and true teacher have different sources, results, characters, appeals, fruits, and ends. Of course, the fact that there is a counterfeit is no reason to reject the true object. There will be false teachers and hypocrites in the church, but one must not let that adjacent falsehood prevent one from embracing the genuine true teacher of God's word and His people. God will separate the true and the false in the end (Matt 13:24-30). Christians need to keep their eyes clear and focused on Christ.



Darkness Lesson 4 Questions

Eyes Full of Adultery: False Teachers

1. What is the difference between the prophet and the teacher? How does 2 Peter compare them?
2. What are the impure motivations of the false teacher?
3. What are six ways that the false and true teacher differ?
4. What do Matthew 7:15-20 and Luke 6:44-45 teach? What are the fruits of a true teacher? What are the fruits of a false teacher?
5. What does 1 Timothy 4:1-3 teach?
6. What does Luke 6:26 teach?
7. What does Romans 16:17-18 teach?
8. What does 2 John 1:9-11 teach?
9. What does Matthew 24:24 and 7:21-23 teach?
10. What does 2 Peter 2:1-3 teach?
11. What does Jude teach about false teachers?
12. What was the relationship of the people to the false prophet in Isaiah 30:10 and Jeremiah 5:30-31?
13. How should Christians act to prevent them from being a person whose eyes are full of adultery and like the dog that has returned to his vomit?

Darkness Lesson 5

Eyes Full of Adultery:

Eye Plucking

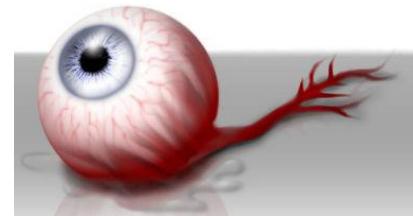
by T.S. Stephens

Introduction

Imagine it. “Those participating in eye plucking this Sunday please move to the front pews on the right.” “Eye plucking Sunday” might be so gruesome that it might draw a special crowd. There might be objection picketing outside at the street too. It might be quite a circus. Who would knowingly pluck out their eye? (Photo: Make-up artist DeGarmo’s impression of eye plucking.)

Eye plucking just might be more common in history than many would expect. As an optometrist, I once saw a patient who had a psychological condition where they were obsessed with the idea that dirt was under their eyelids. This patient eventually injured their eye, and the eye had to be removed.

In medical literature, there are other cases where folks have gouged out an eye. I have seen a few patients who stated their pain was so bad they wanted to gouge their eye out; however, no one did so. I have had many patients with behaviors regarding their eyes who I thought might yield injuries to the extent of gouging out their eyes. I have also seen many patients from correctional centers with “basketball injuries” who looked like someone tried to gouge out their eyes. (“Accidents” involving the eyes are common in prisons. Inmates state they fell and hit their eye all the time, despite the surveillance video demonstrating otherwise.) I have also counseled patients with an eye-cancer, helping them decide whether to allow a surgeon to remove their eye to prevent the spread of cancer. Truly one must be desperate or in need of psychological help to put their eye out.



In history, perhaps one of the best-known cases of plucking eyes was in 1014. Byzantine emperor, Basil II, was born into a world of politics and suspicious deaths among powerful people and family members. He would rule from 976-1025. He often was called Basil the young and later Basil Porphyrogennetos (Basil the Purple born). After the final subjugation of Bulgaria, the empire's strongest European foe, he was also known as the Bulgar Slyer. He would leave the empire in military security and strong economic status, in essence, the zenith of the empire. (Photo Wikipedia Basil II with Constantine VIII)



In 1014 about four years before Bulgaria would finally surrender, at the Battle of Kleidion, Basil II would take a decisive win over his long-time war with Samuel of Bulgaria. Samuel escaped because of the valor of his son Gabriel. However, Basil would capture 15,000 Bulgarians. He carried memories of his defeats, including a significant loss 28 years earlier. At this victory, he committed a cruelty that would fire Bulgaria's resistance until the end of the war. He blinded 99 out of 100 captured soldiers, leaving one man with only one eye to lead the other 99 home to Bulgaria in groups of 100. Two days later, learning of the events, Samuel would die of an apparent stroke. Beyond this historical example, there are scriptural cases.

Scriptural Examples

Most find Basil's actions particularly cruel, but there are many examples of eyes being put out or blindness in relation to battle in the scriptures. Perhaps the best-known example is when the Philistines gouged out Samson's eyes after his capture in Judges 16:21.



King Zedekiah experienced the same fate after his capture by the Chaldeans. Jeremiah foretold that **King Zedekiah** would not die by the sword (Jer 34:4). Similarly, Ezekiel prophesied King Zedekiah would be snared by the Chaldeans, brought to Babylon, but would not physically see it (Ezek 12:13). Prophecy was fulfilled when the Chaldeans gouged King Zedekiah's eyes after witnessing the death of his sons before taken to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7 and Jer 39:6-7).

Another example is when God helped **Elisha** by changing the eyes of those who served him as well as the army sent to capture him. (This is more of blindness in battle as opposed to gouging.) The king of Assyria is told the King of Israel knows whatever he says in his bedchamber because of the prophet Elisha. In 2 Kings 6:13, he sends a great army with horses and chariots to seize Elisha at Dothan by surrounding the city. Elisha calms his nervous servant by telling him, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” The Lord allowed the young servant to see the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. Then Elisha prayed again, “Please strike this people with blindness.” The Lord did as Elisha prayed. Elisha then led the army to Samaria. Again, Elisha prayed, and the Lord opened the army’s eyes. The King of Israel was then instructed not to strike the men down but to feed them, which he did.



In 1 Samuel 11, **Nahash** the Ammonite offers peace to the people of **Jabesh-gilead** if they agreed to put out the right eye of every man in the city, bringing disgrace to Israel. The elders of Jabesh negotiated time to see if they could be rescued by sending out messengers before giving themselves to Nahash. Saul received their message and sent out the call to Israel. The Ammonites were defeated, and the nation was renewed with Saul as king.

Plucking Out an Eye

Matthew 5:29-30 (ESV) reads: “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”

Some might see this as a literal instruction, but most understand it as a hyperbole. Christ is asking us to recognize the value of eternal things, and not to be derailed by the physical and temporal distractions the devil places in front of our eyes. In other words, at all cost get untangled from sin because eternity is so much more important than the most valuable things in this life, even an eye or a hand.

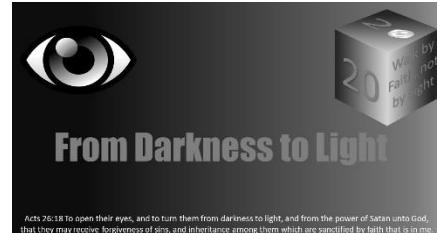
Out of the Heart

Sin starts in the mind/heart as we learn in James 1:14. It is not the seeing, but the further building and focusing on what one sees toward sin. The text of Matthew 5:29-30 is a hyperbole because the removal of an eye, hand, or foot does not change the condition of the heart. The person with one eye and one arm and one foot can still sin. We are meant to understand that being eternal with God makes all earthly desires seem trivial.

Christians cannot allow sin to be an integral part of their lives. We must seek to overcome sin, even if that causes a loss as painful as the loss of an eye or hand. Salvation is far more precious. Romans 6:11-14 encourages Christians: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

In Mark 7:18-23, Jesus explains it is what comes out of the heart that is evil: “And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, *it* cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”

We must make sure we are not giving space for the flesh and sin. If a person had a pornography habit or temptation, then they might have to get rid of their internet service or make their computers only usable with someone who is helping them be held accountable. If Jesus is not telling His followers to literally pluck out their eye because this is a hyperbole, then He is telling Christians to avoid sin at all costs. We cannot always go through life avoiding all temptations or exposure to sinful things. However, we must make sure we do not start by looking, then lingering, then taking a place at the table of sin.



A Pattern of the Sinful and the Children of Light

Psalm 1:1-2 teaches, “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” This text has the progression of the sinful and corrective actions to take for the children of Light. The sinner starts by walking by the activity of the ungodly. Maybe this is accident exposure followed by a bit of rubbernecking. Then, the person is standing nearby to the activities; Not exactly fully involved but soaking it up by their presence. But in the end, the person is fully involved by sitting among the sinners. A person might not prevent a bird from flying over their head, but they do not have to allow it to nest on their head. Similarly, we do not have to let sin take place and root. In contrast to the pattern of the sinful, the instruction for the child of God is to delight and meditate on God’s law.



Christians should not focus on the flesh but on Christ. We must train ourselves to refocus on God by study, meditation, and prayer. 2 Timothy 2:15-16 is often cited as the first part of a diligent training plan. The Bereans in Acts 17:11 are examples of people who diligently searched the scriptures daily. As we make a daily effort to study, pray, and meditate, we must also be active in doing good works. This continual effort also builds up and trains our spiritual health.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 teaches that the Christian’s warfare is in the heart and mind, seeking to bring every thought to obedience in Christ. “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ....” Thus, study, meditation, prayer, and doing good works allows us to be useful on the battlefield. The pattern of life for the child of Light involves studying, meditating, and delighting in God’s word through prayer and good works.

Personal Viewpoints

Personal Viewpoint One: There must be an application, or this was only a nice history lesson with some texts from the Bible. Here are the questions: **Would I put my eye out if it would allow me to win the battle against Satan and allow Christ to save my soul?** If I knew the result was certain, I would. Yet, I think most of us would want to think and ponder on it before acting. The eye is a

valuable part of our body. Wonder if “eye plucking Sunday” would be popular among the brethren? Do I understand as valuable as my eye is my soul is my most precious possession? Have I jeopardized my soul for something of less value than my eye? This text should cause us to think about the priorities of our time and resources. Do I fully understand I must lead a life that walks by faith and not by sight? Sometimes, it is hard to not trust our eyes but to place confidence on the evidence of things not seen. If plucking out my eye would control Satan in order to get to heaven, then I would. And so would every Christian if they understood. However, since this passage is not about literal eye plucking, **what things might we need to literally pluck out of our lives to escape hell?**

Personal Viewpoint Two: When I first started volunteering at the hospital, I was a transporter moving patients place to place. Eventually, I became a research assistant. One of my responsibilities was to attend morbidity and mortality conferences to collect data. These are typically attended by doctors and residents. The interns typically attend their first conference after the 4th of July weekend in order to review case details regarding what happened with patients after the busy weekend. This process is meant to be a learning experience.



Things at the conference typically start out smoothly...then, it happens. The intern is presenting a case that went badly or wrong—often, through no fault other than the fact death follows life. However, the audience in this room is not so kind. The old guy who you thought was asleep suddenly shouts after about two minutes into the discussion: “Call the cops! Lock the doors! We’ve got a killer here!” It is at this moment the intern will start a metamorphosis. They will either stand and defend their decision, knowing they were present and did the right thing, or they will melt away. It is a brutal trial by firing squad of experts. If someone did make a mistake, that is another “kettle of fish” altogether. This hardening process is cruel but important in the learning process as well. Post-mortem reviews are still helpful to teach doctors in training. Doctors should never stop learning, just as the Christians should never stop learning from God’s word.

Like the medical intern in the training process, Matthew 5:29-30 might also be understood as hard instructions for us. Sometimes, we need to do a harsh post-mortem review of events in our lives. How did I reach this point? How can I

prevent this type of sin or situation in the future? **How can I learn to keep my course on the straight and narrow in the future? Self-evaluation is very hard but important.**

Personal Viewpoint Three: “In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.” This famous quote from Desiderius Erasmus argues even a person with limited abilities and knowledge is at a great advantage to those with lesser abilities and knowledge. This strategy is often used to illustrate political choices between a group of lesser candidates to the voter. However, I wonder if this might also be true among Christians.

We might have plucked out or given up something precious in this life; we might have but one eye so to speak. Hopefully, our eye is focused on Christ with the goal of heaven. Many in the world may have both eyes but are blinded by sin and Satan’s lies. They cannot see the eternal perspective like the faithful one-eyed Christian can.

As a Christian, we have the opportunity to guide these blind folks to Christ and salvation. **Are we leading others to Christ?**



Darkness Lesson 5 Questions

Eyes Full of Adultery: Eye Plucking

1. Should we schedule eye plucking Sunday?

2. Give a few scriptural examples of when a person's eyes were taken or threatened to be taken.

3. In your words and understanding, what does Matthew 5:29-30 teach and mean?

4. Does removing one's eye prevent one from sinning? Then, why would you pluck out your eye?

5. If eye plucking could control Satan, allowing you to serve God and go to heaven, would you pluck out your eye? What other things would you pluck out if it helped you on your path toward heaven?

6. What might you need to pluck to seek heaven?

7. Are you leading others to Christ? Are you carrying the Light to the lost?

Darkness Lesson 6

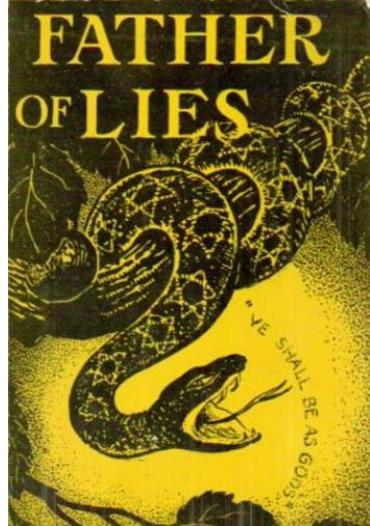
Devil's Dark Distortions:

Changing How We See the Father of Lies

by Mark Childers

Introduction

Satan is humanity's grand adversary. And we know, at least intellectually, he will use whatever means necessary to lure us away from God to follow him. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:11, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." Satan is our enemy (1 Pet 5:8-9). He never ceases to devour us, and we must not cease to pray for God's deliverance. We first learn of his crafty and cunning ways in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1). He is an accuser of God's servants (Zech 3:1-2). He is a thief, murderer, and destroyer (John 10:10). And he is the father of lies (John 8:44). He seeks to use his dark deceptions to distort our view of reality when we look to eternity. We must instead look through the prism of eternity of the lens of faith and focus on Christ. It is important to understand who the devil is and his purpose and methods. Christians must learn to see the father of lies as God sees him.



Satan's Devices

We can be pulled away from God through the devil's cunningness (2 Cor 11:3) as the devil tempts us to sin (1 Corinthians 7:5). The devil can transform himself into an angel of light to aid in his deception (2 Cor 11:14). After all, the devil is a liar and the father of it (John 8:44). He is very skilled at using others (Luke 22:3-4) and filling our hearts (Acts 5:3) to accomplish his schemes (Eph 6:11). He continues to use the same three tools since the garden on us - lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16). Whether it be through doubt, fear, deception, addiction, divorce, division, pride, dishonesty, hypocrisy, self-righteousness, lust, pornography, and the like, Christian's must see their soul as their most prized possession, and protect it and not exchange it for



one of the bobbles that Satan places in front of our eyes. To see this reality, we must look at its value as God sees it.

Instructions for Defeating Satan

As Christians, we know that all of these devices of Satan. God, in His infinite wisdom, has given us enough information that we can be victorious against the devil's devices. If we resist the devil, he will flee (I Peter 5:9). Christians must put on the full armor of God and stand firm (Eph. 6:11-16). Like any good soldier, this requires us to be alert and sober of mind (1 Pet 5:8). This requires us to truly resist sin and the devil. We often like to say we struggle with sin, but often we like to see how close we can get and not get burned. We must humbly submit our will to God's in obedience (James 4:7, 2 Cor 10:3-5).

We know about Satan's devices. God has also given us the tools and instructions for defeating Satan. So, given that we know all of this, you would think that we would do a better job of overcoming him. Why don't we? Because we do not see things the way they really are. **We need to change the way we see things. We need to see things the way that God sees them.**

Changing How We See Things

When we think about Satan, we need to think of him as an illusionist, someone who produces illusory effects: A conjurer, a trickster. He is able to trick us into thinking things are different than they really are. He is able to make things seem like a good thing, when in fact, just the opposite is true. Or, he is able to appeal to our emotions in a moment of weakness. We oftentimes know that what he has placed before us is wrong, yet we want it anyway. We become delusional. We imagine the nonexistent, the unreal. He decorates the temptation with tinsel, to make it appeal to our senses, and we take the bait. Satan will use persons, place, and things to manipulate us. He often changes the labels to confuse us. And, he often changes the price to make something seem less. To illustrate, use a sexual temptation. Satan whispers God's plan is not enough. You deserve to fulfill your desires. You deserve "happy." It will not hurt. He entices. Yet, in the end, the emotional scars, the physical cost such as disease, and even the economics (as in divorce) are huge. There are several things that we need to be reminded of about the Satan that will help us in our battles against him

I Peter 5:8 says that the devil is like a **roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour**. Do we really appreciate this? I think we just sort of brush the concept off. If there truly was a lion loose in our neighborhood, would not it change the way we go about our day? Would we take precautions when we had to leave the house? Would we want protection? Maybe even a weapon? Would we leave our house? If there truly was a lion loose in our neighborhood, wouldn't this freak us out a little? The Holy Spirit is trying to get our attention by using that illustration.



People who decide that the devil is not real, especially religious people, have a problem with Jesus because the Christ believed that Satan was real. In Matthew 4: 1-11, Jesus has an encounter with Satan. He talks to the devil, and the devil talks to Him. If the devil is not real, to whom is Jesus talking? In fact, Jesus references the devil many times in all four of the gospels. If the devil is not real, why does Jesus have so much to say about him? Either the devil is real, or Jesus is a liar. He is not some red horned, pitched fork character as often described in literature. He is not some misunderstood personality. He is evil and real. **We must see the devil as real.**



The scripture talks a lot about Satan. We need to know that none of it is good. In Matthew 13:19, he is called the evil one. In Matthew 4:3, he is called the tempter. In John 8:44, he is referred to as a murderer and a liar, the father of lies, Jesus says. The truth is not in him. Peter says that he's the lion trying to devour us. He is the adversary. We have his names, but we also have all the references to his work.

What did he do in the garden? In Genesis 3, he is after Eve trying to lure her away from doing God's will, and get her to sin, and when he does, all of those awful things happen to her. He tries to also tempt Jesus with the

lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life just like Eve in Matthew 4. In Luke 22:3, he tempts Judas to betray Jesus. In Acts 5:3, he is after Ananias and Saphira to get them to lie about some money.

Do you get the picture? Scripture talks about Satan over and over again. And whether it is giving him a name or talking about his work, **it is all BAD!** We need to be reminded of his evil purposes. When we are doing battle with him, all of us need to remember that **he is EVIL.**

When I am being PULLED to do something that I know is against the Will of God, the very first thing that needs to come into my mind is the source. Where is it coming from? From the EVIL ONE. From the ADVERSARY. From THE LIAR. I NEED TO SEE THE WORK OF THE DEVIL. The devil is not just some misguided personality. **We must learn to see the devil as evil.**

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Eph 6:10-11, NASB). The devil is scheming against us. Paul warns elders about falling into the devil’s trap in 1 Timothy 3:7. Paul describes the devil’s craftiness to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:3.

Have you ever thought about the devil thinking about you? Scripture clearly indicates that he is. What do his schemes look like? In John 8:44, Jesus calls Satan the father of lies. One of the things we know the devil does to us is that he lies to us.

In the Garden of Eden, God said do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you are going to die. And you remember what the devil said to Eve? You will not die. He lied. What happened? Eve died.

He lies to us. He looks for opportunities to take advantage of us. He looks for moments when we are vulnerable. Ephesians 4:26-27 teaches, “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

Some translations say, do not give him a “foothold.” That’s what Satan is looking for. He wants a stronghold in our lives. A foothold. A way to get in and start working on us and control us. He preys on our vulnerabilities.

He uses other people. He uses other people to lead us away from God. This is how he operates. He lies and uses other people to try to get a foothold.

If he is going to be thinking about me, then we better be thinking about him. If you were the general in a battle, would you not want to know as much about your enemy's strengths, weakness, and tactics as possible. If you were going to be in the big game, do you not want to study your opponent's film to know what they do and be prepared? Is it not so much more important to know our enemy in the battle of life? We must learn to see the devil as a schemer out to hurt us.

The devil is a loser. We should not forget this. The devil has been fighting God for a long, long time. And he has never won. On judgment day, Christ will deliver the final crushing blow to Satan. We do not have to be with the devil in the end. If we are, we will have lost in the worst way possible. Am I on his side or the Lord's side? If I am on the devil's side and do not change, I am the ultimate loser. We must learn to see the devil ultimately as a loser.

What are some things we can do to make sure that we are not with Satan?

First, we must stop blaming our sins on the influence of other people. Ask yourself, "Where did that temptation come from?" from the Tempter. Put the blame where it belongs - with the evil one. Second, we must be vigilant. Think about the devil's tactics on a regular basis. Remember, he is thinking about capturing and devouring you. Third, educate yourself. What does the Bible say about the truth of the sin which I struggle to avoid? Fourth, talk regularly about the devil and his schemes, to yourself, your children, and your family. Fifth, pray for the strength to resist or a way of escape. Sixth, remember to see temptation as God sees it. An illusion from the trickster.

Conclusion

To defeat Satan, we must change how we see the father of lies. We must learn to see him as God sees him. When we see Satan through a prism of eternity or lens of faith, we know that he is a roaring lion out to devour us. We know his basic lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life schemes. We know that he uses people and circumstances to devour us. He changes labels and price tags to distort our view of him. We must

understand he is real, evil, and ultimately a loser. We must see the father of lies as God sees him, then we can be prepared to defeat him and his crafty schemes of dark distortion.



Darkness Lesson 6 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions:

Changing How We See the Father of Lies

1. Read 1 John 2:16. Now, look to Genesis in the garden of Eden and Matthew 4 where Satan tempts Eve and Jesus. Note how he used tools of 1 John 2:16 in both cases.

2. Observe some of Satan's best lies to us and humanity.

3. How do you handle a roaring lion? What is the spiritual equivalent?

4. What single word do you think best describes the devil? Why?

5. How does Satan distort our perception of him? How does he distort our perception of other things? Give examples.

6. How should we see the father of lies?

Darkness Lesson 7

Devil's Dark Distortions:

Doubt and Skepticism

by Devin Roush

“You shall not surely die.”
– Satan (Genesis 3:4)

What if? We sometimes entertain this question as we daydream. What if we had a million dollars? What if I had a clone who could work for me so I could just relax all day? Sometimes we might pose the question to challenge our thinking or plan accordingly regarding a potential scenario. What if someone broke into the house? What if the car breaks down on my trip out West?

Satan, too, likes this question. He, however, poses it to cast a shadow onto our faith. What if there is no God? What if the Bible is not true? Or maybe, in a more subtle tone, he suggests, “What if God does not really care about my situation?” “What if I am just too sinful to save?”

In the beginning, as quoted above, Satan cast a shadow of doubt into Eve’s heart as he modified what God had told her. And, upon entertaining the possibility that he could be right, she began to be enticed by the lust of her flesh (*the tree was good for food*), the lust of her eyes (*it was pleasant to the eyes*), and her pride (*a tree desirable to make one wise*). (See Gen 3:6 cf. 1 John 2:15-17.) In the end, she ate of the forbidden fruit, and likewise, Adam also ate. They sinned; despite what Satan had told them, they *did die!* (Rom 6:23; Isa 59:1-2)

“He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”
(John 8:44)

Satan uses the same deceptions on us today, and sadly, we often fall for them just as Adam and Eve did. The good news, though, is that we do not have to! In this lesson, we want to consider the remedy to doubt. We are sure to have those “what if” thoughts from time to time, but how can we eliminate them? How can we replace our doubts with confidence?

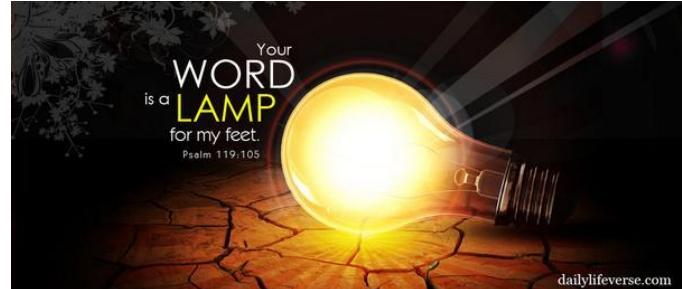


Stay Focused on the Truth

“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life...”
– Jesus Christ (John 14:6)

Time and time again, we are reminded in God's word of the importance of staying focused on Jesus Christ. By calling Himself “the Truth,” He implies that He is the source of truth. Thus, to stay focused on the truth is to stay focused on Christ and what He has revealed for us to know. He stated in John 8:31-32, *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* Thus, to abide in His word is to know the truth. We also see Christ making this connection in His prayer to God in John 17:17 where He stated, *“Thy word is truth.”*

Doubts arise when we lack information or when what we have come to know is called into question. They are eliminated when we educate ourselves or, perhaps, remind ourselves of the facts. In describing the word of God, the psalmist said that it is, *“a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* (Psa 119:105)



The importance of staying focused on Christ is seen in a very literal way in the account we find in Matthew 14:22-33:

“Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ So, He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And

immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’ ”

We often give Peter a hard time when referencing this account, failing to remember that he is the only one who had enough faith to get out of the boat in the first place! However, we see his faith wavered when he took his eyes off the Lord. He began to listen, if you will, to the winds and the waves and the laws of nature that were screaming at him with doubts: “Human beings cannot walk on the water!” “This storm is too big for you to handle!” “Look how dark these waters are! What will become of you if you start to sink!?”

The conclusion to this episode perfectly makes the point we are stressing:

When doubts begin to arise...

When you feel as though the darkness of skepticism is creeping in all around...

When you start to sink into questions that threaten your trust in God...

Take. His. Hand. Get back to the truth. Re-focus yourself on your King.



“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” (Heb 12:1-3)

Can we trust the Bible?

It is all well and good to talk about our need to focus on God's word as the standard of truth, but if we are being honest, a lot of time we find ourselves doubting because of skeptics' claims that the Bible is merely the work of fallible men; that it is ultimately nothing more than a collection of myths and fables. Please consider the following facts about the Bible that demonstrate its trustworthiness:

- The Bible claims to be from God (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 1 Thes 2:13; 1 Cor 2:13)
- The Bible is not a single book. It is a combination of 66 books: 39 that comprise the Old Testament and 27 that comprise the New Testament.
- The Bible was written by some 40 different authors. The men who wrote the Bible came from various backgrounds. Some were kings, while others were doctors and fishermen.
- The books of the Bible were written over a period of some 1,500 years.
- The books of the Bible were not all written originally in the same language. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek.
- The Bible is accurate and reliable when it touches upon academic areas such as history, science, and geography.

Can you imagine the result we would have today if we took 40 men with varying educations, cultures, backgrounds, and occupations and gave each of them a year to write their thoughts concerning God that would, ultimately, be compiled into one single volume? It would, undoubtedly, be full of conflicting ideas. Yet the books of the Bible fit together perfectly. They form one complete picture and convey one unified message concerning God and His will for mankind.

Christ: The Ultimate Proof

“Jesus Christ our Lord...declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead.”

— Paul (Romans 1:3-4)

If we are being honest, a lesson on this subject is not of much help or comfort if we simply talk about the need to stay focused on Jesus and His word while failing to demonstrate that He truly is the Son of God as He claims. Now, we did take some time to demonstrate evidence that the Bible is more than just the product of men (evidence we will add to before the lesson is concluded), but I want to take a moment to talk about how Jesus truly is the ultimate proof for the validity of this book we call the Bible.

One of the main facts regarding the gospel message is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-4). The details of this are contained in each of the gospel accounts (i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and its significance is reiterated repeatedly throughout the remainder of the New Testament. Paul even goes as far as to say that if Jesus did not rise from the grave, then our faith is empty.

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty, and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (1 Cor 15:12-19)

Skeptics of the Bible often try to dismiss the resurrection (not surprisingly). If they can disprove Christ's ultimate miracle, then they effectively discredit Christianity and, subsequently, the Bible as a whole. After all, Jesus quoted from 24 Old Testament books. So, proving Him a fraud not only discredits His teachings in the New Testament, but everything He claimed to be true from the Old Testament as well. Note, however, if we can demonstrate the antithesis, then such validates both Testaments of the Bible! Hence our claim that Jesus, through His

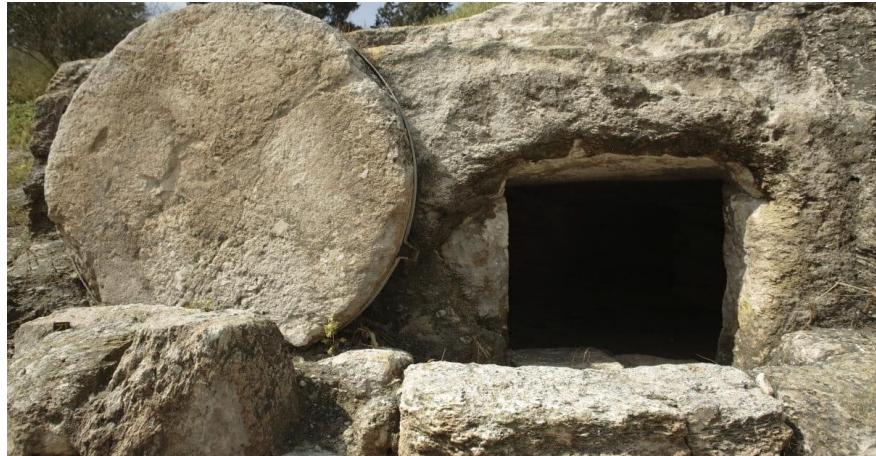
resurrection, is the ultimate evidence. It proves our need to remain focused on Him!

The honest critic will acknowledge that the resurrection is one of the best-documented events in history; that the gospel accounts are accurate regarding other historical facts, cultural norms, geography, etc.; and that the gospel writers, therefore, are reliable. This does not prevent, however, various theories about how the resurrection could be explained in a non-miraculous way.

Some will say that the disciples created the story to perpetuate their made-up religion. However, it is interesting to note that the Jews at that time anticipated them doing this and took steps to prevent such from happening (Matt 27:62-66). They had Pilate seal a heavy stone over the tomb and set a guard so no one could sneak the body of Christ out and thus perpetuate a hoax! Roman soldiers were no pushovers. They were highly trained and took their duties to guard prisoners very seriously. If that which they were guarding escaped or was stolen, they understood that it was their life on the line (cf. Acts 12:18-19; 16:25-28). The theory that the disciples rolled away the stone and stole the body without these guards noticing is simply improbable. It is interesting to note that after Christ was raised, the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb went to the chief priests and reported what had happened. What were they told to say (Matt 28:11-15)?

If the disciples were perpetuating a lie and had any belief at all in God, why would they willingly subject themselves to eternal punishment? They would have understood that God does not tolerate liars (Prov 6:17)! If they were without faith and desiring to create a false religion for their own glory, why would they willingly subject themselves to torture and untimely death (Acts 7:57-60; 12:1-4)? Further, the scriptures are not shy about conveying the disciple's defeated mentality. John 20:19 states, "*The same day at evening, being the first day of the week...the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled...for fear of the Jews.*" The disciples, even after Christ had been raised, were under the impression that Christ was going to set up an earthly kingdom. When he died, they thought all hope had been lost. After He had risen, Acts 1:6 states, "*When they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'*" Understanding these things is important because it shows us the disciples would not have even thought about trying to steal His body. What good would a dead king be to their hopes of a restored kingdom?

Some will try and teach that Christ was not actually dead when placed into the tomb. Thus, once He awoke, He was able to roll the stone away and escape. The problem with this is two-fold. First, the fact that Christ was truly dead was confirmed by a trained Roman centurion (Mark 15:42-45). Secondly, the stone covering the tomb was not a mere pebble. We are told it was very large and would require the effort of multiple men to move (Mark 16:1-4). Even if Christ did not actually die, He would have been weak and helpless after having been beaten, scourged, and crucified (John 19:1-3; Matt 27:35). How could one in such a state roll away such a massive stone all by himself?



One final theory puts forth the idea that the eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection only had visions of Christ. Thus, while they had good intentions, they were simply mistaken. While the idea of one person having a vision or a dream and perceiving it to have been real is somewhat plausible, the idea of multiple people having the same vision at the same place and time is not. In 1 Corinthians 15:6, Paul stated that "*He [Christ] was seen by over five hundred brethren at once.*" Luke records an occasion where He appeared to the disciples in Luke 24:36-43. At this time, He proved Himself to be more than a vision or a ghost by eating a meal in their presence and allowing them to touch Him. If these individuals were only hallucinating, why, upon their initial preaching of the gospel, did the Jews not simply say, "Wait a minute, we have the body right here!"?

The logical conclusion, upon weighing all the evidence, is that Jesus Christ did indeed rise from the grave proving He is more than just another man. His resurrection proves His claimed identity and the validity of the message He taught. C. S. Lewis once wrote, "*A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice.*" The resurrection of Christ makes this choice clear. It re-enforces the need for us to remain focused on Him and His knowledge as our Guard against doubt.

True Science Confirms the Bible

“I don’t know why you always have to be judging me, because I only believe in science.”

– Esqueleto (Nacho Libre movie)

I am sure you have, at one point or another, been accused of being ignorant, backward, or otherwise anti-science for having expressed your belief in God and/or the Bible. Since we are in the business of eliminating doubt and skepticism in this lesson, I thought it would do us well to demonstrate that true science is not anti-Bible. In fact, true science upholds the Bible! Consider the following sampling of facts:

- At a time when other religions spoke of the earth being supported on the back of a giant creature, the Bible accurately spoke of the earth’s suspension in space. In Job 26:7, it states that God “*hangs the earth on nothing.*”
- Shipbuilders have confirmed that the dimensions given for Noah’s ark in Genesis 6:15 and the verses following are ideal for a sea-worthy cargo vessel.
- Physicians in ancient Egypt and during the Middle Ages often used leeches to remove “bad blood” from sick patients. Patients would often die from such practices. Doctors have since discovered that we need our blood to remain alive. The Bible established the fact that “*the life of the flesh is in the blood*” in Leviticus 17:11 and 14.
- Have you ever wondered why a dog and a cat cannot breed to create a hybrid creature? The Bible explains “kinds” of animals in Genesis 1:24.
- Before Ferdinand Magellan became the first to sail around the world in the 1500s, the common opinion was that the earth was flat. Oddly enough, some today have also reverted to this erroneous concept despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It is important to note, though, who first identified that the earth is round. The prophet of God wrote in Isaiah 40:22 that God sits “*above the circle of the earth.*”

- Ocean currents were discovered by Matthew Maury in the 19th century. He was an officer in the United States Navy who decided to figure out what the “*paths of the seas*” were in Psalm 8:8. He went on to write the first book on Oceanography.



- The first law of Thermodynamics states that, in a closed system (such as our universe), there is a set amount of energy. Energy can change states, but such does not affect the actual amount of energy that exists. Why is this? The book of Genesis provides an explanation: “*Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done*” (Gen 2:1-2).
- The Bible also establishes the second law of Thermodynamics, sometimes referred to as the “law of Entropy.” It is the idea that as energy converts into different forms, the resulting energy is less usable. In other words, things are slowly wearing down. In Psalm 102:26, we read: “*They [the heavens and the earth] will all grow old like a garment.*”
- The man credited with writing down the details of the water cycle, Bernard Palissy, did so in the 16th century. Hundreds of years prior to this, however, Biblical writers wrote very plainly concerning this process. Note the following two passages:

“For He draws up drops of water, which distill as rain from the mist, which the clouds drop down and pour abundantly on man.” (Job 36:27-28)

“All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.” (Eccl 1:7)

- The Jet Stream is mentioned by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 1:6. There he writes, “*The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually and comes again on its circuit.*”
- The law of Biogenesis states that life cannot come from non-life. Science has demonstrated this time and time again. As such, popular theories such as evolution fail in explaining where life came from because such theories claim that life must, at some point, have arisen via non-living matter. The Bible, though, provides a solution in Genesis chapter one. There we are told

that God created life. It is only within such a context that the law of Biogenesis makes sense.

- In Leviticus 15:13, washing under “*running water*” is specified as necessary for a person to be purified or clean. Modern doctors learned this truth the hard way as, for many years, the practice of washing one’s hands in the same bowl of water when dealing with multiple patients caused many untimely deaths.
- In Genesis 17:12, we find God’s command to Abraham to circumcise his son on the eighth day. This might seem random at face value, but physicians have confirmed that on the eighth day of a male child’s life, prothrombin and vitamin K are at their highest levels (over 100% – the only time such will occur throughout a male’s lifetime under normal circumstances). These two elements control the body’s ability to coagulate blood. Thus, this is the optimal time for any kind of surgical procedure to be done on a male child.
- Sanitation is addressed in Deuteronomy 23:12-13. There it explains the Israelites were to relieve themselves outside of the camp. They were also to carry a small shovel to bury their waste. Many soldiers pre-WWI died from disease rather than injury due to a failure to isolate human waste.
- Science has confirmed the human body can be broken down into 28 basic elements. This confirms what the Bible tells us! In Genesis 2:7, we read that God created man from “*the dust of the ground*.”

Another interesting thought I think is worth discussing relates to the dating methods you often hear cited to suggest the earth is millions of years old. This idea is often presented as a Bible slayer because the Bible suggests a very young age for the earth and the universe (roughly 6,000 years – a number ascertained by studying the various genealogies and other time frames recorded in the scriptures). A scientist dating a rock to be 1.7 million years old, however, need not be a source of doubt for the Christian. Why? Because God created a mature universe. Read Genesis chapter 1. God created an earth with mountains, valleys, rivers, and seas. He created fully mature trees and creatures. He created stars and planets and all the other heavenly bodies with inherent age. If you were able to go back in time and behold the earth on the seventh day, you would observe what would appear to have existed for a very long time.

This realization, by the way, also solves the “problem” of light from distant heavenly bodies. Since we have been able to test and verify the speed at which light travels upon generation, some have asked, “what about distant starlight?” Given how far we know many stars to be from the earth (again through scientific study), it would follow that for the light from those stars to be visible from the earth, it would take much longer than 6,000 years to get here! Friends, if God could create all we see and experience simply by speaking (cf. Gen 1:3), then He surely could create light in such a state of existence that it had already “travelled” the distance between its source and the earth.

“Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so” (Gen 1:14-15; emphasis mine – DCR).

Do not let the enemy convince you that you are against science if you believe in God and His word. Recognize, as we have just done, that true science (not theory or opinion) validates your belief in the scriptures and He who inspired them to be written (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17).

Do not be Unbelieving, but Believing

“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

– The father whose son was possessed of a demon (Mark 9:24)

As we conclude this lesson, it is important to realize *everyone* doubts. It happens to us all sooner or later. If it does not come through the challenge of non-believers or skeptics, it will come through trials and hardships. Many, sadly, turn their back on God the moment tragedy strikes. Like a plant that springs up in rocky soil, their faith is scorched the moment they face the heat of hardship (cf. Matt 13:20-21). “Why did you do this to me?” they will ask their Creator. “Don’t you care?” Doubt, you see, creeps in. The loss of a loved one is especially trying as most of us know. Even death, though, had its beginnings not with God, but through the deception of our adversary as we had noticed earlier. It is funny how every form of doubt traces back to him, isn’t it?

You may be wondering why we have not talked about Thomas yet? We typically refer to him as “doubting Thomas” after all. Well, I would like to talk about him now for just a moment. In John 20, there was an occasion where the

resurrected Lord appeared to all but two of his disciples. Judas had taken his own life (Matt 27:5), and Thomas was otherwise absent.

“Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving but believing.” And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:24-31).

I always find it remarkable when reading something Jesus said and realizing he had me (and you too) in mind when he said it. Thomas believed because he saw the evidence with his own eyes. Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* He was referring to you and me, friends! Is Jesus trying to say that we should have a blind faith? God forbid! He was simply saying that we do not have to have been witness to His resurrection with our own eyes to believe in Him. Why? Because we have ample evidence to demonstrate he did indeed rise! Hence, we have what John writes in verse 31: *“These are written that you may believe!”* In other words, these things were written so you can confidently believe despite not physically having been there!



One of my favorite songs as a child was “This Little Light of Mine.” One of the reasons I enjoyed it so much was because of the verse that read, *“Won’t let Satan “poof” it out, I’m gonna let it shine!”* I liked making the “poofing” noise when singing that verse. Doubt is one of the primary ways Satan tries to “poof” out our lights (cf. Matt 5:14-16). It is my prayer this study has and will continue to aid you in not letting Satan be a successful poofer. As Jesus told the father whose

words we quoted above in Mark 9, “*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes*” (verse 23). Keep your eyes on the Lord, and He will give you confidence!

“*Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you*” (Isa 60:1-2).



Darkness Lesson 7 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: Doubt and Skepticism

1. How does doubt distort our vision of reality and eternity?
 2. What tools does Satan use to introduce doubt as He did with Eve? How do we guard against these?
 3. What are some of your doubts?
 4. How can we best address our doubts?
 5. Why can we have confidence in the Bible?
 6. What does Peter's walk to Christ on the water teach us about doubt?
 7. Based on the evidence, was Jesus Lord, lunatic, or liar? Explain the evidence.

Darkness Lesson 8

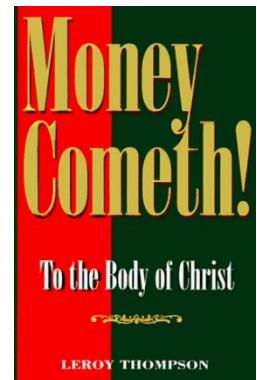
Devil's Dark Distortions:

Disappointment - Overcoming the Disappointments of Life

by Nick Angel

The Devil's Great Deception

One of the greatest draws of the modern-day “Health and Wealth Gospel” or “Prosperity Gospel” is the belief the disciple of Jesus will go through this life enjoying all of the blessings available without experiencing the many disappointments that are also possible. “You are blessed and highly favored by God, and no child of God will go wanting in this life!” is the favorite mantra of those who might buy into such teachings. In fact, Leroy Thompson was once quoted as having proclaimed, “God said: ‘It is time to tell the money you don’t belong to the wicked you belong to us!’” He would go on to say and even author a book focusing on the idea of, “Money come to me now!” Whether it be money, health, or any other blessing imaginable, those who prescribe to this type of teaching go all in and expect their fortunes to turn in their favor. They plan to no longer experience the disappointments (sadness or displeasure that is caused by one’s hopes and expectations not being realized) of life that has for years weighed upon their shoulders. Who could blame them for at least giving it a shot?



For the person who has already experienced many of life’s disappointments, this type of hope offered by the “Prosperity Gospel” is too good to pass up. Who would not jump at the opportunity to live a life where only blessings are enjoyed while the disappointments are in the rearview mirror? Unfortunately, those who fall for the lies of the “Prosperity Gospel” are left in a place that surely must seem even worse than where they were to begin with. They go into this faith exercise expecting for the disappointments of life to be a thing of the past, but they quickly realize they are just as susceptible to difficulties as they were before.

Worst off are those who respond to the continuance of life’s challenges by assigning blame to God as if He were the One who caused us to experience such difficulties! Those people who presumably throw themselves at the mercy of God in faith and fail to achieve a higher level of fortune are now jaded towards God because they see Him as being a liar. The false teachings they have been fed through the false gospel of health, wealth, and prosperity leave them with a

completely distorted view of God's promises to His people. Instead of realizing the eternal blessings that come through Christ, these people are left wanting only those temporal and earthly blessings that were so strongly promised to them by the health, wealth, and prosperity teachers. The good influence the pure gospel of Jesus might have had earlier in their lives is now greatly hindered by the false gospel.

And yet, that is exactly what the great Deceiver has set out to do! Satan, "the father of lies" (John 8:44), knows a distorted view of God and His promises is a highly effective tool in keeping people from possessing a true measure of saving faith. In fact, is that not what the serpent did in the very beginning with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3? Did he not seek to distort Eve's understanding of what God desired for the crown jewel of His creation? God had simply said, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (Gen 2:17). God only wanted what was best for Adam and Eve. He did not want them to die!

However, it does not take long for there to be an attempted distortion of God's will for humankind. In Genesis 3, we find the serpent testing the understanding of Eve concerning God's commandments for her and her husband. "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" (Gen 3:1) Of course, this is not what God had told Adam and Eve, and Eve was well aware of this. She showed this understanding by simply restating in Genesis 3:2 what is originally recorded for us in Genesis 2:17. Yet, the serpent is not willing to drop this discussion. Instead, we see him seeking to distort Eve's understanding of what God had said by saying, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5).



Do you see what he did there? The serpent sought to pit Eve against God by saying God's motives were purely selfish! According to the serpent, not only would Eve not die, but she would actually be improved and elevated to a lofty position like God! Surely the serpent was setting disappointment in the heart of Eve by leading her to believe God did not truly want what was best for her and her husband. How could a loving God keep something so great from His favored creation?! Therefore, it should not surprise us. This distorted view of God's will

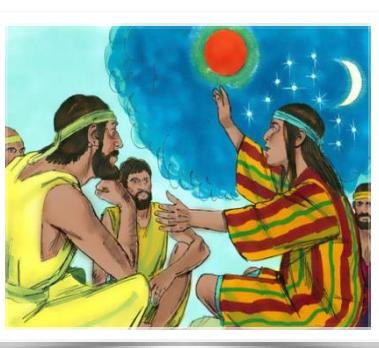
for man in the Garden of Eden leads Eve to the point of disobedience to God when she sees the tempting nature of the fruit and succumbs by taking of it, giving some to her husband, and eating it together with him. It is at this point true disappointment is realized not just by Eve and her husband, but God also feels it because of the failures of the man and his wife.

God's disappointment was quickly followed by punishment because of Adam and his wife's sin. Expulsion from the garden (Gen 3:21-24) and the introduction of difficulties in living a life on earth (Gen 3:16-19) only led to further disappointments for the first man and woman and the many generations that were to follow even up until our current day. The disappointments we experience in life were not God's desire for us. But they are a natural consequence of the presence of sin in this world because of our unwillingness to submit faithfully to the will of God in all things. Yes, Adam and Eve were the first to experience disappointment in this life, but they are far from the last examples found within scripture.

Other Examples of Biblical Disappointments

Quickly following the happenings in the Garden of Eden, we find Cain experiencing disappointment because the heavenly Father did not hold Cain's sacrifice in high esteem. The text says, "but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So, Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell." (Gen 4:5) Did you catch the end of that verse? "His countenance fell." Cain was experiencing the disappointment that comes when hopes and expectations are met. We know Cain's reaction led him down a very dark road that ended with the murder of his own brother.

Joseph surely would have never imagined his brothers would hate him to the degree that they would fake his death and sell him off to a band of Midianites, but that is precisely what we read happening in Genesis 37:18-36. His disappointments are only compounded when he finds himself in Egypt as a slave. Sure, he eventually found himself in a high position within Potiphar's house, but then comes the wicked actions of Potiphar's wife that leads to Joseph's wrongful imprisonment (Gen 39:6-20). Oh, and then there was the time Joseph interpreted a dream for the chief cupbearer, which led to the cupbearer release from prison. All Joseph requested in return was that the cupbearer remember Joseph when things went well, but Genesis



40:23 tells us the cupbearer failed to remember Joseph's kindness. I feel confident in saying Joseph's life was full of disappointments.

While Moses was the strong leader, God needed to guide His people toward and into the promised land, Moses's own personal journey ends short of the promised land. During the forty years of wilderness wanderings, we find the people in great need of water, and God seeks to provide for their needs just as He had always done. The solution for this water shortage was for Moses to go up to the rock of Horeb where he was to strike the rock. Moses obeyed the Lord, and from the rock poured forth water that refreshed the children of Israel (Ex 17:1-7). Later on in Numbers 20, we see the people again complaining about a lack of water, and God commands Moses to go up to the rock once more. However, this time, God commanded him to speak to the rock. Unfortunately, Moses lost his composure with the people and did not hold God sacred, and he struck the rock. Water did come pouring forth from it. However, this act of disobedience aroused God's anger, and His punishment was swift and severe. "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them" (Num 20:12). For Moses, this must have been devastating! He had long labored with these stubborn and cantankerous people, and yet he would not enjoy the overflowing milk and honey of the promised land. What disappointment for this godly man and leader!

David faced disappointment in his life. Though he had given around seven years of his life in service to King Saul, David was hated by his king because of the wicked heart that had developed within Saul. This most certainly weighed heavily on the heart of David as Saul pursued David for around four years. David truly only wanted the best for God's chosen king and people (I Sam 21-31). The disappointments within David's life didn't end with the troubles he experienced concerning Saul. Sadly, we know David made grave mistakes that brought upon heart-breaking consequences. No error was greater than what we see in 2 Samuel 11 & 12 involving Bathsheba, Uriah, and the baby that would eventually die. Yes, David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), still experienced tremendous disappointments throughout his life.

There are numerous other biblical examples of people who struggled with the disappointments they faced in life. But we should also consider our Lord Jesus. Our Lord was willing to leave the perfect home of heaven in order to take on flesh (Phil 2:5-8), and His willingness to do such a thing only opened Him up to the possibilities of experiencing the many disappointments of this life. Sure, Jesus

must have been constantly disappointed and discouraged by the Jewish leader's hard-heartedness of His day, but all the more disappointing must have been the lack of faith, trust, and spiritual maturity shown by His closest disciples from time to time. Whether it be their arguing over who would be the greatest (Luke 22:23-27), Peter's overconfidence (Luke 22:28-34), or Peter's betrayal (Luke 22:55-62), Jesus' expectations of His disciples were not always realized. How disappointing, frustrating, and even discouraging that must have been! It is one thing for imperfect humans to experience disappointment, but it must be another thing altogether when the perfect Son of God suffers such things!

Our Disappointments

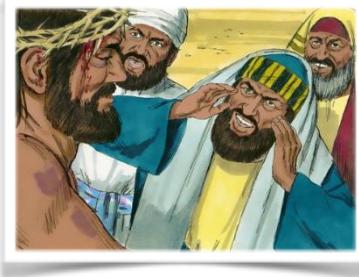
This leads to an all-important realization we must come to accept. If all of these biblical figures (especially Jesus) could experience disappointments in their own lives, then surely we must be aware such things can affect us, as well. Yes, hundreds and even thousands of years have passed since the events recorded in the Bible, yet disappointments still exist because their causes still exist. We might be living in a world that looks vastly different from the world of biblical times, but its inner workings are still basically the same. Disappointments continue to occur because we as people continue to experience loss, and we continue to be exposed to sin.

Go back and think about the examples we have highlighted in this material. Think back to Adam and Eve, Cain, Joseph, Moses, David, and Jesus. Which of these individuals did not experience great loss within their own lives? Adam and Eve lost their perfect unstained purity. Cain lost the life he knew among his own family. Joseph lost his freedom and identity. Moses lost out on experiencing the promised land. David lost years of happiness and a son. Jesus would eventually give His life in an excruciatingly, painful manner. Each and every one of these biblical figures knew what it felt like to lose something precious to them.

Which of these individuals experienced loss not associated some way with sin? Adam and Eve transgressed God's law concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Cain killed his brother. Joseph's brothers hated him and deceived Jacob into believing his beloved son was dead. Moses struck the rock when he had

been commanded to speak to it. Saul's wicked heart hated David, and David's lust got the best of him.

Of course, there was no sin on the part of Jesus, but his death was a direct result of the hatred that was directed towards him by the Jewish leaders. On top of that, Jesus only needed to come to this world to die because of the sins of humankind and to fulfill our need for a perfect redeeming sacrifice. At some point in the loss of each of these examples, we find sin at the root. This is significant for us to understand when it comes to coming to grips about the disappointments we experience in life.



However, I do not want us to be of the understanding that all loss and disappointment is a direct result of our own sin or the sins of someone associated with us. The preacher of Ecclesiastes reminds us that sometimes in life, things just happen. "I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them" (Eccl 9:11-12). Sometimes bad things just happen because we live in a broken world!

Regardless of why loss and disappointments happen, the reality is it does, and we must learn how to deal with it. If we only direct our efforts towards the prevention of disappointments, then we will eventually realize our endeavors to be in vain. Even if we rid ourselves of sin within our own lives, we still live in this old broken world that will leave us disappointed in one way or another. Therefore, consider how it is we can learn to deal with the disappointments we face in this life. If prevention is not worthwhile, then what can we do to handle the disappointment we might as well expect to come our way?

The Chief of Disappointments

There is one particular man we have not mentioned up to this point who experienced his fair share of disappointments and discouragements in this life. That man would, of course, be the Apostle Paul. Those who have spent even just a little time within the New Testament letters are surely aware of the difficulties the Apostle Paul went through during his ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he finds himself having to defend his apostleship before these brethren. One of his main proofs is the detailing of everything he was willing to endure and had endured for the sake of Christ. "...in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:23-28).



Can there be any argument Paul was not a man who knew what it felt like to suffer disappointments and discouragement? Paul faced nearly every discomfort known to man. He found himself constantly in danger of losing his life. His former brethren hated him. If those things were not enough, he also had the heavy burden upon him of his great concern for all of the congregations of God's people. This list of sufferings would be incredible for a group of people to endure, but is it possible for one man to have all of these things be true about just himself? How many opportunities for disappointment and discouragement can one person endure without being completely overcome?

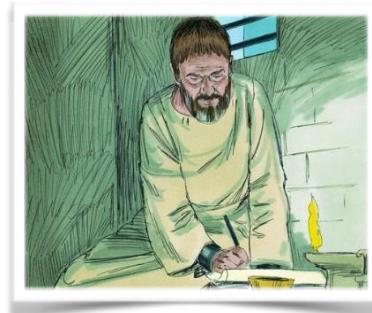


This list in 2 Corinthians 11 does not even include the disappointments Paul faced while having to accept the reality of his past. A horrible past of persecuting Jesus' people while still living as Saul of Tarsus. This past was completely against the will of God, even though he was convinced he was serving as an obedient Pharisee before God. Paul's writings to Timothy show us he was well aware of his past. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the

world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim 1:12-17). In this text, we find Paul being overcome with gratitude to Jesus for choosing him as an instrument for the spreading of the gospel. He also specifically mentions just how incredible the grace of Jesus is based upon who Paul was. He was a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent aggressor against Jesus and His people. He saw himself as the foremost and worst of sinners. We’ve already mentioned how he suffered for Christ, but how much must this have weighed upon his heart?

Yes, Paul found forgiveness in Jesus, but that did not erase his past in the sense that it never happened. Paul’s history was still very much a reality. Could you imagine being the Apostle Paul and going into the homes of friends or relatives of the very people you had imprisoned or cast your vote to have killed because they were Christians? How much guilt, pain, and disappointment must Paul have felt because of his past actions? And yet, we find the Apostle Paul fully embracing the grace and mercy of Jesus. Paul was willing to allow his past mistakes to serve as an example so others might be more fully convinced of Jesus’ patience being present within their own lives.

The key to Paul’s ability to overcome the disappointments of life is surely evident, is it not? It all had to do with Jesus! Paul had fully committed his life to Jesus. He had come to Jesus as a man who was, as Jesus had previously said, “weary and heavy laden,” and he had truly found rest from his past in Jesus (Matt 11:28). Yet, how had he found this rest in Jesus? How was he able to leave the past behind? How was he willing and able to keep the major disappointments of life from destroying him? I believe the answer to this question is found in Philippians 3.



Paul's Triumphs Over Disappointments

The letter that Paul wrote to the Philippians was a letter that clearly centered around efforts to encourage some brethren who Paul would say had experienced, “the same conflict which you saw in me” (Phil 1:30). They had their own opponents (Phil 1:28), and Paul wanted them to know they could overcome the difficulties they were facing that surely caused them to be disappointed and discouraged. Paul uses his own life, attitude, and mindset to encourage these brethren to follow his example and the example of others who were mature in their faiths (Phil 3:15-17). What was the attitude and mindset that helped Paul to overcome?

In Philippians 3:1, we find Paul reminding the brethren that this letter was meant to be a safeguard as a means of encouragement because there were going to be dogs and evil workers of the false circumcision who were going to continue to trouble them in their faiths. He reminds them they were of the true circumcision that is found in Christ (Col 2:9-14), and their confidence was not to be in the flesh.

However, if anyone could put their confidence in the flesh, then it would be Paul. “Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Phil 3:4-6). Paul had every right to put enormous confidence in this fleshly and worldly accomplishments. But instead, he was willing to “count all things to be loss in the view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Phil 3:8). Paul’s worldly experiences, both positive and negative, were of no value to him because he only valued what he had in Jesus Christ. He was politely stating it was nothing but dung or excrement in his eyes. That is how strongly Paul felt about his past!

Paul would go on to say he had but one purpose and focus. That focus was to continue to “press on” (Phil 3:12) and constantly be “reaching forward” (Phil 3:13), so he might achieve the goal and be able to lay his hands on the ultimate prize (Phil 3:14). We cannot forget that Paul’s eyes were always looking to Jesus. No matter what his past mistake. No matter what his past disappointments. No matter his past discouragements. No matter what he might be going through, Paul kept his eyes on Jesus and the goal of being like Him in everything he did. He knew this intense focus on Jesus would allow him to overcome whatever this life

might throw at him whether those be things in his past, things in his present circumstances (by the way, Paul was in prison as he wrote this letter), or things that would come. Paul recognized his citizenship was residing in heaven (Phil 3:20), and he had eyes only on achieving the goal.

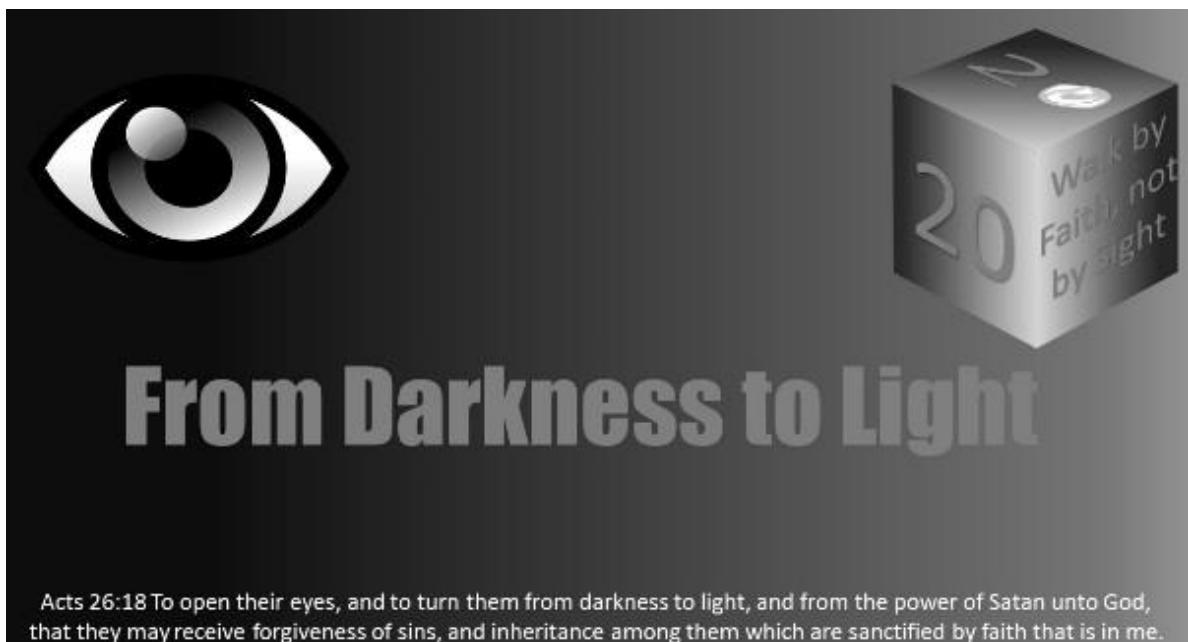
Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 quite nicely sum up the totality of what Paul was trying to get across to the Philippians. "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." He wanted the focus of the Corinthians as well as the Philippians to be on that which was eternal and not that which was temporal. Their earthly existence might have been a miserable experience. Paul's earthly existence sure doesn't sound as if it was a stroll through a flowery meadow. However, Paul was willing to endure such things because he truly desired to experience the blessings at the feet of Jesus in heaven. He was willing to endure whatever disappointments this life threw at him so long as he could experience eternal glory forever with his God in heaven. He knew there was a "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim 4:8) waiting for him beyond this life!

Conclusion

We will only be kidding ourselves if we fail to recognize the severity of the sufferings of Paul. We just fool ourselves if we fail to acknowledge the disappointments he faced in his life as a disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ. We only hurt ourselves when we fail to consider his example so that we might be strengthened and encouraged to overcome the disappointments and discouragements we face in our own lives.

Yet, we know Paul was far from the first person who faced such disappointments and negative aspects of this broken world. Adam, Eve, Cain,

Joseph, Moses, our Lord Jesus, and many other biblical characters found themselves facing disappointments. Some of these disappointments were results of their own doing, sometimes they were at the mercy of others' poor mistakes, and other times they were victims of pure bad fortune. Regardless, we have seen that our circumstances do not have to lead us down paths of hopelessness and despair. Satan would surely love for this to be our end, but through the grace and mercy of Jesus our Lord we can still attain the victory in this race of life by keeping our focus on the goal of being like Jesus so we might obtain the prize of eternal glory with our Heavenly Father. May he bless us and strengthen us as we strive to overcome the devil's dark distortions and run this race in such a way that we might win!



Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Darkness Lesson 8 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions:

Disappointment - Overcoming the Disappointments in Life

1. What is disappointment, and what type of impact can it have upon our lives?

2. What is at the root of the disappointments that we experience in our lives?

3. Are our disappointments all that different from the disappointments experienced by biblical characters? How so?

4. What aspects of Paul's life could have led him to experience disappointment?

5. What about Paul's attitude and mindset helped him to overcome disappointments?

6. When things don't go our way, and we become disappointed in our circumstances in this life, what must our response be?

Darkness Lesson 9

Devil's Dark Distortions:

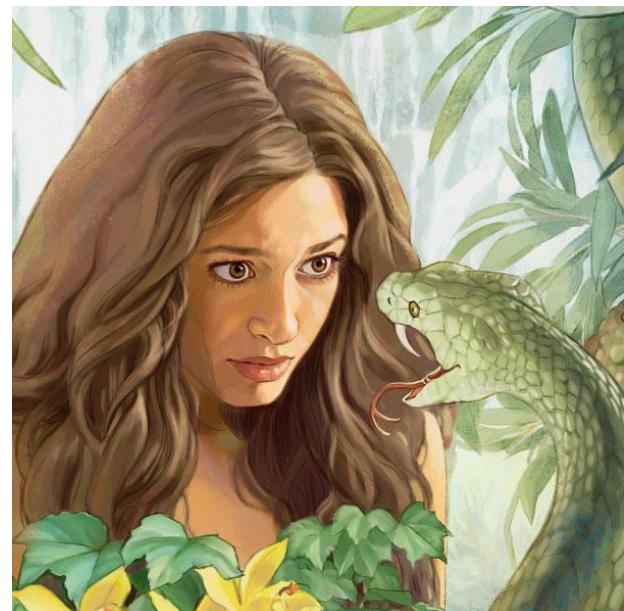
Deception

by Daniel Ruegg

In speaking of the devil, Jesus said, “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). The devil will do all he can to cast a looming shadow of darkness in his lies to keep us from seeing the true Light of Hope in God’s eternal goodness. There are three great deceptions which we must be enlightened by the Light of Truth to make sure we are not led astray by the devil.

Deception 1: Since God Often Says, ‘No,’ He Can’t Possibly Be Good

This deception is the first one Satan laid before mankind and ultimately led to our current corrupt existence in this world when Eve fell for it. In describing the true skill in the art of deception, Moses wrote of the devil, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made,” (Gen 3:1). From the very first words, the devil spoke through the form of a serpent (Rev 12:9; 2 Cor 11:3). We get a taste of how good he is at twisting our minds and thoughts to accept a faulty logic about the nature of God when the devil said to Eve: “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). As much as I loathe and detest the murderous nature of Satan to destroy our eternal souls and us, I cannot help but stand in awe of his true skill in the art of deception with this statement.



In Genesis 3:1, Satan lures Eve into a theoretical discussion on the logic of God’s goodness. He forces Eve to ponder and wrestle with the reality of what God has done against the obvious logical assumption of his stated premise. Obviously, God did not create a world full of delicious food which by His own admission declared to be “Good” only to tell Eve she could not have any of it. This clearly would be the definition of a God who was “bad.” So if Eve would agree this

would certainly make God “bad” to create a world where you couldn’t have anything, then logically the opposite would have to be true. Since it would be bad for God to say you cannot have anything, then God can only be good by saying you can have everything. However, Eve is tripped up in declaring this theoretical description of God in her defense of His goodness by admitting He actually hasn’t said you could eat anything. And it is at this moment where Satan’s deception takes full root.

Eve wrestles with this logical inconsistency of a God who clearly is not “Bad” by the serpent’s definition but must somehow still be “Good” even though the logic does not seem to support it. Eve defends God’s created goodness stating that, yes, God’s goodness can be observed by His permissiveness, since he said we could eat from any of the trees in the garden...well...that is...wait...except this one. “The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will surely die’” (Gen 3:2-3).

Now Satan has Eve stuck contemplating what seems to be a glitch in the logical assumption that God’s goodness is verified by His permissiveness. Because she acknowledges God’s restrictive command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it would seem she now has to atone for this lone exception to the permissive nature of God’s goodness and explain how it can possibly fit into the character of a good God.

In this mental battle of accounting for how God can still be seen as good while restricting her from something that on the surface appears to be so good, Satan slips in another lie. “The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil,’” (Gen 3:4-5). This final death blow of the supposed sinister explanation behind God’s restrictive order makes it impossible for Eve to defend God’s goodness any longer. Embracing Satan’s deception, Eve follows her own determination of what is truly good rather than trust God’s knowledge and direction. “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate” (Gen 3:6).

As the aftermath of heartbreak and destruction unfolds in consequence to Adam and Eve’s disobedience, we learn of the presence of something in the midst of the garden, which Adam and Eve never even considered

partaking of as they were completely distracted by the devil's deception. All along, there was a tree that represented the full extent of God's permissive goodness, the Tree of Life. Essentially, they could have eaten from this tree as much as they wanted and experienced the fullness of God's intended purposes for good. For them, this tree represented never-ending eternal life. Because they brought in corruption after eating from the forbidden tree, it would no longer be good for them to remain eternally in that state and God removes them from being able to eat from it. "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (Gen 3:22).

When we see these two trees together, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life, we realize the truth is God's restriction regarding the tree of knowledge was to ensure they experienced the fullness of God's permissiveness and ultimate goodness in partaking of the tree of life. By saying, "No" to eating from the tree of knowledge, God was still exercising His goodness in that this would ultimately protect and shield Adam and Eve from harm and ensure they would be equipped to experience the true eternal goodness of God in its fullest and most amazing form.

Satan deceives us into thinking when God says "No," He is not being good and is holding us back and ultimately preventing us from experiencing something good. The truth is when God says, "No," it is to guard and protect us from harm, ensuring we experience His ultimate goodness without any interference.

Jesus brings the light of this truth in His plea for us to trust Him as a good shepherd. "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," (John 10:7-10).



As a truly good shepherd, Jesus is seeking to gain our trust and follow Him to find living water where wells of water spring up to eternal life. We are permitted and encouraged to drink from that water as much as we want and will find God's true goodness in the abundant life it contains and provides. As a good shepherd, He will point to the dangers and pitfalls and say "No, don't go there," as they will ultimately harm and interfere with our ability to partake of the wells of permissiveness experiencing God's ultimate goodness.



Satan will tempt us with the deceiving lie that is based upon the appearance of goodness. God's restrictions to these things are somehow sinister in His nature wanting to withhold us from partaking in something truly wonderful, blissful, and enjoyable. Do not be deceived.

To win us over and fully trust God's goodness completely, Jesus was willing to lay down His life to pay for the sins we committed in our own distrust of God's direction and remove the penalty of death we were deceived into experiencing in exchange for following our own desires and definition of what is "good." "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep," (John 10:11,14-15).

He desires that we would renew our trust in God through Him and ultimately trust He seeks to bring us into experiences of ultimate goodness where we will never be separated from it ever again. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:27-30).

Don't be deceived. When God says "No," this is an extension of His goodness protecting us from what only has the capability of interfering and preventing us from experiencing what He fully intends for us to embrace and partake of in eternal goodness. "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward" (Heb 11:24-26).

Deception 2: Living A Life Deprived of Immediate Gratification Is A Life of Slavery

Satan is so good at deceiving us into believing true freedom is the ability to have immediate gratification any time we wish or desire and that anything less is to live a life of slavery to a ruthless master. Ultimately, the things God says "No" to are presented before us the same way the tree of knowledge was presented to Eve. It looks and seems so good on the surface that to deprive ourselves of it appears to be enslaving ourselves to an uncaring master. This, also, is a dark deception. Self-indulgence and unlimited immediate doses of pleasure and enjoyment seem to provide a path of freedom when, in reality, it is Satan's deception to enslave you to those very enticing lusts.

Consider the confession of those who reveal they once lived a life pursuing whatever they felt like experiencing only to find it actually enslaved them and isolated themselves in darkness and misery. "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another," (Titus 3:3). Admitting they were deceived, there is the confession that they disobeyed the direction God wanted to lead them in to pursue all the goodness they could experience through their own lusts and pleasures.

As Moses was well aware in the previous verse, the pleasures of sin are passing. To achieve and maintain the same level of fulfillment we receive from indulging in them, we must continue to come back again and again to them inevitably becoming a slave to our own desires. Eventually, we become dissatisfied with the level of pleasure and satisfaction we can experience and become full of envy towards those who have better versions and bigger doses of that fulfillment. We then are filled with malice and hate rather than joy and happiness. Forced to go back to inadequate doses that we can afford or what is available, we become miserable. Satan remains focused on blinding us into believing that the passing pleasures of sin are more satisfying than God's love and

holiness in our obedience. We must learn to hate evil and love holiness to avoid the devil's distortion of our vision.

The truth is God wants to free us from these limitations and short-lived doses of enjoyment to find an eternal spring of everlasting fulfilling life. "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life," (Titus 3:4-7).

Consider the confession of one of the most successful musicians and popular entertainers of all time, John Lennon. As one who achieved such success and stardom, it would seem one who had virtually no limit to the pleasures and enjoyments one could experience would be at the height of joy at all times. In the depths of his own misery living the life of slavery to his passions, John reached out for help by writing a letter to the television evangelist, Oral Robert.

"This is Ex-Beatle John Lennon. I have been waiting to write to you, but I guess I didn't really want to face reality. I never do so this is why I take drugs, reality frightens me and paranoids me. True I have a lot of money, being a Beatle, been all around the world but basically I am afraid to face the problems of life. Let me begin to say I regret it that I said: "The Beatles" were more popular than Jesus. I don't even like myself anymore. Guilt... As the song we wrote is that we wrote, Paul and me, "Money Can't Buy Me Love," it's true. The point is this I want happiness, I don't want to keep up with drugs. Paul told me once you make fun of me for not taking drugs, but you'll regret it in the end. Explain to me, what Christianity can do for me. Is it phony, can He love me? I want out of Hell!"



“Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life,” (John 4:13-14).

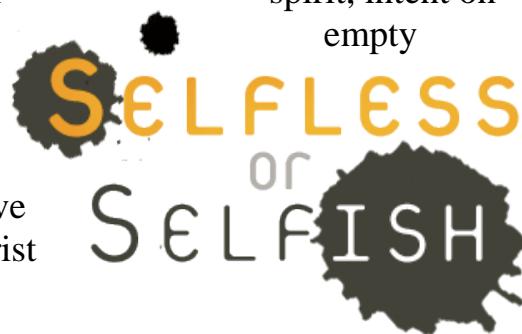
Deception 3: To Experience True Joy, Pursue All of the Things That Make You Happy

The temptation is strong to lookout solely for yourself and your own interests. Even though we have been taught to be polite when we are surrounded with a group of friends, and there remains one last slice of pizza, the urge is strong to make a quick grab and secure it for yourself.

Satan makes it seem so innocent. With most of the world essentially operating on the same level of selfishness, it becomes a matter of self-preservation to be on the lookout to secure as much as you can for yourself before somebody else snatches it up before you do. Thankfully, we have such a striking visual as the Dead Sea to shed light on this deceptive lie and present the truth of the matter. Essentially taking all it can from the Jordan River while giving nothing anywhere else, the Dead Sea becomes a true representation of the outcome of selfish living.

When we live selfishly, taking as much as we can while giving nothing in return, we become self-absorbed, bitter, and lifeless. “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive,’” (Acts 20:32-35).

The truth found in Jesus and His constant example of selflessness is that true joy is found in giving and serving others. “Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely lookout for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:2-5).



Despite never possessing great wealth or earthly power and even suffering the excruciating torture He endured on a cross, Jesus was filled with joy and hoped His example would lead us to have it as well. “But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves” (John 17:13). “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God,” (Heb 12:2).

When we accept the truth of the reality of the presence of an eternal kingdom Jesus invites us to enter, we leave behind any attachment to the temporary allurements this temporary world has to offer. We also find ourselves embracing a joy in selflessness that loosens our grip on the things so many are seeking to hoard up for themselves. “And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:29-34).

As we embrace and practice the selfless and giving love of God within this eternal kingdom, we are even able to joyously withstand the trials and painful carnage of life with all of its sudden twists in the valleys of darkness and uncertainty. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us,” (Rom 5:1-5).

The beauty of having our eyes opened to the truth of God’s love after spending time in the darkness of Satan’s deceptions is that we see how the true joy of selflessly serving in the kingdom far outweighs the momentary temporary glimpses of happiness we chase after in this world. “Many are saying, ‘Who will show us any good?’ Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us, O LORD! You have put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and new wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O LORD, make

me to dwell in safety” (Psa 4:6-8). So powerful and completely peaceful and satisfying is this love which dwells in us by faith that not even the temporary pain of loss or suffering can diminish or affect it. We can truly say through the power of His love, “I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction” (2 Cor 7:4).

Conclusion

The devil has always used deception to blind humanity to reality. To make us think some immediate sinful gratification denied means God is not good. He blinds us to the joy of being selfless instead of selfish, thus enslaving us to sin.



Darkness Lesson 9 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: Deception

1. What are the three great deceptions of the devil the author explores which require one to be enlightened by the Light of Truth to make sure we are not led astray?
 2. When God says “no,’ does this mean He is not good? Why?
 3. Is permissiveness “good”? Why or why not?
 4. Why does God withhold some things from us? What has He promised us?
 5. How does denying immediate gratification keep us from being enslaved to sin?
 6. Explain the difference between selfish and selflessness. How does bring selfless yield joy and happiness?

Darkness Lesson 10

Devil's Dark Distortions: Desperation

by Bryan Sircy

Introduction

James, in the first four verses of his letter, tells us trials will come. His plea—have the right perspective because trials are used by God to bring us to righteousness. However, through the rest of his letter, he virtually points to things that are getting in their way, things of the devil. From inward, sinful enticements to outward struggles to struggles with our own brethren, Satan is constantly at work to turn our perspective away from righteousness-growing trials to desperate attempts that always fall short.

Desperation Defined

One of Satan's greatest tools is desperation. Desperation is defined as "a loss of hope and surrender to despair; a state of hopelessness leading to rashness."

When thinking about this definition from a Christian mindset, what jumps out as the opposite? The desperate have loss of hope...but we are to be full of hope (Rom 5:1-5). The desperate surrender to despair...but we are to surrender to the Christ (Jam 4:7). The desperate have a state of mind and outlook of bleakness, but our eyes are to be set on things above (Col 3:1-4). The desperate are rash, but we are to be careful how we walk (Eph 5:15-16).



What to Do in Desperation

The question to consider is not if desperation will come, but instead, what to do when one reaches the point of desperation. What we do or how we see at that moment, in those times, could either be a tool for the devil or strengthening for the Lord. To illustrate this, I want to briefly consider King Saul and David.

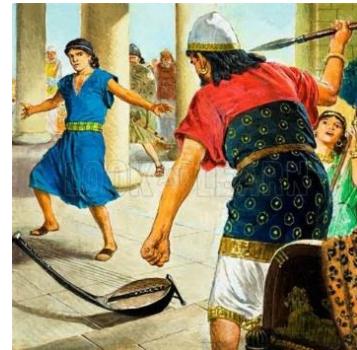
Two Examples at the Crossroads of Desperation

We read about David and Saul's similarities and differences in the book of 1 Samuel. Both were chosen by God to be king (1 Sam 9; 16); both showed great ability early on in war (1 Sam 18:7); both had traits to make them quality kings (1 Sam 9:2; 1 Sam 17). However, when desperation hit, these men are as opposite as they could be.

After disobeying God with an unlawful sacrifice (1 Sam 13), King Saul starts on a bad path of desperation. The spirit of God, which once was in Saul, now has departed, and we also read at different times how Saul was filled with a different spirit (1 Sam 16:14). Saul was at desperation's crossroads. Instead of yielding to God's decision to pass the kingdom to a new lineage, he sets out to find and destroy the one to which God would give the kingdom. This resulted in more and more bad decisions that continued to lead him away from God. He became selfish and self-serving in his desperate attempts. Saul would go on to see his desperation the way Satan would have it—dark despair.

The path of King Saul's desperation is easy to recognize from our viewpoint:

- Made a rash vow (1 Sam 14)
- Pushed away God and a godly man—Samuel (1 Sam 15)
- Became jealous of one fighting for him (1 Sam 18:6-9)
- Tries to kill David twice with a spear though David is helping him (1 Sam 18:10-11)
- Seeks to kill David multiple times (1 Sam 18-26)
- Turned against his own son (1 Sam 20:30-34)
- Turns to a witch instead of God (1 Sam 28)
- Ultimately, lost his life and kingdom (1 Sam 31)

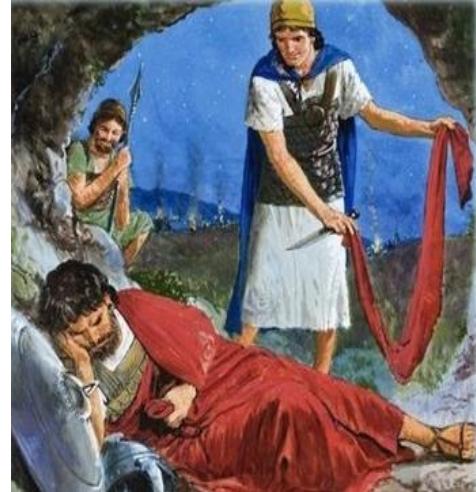


King Saul lost hope, surrendered not to God but to self-serving pursuits, made rash decisions without God, and only ever seemed to have the bleakest of views on life. Saul chose Satan's perception at the crossroads of desperation.

During this time, David would face his own difficult crossroads because of Saul's wicked desperation.

The path of King David's desperation is easy to recognize from our viewpoint:

- Serving the king faithfully, but was hated by his master
- Would have attempts made on his life
- Would become a man constantly on the run
- Would be forced to hide in caves and amongst the enemy Philistines
- Would not commit evil against his foe (1 Sam 24:10)
- Trusted in God's promises
- Turned to Samuel (1 Sam 23:2-3)
- Had God on his side (1 Sam 18:14)
- Would surround himself with loyal, like-minded men (1 Sam 22:1-2)
- Would eventually become the greatest king and a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:21-22)



David had plenty of (earthly) reason to lose hope, to surrender to self-preservation rather than to God, to make rash decisions without God, and to have only a bleak view of life—but he did not.

Two men in similar positions—one saw thru Satan's perception at the crossroads of desperation, while one saw through God's. For both, it depended on through what glasses they were looking. For you and I, it is the same way. James speaks again to Satan's desired perception versus God's in James 2:13-18. "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. What *doth it profit*, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it profit*? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."

Two Different Paths on the Crossroads of Desperation

Viewing life with Satan's desperation yields obvious consequences: One will learn selfish ambition gets you nowhere. One will learn short-sightedness happens because of earthly thinking. One will experience that rashness comes causing disorder and evil actions. By walking Satan's path, a person is without patience, hope, and peace. It is full of distorted vision and not sober thinking.

Godly vision at the crossroads of desperation causes us to grow closer to Him in righteousness. Further, one is strengthened through trials. This can cause re-evaluation and examination of life. This approach should cause one to realize



their dependence and confidence in God and His promises. Godly vision at the crossroads of desperation helps us see clearly that this world is not something we should long for or desire. Out of Satan's and the Jewish leaders' desperation, we have the cross. For those same reasons as listed previously, our Savior went to the cross:

Consider the selfish ambition of the Jewish leaders leading to the crucifixion (John 11:47-53). Further, Christ often taught in parable because of short-sightedness (Matt 13:13-15). In their rashness, the Jewish leaders rushed the trial of the Lord (Matt 26:57-68). Ultimately, there was no patience, hope, or peace at that moment (Matt 27:24-26). It is a path full of distorted vision and is the opposite of sober thinking.

Application

We see the same in Acts 7:51-60 as Stephen presents those Jews with the reality that cuts their hearts, but their reaction is one out of pure evil desperation. Only thinking this message did not fit what they wanted, they killed the messenger and their opportunity, at least at that moment, to become right with God. You see, out of evil desperation man has seen fit to do very wicked things. The reality is they are not alone. We too have seen fit to do wickedly (Titus 3:3). Living with a view like this, we would certainly have no hope without Christ (Eph 2:1-3).

Yet, out of Christ's desperation, we have the Cross (Matt 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46): It gives us the way to righteousness (John 14:6) and the ability to withstand trials (Eph 6:13). It is a new perspective on life (Acts 26:18).



After Peter tells the people on Pentecost that they had crucified the Christ, desperation hits them. In Acts 2:37-42, desperation led to questions, which led to godly answers, which led to obedience. Those who received chose to see through wicked desperation to God!

God's plan works. Satan's desperate attempts did not even work for him. Why would we think his way would work for us?

Desperation's crossroads could come at different times and in different ways for different people. As James points out in chapter 1, the question then is not "if" the devil or difficult trials come but instead to "what" or to "whom" will you turn? Satan is going to continue to prowl around after us to devour us with things like worldly desperation (1 Pet 5:8).

But as Joshua was told by God, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh 1:9), we are also told the same in 1 Pet 5:6-11. We can resist the devil by humbling ourselves to God, casting our anxiety on God through prayer, being sober of spirit, being on alert, strengthening our faith, knowing we have the grace of God on our side. Ultimately, we must realize we are not alone in our struggle. If God is on our side, we do not have to worry about the details of the box score of life. Instead, we can have faith and confidence in His promises that in the end, we will be with Him for eternity. History is full of those who have faced torture and even death with their faith in God. These people are a great cloud of witness not to grow weary or get frozen by fear.

We must not let Satan distort our view with worldly despair but be strong and courageous through desperate trials in life. Let our focus be like David, Joshua, and Christ through desperation fixed on God and His plan.



Darkness Lesson 10 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: Desperation

1. How does Satan distort our view with desperation?
2. We all have been deceived by Satan (Rom 3:23), what has desperation lead you to do in those instances?
3. Hindsight being 20/20, how/what could you have done differently with a Godly perspective?
4. What foolish things did King Saul do in his wicked desperation? How was David different in his desperation than Saul?
5. How has Satan even lost in his desperation?
6. In 2 Chronicles 14-16, Asa desperately faces Zerah and a million Ethiopians at the Valley of Zephathah. Compare his response here (2 Chron 14:11, 15:2) with his response facing Baasha and making an arrangement with Benhadad (2 Chron 16:7-9). Both are desperate situations for him. What was different about his reactions?
7. In 2 Chronicles 32:10-24 when facing Sennacherib, Hezekiah trusted in God (2 Kings 18:5). In our time of desperation, do we seek God? Do we put our trust in God? Do we see God as enough?
8. List and discuss some other passages that can help the Christian when Satan comes with desperation.

Darkness Lesson 11

Devil's Dark Distortions:

Overcoming Addictions

by Art Adams¹, MSW, LCSW, LCAC, CADACIV, NCCE, NCPE

Overcoming Addictions

One of the devil's dark distortions to our view of eternity that he uses to enslave us is various addictions. While usually used in a negative context, the term addiction is actually neutral. In 1 Corinthians 16:15, the word in the King James Version (KJV) is used in a positive way instructing the Corinthians to be "addicted to the ministry." However, for our study today, we will be using the word "addictions" in its usual negative context.



¹

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He is Executive Director for Leaving the Pit Behind, an organization designed to provide mental health and addiction education services to church leaders. Leaving the Pit Behind also provides digital and face to face clinical counseling services to members of the church.

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Addiction can highjack the brain impacting both behavior and motivation. In time, a person can become a slave to addiction and can value satisfying the addictive cravings over life itself. Overcoming the downward spiral of addiction can become one of life's greatest battles, but God can equip the addict to gain victory and freedom.

In 2013, about 6.6 percent of the US population was dependent on alcohol or had difficulties relating to alcohol use, while more than 24 million people had abused an illicit drug in the prior month, says the National Institute on Drug Abuse (<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/nationwide-trends>). A Barna study revealed that by self-report, 64% of self-identified Christian men view pornography at least monthly with more than 10% admitting to viewing it daily. Gambling among self-identified Christians is at 61%. Alcohol/Drug abuse is at 35% with those identifying as "evangelicals/born again." While these numbers are alarming, we do not know what the rates are among those we would identify as Christians. However, we know we have a problem among us. From my clinical interactions with members, I would give a conservative guess of 25-50% of our families are impacted by addiction issues. So, we have a big job with the addicted person, and also with their families.

When the gospel news is spread and we "go into the highways, byways and hedges," who comes out? People with life issues, baggage, and who are damaged by life. They come for healing and help. Let us be ready to greet and help. Oh, and sometimes we need a turn, too.

Defined

The subject of overcoming addiction is complex. There are no magic answers. The trip into addiction is the same distance back as it was there. Effective recovery is individualized. One size does not fit all. Everyone's recovery is different. To reach "overcoming," one must first consider the nature of addiction, types of addictions, how addictions vary in intensity, recovery rates, natural supports and motivations available to the one seeking to overcome. Once addiction is understood, helpers are in a position to be supportive in the recovery process.

What is "addiction"? Essentially, it is an obsessive/compulsive behavior. By nature, addictive behavior is progressive. It does not stop where it starts. Paul emphasized this to Timothy (2 Tim 3:13). Addiction is a complex series of events which alter the brain's chemistry usually resulting in devastating consequences. Multiple brain circuits are affected, and channels are created, including those

involved in reward and motivation, learning and memory, and inhibitory control over behavior. Overstimulating the reward centers and the pain response centers of the brain is key to addiction.

The Bible emphasizes things can and often do gain mastery over a person. Consider: Stronghold (2 Co. 10:4); Devoured (1 Pet 5:8); Drunkenness (Gal 5:19-21); Sorcery/witchcraft (Gal 5:18-21); and Snare of the devil (1 Tim 3:7; 6:9); Deceiver (Prov 20:1).

Addiction keeps some bad company with: Excess of riot (1 Pet 4:4); Fornication/Adultery (Gal 5:19); Lasciviousness (Gal 5:19); Deceptions/Lying (Rom 1:31; Rev 21:8); and Degrading one's body (1 Cor 6:18-20; Rom 1:21-32).

The intent of this lesson is not to convince the reader addiction (enslavement) is wrong, which it is. Our purpose is to understand addictive processes and to identify ways to counter the progression of the problem.

Addiction can take many forms and targets many things: chemicals (illicit drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol, over-the-counter drugs, nicotine, food, digital, gambling, sexual, relationship, and shopping/hoarding and more). The process of addiction is the same regardless of the form. The rewiring of the brain can be different, whether by taking in chemicals or diverting the body's natural chemistry to overstimulate the pleasure centers of the brain. The process of triggering the body to release an overabundance of adrenaline, oxytocin, endorphins highs, and sedation can become an obsessive behavior. Tricking ones' body to overproduce natural chemicals can create a natural high and effect which the individual chases.

Who Can Become an Addict?

Some people are more vulnerable than others to becoming addicted depending upon genetic makeup, the age of exposure, and environmental influences. While a person initially chooses to feed a behavior to the point of becoming addicted, over time, the effects of prolonged exposure on brain functioning compromise their ability to choose. Thus, seeking and feeding the addiction becomes an obsession and compulsion, often eluding a person's self-control and will power. This is to say, satisfying the cravings of the addiction becomes a way of life. The enslaved person chases the highs and avoids the lows as a way of coping. The dysfunctional behaviors resulting from addiction can interfere with his/her normal functioning in the family, workplace, church, and the larger community. In short, addiction to anything can become an idol to be

honored, worshipped, and placed above all else in the person's life. Idolatry in the form of addiction is, therefore, rampant in our society.

Often people want to ask "why?" "Why" questions are about who or what to blame, which is a bad approach. The better and real question is: What? What happened? What prompts a person to become involved in addictive behaviors? Reasons vary greatly by individual and circumstance: experimenting, family history/genetics, prescription drugs abuse, loneliness, peer pressure, to feel good, mental health disorders, old coping styles stop working, self-medication, grief/loss, trauma. Addiction is about trying to find something to fill the pain, emptiness, stress, or boredom. It is often about seeking a secular solution to a spiritual problem. This is why all recovery programs that work have a strong spiritual component.

The Descent into Addiction

Triggers for addiction can be identified in one of six (6) areas: loneliness, angry, hungry (emptiness of any sort), tired, fitting in, or self-medicating. Weaknesses in these areas must be addressed, or they become portals for addictive behavior and/or relapse. The reader can develop many lessons from the scriptures to show God's teaching. Keep in mind these six (6) areas are the gateway into the downward spiral.

Those seeking to escape addiction frequently ask, "What do I need to change?" The answer is simple. "Everything." I say this because the addicted person usually does not realize the erosion which has taken place in his/her life. Like the prodigal son of Luke 15, the way back is often more difficult than the way into "riotous living." Like him, there was a character change, and he traded the qualities his father taught him for defects to his character. Often, addicted persons lose their ability to be thankful, and their world becomes one of negativity, chaos, and drama. This is what happened when we trade godly principles for the devil's lies. The path down leads to compromised morals, lies, and deceit. It also leads to betrayal of relationships, loss of possessions, and loss of focus. Eventually, nothing becomes more important than the object of ones' addiction...not even life itself. The end of the road for the addict is death or insanity.

Assessment and Criteria

To determine the progression of addiction, evaluate the following measures: preoccupation, inability to control or quit, continued use despite the consequences, blackouts, withdrawal symptoms, and significant distress or impairment in social,

occupational or other important areas of life. Any two of these are sufficient to give a clinical diagnosis of addiction.

Treatment and Recovery

Treatment and recovery are not simple due to many dimensions and disruptions in the individual's life. Effective addiction treatment must help the individual stop the obsessive/compulsive behaviors, address the triggers and cravings, maintain a new lifestyle, restore productive family functioning, and give new hope/excitement in life. At the same time, the individual is changing. The environment in which he/she lives must change to support recovery goals. This means removal from old playgrounds, playmates, and playthings. It means creating a network of people supportive of the addict without being enablers. Recovery is hard work and sometimes not very rewarding due to the many bridges that need to be mended and schedules that must be kept in order to support one's recovery.

Some Principles of Effective Intervention commonly used in recovery are:

1. Addiction is complex affecting brain function and behavior.
2. No single approach is appropriate for everyone.
3. Treatment needs to be readily available.
4. To be effective, interventions need to address the multiple needs of the person, not just the substance.
5. Remaining with help for an adequate period of time is critical.
6. Approaches need to include individual, family, and groups.
7. Medications are an important element of treatment for many. Defer to a physician.
8. Care plans must be modified as necessary to address changing needs.
9. For most, co-occurring mental disorders must be addressed (whack a mole).
10. Detoxification should be medically assisted. Alone it does little to change long-term abuse.
11. Treatment does not need to be voluntary to be effective.
12. Chemical use during treatment must be monitored continuously.
13. Treatment programs should test for "high-risk issues" – HIV/AIDS, Hep B and C, TB, STI's.
14. Self Help/Peer Lead groups – The experts on addiction are those who have survived and come out of it. Let them lead. Those not in their own recovery can support, guide, and direct. Tools that a congregation might consider using in focus groups of people self-identifying with

addiction are *12 Step Christianity* by Hazelden, *Faithful and True Study Workbook*, Recovery Coaches, Big Brothers/Sponsor Program, Digital Apps with a panic button, and Treatment Programs for referral/consult.

If your congregation does not want to get involved in peer groups or assignments, find AA, NA, CA, SA, Alanon, Naranon, and Sanon meetings in your area; keep the list handy. Offer to go with the addict and/or their family to these meetings. You will learn much by the openness and honesty of these groups. Be prepared; language can be crude. Do not miss the jewels because of the mud.

Families play a large part in the recovery of an addict. Addictions do not happen solo. Families are changed by the addicted one. Denial, shame, and guilt often mask the secret life within the walls of homes. The unspoken rules of “don’t trust, don’t feel, don’t tell, don’t talk” often hide the elephant in the room. Sunday smiles and handshakes will not fix this problem. We get sick when we keep secrets. But, where is it safe to talk about what is hurting us...our pain? Is it safe to share issues where you worship? What is happening in our churches filled with people?

Here are some ways individuals can help:

1. Families and friends need to take care of their own health so they can provide the addicted person help in healing. Sometimes the “sickest” person in the family is not the addict. Look for opportunities with the whole family.
2. Squelch gossip, talebearing, and backbiting. Where such is present healing cannot occur.
3. Learn as much as possible about addiction. Every day, research teams learn more about how addiction interacts with the cells inside the brain. That knowledge is used to develop new treatments. Education can help families to escape the blame game. Rather than seeing the addiction stemming from weakness, willfulness, or stubbornness, they might learn how addictions stem from changes in brain chemistry and electrical impulse alterations. Anger does not change that. Ranting will not fix the problem, but it will frustrate the recovery.
4. Connect with understanding peers. Living with an addict is not easy. Support is needed. Mistrust runs rampant in every member of a family touched by addiction. Connecting with peers may help (programs like SA, Sanon, Al-Anon, Naranon, or Alateen, GA, and others). The idea here is to provide help for families of addicts/ alcoholics. These programs provide a safe, nonjudgmental space for family members to learn, discuss, and

overcome addiction. Congregations might consider offering support groups for the members. In a survey published in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3817053/>), participants reported they were drawn to meetings hoping to find help with: better quality of life, fewer problems with the addicted person, lower stress levels, and improved psychological health. I would add improved spirituality can come from these meetings as brethren share and help “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6). In these meetings are people with the problem showing others behind them the way through the problem. There is power in telling our story and sharing our journey as Paul did in Acts 9, 22, 26.

5. Encourage family members to go to family therapy sessions. Dealing with an addict is never easy. The nature of addiction is it not only changes the addict – it changes the family, too. Family members can become distant. Often, they do not talk openly. They become strangers marked by avoidant behavior and living in guilt, blame, and shame. Coping tools are needed to assist someone into active recovery. The family may have lost its way. A goal of therapy is to assist the family in supporting one another, come what may.
6. Prepare meals and eat them as a family. While schedules can get tight, a family meal allows everyone in the family to reconnect at the end of a day. Each meal helps to establish a ritual and a connectedness.
7. Manage expectations – It can take a long time for patterns to change. Do not allow yourself to “get weary in well-doing” (Gal 6). Sometimes the slow shift leads to discouragement and disappointments. Recovery often involves relapses. Be patient and helpful.

How the Church Can Help

1. Linking to resources – Develop a list of church resources and community resources. You can do this by connecting with your local United Way either online or in person and printing out the thick list. Ask other churches (more conservative) who they refer to. Interview the team you want to refer to for treatment. They will be more than happy to develop you as a referral source. Identify where community meetings are happening (check with the Board of Health or United Way). Those meetings will keep you informed about what is happening in your community and are nice tools for evangelism and tours of their facilities.
2. Know your limits and boundaries (avoiding codependency/enabling). When do we need to refer? To whom do we refer?

3. 11 Ways to help:

- 1) Get educated about addiction – Addiction may be masking an even larger problem such as underlying emotional issues, chemical imbalance, depression, anxiety, bipolar, eating disorder or other disorders that cause a person to self-medicate.
- 2) Offer support, but do not enable – Enabling a member’s addiction can come in many forms. Enabling behaviors help the addict or alcoholic remain sick. Enabling can be anything from letting the “using” member live in your home and continue their behaviors while there, or it could be something as simple as making excuses for the person. Other examples might be bailing them out of jail, paying their bills while they continue their addictive behaviors, and more.
- 3) Avoid supporting the addiction financially – When a drug-addicted member asks for money, has you pay their bills or even lives in your home rent-free, this may be enabling their addiction. The member may give many reasons why they are asking you for money, but unfortunately, all paths likely lead to supporting the drug/alcohol use financially.
- 4) Establish boundaries and stick to them – Once you have decided you will not be a part of their addiction but will be a part of their recovery, then you have to set boundaries. Coming to this point is likely one of the hardest things to do. Enforcing those boundaries is just as hard. Be realistic about your boundaries and be willing to follow through on any boundary you set. These boundaries are set in place to protect you and your families.
- 5) To help them, you must help yourself. The recovery and healing process are as much for the member as it is for you and other members. Addiction affects family relationships in different ways. Being a part of the solution rather than a part of the problem is critical to family recovery.
- 6) Do not let their addiction struggles take over your life – Sometimes one’s addiction can consume your life and swallow up your time and energy. Love the addict but take care of yourself and give time to other family members. You do this by carrying on with your regular life, work and interests, taking time to care for yourself. Their addiction is their addiction (not yours), and their recovery is their recovery (not yours).
- 7) Avoid lecturing/guilt/intimidation – Complicated family relationships and issues are sometimes a factor in destructive addictive behaviors.

- Making your member feel hurt, scared, or undermined can only aggravate the situation and cause a vicious cycle of more self-medication. Treatment and recovery require love, support, and empathy, but also a willingness on the part of the addict/alcoholic.
- 8) Look into professional treatment and rehabilitation service options – Likely the addict and the brethren do not even know where to begin or what options are out there for them to get help. In fact, the addict/alcoholic may not even want to hear about options. So when you suggest options, they may be shot down. Keep 211 in mind. It is the national mental health and addictions resource line manned 24/7.
 - 9) Treatment ranges from individual therapy sessions to clinical groups, to inpatient detoxification and rehabilitation and/or residential treatment. Peer support (which is not treatment) is seen in group meetings such as alcoholics anonymous, narcotics anonymous, cocaine anonymous, and other community groups. I strongly suggest helpers visit one or more of these groups in their “open” meeting. “Open” means anyone may attend whether they have a substance problem or not. In particularly difficult cases, intervention may be staged to coerce the member into accepting treatment.
 - 10) Encourage them to seek help – Trust is a key factor in getting a member into treatment. Encouragement happens when one takes an objective approach to the problem and taking a position to assist the member in starting to get help.
 - 11) Be involved in the rehab treatment and recovery process – Healing from alcohol and drug addiction is everyone’s responsibility. If a person is on the road to recovery, and the members have not taken steps to be a part of the healing process, this can actually hinder the addict/alcoholic’s recovery process. Often, addiction is a deep-seated family issue. Learned behaviors within the home may be a barrier if the family has not begun their own recovery processes. When a person goes to treatment and then returns to the same environment that made him/her sick, they are likely to revert to old behaviors. Recovery means the entire family unit needs to be in recovery.

From all of this, I suggest:

- 1. Know your limits and where to refer within your community. Be wise. Think before you act.
- 2. Keep the problem where it belongs. The addicts’ problem is the addicts’ problem...not yours. You did not create the problem, and you cannot fix it.

You can coach and encourage. Do not let his/her problem become yours.
Be a part of the solution, not part of the problem.

3. Remember, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Be careful. When helping people out of the pit, you must be careful they don’t pull you in the pit with them.
4. Contact <https://www.leavingthepitbehind.org> for more help and resources.

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Darkness Lesson 11 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: Overcoming Addictions

1. What is an “addiction”?
2. Name five (5) different types of addiction.
3. Who is in “the highways, byways and hedges” (Luke 14:23)?
How do Christians “compel” them to come in?
What is your congregation doing to “compel” them?
What are you as a Christian doing to “compel” them?
Is the Lord happy with a partially filled house?
4. What Bible terms describe addiction?
5. What “bad company” travels with addiction?
6. How are addiction and idolatry the same?
7. What chemical solutions does the addict attempt in place of spiritual solutions?
8. List six (6) triggers that lure people into addictive behaviors.
9. Name five (5) results of effective treatment.
10. Does one recovery approach prove effective for everyone?
11. How does gossip, judging, talebearing, and whispering help or hinder the addict who is trying to be sober and in recovery?
12. Discuss the strength in recovering addicts helping those who are trying to come out of addiction.
13. How can the family become dysfunctional while dealing with an addict?
14. What is “enabling behavior”?
15. What can you do to be available for addicted persons?
16. What can the congregation do to minister to addicted persons and their family?
17. Whose recovery is it?

Darkness Lesson 12

Devil's Dark Distortions:

Divorce

by Dwight Mullett

Introduction

Upon request, I have prepared a lesson on the darkness of divorce, a few key lessons learned, and basic questions to help us remember and reason. This darkness is a direct result of Satan's influence on humanity. He has many tools to blind you from the truth. They range from distorted truths to blatant lies.

My perspectives come from personal events and experiences that required me to diligently seek God's instruction. I freely acknowledge I am by no means the authority on divorce nor is my lesson meant to be exhaustive for every case or circumstance. Please study God's word and find wise counsel to determine what is pleasing to Him with respect to your matters of divorce.

The wisdom of Agur in Proverbs 30 reminds me to always be humble and trust God's word to receive His protection:

"Surely I am more stupid than any man, and do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom nor have knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know? **Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.** Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." (Prov 30:2-6)

Yes, we need God's protection from Satan's subtle attempts to distort the pure teachings and commandments of Jesus Christ.

Background

Over twenty-five years ago, while in my mid-twenties, I was caught off guard and handed an envelope during work hours by a local law enforcement officer. He next asked me to sign for its contents. I remember thinking I was not expecting any documents from anyone. As I



thanked the officer for his time, he immediately exited the building in a somber manner as though someone died or some disturbing news was about to be revealed.

I remember my colleagues looking at me in a bewildered manner. They were so quiet with eyes fixed and full of curiosity. Finding a safe and private place was the first thing I did. Once there, I slowly opened the envelope. My heart was pounding, my palms began to sweat, and shortness of breath followed. Then I discovered...I was just officially served with divorce papers.

Were they pleasing to God? Were they from God, man, or a result of Satan's subtle distortions that end in the separation of once-loving spouses and God's fellowship within a marriage? I was shaken to the core of my being as the darkness of divorce entered my life.

Immediately, Satan's crafty lies began to emerge. Eventually, they lead to a divorce that left me with an empty home and heart. The spiritual, emotional, and physical pain that followed is quite real. It fully manifests when trust is destroyed and all hope of reconciliation is lost.

Scientific studies show, the body actually releases stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenalin during times of great loss. Nausea, difficulty in breathing, and weakening of the heart muscle may follow. Doctors refer to this as Takotsubo cardiomyopathy. I call it "heartbreak." It can even be fatal in some cases. I pray you never experience the pain and suffering of separation, as I once did.

Mercy and Truth go before Your Face.

Psalm 89:14

The Darkness of Divorce

Let's start from the beginning just as Jesus has taught us to do. He often asked good questions like, "Have you not read?"

In the beginning, Adam had the perfect world and relationships to enjoy. The Garden of Eden was his home. Most importantly, he had intimate fellowship with God. Adam walked and talked with God in the garden. How blessed he was! God provided everything Adam needed. Above all earthly blessings, he was soon richly blessed with a good woman, a wife, and suitable companion – Eve.



Eve was much more than a physical helpmate. She was united with Adam spiritually in holy matrimony designed by God. The two became one flesh and shared fellowship with God in their first home, the Garden of Eden. The perfect marriage!

In addition, God taught Adam and Eve. He provided instructions for them to respect and obey from the purity of their hearts. Remembering and honoring their love towards their Father, our Father in Heaven, would be their protection. And God was their Father in only a way they experienced. Oh, how special their relationship began with God and each other during creation!

They were totally dependent upon Him for their everyday existence. They were loved and protected in every imaginable way by our Father, by His hand, His guidance, and His will. He taught them how to marry one another with His blessing. He even granted them their own free will and allowed them to make choices, good or bad. That demonstrates great love and makes any parent experience agony when harmful choices are made.

When they disregarded their love for Him in a moment of temptation, deception, and disobedience, then an hour of darkness like none other filled their home. Treachery entered the garden directed toward God and His word (Gen 3; Mal 2). The origin? Satan. He opposes God and His word, (Rev 12). Let us not be deceived and forget what God has revealed to us in His word.

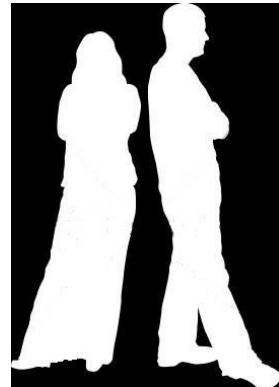
Yes, Adam and Eve disobeyed when they neglected God's word, their eyes were opened, and they discovered the knowledge of good and evil. Darkness filled the garden and destroyed their perfect new home with God. Pain and suffering followed indeed. Even more so, they experienced separation from God in their new-found nakedness. They lost God's protection from pain and suffering. Thus begins the darkest hour, ***separation from God.***

We must also see darkness today in ungodly divorces! Do we acknowledge the separation from God that results from hard hearts and disobedience? God is no longer part of a marriage today when we disobey Him, divorce our spouse, and break our marital vows for any minor reason. It is an act of violence when a divorce occurs outside of the teachings of Jesus. Violence towards your spouse and God is playing out.

When a man has a hard heart toward the very gift God gave him—a companion, a helpmate, a "good thing," a wife—, then his thankfulness to God for her is also hindered. We do not thank God because we do not take the time to

understand our spouse, right? “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with **understanding**, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your **prayers may not be hindered**” (1 Pet 3:7). The same is true for both husband and wife.

Although Adam and Eve did not experience divorce, broken marriages today end with the same loss of joyful love and fellowship between a man, woman, and God. Especially when divorce is the end result. Both husband and wife experience great loss. And our Father, God, has always hated divorce. Malachi 2:16 is quite clear, “ ‘For the Lord God of Israel says that **He hates divorce**, for it covers one’s garment with violence,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.’ ”



Do we remember this? Does our society know and remember this? We not only hurt our spouse when we divorce, but we also hurt God. God said, “...let not man separate” in Genesis 3.

Divorce is treachery. We are losing the opportunity with our spouse to jointly raise godly offspring. Malachi, the prophet, warns us: Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt **treacherously**; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? **He seeks godly offspring**. Therefore **take heed** to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth (Mal 2:14-15).

In Deuteronomy 24, men are putting their wives away and out of the house. Why? Because they forgot what God said in the beginning? Because they decided it was “ok” to put their wives away for any cause? Because they had hard hearts toward God and their wives? Yes, they were sinning against God first and their wives too. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 provides the Old Testament context needed to fully understand Jesus when he rebukes the Pharisees in Matthew 19. Let’s read and learn or remember together.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 reads: “*When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she*

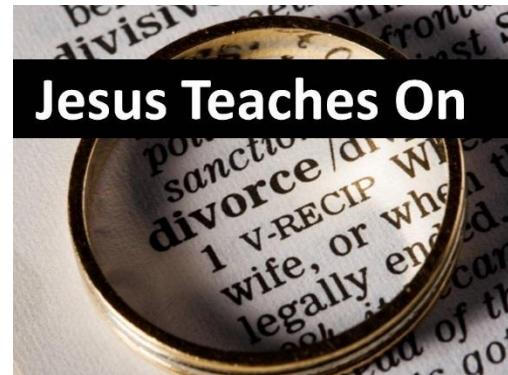
has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance."

Did God, through Moses, intend to allow all divorces under the sun to be permitted? Was He giving men a "season pass" for divorce? No! He was giving mercy to the women who were mistreated by the hard-hearted men. This is not the norm God wants.

People today, just like the Pharisees in Matthew 19, have it all backward too. They want to freely divorce in many cases for any arbitrary reason. This requires men to distort or ignore revelation, God's design for marriage.

Does God distort His own words as men do? He is not double-minded. He is always the same. Hebrews 13:8-9 teaches, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace."

There is no doubt, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees in Mathew 19 sharply. He also knew their thoughts were exactly like the men of Deuteronomy 24, with hard hearts. Jesus did this by recalling His Father's words and authority from the beginning, from the Garden of Eden. Jesus is surely not happy when He answers. Possibly, He is in agony while He speaks. Let the words of Jesus remind us today too.



Matthew 19:3-10 sets the record straight: *The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two*

shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.' His disciples said to Him, 'If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.' "

Jesus is standing before the Pharisees, giving them direct revelation. His message was inclusive for all people, of all ages, including us today. The Pharisees' distorted thinking came from hard hearts and Satan's influence.

We must know the entirety of God's word and keep it in proper context, always. Psalm 119:160 is a reminder from King David: "The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever."

When we properly consider God's words during the creation of marriage in Genesis 3, along with the thoughts and actions of men in Deuteronomy 24, and consider Jesus' response to the Pharisees in Matthew 19 is a rebuke in light of the entirety of God's word, we understand who had the hard hearts. We understand what God said. We understand what Jesus said. We know who or what caused women to be defiled after the second marriage. And we can clearly see, God did not allow the promise land to be polluted with an abomination. Will God allow heaven to be polluted with uncleanness?

Is our heart hard today? Have we forgotten what Jesus said to the Pharisees? Have we forgotten what Jesus said in Matthew 19? Are we out of context and neglecting portions or the "entirety" of God's word?

What about the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5? Has Satan distorted that too in men's hearts? Has it been watered down, sugar coated, and now also forgotten in the courts of the land today? Matthew 5:31-32 makes clear, "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality **causes her to commit adultery**; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."



If you have forgotten, let the word of God discern and remove Satan's distortions in your heart. Replace carnal thinking with God's spiritual perspective on life. This will clear your vision and heart. Hebrews 4:12 ensures us, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**"

In Mathew 19, the Pharisees were thinking just like the men of Deuteronomy 24. Both had hard hearts and a distorted understanding. They were changing the word of God and turning it upside down. Are we doing the same today within the courts of man? Do they often reject God's word?

In the case of my divorce, an attorney warned I would never be permitted to use religious beliefs in their secular courts. My response was in the form of a simple question: "...Then how did the courts accept my marriage with the Bible opened and a preacher quoting from the word of God during the marriage?"

Humanity's thinking is becoming shameful, inconsistent, and distorted. Is history repeating itself? Who is man to forbid God's word in our courtrooms today? Even though the paralegal agreed with God's word and expressed genuine godly sorrow to me while preparing for my divorce case, I was adamantly warned again the courts would not permit any religious beliefs, whatsoever! The divorce would be granted for "any reason," and there was no way to stop it. I sadly learned that day, some of man's courts have chosen to distort or disregard, entirely, the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Let us remember God's holy court and honor His eternal word. The Psalmist understood when he wrote, "For **a day in Your courts** is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psa 84:10). Zechariah 3:7 instructs: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'If you will walk in My ways, And if you will keep My command, Then you shall also judge My house, And likewise have charge of **My courts; I will give you places to walk Among these who stand here.**' "

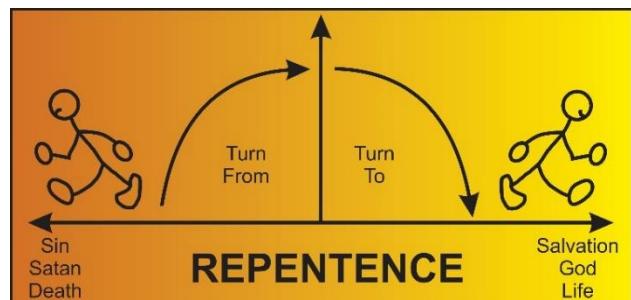
Although Satan has a short amount of time to distort God's word, rest assured, God's word is eternal and unchanging for those who chose to obey! Mark 13:31 confirms, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but **My words will by no means pass away.**"

Godly Sorrow

Years ago, I learned to seek wise counsel. The words of Agur, recorded in Proverbs 30, humbles me to this day..."Surely I am more stupid than any man, And do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom nor have knowledge of the Holy One."

My search led to wise men introducing my thinking to 2 Corinthians 7:10. "**For godly sorrow** produces **repentance** leading to **salvation**, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." When we sin against God, sincere and godly sorrow moves us in the right direction. It moves a humble heart to repent and truly please Him once again.

Separation from God occurs when an unmerited divorce is practiced. Fellowship is lost with God and a spouse. Separation is Satan's goal and great darkness. The sorrow, heartache, and tears will follow when you realize God is not pleased and your marriage is lost. I am thankful for the wise men and godly sorrow that brought me to bended knees in prayer. It was then, and only then, that I could see clearly again.



Worldly Sorrow

In addition to godly sorrow that leads to repentance, divorce brings about worldly sorrows too. This sorrow is unavoidable in everyday life. Although it pales in comparison to knowing you displeased God, numerous reminders shadow divorce.

In my experience after divorcing, you may have to overcome loneliness and public shame. You find yourself attending outings alone and feeling your friends and family distancing themselves from you. There is also a good chance you will answer endless questions about why you are divorced for those courageous to ask. Young children who don't even know about divorce may become tearfully sad to see you alone. If you don't have children before the divorce, it is tough to realize life with no children or grandchildren. You'll even be reminded of your divorced status when completing the marital section of job applications and health forms. The list goes on and on if you dwell on it. These worldly sorrows should be reminders of the most important sorrow, godly sorrow.

The right spirit and mind are needed to overcome worldly sorrow. Remind yourself often of 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." While a person full of courage will overcome the darkness of worldly sorrows, the person moved by godly sorrow will overcome the sin and repent before God (Psa 51). We must strive to overcome both.

Thankfully, all dark moments can be overcome by faith in God's word and a little help from supportive friends who kindly and tactfully practice Galatians 6. These friends are a true blessing! Galatians 6:1-2 brings loving fellowship and support to the soul lost in darkness. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. **Bear one another's burdens**, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Thinking about good things will also help overcome worldly sorrow. Do not let Satan distort things and plant a bitter seed in your heart. He has all sorts of lies to tell us. Cast Satan out with good thoughts and deeds. Philippians 4:8 wisely guides us, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—**meditate on these things.**" There always remains hope and joy if we will, once again, listen to God.

Satan's ultimate goal in marriage is to destroy the family by distorting or eliminating God's word from humble hearts. Satan will tempt us to practice frivolous, ungodly divorce. Divorce truly hurts God and destroys His fellowship within the family. The triangle relationship between spouses and God is broken.

And, the ability to produce godly offspring within a broken relationship is severely challenged.

Today, the family unit is violently under attack in our country. Moral decline is quite apparent. Sadly, the courts in our land are listening more and more to the distorted words of men and Satan with respect to divorce, marriage, and remarriage. We must remember and obey God's commandments. We must keep our vows as commanded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, "**Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.**"

Key Lessons Learned

(1) **Marriage is Between One Man and One Woman for Life**

Jesus abruptly rebuked the Pharisees for implying divorce is quite acceptable for any reason. Remember what they asked Jesus, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"

It is quite clear. The Pharisees attempted to justify divorce and remarriage in all cases using the worst scenario created by man in Deuteronomy 24. That was the mistake Jesus is addressing in Matthew 19. Immediately we can see and feel the pain in His heart. He reminds them of the hardness of men's hearts and how they profane our Father's perfect **holy marriage between one man and one woman** defined clearly in the Garden of Eden. Did the Pharisees just forget God's plan and instructions or neglect them? Maybe both? Were they deceived by Satan? Yes. When carnal chaos darkens men's hearts, Jesus and His word restores righteous order.

The same is true in society today. Is this happening among God's children? Is this happening in the church where you worship? Are we like the Pharisees? If yes, then read again and listen to Jesus in Matthew 19. He is also saying that to us today.

(2) **God Hates Divorce!**

Can you think of one case where God is pleased with the end result of divorce? **God hates divorce!** He is forgiving, and we can also forgive a spouse that is found "naked" in the garden when they repent. God does permit divorce in the case of adultery, but he still hates divorce. He teaches us to repent, forgive, and reconcile if possible. Our Father in heaven is loving, merciful, and kind. He is

forgiving, and we must be forgiving too. Mark 11:26 reminds us to consider, “But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

When we do not love and honor God’s life-giving words full of joy for every tribulation, then we will also be tempted, deceived, and disobey like Adam and Eve. The darkness of divorce will fill our home until we repent out of godly sorrow. If we do not remember what God taught us, we will become like the Pharisees allowing or even encouraging divorce for any reason.

(3) The Darkness of Divorce is Separation from God and your Spouse.

Satan knows you shall surely die once he separates you from God. He deceives you into believing you have a right to be “happy” and to enjoy a life full of sin even if it occurs before God in His garden, His church, or His holy gift of marriage.

Marriage is an intimate gift shared with God between you, your spouse, and Him. Imagine a father giving his son a priceless, first, new car. It is reasonable for the son to respect and care for this gift out of thankfulness and love toward his father. What if the son never performed any maintenance? What if the son was not headed in the right direction? After all, in marriage, our Father is figuratively riding in the car with us and wants us to reach His destination, His home, heaven.

Imagine a son that is taking every wrong turn due to poor vision. What if the son abandoned the car along the roadside after the engine light came on. How would an earthly father feel? Disappointed? Disrespected? Not Appreciated? Not pleased? Not loved? When the son abandons his car, or gift, along the roadside, he also abandons his father. Divorcing a spouse, outside of the teachings of Christ, is no different. And, a spouse is eternally more valuable than a depreciating car.

Satan distorted what God told Adam and Eve in Genesis. God warned them and warns us today. Satan is more than pleased to accuse you before God. He will distort the life-giving words of God if you freely choose to allow him. We will “surely die” is what God said in the beginning if we do not heed his warnings. Psalms 19 gives us a promise of great rewards for heeding.

A marriage and the church may exercise discipline in a similar manner as God justly did in the Garden with Adam and Eve. In all three instances, someone can be divorced, withdrawn from, or put out. The result? Relationships may be destroyed eternally! We must discipline ourselves. **Separation, where there is no repentance or forgiveness of sin, is the darkest moment of divorce.** Satan’s

end game is to separate you from God resulting in spiritual death if reconciliation does not occur. He often begins by attacking one or both spouses.

(4) Count the Cost

The darkness of divorce goes well beyond the emotional pain one may experience. The vows made before God and others are for life. Separating from a spouse creates a vast reaching void. Only God's forgiveness, mercy, and grace can bring light to the darkness of divorce and fill the void. Before you decide to lawfully divorce a spouse, please honestly consider the far-reaching impact on your family, community, and the nation. Families are the backbone of every nation. **Count the cost.**

Erroneous divorces are only one distortion of God's word Satan uses to accomplish his hidden agendas. Satan has his own version of the truth to entice you. It is called a lie. His lies are sugar-coated distortions of the truth. They are so enticing that you can miss what is right in front of you. They may taste good for the moment, but they are loaded with a deadly poison that can separate you from God today, tomorrow, and eternally. The greatest darkness of all is reserved for the person who misses heaven. **Please count the cost.**

(5) Remember God's Word

Who is our Father? God or Satan? If we say "God," we must identify and stop all deception, blame, and malice. Reject Satan's distortion of God's word. A faithful, humble heart will replace sin with truth and kindness taught by our Father. And, the darkness of divorce will be no more. Separation from God and your spouse will be restored with love and fellowship once again. Proverbs 3:1-7 instructs the children of Light:

"My son, **do not forget my law**, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and **peace** they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so **find favor** and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. **Do not be wise in your own eyes**; fear the Lord and depart from evil."

(6) If Involved with Divorce, Love God with All Your Heart, Soul, and Mind.

In times of darkness during and after divorce, please reflect on the instruction wise men and women share from God's word. Pray, meditate, and seek forgiveness when the shadows of divorce haunt and tempt us to yield. The best advice is to avoid divorce where possible. It is a commandment. How? Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind (Mt 22:37, Mk 12:30). Follow His word, and you will understand how to love Him, His guidance, your enemies, your neighbor, your family, and your spouse.

(7) **Faith in Jesus Christ Brings Victory**

We can enjoy fellowship with God and our spouse, today, tomorrow, and eternally. We can enter heaven using our own free will humbly obeying His word and remaining pure. How? **Faith in Jesus Christ brings victory.**

Hebrews 12:1-3 teaches us to focus on Jesus. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith**, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

We must choose wisely and fight each day to “...keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (Rev 14:12)

In Christ, we can be delivered from darkness as Paul reinforced in Colossians 1:13-14, “He has **delivered us from the power of darkness** and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom **we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.**”

Let us not forget John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul’s admonition in Romans 12:18 also applies to marriages. “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”

This includes a spouse even more so! Value them as a sanctified gift above all. Live together in harmony with God and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Understand and communicate in truth and kindness offering prayer often, (Prov 3:3; 1 Pet 3:7). Please avoid divorce at all costs where possible while confessing your shortcomings to one another before God. Love God with all your

heart mind and soul. Only then, will you see clearly and love your spouse in the same manner.

If you choose wisely to please God, Satan's distortions will fade away, and divorce will no longer be in sight. Yes! A husband and wife may enjoy victory together through their shared love, purity, and faith in Jesus Christ.



Darkness Lesson 12 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: Divorce

1. Who were the first two people to marry? Adam and E_____ (Gen 2; 3:18)
2. Who created marriage? God or man? (Gen 3:24)
3. What court were they married in? Heaven's court or Man's courts?
4. How does God feel about divorce? He h_____ divorce! (Mal 2:16)
Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man s_____.” (Matt 19:9)
5. Who started divorce? God? Man? Satan?
6. In Deuteronomy 24, what problem existed with men's hearts? (Also, see Matt 19:8.)

7. What type of heart divorces for any cause today?

8. Who is hurt by a violent, treacherous divorce?
 - A. You
 - B. Spouse
 - C. Children
 - D. Family
 - E. Friends
 - F. Community
 - G. Nation
 - H. Church
 - I. God
 - J. All the above
9. Is every divorce permitted by God? Yes / No
If permitted, is it God's first preference? Yes / No



10. When Adam and Eve sinned before God, what were the consequences for disobeying God?
- A. They were "put out" of the Garden of Eden, physically.
 - B. They were separated from God, spiritually. Close fellowship with God was diminished.
 - C. The ground was cursed.
 - D. All of the above. (Including sorrow, suffering, pain, tears, etc. Gen 3)
11. Who is the spiritual Father and Creator of man and woman?
- A. God in heaven
 - B. Satan in hell
 - C. Man on earth
12. Who teaches His children instructions to bring order, peace, long life on earth, and eternal life?
- A. God in heaven
 - B. Satan in hell
13. Who is the father of disobedience, disorder, lies, malice, and hate?
- A. God in heaven
 - B. Satan in hell
14. God established the marriage relationship between whom? (Think about your vows too.)
- A. Man and woman
 - B. Man and God
 - C. Woman and God
 - D. Man, Woman, and God
 - E. All the above
15. If marriage was created by God, is it also sanctified by God, holy? Yes / No
The marriage bed must remain pure, undefiled. Yes / No
16. In scripture, Christ's relationship with the church is a divine parallel to marriage. God's manifold wisdom is the church. It is also to remain pure, just like marriage. Yes / No
7. When adultery is discovered in a marriage and continues without confession or repentance, a divorce and remarriage are permitted for the innocent spouse only. Yes / No (See Jesus' teachings in Matt 19.)

18. When a member of the church lives in sin and continues without confession and repentance, then discipline must be practiced by the church. (Matt 18) Yes / No
19. God provided a way for discipline and justice to occur in a marriage and in the church. A similar act of discipline occurred in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned. Were they both “put out” of the Garden and separated from God to some extent? Yes / No (Gen 3:23)
20. When divorce proceedings occur today, what shamefully becomes of the teachings of Jesus and His commandments in the case of divorce for any reason? (Specifically, cases that do not have any sexual immorality.) Circle all that apply:
- A. Forgotten
 - B. Ignored
 - C. Distorted
 - E. Forbidden by the courts
 - F. Faithfully followed by all parties involved before God
21. Who is winning for a season today, when hard-hearted divorce occurs for any and every reason? Satan? Do these scenarios look like the Garden of Eden’s events playing out over and over? Is Satan treacherously distorting God’s word that was once firmly planted in a humble heart? Yes / No
22. Satan has great w_____. Why?

Revelation 12:12

Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them!

Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea!

For the devil has come down to you,

having great w_____,

because he knows that he has a short t_____.”

23. Who is Satan making war with?
What do the enemies of Satan's keep and have that he wants to distort or destroy?

Revelation 12:17

And the dragon was enraged with the woman,
and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring,
who keep the c_____ of God
and **have** the t_____ of Jesus Christ.

24. Two of Satan's distortion tools are revealed in scripture. What are they?

Did both tactics help separate Satan from God and keep him out of heaven?
Can we also miss heaven when we act like Satan's child?

Revelation 12:9-10

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan,
who d_____ the whole world;
he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.
Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength,
and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come,
for the a_____ of our brethren,
who a_____ them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

25. If Satan can deceive you, then you will deceive others next.

Who gets blamed during a divorce? You? Your spouse? The world? God?

26. When couples divorce today, outside of Christ's teachings, is the deception and blame easily identified by outsiders looking into the marital problems or circumstances?

Do you long for troubled couples to practice what their Father and Counselor have revealed?

More specifically, when deception, blame, and malice distort a marital relationship, do we see spouses hold fast to the revealed teachings in 1 Corinthians?
_____ never fails?

1 Corinthians 13

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,

but have not _____, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,

and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains,

but have not _____, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned,

but have not _____, it profits me nothing.

Love suffers long and is kind; _____ does not envy; _____ does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

_____never fails.

27. When our spouse becomes our “enemy,” so to speak, we should still _____ them?

Matthew 5:43-44

“You have heard that it was said,

‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

But I say to you, _____ your enemies,

bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you,

and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

28. When these teachings are abandoned, does this lead to separation and divorce?

If both parties practiced love, confessed sins, repented, and f_____, would this be obedience to God and His teachings about marriage? (Mark 11:12)
Would this please God?

Mark 11:26

But if you do not f_____,

neither will your Father in heaven f_____ your trespasses.”

29. Can you identify a relationship you enjoy today that resembles the initial purity shared by God, Adam, and Eve in the Garden?
- A. Your marriage
 - B. The church and your relationship with God
 - C. All of the above
30. If we understand maintaining purity in the church and in the marriage, then we see the beautiful divine parallel. Do we also see, we are preparing our hearts and minds for the purity that we need to enter into Heaven? Heaven is far greater than the Garden of Eden or an earthly marriage. We will be like _____ in heaven.

Mark 12:25

For when they rise from the dead,
they neither marry nor are given in marriage,
but are like a _____ in heaven.

Questions – Summary

Yes, there was purity in the Garden of Eden and the first marriage between man and woman. We also know the promised land was to be entered by the undefiled people of God. Additionally, marriage and the church must remain pure today. Most importantly, all things in heaven are pure and holy. That is where God is...on his throne. We are on a practice field preparing for heaven.

Psalm 11:4

The Lord is in His holy temple,
The Lord's t _____ is in heaven;
His eyes behold,
His eyelids test the sons of men.

Psalm 89:14

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your t _____;

Darkness Lesson 13

Devil's Dark Distortions:

Division - Everyone Is Not an Eye

by T.S. Stephens²

Introduction

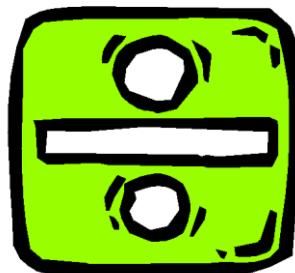
I am not certain when it happens in humans. Yet, we see it in so many ways. No matter when it starts, eventually we think or act like we are better than someone else. We recognize no two people are the same. We ultimately decide one difference is better or worse than another and then conclude our difference is better than someone else's. As a result, pride germinates yielding prejudice, racism, arrogance, and self-righteousness.

There are many places where one can find division. If you are on social media such as Facebook, you have probably seen division. Civil discourse to enhance understanding is rare, and name calling and fighting words are too common, resulting in an acrimonious anecdote.



American politics seems to be rich in this approach, as well. Trying to solve problems together seems to be forgotten for "let's get them [the other party]!" The same attitude was among our founding fathers. Simply recall the Burr and Hamilton duel. Their bitter rivalry resulted in Hamilton's death. In 2018, two men in Florida combined politics and Facebook. When they finally met after a Facebook argument, one killed the other before they even spoke in person.

Unfortunately, division is not just a worldly issue, it is common among brethren both between congregations and within a congregation.³ Often many try to justify division because of "doctrinal soundness;" sometimes division is born out of doctrinal issues. However, more often, it is this author's observation that division is caused by differences between



² I am certain that I have used notes from sermons that I have heard preached that I made in my Bible. My apologies to anyone who I have failed to recognize.

³ One might ask are there any acceptable divisions? Clearly, there are different roles in the work of the church, as well as, divisions of labor. There is also the division between the righteous and evil as Psalm 2:1-5 discusses.

leading personalities. Thomas Campbell expressed it best by concluding many divisions in the church are matters of “private opinion or human invention.”

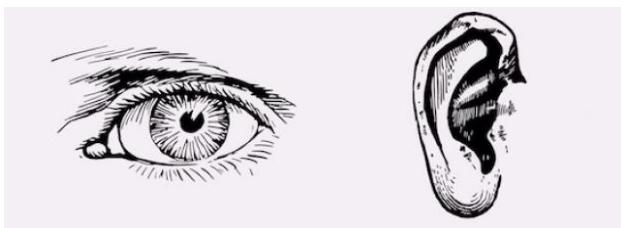
A few decades back on The Phil Donahue Show, Jane Elliott conducted a social experiment with the audience on division and discrimination. She appeared to express the supremacy of brown-eyed people over all others. It took the audience a while to figure out what she was saying. She presented "evidence" to blue-eyed folks' inferiority. She had audience members buying in before she revealed her real point about racism. Many might take exception to her technique and her conclusions, but Elliott made a powerful point about how humans will divide over anything and bash a target group. People will use anything to divide and decide one group is better than the other.

In truth, individuals have talents different than others. One skill or status may be more prized by society, but it takes a variety of talents to make society function properly. The church is no different. The variety of talents in the church should be embraced as each person fills a place or niche in serving and glorifying God.

Eyes and Ears



In 1 Corinthians 12:14-27, Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write, “For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that



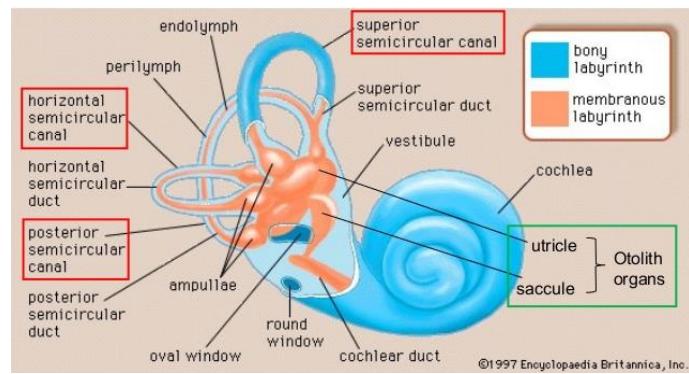
part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Paul teaches that God does not want division, but Christians should have the same care one for another.

Vestibulo-ocular Reflex: Some Science on the Eyes and Ears Together

If you are not interested in the science of the eyes and ears working together, please skip down to the next section "Division in the Early Church."

The eye, ear, and hand are of particular interest to most. Because of sports, most of have heard about hand-eye coordination. It is a very important skill in most sports. But, let's consider the importance of the eye and ear to each other.

The human body has a kinesthetic system. This is the body's own awareness of itself. In humans, the vestibular system as part of the human ear allows us to have a balanced system, as part of the kinesthetic system. In a 2017 experiment, an earthquake machine was used to illustrate how the visual system and middle ear work together. The vestibular system of the ear is necessary for proper eye movements. The fluid-filled canals of the middle ear respond to the inertial forces produced by changes in speed and direction of movement. This combined set of information from the eyes and ears is called the vestibulo-ocular system.



The vestibulo-ocular reflex (VOR) is a reflex that connects the inner ear and the muscles that move your eyes. The two junctions between nerves along this path make it very fast. This allows humans to focus and move their eyes and head quickly. When you move your head, the vestibular apparatus in the inner ear senses the precise direction and speed of that movement and signals the brain. The brain uses this signal to instruct the eye muscles to counter the head movements.



and keep the focus on the object of attention. If you look at an object and rock your head up and down or left to right, the object should remain focused and centered. VOR allows humans to track and attend to many tasks, even if the object or the person are both moving. If this were not true, then walking and driving would be almost impossible.

Unfortunately, this system can break down because of the inner ears, the transmitting nerves, improper processing by the brain, poor control of the eye muscles by the brain, or the eye muscles themselves. A commonly employed test of the VOR is the called the caloric test or sometimes called the COWS test when cold or warm water is poured into an ear looking for the appropriate eye movement as the water causes a small amount of endolymph in the lateral semicircular canal to move and causes the eyes to move. Vestibulo-ocular problems are frequent after traumatic brain injury. When this system does not work properly, it can be very difficult for a person to function. It can take a person who has suffered traumatic brain injury years to make any progress when this system has been injured. Optometrists often use prisms in lenses to move the image to an eye (instead of the eye moving to align itself) to help individuals with these problems. Christians need to use the prism of eternity to see the eternal rather than the temporal, the spiritual rather than the carnal.

The ears and eyes work together in another way. The eyes often start their tracking with the ears. In fact, the ears start to move (internally) in the direction of the movement of the eyes before the eyes move. This also allows the brain to predict what you will see. Specifically, the eardrums move slightly before and with the eyes in sync with each other. Your hearing allows the brain to make predictions. If your eyes are closed and you hear a sound, the brain identifies and predicts the direction of the sound for the eyes. It activates the same areas of the brain as though it had seen a bird when all that happened was you heard a bird tweet when your eyes were closed. Clearly, the eyes and ears are interconnected and depend on their best work together rather than apart.

Division in the Early Church

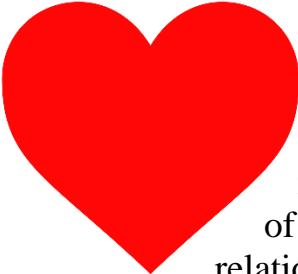
Clearly, division existed in the New Testament church. The Holy Spirit inspired the authors to address this issue, reminding them of the problem of division as these saints were growing and transforming.

As you read the New Testament, you can see evidence of division in most of the epistles written. Perhaps the **Corinth** church comes to mind first because of Paul's letter to them. Another example is the **Jerusalem** church with the Greek-

Jewish division. And, what Bible student could forget the division caused by the Judaizing teachers, especially as seen at **Galatia**. Paul was focusing on fostering of unity in **Ephesus** as well. The Holy Spirit's inspiration for the church of **Philippi** called for them to be like-minded while pursuing the same purpose. **Colossians** was written to a church that had division over keeping holy days, eating restrictions, and worship. The **Thessalonian** church had a division as some refused to work, expecting others to care for their needs as they anticipated Christ's return. Moreover, Paul had to leave Timothy in **Ephesus** to deal with doctrinal concerns as well as those who were imposing Jewish law. Further, he left Titus in **Crete** to deal with dividing issues. Peter's second epistle deals with false teaching division. Third John notes Diotrephes who was destroying unity with his desire for power.

When the New Testament was penned, the Roman empire was a swirl of cultures and differences: Gentile and Greek, slave and free, male and female. Even the Jews had many different subgroups. The New Testament church had people of very different backgrounds from the pagan idolaters to previously devout Jews. There was a huge challenge to unify these individuals in churches. Churches today in the United States do not face as much diverse cultural and political differences compared to the early church.

Working Together in Love



In the Lord's church, the ears, the eyes, and the hands, as well as all other parts must **work together**. God cares for humanity so much that even the hairs on one's head are numbered. The church, as the body of Christ, has many members but only one body. When one member suffers, all suffer. When one Christian rejoices, all rejoice (Rom 12:15-16). In a most connected world of communication, real human connections should start with relationships with fellow children of Light at the congregation where they worship. Christians can serve, accomplish, and glorify God so much more by serving and working together in brotherly love.

1 John 2:7-10 reads, "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his

brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.” Often, we hear brethren lament over division regarding a concern of doctrine, but most know it was over a personality or pride point. Children of Light must **love and not hate** each other. Christians must endeavor to practice *agape* love, and God must come first. Those who hate are blinded by darkness.

The basis of unity is scriptural and found in Christ. Christians must oppose needless fighting, jealous factions, and strife. The lost will not be drawn to a place of fighting. God unifies the church, but Christians need to have an attitude of unity and caring in obedience to Christ.

God Unifies the Church

God created humanity in His image. Each soul is important to Him. He sacrificed His only begotten Son so He might bring salvation to all. A person’s “whatever” is not as important as the salvation of their soul. Christians must be about sharing the gospel. Division among Christians cannot be over the color of skin, weight, height, birthplace, economic status, educational background, or preferred color of drapery. **Each person has inherent value as God created them in His image and sacrificed the Christ to offer redemption for them.** God demonstrated His love, kindness, goodness, and light. As a Christian, we must teach our children the eternal or things we cannot see are essential to life.

Jesus desired His followers would be united (John 17:20-23). "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

Further, the **attitude of unity** is seen in Ephesians 4:1-6: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” **For children of Light, oneness is in God and**

Christ. The one body, the church, is where Christians are united⁴. One spirit has revealed God's word⁵. There is one hope of heaven⁶. Jesus Christ is our one Lord and authority⁷. One faith is the doctrine of the gospel⁸. There is one baptism into Christ⁹. There is one Father to be worshipped and glorified¹⁰. This is how God unites Christians.

The attitude needed to practice God's unity starts with humbleness considering others first¹¹. Gentleness and meekness are also part of the attitude of unity¹². Longsuffering, as illustrated in forbearance and patience, is also needed¹³. It also requires a love of one another¹⁴. **The attitude of unity** also requires diligence, not an approach of apathy and inaction.

Unity does not mean uniformity. God uses different people differently for His purposes and glory. The first century New Testament church comprised of various backgrounds. Consider the diversity of even the Apostles to illustrate. There were differences. People can be different and still be united in Christ.



Congregations can even be different in style because of different cultures. Clearly, God had a plan where local churches were autonomous. However, this allows for diversity. Visit the congregation where this author worships. The men are dressed from suits and ties to blue jeans. Two hours away, another congregation has many worshippers wearing leather vests and chaps at worship. Their dress is appropriate with the motorcycles they drive to worship. This is the local culture. Decency and not standing out (immodest) is the key. Diverse populations draw diverse people to Christ. Christians must seek to be unified in Christ, making use of the differences as strength in service to God.

⁴ Matt 16:18; Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12; Eph 2:14-22; Col 3:15

⁵ 1 Cor 2:9-13; John 16:4-15; 1 Cor 12:13; 2 Cor 11:2-4; 1 John 4:13

⁶ Eph 1:17-19; Col 1:3-6; Titus 1:1-3; Acts 15:11

⁷ Matt 28:18; Acts 10:36; 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:10

⁸ Gal 1:6-10; Eph 4:11-13; Jude 3; Titus 1:4; 2 Pet 1:1

⁹ 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-28; Rom 6:3-4

¹⁰ 1 Cor 8:6; 1 John 3:1-3; Rom 3:30

¹¹ 1 Pet 5:5-7; Phil 2:2-4; Rom 12:3

¹² James 3:13-18; James 1:21; 2 Cor 10:1-6

¹³ Rom 2:4; 1 Tim 1:16; 2 Pet 3:14-18; 2 Tim 4:1-5

¹⁴ John 13:34-35; 1 Cor 13; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Pet 3:8-11

Paul also demonstrated by starting with how people were when he started teaching them in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might, by all means, save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."

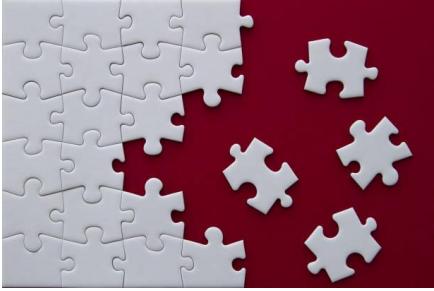


Compromise of doctrine is not part of unity. Doctrine is the boundaries of God's law. God prohibits changing His word and law. Children of Light are called to be of the same mind. If a person in a disagreement remains convinced they are right and only tolerate the other party, then there really is not unity. Division is part of Satan's tools (1 Cor 3:1-4). This is not a worldly commonality being emphasized. 1 Corinthians 1:10 reads, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

When some people read 1 Corinthians 1:10 and say the church must be in complete agreement on everything, they miss the point. Just ask a committee to pick out a color scheme; you will see differences. Further, this text is not talking about buildings, color schemes, or curtains – they did not have these things then. Differences in opinions do not mean there is no unity. Consider Paul and Barnabas' disagreement over whether to include John Mark in Acts 15:36-40. Or, consider Romans 14 regarding the eating of certain meats. Compromising doctrine is not part of unity. As Romans 14 illustrates, there are places in the practice of our faith where we might have differences without compromising doctrine.

God uses difference to strengthen the church. Jesus demonstrated the use of different personalities with the selection of the Apostles. Some folks are more like a Paul. Some are more like Peter. Some are like John or Matthew. While

others are a mixture. God can use each accordingly. Together, differences make for greater strength. God wants His children to use their differences to be stronger collectively. My weakness and your strength can offset each other and vice versa such that we are stronger together. **God's differences in His saints allow the function of the church and should promote unity instead of strife.**



Children of light cannot let ego, pride, or the “Big-Me-Little-You” syndrome develop. If God has blessed a person with greater talents, opportunities, skills, and abilities, then there is no doubt more shall be required if they have more. If you have less, all He expects is for you to exercise your talents in His service. Luke 12:48b explains, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

A variety of people were taught and obeyed the gospel. These very different people became one in Christ.¹⁵ People can indeed do things differently and be united in Christ. In the first century, those being converted to Christ were Jews and Gentiles. The internet, social media, TV, telephone, and printing press were not available. Most communication was verbal or reading from a written letter. Common concepts and even the concept of deity was different among those converts. Many came from a background of idolatry with a pantheon of deities. Imagine a convert who was being taught about morality who came from an area where fertility gods were worshipped by sexual intercourse and prostitution. The Jews often had others adding weights to their practice of worship as well such as the Pharisees.¹⁶ The backgrounds and cultures were very different from each other, even down to their food. The Roman world, with many interacting cultures, had souls from different cultures with many human differences. **Unity through likeness is a human achievement, and unlikely.**

Unity in Christ is different. We can have different opinions about curtain colors and meeting times and still be united in Christ. Even differences in some

¹⁵ Acts 2:9-11, Acts 10:28, Acts 11:19-24

¹⁶ Matthew 23:13-36

other matters can still exist with unity.¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 teaches Christ died for all, and through Him any can be reconciled to God. 1 Peter 2:21-24 helps us understand Christ suffered for all, and He left His followers an example of enduring suffering. Could we suffer a bit by giving into another's preference on some detail that really is not important? The Children of Light have unity in Christ. This is not about speaking of the need for obedience to God or justifying some evil desire, but God unites His followers. **It is divine and not human.**

Ephesians 2:11-22 helps us understand how God achieves unity. Paul notes the gulf between the Jews and the Gentiles before Christ's sacrifice. Circumcision was practiced as a commanded symbol of God's covenant with His people.¹⁸ Before Christ, the Gentiles were outside the covenant with God and without hope. This changed in Christ. God reconciled the Jewish and Gentile believers, making them one. Not by one becoming Jewish or the other becoming Gentile. God produced the peace between them. He made them part of His family. Now, both are built together on the cornerstone of Christ. Acts 15:1-29 indicate neither the Jewish believers or Gentile believers all understood this. God has brought the Gentiles near and made both groups one. God did this. It was not something the Jews and Gentiles did through uniformity. Even though these people were very different, placing their trust in Jesus Christ unified them through God's act even though it required the right attitude on their part, not through the people being alike.

Christ taught that Christians were united in Him. There is oneness in Christ and God. In Acts 20:28-30, Paul anticipated division in the early church. Many of the New Testament writers were dealing with divisions and dividers in the church. Becoming united by likeness is not what God provided; He provides unity in Christ. Romans 12:4-10 explains, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." Paul instructs Christians to use the

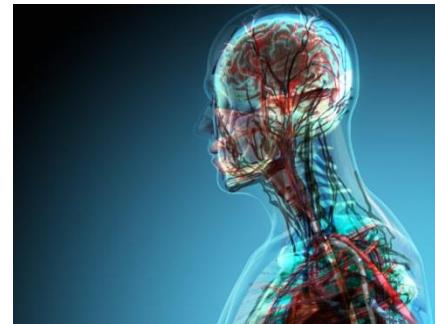
¹⁷ Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 6

¹⁸ Genesis 17:9-12

opportunities and talents they have in Christ and to be united in Christ serving in love, giving the other preference.

Conclusion

In 1 Corinthians 12: 4-14 before illustrating with the eye and ear, Paul also explained: "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."



We might be an ear or an eye or a hand or a foot, but each has their use in the body of Christ. We would not want to cut off their hand because it is not an eye, neither would we want to divide from a brother because they are not uniform as another brother because all the saints are united in Christ. In the unity of God, there can be differences in opinions and talents. Together, the church is stronger as each member helps the other. Christians must work together in love. This oneness is not of human origin in uniformity, but oneness in Christ. Christians must not let Satan use his dark distortion of division to blind them. Unity accomplishes so much good in a church, while division is like cancer.

Darkness Lesson 13 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: Division - Everyone Is Not an Eye

1. What illustration of eyes and ears does Paul use to discuss unity and division in 1 Corinthians 12:14-27? What would happen if the body was made up only of eyes?
2. Are brown-eyed or blue-eyed people superior? Why?
3. What should Christians do when presented with gossip and divisive discussion? Note a scripture that warns of the danger of gossip.
4. What should the Christian's attitude be toward those they think "less honorable"?
5. When another suffers, what should Christians do?
6. Do the eyes and ears work together? What happens when they do not work together? Should Christians work with those who are different from them?
7. Can Christians hate others? What should the attitude of Christians be to those who spitefully use them?
8. How does God use different talents/personalities/etc. in the church? Please illustrate.
9. Did Jesus want His followers to be united? How can Christians be different and united at the same time?
10. In what way are Christians one in Christ?
11. What is the attitude of unity? What does apathy do to this attitude?

12. Is unity accomplished through uniformity? Who accomplishes unity?

Darkness Lesson 14

Devil's Dark Distortions:

Dealing with Racism and Prejudice

by Benjamin Lee¹⁹

“Why do we even have to talk about racism? Wouldn’t it better if we just didn’t say anything?” I know some think this way because a brother in Christ said those words to me a few years ago. I was teaching a class on this subject. I appreciate him sharing with me how he felt. What do you think? Should we talk about the problem of racism anymore?

Racism is a problem that continues to exist. We hear about it in the news. There are discussions on it on social media. In 2018, I held a meeting in Tennessee. It was on navigating cultural storms. One of the topics I discussed was on racism. I learned one of the members who is black was attending the University of Memphis. She lived in a dorm on campus. Someone wrote some racist words on her dorm door.

When I was conducting a meeting in College Station, I spoke to one of the students. She shared with me how some of the Christian college students still share racist jokes with one another. Racism is still a problem. There are plenty of people who are talking about racism. But not enough are going to the source where one can find the solution: God’s word. *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim 3:16-17). If anyone should be talking about this subject, it should be God’s people!

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the issue of racism. It is a topic we cannot shy away from. We will have to be bold and courageous. We will have to

¹⁹ Benjamin Lee has been preaching the gospel since 2009. After working for several years for Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, Benjamin devoted his life to preaching the gospel. He and his wife, Nikki, moved to Beaumont, TX, in July 2009, where he began working in the evangelist-in-training program under the instruction of the elders and evangelists at Dowlen Road. He began the work of a full-time evangelist with Dowlen Road in July 2011-2018. Benjamin began working with the West Main church of Christ in Lewisville, TX, on March 1, 2018. He and his wife have been married for 15 years. They have a seven-year old son named Joshua. Benjamin is passionate about faith, family, fitness, and food! He has had the opportunity to preach and teach in Africa, Mexico, and throughout the United States. His blog can be found at www.icandoicd.com. The West Main website is www.westmainchurchofchrist.org.

trust in God and His word. Racism has been used by Satan to distort our perception of reality too long. We must use God's word and the lens of faith to see this as God has instructed.

As we seek to learn from the scriptures, I would like to begin our thoughts by sharing a story. It is from a brother in Christ who I love very much. We are friends and he has assisted me throughout the years. He gave me permission to share his story of overcoming racism. I shared his story while doing a weekend meeting on racism at the Twin Cities Church of Christ in College Station. I have also had the opportunity to share it in different meetings in Lewisville, Texas and in Bartlett, Tennessee. As you read about his journey, I want you to see what we can learn about racism from him and how we can overcome it. What you are about to read are the comments my brother in Christ shared with me.

"My mother grew up in deep southern Louisiana where most blacks were former slaves. Blacks were considered less than human. I grew up in a small East Texas town, and my mother taught me to be racist. Blacks stepped off the sidewalk when they passed a white person. They had their own schools and lived in designated areas of town called 'quarters.' A drive-in burger place would have a service window marked 'white' and one marked 'black.' No black restrooms were provided. Blacks could only go to the back door of a restaurant to eat. If a black came to your house he had to come to the back door. I was taught a black was unclean and you had to wash if you touched one and could never drink after one. This was the normal way of life in the 1940's.

"When I went off to Texas A&M in 1955 (class of 59), there were no blacks at the school. The student assistant at one time sent former students a letter telling them if they sold a used car to a black to remove the A&M stickers off. This was so people



would not think that blacks attended school. Life was the same during my college days.

"When I went into the Army as a 2nd lieutenant, my commander was a black captain to my shock. He seemed like a fine fellow at my surprise. I endured this as best I could. This was one of the few black officers in the old segregated army making a slow race change. When we moved to Beaumont Texas, race was at a troubled point and blacks would go as a group to church services to show they had the right. The old Pine Crest congregation had a business meeting about how it would handle the situation if faced with it. Some wanted to close services, some to ask them to leave, etc. Shortly after this, the schools were integrated, and all manner of problems existed. It was very unfortunate that the black teachers that were now teaching the students were unqualified. This was the result of the equal but separate failure created by the whites and little education for black teachers or students. The high schools had police walking the halls and doors were locked. This started the white flight out of Beaumont in all directions.

"After this period, I was working with over 100 black men and I started to have an understanding about their lives and problems. I found them always interested in studying the Bible, but almost no sound black churches existed in the area. I brought a black to one of our meetings and one member was so offended that he quit coming to church. He would later repent.

"During this time, I became a company commander in the reserves and found the 100 plus men under me were my responsibility wherever we went. I was responsible (for blacks and whites) for their care, food, health, clothes, pay, and discipline. Later as a battalion commander, I had a greater responsibility for over 500 men black and white.

"You learn from the scriptures and in the world; you must treat all men equal. Many years of studying dealing with the issue of race teaches us that all men are equal. When serving as an elder, this is something in God's word you must master and apply correctly. I sometimes think that after going to Africa and helping those brethren

in eight trips and 20 years may be my penance for my attitude about race in my early life.”

What stood out to you in this story? Write your thoughts below.

What can we learn with respect to racism and overcoming it as we seek to do the will of God? Let's consider a few thoughts.

What is the problem?

Understanding racism is the first step to ensure that we avoid it in our lives.

How would you define racism? Write your answer below.

Racism can be defined according to dictionary.com as:

- “A belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human racial groups determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one’s own race is superior and has the right to dominate others or that a particular racial group is inferior to the others.”
- Another definition is “hatred or intolerance of another race or other races.”

A few years ago, I had a conversation with a brother in Christ, Craig Roberts. He shed some insight about this subject. I



respect Craig very much. He is a big reason as to why I am preaching the gospel today. What you are about to read are his thoughts he shared with me.

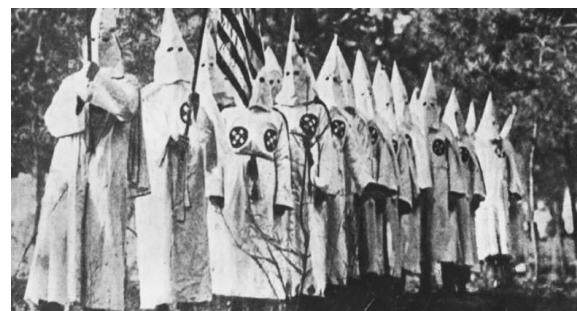
“We all stereotype based on ethnic groups, sexes, races, or other groupings. When those statements are based on skin color, are derogatory, and extreme, it could be called ‘racism.’ When not extreme, I would call it ‘implicit bias.’ There is white-black bias, black-Hispanic bias, urban-rural bias, male-female bias, northern-southern bias.

“Implicit bias affects our actions, words, and feelings, though we are often unaware of it. When I see race-based implicit bias acted out, I see it among my white colleagues. It usually involves white people assuming less of black people. In these cases, whites might see blacks as prone to crime and teenage pregnancy, poorly educated, and athletic instead of academic. This bias, completely unintentional, is in our brotherhood at various degrees. It is caused by historical events and statistical data.

“From my experience, biases are less frequent in the congregation than in the world, assuming the congregation is strong. What is a concern to me is the lack of understanding of life for the black person versus the white person. Even lack of interest.

“Whites in the brotherhood do not know how to sympathize with their black brethren. They believe the mistreatment of blacks is similar to the mistreatment of whites. They deny the concepts of white privilege and micro aggressions. Instead of investigating these concepts, many white Christians become angry at their mention and consider such concepts as part of the liberal agenda.

“In my experience, the lack of understanding, listening, and sympathy is commonplace among whites in the church. Even among elders. Very common and heartbreakingly. When blacks protest, whites believe they are overreacting (unless the KKK is involved or a Rodney King type of video is provided).”



Craig's comments have helped me understand this issue more. Also, I have had the opportunity to sit in a lecture at the University of Missouri that discussed the topic of micro-aggression (a subtle but offensive comment or action directed at a minority or other non-dominant group that is often unintentional or unconsciously reinforces a stereotype) to help me to have a better understanding of this topic. While not everyone is racist, many can struggle with implicit-bias and micro aggression.

How familiar are you with the idea of implicit bias? What about micro aggression? Think about if you have ever struggled with biases toward certain people. Think about if you've seen micro aggression in action. Write your thoughts below.

Understanding and working through these terms and thoughts is an important task to do. It reminds us that the issue of racism is a heart problem. It is learned behavior. Remember the story I shared earlier from our brother in Christ? He said he was taught to be racist. Young children don't have this problem. Just watch how they all play together after worship services. They're not concerned about who is black or white. They just want to play. Racism is a terrible heart condition. One could take away guns, social media, the government, and flags, and racism would still exist. It's a potential problem for everyone. Racism is sinful! Why?

Reading the following passages will help answer this question. Read them and then write out what you can learn from them.

Genesis 1:26: “*Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.”



Luke 10:27-29: And he answered, “*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.*” And He said to him, “*You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.*” But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “*And who is my neighbor?*”



Galatians 3:28: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*”

Matthew 7:12: “*In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*”

Racism is wrong. It is sinful. Let's avoid it at all costs.

What is the solution?

The solution for this terrible heart condition is Jesus Christ. God has always loved all men. The book of Jonah provides us with an excellent example of this thought. This book also helps us to see how one's view of people (even spiritual

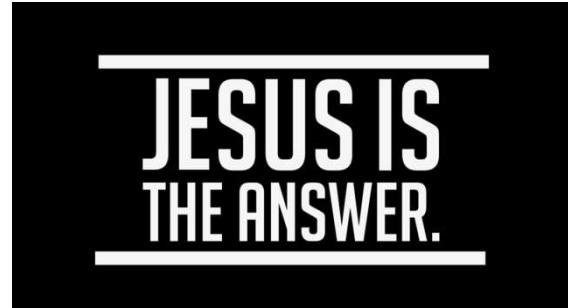
individuals like a prophet) don't always line up with how God wants us to view people.

Read the book of Jonah. How did Jonah's view of the people in Nineveh differ from how God viewed them? Write your thoughts below.

God loves all men. Jesus loves all men. John 3:16 reads, “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*”

When we understand that Jesus died to deliver us from our sins, it should change the way we view everyone. God the Father loved the world so much He sent His Son to die. Jesus is the one that can change the hearts of men. Mark 7:21-23 teaches, “*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.*”

He is the solution. Jesus was the solution that brought both Jews and Gentiles into one body. Ephesians 2:11-18 explains, “*Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one*



body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.”

If He was the solution in the first century, then He is the solution in the 21st century. While Jesus is the solution, it took a lot of time for Jews and Gentiles to come together. They did have challenges and even setbacks. They did. It took time for their hearts to change. One of the best examples of this was with the apostle Peter. Acts 10:28 records, “*And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholly or unclean.”*

Further, Acts 11:1-3 continues, “*Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”* It took a lot for Peter to go to the house of Cornelius. Even when he got to his house, it was uncomfortable for him. But in the process of time, he would learn that “*God is not one to show partiality.*”

Peter and others in the first century help us to see that it is possible for hearts to change. Acts 11:18 records, “*When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, ‘Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.’*” If they were able to change, people can change today.

How should we respond?

We know all of the right things to say. We know racism is sinful and that Jesus is the solution. Yet, if not careful, racism or implicit bias can still get the best of us. There are some things we all need to consider and do. They are not always easy, but should still be done. Here are some suggestions.



Examine your heart. Acts 10:34 teaches, “*Opening his mouth, Peter said: ‘I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality.’*” As Christians, we should always be doing this. We need to take some time and really consider if we have some blind spots that have been causing us to treat or view our brethren and people in the world the wrong way. Think about the following:

- How we talk about other people: Are we using inappropriate speech in our homes as we speak about others of different races? If so, why? We should repent if so.
- When someone brings up an issue about, am I truly listening or am I preparing what I am going to say as they speak?
- Am I lefting or righting the issue (MSNBC vs. FoxNews) when it comes to race? Or am I really trying to look at it and understand what others are going through with the proper vision?
- When I hear or see others acting or speaking in a sinful way, am I too afraid to say anything?
- Have I allowed past experiences to get in the way of me being sympathetic towards others now?
- If you see a black man with a white woman, or a white man with a black woman, does that make you feel uncomfortable? If so, ask yourself why? It may help uncover some things you have not considered.

Have any of these been a challenge for you? If so, what action can you take to change?

Be a pioneer. Acts 9:26-27 reads, “*When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.”*

I love the phrase, “Be a pioneer.” When I was a part of a race forum a few years ago, one of the speakers used this language. It has stuck with me. Be like Barnabas. Remember what he did? When the saints were afraid of Paul, it was Barnabas who helped bridge the gap. It is a good thing that he did! He was bold and courageous. This is the mindset we must have. Be a person that unites people. Be a person that fixes a situation. When it comes to race, there are so many things we can do.



We could start a study in our home discussing this very issue. I think one of the best things to do is to open our homes more. Acts 10:48 illustrates, “*And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.*”

Remember when Peter and the other Jews stayed at the house of Cornelius? Can you imagine all of them sitting down for breakfast the next day? I wish we had some details about those conversations. Have some genuine conversations about race with others. Talk about what terms may be appropriate or not appropriate to use. Truly seek to understand the struggles and challenges others have been through.

A few years ago, during a meeting I went to one of the shepherd’s house for lunch. He shared with me that was the first time a black person has been to his house. I appreciated his honesty and we were able to have a great conversation about race.

Learn about different experiences those in your congregation may have experienced in the past and in the present. I believe too many brethren will vent and try to have a conversation on Facebook about this topic. I do not believe that will work. It often creates more problems. Disconnect and then connect. Less talking via social media and more face to face conversations are needed. This will require courage, time, and effort. Make it a priority. The more we talk about it and focus on Jesus, the more things will improve. Teach a class on this subject. Preach a sermon on it. Be bold!

Decide where you will worship and place your membership based upon what is being taught, and not whether the church is primarily black, white, or Hispanic. Years ago, there was a black sister who visited where I was formerly preaching at the Dowlen Road Church of Christ in Beaumont Texas. The congregation there is about 50/50 with respect to blacks and whites. She looked us up on the internet and saw my picture. She assumed it was a primarily black church and decided to visit. She was shocked when she walked in saw so many blacks and whites. She eventually shared this story to my wife. She should have been more concerned with what was being taught.

While I was teaching a class on racism at Dowlen Road, one sister shared a story of a white couple who moved to a new city. There was a congregation that was made up mostly of blacks. They did not feel comfortable attending. They wondered how they might be welcomed. Instead, they drove about 45 minutes to a more mixed congregation. In the process of time, the price of gas became too much. They decided to attend the other congregation. They were no issues. They were welcomed and

loved! Don't assume! Be a pioneer. While there is not necessarily anything wrong with a congregation made up primarily of whites or blacks, this should not be the standard when it comes to us deciding where we will worship.

How might you be able to be a pioneer? List some ways below.

Don't be a sellout. Ephesians 2:14-18 reads, “*For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.”*

What I mean by don't be a sellout is this: Don't sell out your faith in Jesus or your fellowship with brethren because of your families, your race, or your political views. We are in Christ. That's a really big deal! Do not take it lightly.

Share the gospel. Acts 8:1-4 reads, “*Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.”*

As one preacher has said, “Our congregations should look like our communities.” The best way to do this is by sharing the good news of Jesus. Talk to everyone. This is what the saints did in the first century.

When I invite others to visit, I will often let them know where I worship is not a black church or a white church, but rather a group of Christians striving to make it to heaven. I got this line from another brother in Christ. I will sometimes emphasize this because as a black man, there will be people who may assume I attend an all-black church, and they may not feel comfortable visiting. The reality

is most churches are made up of one particular race. So, I use that phrase to help them know they are welcome and it does not matter what their skin color may be.

Some people may say, “I don’t see color. I’m color blind.” I see color. I do not know how one cannot see color. I recognize people have good intentions when they say, “I’m color blind.” But let us enjoy the diversity God has made and let us also be aware that others see color. Let others know it does not matter what color their skin may be, they are welcomed at your congregation.

I remember one Sunday after services in Beaumont Texas, a couple (the woman was white and the man was black) shared with me how welcomed they felt. They had visited other congregations (I do not know where), and they were not welcomed because they were a mixed couple. That is really sad. I hope that is never the case where you worship.

Do you ever find yourself hesitating to invite someone to services or to a Bible study who may not look like you? If so, why do you think that is? What can you do to overcome it?



Be patient and forgive. Colossians 3:12-13 teaches, “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

While the apostle Peter experienced so much when he went to the house of Cornelius, he still had room to grow. He was a hypocrite at times. Galatians 2:11-15 records, “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the

Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

The brethren needed to be patient with him. It did not mean that they tolerated his sinful behavior. What we see is that Paul corrected Peter. The same will have to happen to us and others.

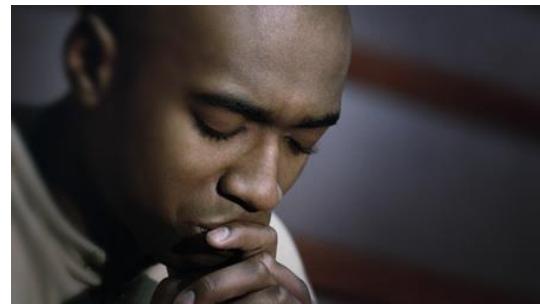
We are all on a journey. We all have different pasts. I know a brother in Christ who saw black men lynched in the South growing up. That obviously had a deep impact on him. He has had to overcome a lot of things with respect to race. He and I are at different places when it comes to challenges to overcome. I have never experienced anything like that. Brethren will need to be patient with him and seek to understand what he has experienced.

There will be times when someone may say or act in a manner that is not Christ-like. During those moments, we will have to have some difficult conversations and be willing to forgive.

I often think about the story of Jacob and Esau. Esau was ready to kill his brother Jacob because of missing out on his birthright and blessing from his father Isaac, But, in the process of time, Esau came to forgive his brother. What's interesting about all of this is that the descendants of Esau did not respond in the same manner. They were filled with bitterness toward Israel. I think this can and still does happen. Yet, when one becomes an emotional hoarder and isn't willing to forgive, it will not end well for them.

Has someone in the past hurt you? Has someone treated you in an ungodly way because of your race? How did you handle that situation?

Pray for all men. 1 Timothy 2:1-4 teaches,
“First of all, then, I urge
that entreaties and prayers,
petitions and thanksgivings, be made on
behalf of all men, for kings and all who are
in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil
and quiet life in all godliness



and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

We do not hate those who are racist, but rather we pray for their souls. They too were created in the image of God. We seek to pray, teach, and provide a godly example for them.

Who might you be able to pray for who may be struggling with this issue? Who might you be able to pray for who has been hurt by someone else who was racist?

Remember vengeance belongs to God. Romans 12:17 instructs, “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” God is the righteous judge. We do not repay evil with evil. This can be difficult. Instead, we seek to be the lights in this world.

Respond with love. John 3:16 teaches, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” 1 Peter 2:17 commands, “Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.”

Let us view people the proper way. Let us love them just as Christ has loved us. As we approach this subject, let us do it with truth, compassion, and love. As we view our brethren, let us think the best of them. God required the most of Himself, and He demonstrated *agape* love. He loved us when we were unlovable. We must do the same.

As the people of God, let us shine our lights. Let us show people what God the Father and His Son have done not just for us, but for the entire world. We have the gospel. Let us share it with as many people as possible. When we do, hearts will be changed for the better, and the devil will be defeated!

Darkness Lesson 15

Devil's Dark Distortions:

Too Many Christians Have “I” Problems: PrIdE

by T.S. Stephens²⁰

Introduction

Among the devil's distortions that darken one's eternal perspective is the big “I” problem: “PrIdE.” It encompasses so many areas of sin and is one of Satan's big three weapons against humanity. Pride becomes a spiritual blinder to Christians. It surfaces in various forms: accelerating greed, keeping up with the Jones across the street, holding on to power and position rather than admit their status, failing to be vulnerable enough to confess sin and neglecting to obtain help in following Christ. Pride is often the etiology of many sins that go by different names like self-righteousness, covetousness, prejudice, and hypocrisy.

Pride simply means to act arrogantly, to have a high opinion of one's worth, or to be self-conceited. Another person defined pride as “over shining, to see one's self as better than you really are. Humility is the lowness of mind, to see one as they really are in light of God's holiness and our sinfulness.” C.S. Lewis is often paraphrased as calling pride as holding the telescope backwards, magnifying self and minimizing the heavens. Someone else defined pride as “the idolatrous worship of self, the national religion of hell.” Another person described pride as “the anti-God state of mind.” No matter how we define pride, the common denominator is “self,” and pride is not of God. 1 John 2:15-17 mentions three things that are of the world; among them is the pride of life.

The “Big Me Little You Syndrome” of pride is alive and stronger than ever in the human heart. People often have their mind closed to truth and the gospel because of pride. The attitude is “Don't confuse me with the facts because my mind is made up.” Jesus faced such audiences who were blinded by power, pride, self-righteousness, and hypocrisy. Further, Acts 28:25-27 tells of those who would not see or hear the truth. “And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this



²⁰ I am certain I have borrowed from things I have read or heard preached. The only person that I can specifically recall where I made notes is from R.S. Yerby and C. Churchill. I apologize if I have failed to acknowledge anyone else.

people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” **Pride causes spiritual blindness**, such that we cannot see ourselves as we really are and leaving us vulnerable to every other sin (Luke 18:9-14). Pride justifies and excuses sin.

Seeing such examples, we should be careful we do turn our eyes away from God’s truth in the scriptures. We are not immune from this “I” problem. Proverbs 21:2-4 teaches, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.” Proverbs 6:17 summarizes “Haughty eyes are an abomination to the Lord.” Proverbs 30:11-13 encourages, “There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness. There is a generation— oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up.” Pride blinds humans so easily to even the truths in their own lives. Christians can turn their senses from the truth just as easily as non-Christians (1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 4:1-4; Titus 1:13-16).

Too many Christians have “I” trouble. This is often apparent in the statements a person makes or thinks such as “I am satisfied with myself” or “I am the perfect example” or “I want things done my way.”

I am satisfied with myself

“I am satisfied with myself” is a statement we make when we see no further need to grow as a child of God. Sometimes we are content to remain as a small sprout with self-congratulatory bloom in stunted growth. **Pride is often the source of stunted growth patterns in Christians.** Such growth often requires chastening so we might become partakers of His holiness (Heb 12:5-11).

The Laodiceans are a good example of being self-satisfied. Revelation 3:14-17 reads, “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and



miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” The Laodicean’s pride and confidence in their wealth caused them to be lukewarm and blinded when they needed to grow.

Philippians 2:12 and 3:13-14 also encourages those who need to challenge an attitude of self-contentment. Philippians 2:12 reads, “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.” Paul continues in 3:13-14, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Diligence and growth are the challenges for Christians. The New Testament calls Christians to be holy as God is holy, being partakers of the divine nature (Heb 12:10; 2 Pet 1:4). It challenges us to transform (Rom 12:1-2), being image-bearers of God. **Pride and self-contentment stop directional growth toward God.**

I am the perfect example

“I am the perfect example.” Sometimes the statement is a little softer but in the same mindset like “I want you to look at me and the good I am doing.” Unfortunately, Romans 12:3 warns us against thinking more highly than we ought to think of ourselves. This is an attitude of pride.

Proverbs 6:16-17 teaches, “These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: **A proud look**, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood....” Likewise, the Pharisees were guilty of being self-conceited and self-righteous in their behavior. Luke 18:9-14 reads: “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Humility acts as the guard against pride. **We must guard against pride by embracing humility.** When we think of



ourselves as all that, we fail to see the standard of God's holy, holy, holy nature. In that contrast, the Christian can see their lowly status. The Lord will lift those who humbly serve. In Luke 14:11 Jesus taught, "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

I will do whatever I want need to do

"I will do whatever I want need to do" is professed by Christians who give in to their own passions, desires, and inclinations. Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10 was such a person. "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica...." How can the person who has this attitude ever pray "Thy will be done"? (Matt 6:10).

We sometimes change our wants into needs. By relabeling our wants to needs, we falsely feel we had to act in this way as though there was no other choice. This is a smidge of false humility. Folks always have a choice to obey or not obey God. The Christian's life and worship are about God not about themselves. If the actions or thought process is not God focused then it is acting out of selfishness and pride. How can we correct this attitude?

I want things done my way

"I want things done my way." Or, "I want things done the right way." These statements are often thought but unspoken. Sometimes the latter is heard more like an appeal to being correct while harboring the arrogance of an I-am-right attitude. They reflect a Christian who is obstinate, stubborn, and set on having things done his or her own way. In current vernacular, folks call this being a "control freak." Have you seen this wrong attitude in yourself at some point?

The Bible addresses a self-willed behavior. Notice among the qualifications of elders in Titus 1:7; they are NOT to be "self-willed." This does not mean when in a role of leadership, one should fail to lead. When possible, the leader should not be self-willed in the process. More often, the reverse is true as self-willed individuals speak harshly of those in roles of authority because they did not get their way. What happens to people who are self-willed? 2 Peter 2:9-10 teaches, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities."

There is the story of two goats (from storyplanet.com). There was a river in a small village with a narrow bridge built to cross it. One day a goat was crossing the bridge while another goat was crossing the bridge in the opposite direction. The bridge was so narrow there was no space for both to pass. Both goats did not want to turn back. One goat said to the other goat "You should go back since I am stronger than you." The other goat denied saying, "No, I'm stronger." Both argued for a while. Later, one goat put down his horns to fight to show it was stronger than the other. They fought furiously and both lost their balance and fell into the stream below. The swift current of the stream carried them away in deep water and both drown. After a while another two goats came on the same bridge in opposite direction. Both started quarreling that one goat should give way to other. This time one goat thought for a while and asked the other goat to stop. He said, "If we both fight, we will fall into the river and drown. Instead I have a plan. I will lie down, and you cross over me." Then the wise goat lay down on the bridge, and the other goat crossed over him. So, they passed each other and went on their ways.



Another illustration is when driving. The father said to his novice driving son to pause for a car even though the son had the right of way. "You do not want to be dead but right because of the aggressive driver." "I want things done my way" can be the curse of "Pride."

I only care about what I want

"I only care about what I want." This statement is made by the Christian who is self-absorbed. How bad are some about getting only what they want? One preacher remarked, "Some Christians are so self-absorbed they cannot appreciate a funeral sermon because they are not the corpse about who the nice things are being said." Christians are taught the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbors as ourselves. Christianity is about serving others to glorify God in contrast to serving the self.

In Luke 10:30-37, one reads the history of the good Samaritan: "And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side. But

a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*, And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.” What can be learned from these events to help the “I only care about what I want” attitude?

Before going on to the example of Christ, Paul admonished Christians in Phil 2:1-4. “If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Pride is a big “I” problem. What other “I” problems are associated with sinful pride?

Why does God feel strongly about pride

Why does God feel strongly about pride? First, pride promotes self-sufficiency rather than “God-sufficiency.” 2 Corinthians 3:5 encourages, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God.” Second, many sins have roots in pride. As one reads in Ezekiel 28:14-15 and Isaiah 14:12-15, Satan’s start was his pride before growing further. Another illustration is Israel’s idolatry has origins in pride as one learns in Isaiah 2:6-22. Lastly, pride has the capacity to destroy lives. Proverbs 16:18 teaches, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

If you could avoid a disease that would blind you, would you not want to avoid a spiritually blinding condition like pride? The Christian’s battle is a warfare to bring into obedience anything that exalts itself against God. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 instructs: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

God points the children of Light to humility. Christians are taught to not think of themselves too highly (Rom 12:3). Jesus demonstrated humility when as master of the Universe, he washed dirty feet in John 13. In Luke 7:36-50, the woman came and washed Jesus' feet in the presence of Simon a Pharisee and his other dinner guests. Because of Simon's negative reaction to her sordid reputation, Jesus taught the parable of the creditor. Jesus asks Simon which of the two forgiven of debt will love the creditor more—the one who owed much or the one who owed little? The response was the one who was forgiven more. Perhaps this should cause Christians to do inventory when they feel puffed up. Christians must see the value in others as souls to be brought to God not in terms of the flesh but in recognition that all humans are created in the image of God. All people are the same footing at the cross of Christ.

C.S. Lewis helped many understand humility when he wrote, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less...Pride is a spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment or even common sense.” Pride is humility’s antithesis. Pride prohibits us from accomplishing what God wants the children of Light to do.

How do we recognize pride in their life

How do we recognize pride in their life? The nature of sinful pride makes it hard to root out. To recognize it in ourself is difficult. Some indications of pride in the life of a Christian include a spotty prayer life, anger, a critical spirit. It also can be seen in a weariness to serve, a defensive reaction to criticism, and seeking praise for accomplishment/prosperity. Another indicator is impatience when having to listen, wait, serve, be anonymous, or be led by someone else. Lastly, a lack of thanksgiving indicates pride. Henry Ward Beecher wrote, “Pride kills thanksgiving, but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grows. A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.” After recognizing pride, then we must repent of it. We should want to act against our own pride before God does. We must be ready to fight against pride every day.

What impact does pride have on confession

Pride often stops the confession of sin to God. As a child of God, one must confess their sin and focus on the light of God (1 John 1:8-9; James 5:16), rendering themselves a slave to righteousness (Rom 6:18-19). As His child, one must stand in opposition to sin, purposing to purify their life and live holy in

imitation of Christ (1 John 3:3; Eph 4:23-24). 1 John 1:8-10 teaches, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." The explanation is in verb tenses -- a snapshot of the past in contrast to practicing sin. The meaning being we do not practice sin, not that we have not or will not ever sin. Some might see an apparent contradiction. However, it is not really a contradiction as much as an understanding that those seeking to serve God do not make a habit of sinning.



Pride and Confession

Confession is when one says what God says about their sin (Greek word "Like – Say"). One cannot spin sin with God. "If you mess up, you must fess up." Too often, there are those who wish to escape the Lake of Fire who have no desire to put off their carnality and worldliness but instead, cling to it in pride. Proverbs 28:13 (NAS) "He who conceals his transgressions, will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." Christians must put away pride and resolve to practice confession as taught in God's word.

Many folks fail to practice confession because it makes us vulnerable and accountable. Instead, we tend to put up a whitewashed façade of "all is good." Children of God must practice confession as taught in God's word. First, the context of 1 John is a confession to God because all sin is against God. Second, as we understand in James 5, it is a confession of faults to each other which enables us to give and get help. Christians must realistically prepare themselves and others for a life of faith, and they should comfort each other during their trials. To effectively help others, we cannot pretend to be completely put together when helping those whose lives are falling apart. And, sometimes, it keeps the person helping from falling apart by also demonstrating their need for help as well.

The church is made up of folks who have had messy lives. Christians are not exempt from trouble, trials, and even worry. Temptations and trials are not removed by baptism. God provides His children with peace, comfort, joy, and hope. Much of the New Testament was written to Christians who, in some form another, were struggling and needed encouragement and edification. Trials and

hardship are part of the Christian's transformation or growth. Just as diamonds and gems are polished with friction, humans are no different.

Too often, we can find ourselves playing with sin and pride. We might say we are "struggling" with sin, but often we are comfortable and "snuggling" with sin. There are only a few letters difference between "snuggle" and "struggle." Unfortunately, we often see how close we can get without being burned. When we say we struggle with sin, there is a smidge of confession and humility, but it is not enough to actually put away sin. We must recognize the pride which enslaves us. When we do not address sin, we are whitewashing the outside but internally are captive to pride.²¹ God knows His children's struggle. Confession allows us to own our pain, being confident God will use that part of our history to draw us closer to Him. God will also comfort His children with mercy and affection through afflictions. He will not forsake us but will transform us if we let him.

Christians, who often struggle to confess, must have the courage to be vulnerable to be genuinely connected as a member of God's people. Everyone connects to others regardless of who they are. Shame is a form of fear of disconnection. To genuinely connect with others, one must have been seen and been vulnerable. Those who can, despite confessed failings, have a sense of love and belonging and a sense of worthiness. They understand they were formerly without hope and God but now are citizens of the kingdom and members of the household of God as Ephesians 2:12-19 teaches. If a person does not feel worthy of love and belonging, then they are not connected, and they fear disconnection or unworthiness – shame as the psychologist might describe it. Those folks who have a sense of worthiness know they are God's children, and because of Jesus' sacrifice are wholehearted. They have made mistakes but corrected course and grown because of it. They are courageous in that they share their story with their whole heart. Courage requires Christians to recognize their imperfections, weakness, and flaws.

The confessing Christian is wholehearted without a façade of pride but instead trusts in God. Wholehearted folks are compassionate toward themselves and others with kindness and care. Everyone has or will have moments that knock their feet out from under them. Such a moment often leaves one bruised, battered, and bewildered. It is then children of God must lean on God's word and fellow Christians, and in their emptiness and contrite heart turn to God to find comfort (Psa 34:18, 51:17). The wholehearted let go of what they or others think they

²¹ I am not certain, but I think the first time I read this "snuggle" and "struggle" word illustration was from Dene Ward.

should be for who they are. It is not always neat and orderly, but God can make the crooked straight. Their concern is what does God think about their service -- what God thinks of a person is more important than what others think about the person. They embrace the vulnerability of confession knowing that which makes them vulnerable makes them beautiful.²²

In contrast, by living humbly, God will give us grace, and exalt us at the proper time (1 Pet 5:5-7). In fact, although God see everything, He takes special attention to the humble in heart (Isa 66:1-2). The promises of humility is God's care.

Spiritually beautiful people have been transformed by the renewing of their mind – often through troubles, trials, and temptations. They become image bearers of Christ in holiness and righteousness having remade their heart, mind, and lifestyle. Those who do not let pride hinder their confession trust that God is in control, and that He is the justifier. Christians are transformed as they experience personal defeat and still obeyed. Pride is swept away as we trust in God and Christ.

Conclusion

Robert Gordis wrote, “Pride is a deeply rooted ailment of the soul. The penalty is misery; the remedy lies in the sincere, lifelong cultivation of humility, which means true self-evaluation and a proper perspective toward past, present, and future.” Ultimately, much of Christianity is about being selfless in service to glorifying God instead of being fleshly for the self.

Pride is the core problem; it distorts one’s view of eternity. In 2020, do you have an “I” problem because of pride? If you do, this kind of “I” problem can keep you from becoming a Christian. It will also deter you from serving God faithfully. The right attitude for the Christian is to prove and hold fast to that which is good through regular study of the scriptures. (1 Thes 5:21; 2 Tim 2:15; Acts 17:11).

Christians need to keep their hands from covering their eyes and ears and instead keep those hands turning the pages of their Bibles and humbly serving others to glorify God. Pride causes you to miss so much because your perception of reality is so skewed. You are often blind to reality, not only in this life but

²² I am confident that I borrowed/plagiarized from Brene Brown’s “The Power of Vulnerability” which is available as a TED talk. However, her discussion is from psychological viewpoint, and the emphasis here is on confession and a Christian’s relationship to God and other children of God.

especially from an eternal perspective. The wisdom of God on pride for those that are spiritually blind may seem like foolishness. But in the end, God will demonstrate His wisdom (1 Cor 1:18-21).

Underview: Some Thoughts On Practicing Humility

The danger of pride is that God resists and opposes it. Haughty eyes are an abomination to God (Prov 6:16ff). Thus, either we will be humble of our own or God will humiliate us. King Nebuchadnezzar had to learn this as he spent time eating grass instead of boasting of his kingdom. Ultimately, one must see themselves as having sinned in contrast to God's holy, holy, holy nature. (See Isaiah's example in chapter 6).

Pride seeks to steal glory from God and exalt itself against God (Isa 42:8). Thus, the key to humility is to see God as He is. Even when leading, one must serve and not lord it over others. Jesus demonstrated this in John 13 when he washed dirty feet.

Christians should cast their anxieties on God (1 Pet 5:7). Children of light need to stop stressing by trying to fix everything and cast their trust, dependence, care, and reliance on God. God is not limited by power nor wisdom. Thus, God is not anxious about helping His children with a problem.

God's children should also practice adoration and thanksgiving (1 Pet 1:3-5, 4:11, and 5:11). Pride does not grow well in the soil of thanksgiving. By practicing confession of sin (James 5:16), one can see the horror of sin. By being vulnerable in confession, the Christian can be open to receiving healing and help as they confess to God and others.

Further, by inviting and pursuing correction, a Christian will grow by it, even when lots of the invited criticism might not be true. (See Prov 12:1). 1 Peter teaches Christians to look to the example of Jesus. Philippians 2:5-8 also teaches to see His example. Thus, Christians should fix their eyes on Christ.



Darkness Lesson 15 Questions

Devil’s Dark Distortions:

Too Many Christians Have “I” Problems: PrIde

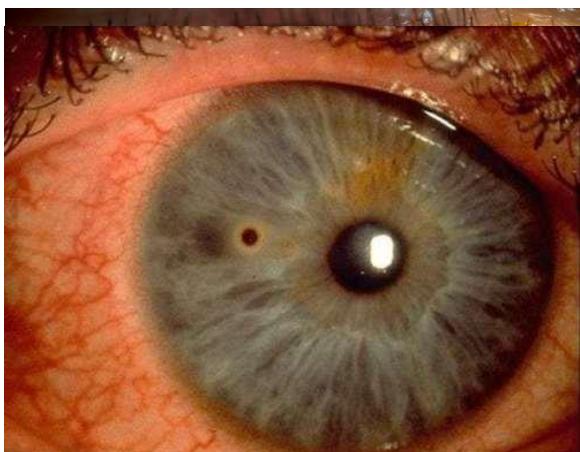
1. Define and illustrate “prIde.” What is God’s attitude toward pride?
2. How does pride cause spiritual blindness?
3. How does pride cause stunted growth in Christians?
4. What are a few of the phrases the author uses to illustrate an attitude of pride?
5. What does a prideful person exalt themselves against?
6. What did the good Samaritan’s example teach about caring for others
7. Why does God feel strongly about pride?
8. How can one recognize pride in their life?
9. What impact does pride have on confession as taught in James and 1 John?

Darkness Lesson 16

Devil's Dark Distortions:

The Corneal Foreign Body, Sin, and Hypocrisy

by Eddie McDonald, OD



Introduction

If you had the nerve to look at these pictures, you were probably feeling their pain. The cornea is the clear front surface of the eye, and it has more pain receptors per square millimeter than any other part of the body! Even the smallest of “foreign bodies” or “specks” feels like a beam or boulder. The most common material that gets lodged in the cornea is metal, but anything from wood to insect parts can find its way in there.

What does this have to do with my soul? Most Bible students will go directly to Matthew 7:1-5. One should remove the beam from your eye before helping another, and whatever you do, DO NOT JUDGE! We will come back to this but take a different look at the speck or beam in the eye in thinking about sin.

The Importance of Eyes

Why were we created this way with such sensitivity on such a tiny body part? How does the brain process visual information? Ninety percent of the information transmitted to the brain is visual. Seventy percent of your sensory receptors are in your eyes. Up to fifty percent of your brain is active in visual processing. Seventy-five percent of learning occurs through vision. No wonder Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:22 (NASB) “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.”

How Did the Foreign Body Get In The Eye?

We are all led to believe that to protect our eye, we need to wear eye protection, and we should. However, even with the most protective eyewear, mistakes do occur. As an eye doctor for eighteen years, I have treated corneal foreign bodies in retired individuals who were wearing multiple layers of safety equipment, including safety glasses and a full face shield. Another example is my 4-year-old patient, who does not wear glasses, who came to my office with a piece of rust embedded in his cornea. Neither he nor his parents knew how the rust got in his eye.



Relating the physical to the spiritual, just as anyone at any age can get a speck or a beam in their eye, we observe that any individual at any spiritual level sins. Even the seasoned Christian who takes precautions will sin, as does the new convert (spiritually immature) who is zealous for the Lord and yet will leave himself or herself vulnerable to sin. Consider the corneal foreign body as a metaphor for sin.

What Were You Doing When You Were Injured

When a patient comes in my office, this is the question that is asked – “what were you doing when your injury occurred?” Metal corneal foreign bodies/injuries typically occur when grinding or welding. Organic foreign bodies such as wood, plant material, or insects typically occur with outdoor activities – chain-sawing, weed eating, hiking, and biking are common examples.

1 Peter 5:8 warns Christians, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Sometimes it is just habit, or sometimes we have made an unnecessary allowance for the flesh.

Everyone has a specific weakness or a cross they must bear. We are called to be holy. We are to be in the world but not of the world. (John 15:19; John 17:14-16).

What Are Your Weaknesses

Do you put yourself in situations where sinning is more convenient? In what ways do you protect yourself from sin? I am not going to grind metal without eye protection. Too often, we place ourselves in places of weakness without the proper precaution.

We teach our children a song when they are young. Somehow, we forget it as we get older, but the principle it teaches remains true:

O be careful little eyes what you see
O be careful little eyes what you see
For the Father up above
Is looking down in love
So, be careful little eyes what you see
O be careful little ears what you hear
O be careful little ears what you hear
For the Father up above
Is looking down in love
So, be careful little ears what you hear
O be careful little tongue what you say
O be careful little tongue what you say
For the Father up above
is looking down in love
So, be careful little tongue what you say



Were You Simply at the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time

Many have entered a space where they did not know of a danger, and a foreign body got into their eye. Spiritually, most of us have been there. We were trying to be good but found ourselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. We were trying to avoid the person, places, and things that draw us toward sin, but it happened. The devil comes as an angel of light. “No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.” (2 Cor 11:14-15 NASB).



As Christians, we have the opportunity to be able to discern good and evil. “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb 5:14). This requires study and use of God’s word and diligence in application. Christians understand the scriptures as the sword in our armor. To be a good sword person requires time and practice.

It is a good thing to want to help someone in need. The good Samaritan is a wonderful example of who we strive to be like. However, we must also be very careful about where we go and what we do in the name of “helping someone.” We all need to have boundaries. As the scriptures advise, children of light must be gentle as doves but wise as serpents (Matt 10:16).

Is it appropriate to have a “bar ministry”? After all, to reach the lost we must go where the sinners are. What if you have alcoholic tendencies? Is it wrong then? Can you think of other examples?

Do You Treat Sin in Your Life Like A Corneal Foreign Body

In the initial pictures, you should understand that as long as the foreign body is in the eye, it is all the person can think about. It is at the forefront of his/her conscience, and they cannot fully focus on anything else. The entire time is dedicated to “how can I get this thing out of my eye?!?” Everyone spiritually had/has or will have a speck/moat/beam/corneal foreign body.

Do we treat sin the same way as a corneal foreign body? Anyone can take time out of their lives to seek an eye doctor to have a large metal corneal foreign body removed, but you might be surprised how many individuals will leave a small minuscule piece in their eye for weeks, walking around in pain until it becomes unbearable. Once removed, you have to give the eye time to heal. Although the eye heals faster than any body part, it still needs time. If the object penetrated deep enough, it will scar. Depending on where the scar is located on the eye will determine how much it will affect your vision for the rest of your life.

What sin hit you like a piece of metal in the eye? What sin in your life did you leave to fester and worsen? Were you able to help a fellow Christian with their sin because you had previously dealt with something similar? Steel hardens steel – Who is your steel? Do you have someone to help you be accountable with a pattern of sin? If you were approached for confession and help, are approachable? Are you of the “GOTCHA” mindset or of the kind and helping mindset? Do you practice confession to God with other Christians as instructed in God’s word? Too often, we think we can handle sin and not get burned. Too often we fail to take the steps need to eliminate the sin. When necessary, I often have to use a spud, needle, or small drill (Alger brush) to take a foreign body out an eye. Those processes are not pleasant but necessary. Likewise, the removal of sin from our lives is often not easy.

How sensitive is your soul? Is your soul’s sensitivity heightened to a point where even the smallest offense will drive you to rectify the situation immediately? Or do you live with scars that are in the periphery of your life that are soon forgotten because it did not really affect your conscience, only to cause you to incur injury after injury until one day it blinds you into hardening your heart to God?

David writes his song to the Lord in Psalms 139: 23-24: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” Similarly, we also sing a song in worship called “Lord Make Calvary Real to Me.”



Verse 1: Show me the cross of Calvary, open my eyes to see thy dying form in agony, Lord make it real to me.

Verse 2: Show me the cross of Calvary, open my ears to thy plea; “Father, forgive them!” can it be? Lord make it real to me.

Verse 3: Low at the cross of Calvary, bowed is my heart as I see grace can save eternally, Lord make it real to me.

Chorus: Lord, make Calvary real to me! Jesus, dying in agony, thy great sacrifice let me see; Lord, make Calvary real to me!

Like the very sensitive cornea, the more we understand what Christ has done for us, the more we see His great sacrifice, the more sensitive our souls become and the more quickly we will seek forgiveness and elimination of the sin in our lives.

Hypocrisy and The Corneal Foreign Body

After looking at the corneal foreign body as sin generally, consider it as the specific sin of hypocrisy from Matthew 7:1-6.

¹Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ²“For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³“Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴“Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? ⁵“You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. ⁶“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.



This is a popular text because people do not want anyone to challenge their behavior. People are fond of saying they are leaving Jesus and the church because the church has a bunch of hypocrites. There are some huge logic failures in such

comments. Moreover, those people are allowing a hypocrite to get between them and God. Hypocrites often cause damage to others (Prov 11:9).

The Mask of Hypocrisy

Peter, an apostle and leader among the disciples, got caught up in wrongdoing such that Paul had to call him out. (See Galatians 2:11ff). The NASB translation uses the word hypocrisy to describe Peter's behavior. He was behaving in a way that contradicted what he said he was. Can we identify Peter as a hypocrite? Tough as it is, it is in the text.



Hypocrisy is a common charge people enjoy throwing at Christians, especially if they have been hurt by individuals in the church. In surveys of millennials, one of the most common reasons noted for leaving the church is "hypocrisy."

Contemplating the meaning of hypocrisy requires us to look at the scriptures closer. Jesus uses this term. As one considers the definition of hypocrisy, the word "actor" or someone who is pretending to be something they are not, to put on a show, fake, and fraud are common understandings. Consider Matthew 22:15-21:

Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap
Him in what He said. And they sent their disciples to Him, along with
the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and
teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not
partial to any. "Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a
poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their malice, and said,
"Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the
coin used for the poll-tax.' And they brought Him a
denarius. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and
inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He
said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are
Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."



The Pharisees were pretending to be curious about an issue. They knowingly put on a show praising Jesus with the intent of trying to trap him. They put on a mask of respect but were really His enemies

Similarly, consider Matthew 6:1-6:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and ⁴your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and ⁹your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Again, we see Jesus condemn those who make religion a show, façade, a mask when their heart is not committed. This is true in benevolence as well as prayer.

Further Defining Hypocrisy: The Heart

Matthew 15:7-9 also helps us define hypocrite:

“You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’ ”

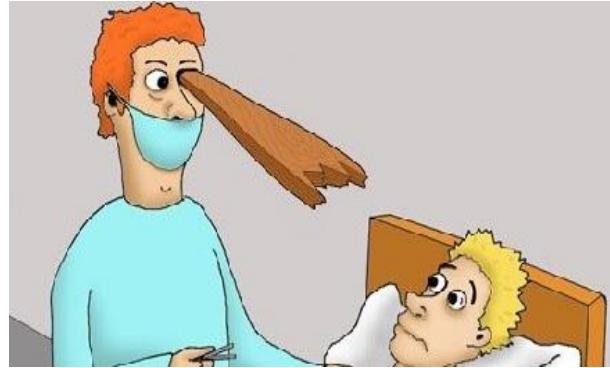
Their lips honor God, but their heart is not there. Hypocrisy is not a moral failure or sin as a single event because even the most mature Christian will sin. However, hypocrisy is a mask or show of faith when a person's heart is not with God.

Hypocrites are not people who just mess up and sin. We all have moments of spiritual failures. Christians are seeking to be godly, yet we may fail. We all are growing. When we were baptized into Christ, bad habits and addictions did not magically disappear. Putting away those behaviors and growth takes time. The church is made up of the broken and sinful who have repented with a contrite heart and seek God. The pretending role is hypocrisy. To call something hypocrisy requires knowing the inward heart instead of just an outward appearance. The hypocrite pretends to create a mirage.

However, Jesus always knows the heart. “But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25). When Ananias and Sapphira lied about the price of the property they sold, it was not fooling God (Acts 5:1-10). Hypocrites often forget God and thus lose their hope (Job 8:13-15).

Be Careful of Judgments

Since we cannot know the heart, Christians must be careful of their judgments. We must be very careful of thinking hypocrisy because trying to live godly and wrong behavior does not mean hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a corrupt heart with a mask. However, sinning or having a spiritual flaw is common to our lives. We are taught to put sin away and live holy. The point is that hypocrisy is not the only explanation for bad or immoral behavior. Good people, including Christians, do the wrong thing sometimes. Paul discusses his own internal struggle in Romans 7:14-15.



Sometimes, good hearts do the wrong thing. God’s word teaches us to guard our hearts (Prov 4:23). Christians are in a process of growth and transformation (Rom 12:1-2, Col 1:9-10). Growth takes time. Have you ever slipped back into an old sin? Ever slipped from a friendly visit to gossiping? Ever lost your temper and became angry?

Judging others most often leads to hypocrisy as we measure out a standard for others we most often do not want applied to us. This is the real speck and beam of Matthew 7. When we measure and do not know another’s heart, this is hypocrisy. Instead, we should take heed of our own footing while seeking to help others enslaved by sin

Satan uses both sides of judging and hypocrisy to ensnare as many as he can. How can we guard against this? First, we must be careful how we conduct our lives, including a willingness to practice confession as taught in God’s word. Second, we must start with the right attitude in all our teaching and works in service to God. It must be an attitude of care, compassion, love, and kindness, especially to those who are caught up in sin. Our enemy is not the false teachers or person living an immoral life, but our enemy is Satan. Those other people are in

the devil's clutches. Too often, we have people on Facebook or in person defending the truth without kindness. Instead, they come across with truth in a tone of hate. This should not be. 2 Timothy 2:23-26 helps us find the right attitude:

“But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”

Corneal Foreign Body and Hypocrisy

We must be careful that we are not falling to hypocrisy by putting on a show of faith. We must be careful not to fall into the same trap by judging others, knowing that we do not know their heart. We must teach with the right attitude of kindness. In the end, God’s eyes see it all. Our façade might fool many, but not God.

“Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:11-13, NASB).



Darkness Lesson 16 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: The Corneal Foreign Body, Sin, and Hypocrisy

1. We use eye protection to prevent corneal foreign bodies in many tasks. What can we do to avoid and protect ourselves from sin?

2. What does 1 Peter 5:8 teach?

3. What allowances do we make for the flesh and sin? In our media consumption? In our language? In our attitude? In our recreational and work activities?

4. When sin is in our life, what causes us to delay in dealing with it?

5. Are we sensitive to sin? What can cause our thinking to be less or more sensitive to sin?

6. What does Mathew 7:1-6 teach you?

7. Define hypocrisy. How is the heart involved?

8. How do we guard against Satan's use of judging and hypocrisy to ensnare us?

9. How do we practice confession as taught in God's word?

Darkness Lesson 17

Devil's Dark Distortions:

Eye for An Eye - Abortion

by T.S. Stephens²³

Exodus 21:22-25 (ESV) reads, “When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman’s husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” What was meant by an “eye for an eye?” The scenario in the text was the unintentional injury or termination of a pregnancy should be punished. This was under the Law of Moses here as well as for false testimony in Deuteronomy 19:21 and injury to a neighbor in Leviticus 24:20. What about those who purposefully terminate pregnancies today? Is abortion sinful because it willfully takes a human life? Is abortion murder?

In Romans 1, Paul describes a culture whose hearts are darkened and their minds reprobate having become futile in their thinking toward God.

They have moved beyond feeling, turning truth into a lie. Among the list of sins in verse 31, Paul refers to people “without natural affection.” Those who do not have the love and attachment as nature teaches mothers to have for their children is descriptive of the American culture through abortion.

Not only is abortion common and demonstrates a lack of natural affection, but society defends abortion as a woman’s right to do with her body as she pleases. Political opposition to halting abortion is so vehement; it presents a view that such oppositional actions are cruel. Such arguments change the truth into a lie. The unborn child is in her body and supported by her body, but the separate cells of the child’s body indicate it is not just her body. It is a life. Isaiah speaks of those who turn darkness into light in 5:20: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil;



²³ I am certain that I have copied several items in this article from David Padfield. I asked him to consider rewriting an article he had written on abortion for this material. He suggested I should write it with his blessing of using anything from his article that I had from years ago.

that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" **Abortion is an action without natural affection.**

"This expression [without natural affection] denotes the want of affectionate regard towards their children. The attachment of parents to children is one of the strongest in nature, and nothing can overcome it but the most confirmed and established wickedness. And yet the apostle charges on the heathen generally the want of this affection. He [doubtless] refers here to the practice so common among heathens of exposing their children or putting them to death. This crime, so abhorrent to all the feelings of humanity, was common among the heathen and is still. The Canaanites, we are told, (Psa cvi. 37, 38) 'sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan.' Manasseh, among the Jews, imitated their example, and introduced the horrid custom of sacrificing children to Moloch, and set the example by offering his own, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 6. Among the ancient Persians, it was a common custom to bury children alive. In most of the Grecian states, infanticide was not merely permitted but actually enforced by law" (*Barnes' Notes on The New Testament*).

How Common Is Abortion in The United States?

The murder of young children has been practiced by many cultures and people. The Nazi Holocaust started with the slaughter of thousands of "defective" citizens, culminating in the death of over 12 million. Since the legalization of abortion in the United States through *Roe V. Wade* in 1973, over 58 million have been killed by abortion at this writing in January 2018. Aborted bodies are often incinerated at a clinic or disposed of in dumpsters. There are no funerals or coffins for the bodies of these unborn. In 2017, some abortion facilities were found trading body parts of aborted children.

Historically, Margaret Sanger often promoted abortion out of racism and eugenics to improve the genetic composition of the human race. Even now, abortion is five times more common in women of color than Caucasians.

The facts of staggering. There were approximately 1.1 million abortions in the United States in 2011 or 16.9 abortions for every 1,000 women of childbearing age. This is lower than the rate of 29.3 per 1000 women of childbearing age in



1981. The abortion to live births ratio has been decreasing since 1984 when it was 364 abortions for every 1000 live births. However, the number of murders/abortions is incredible, despite the rate reduction.
(<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/09/abortions-racial-gap/380251/>).

Globally, 25% of pregnancies ended in abortion in 2010–2014. In developed countries, the proportion declined from 39% to 27% between 1990–1994 and 2010–2014, whereas it increased from 21% to 24% in developing countries. (guttmacher.org Sept 2017 fact sheet). Less than 1% of abortions are estimated to be because of rape, incest, maternal health problems, and childbirth defect.

From 1973 to 2018, over 58.6 million children have been aborted in the United States. At this writing in January 2018, the CDC most recent statistical analysis was available from 2013 (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/pdfs/ss6512.pdf>). To put this in perspective, a recent analysis of all Americans lost in wars tallied over 2.8 million from the Revolutionary War to a soldier lost in the raid in Yemen in 2017 covering 242 years of history.

In 2014 alone, there were 926,200 abortions in the United States. Of those seeking an abortion, 18% were under 20. Adolescents made up about 12% of abortion-seeking patients. And, it has been estimated 5% of women by age 20 will have had an abortion. (<https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states>). It is a fact, abortion is common in American society.

Some Perspective from Scripture

The Mosaic Law called for an eye for an eye in accidental cases. Abortions are not accidental; they are deliberate. Many call for people to see those aborted as blobs of cells. They use alternative labels such as fetus. Nor do they like to view them as children. Ask the hopeful parent if they see the living being inside as their child; their answer will be different.

King David was not fully developed, but God knew him in his mother's womb. He describes himself this way in Psalms 139:13-16, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden

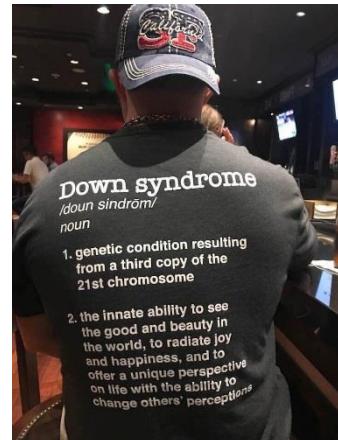


from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”

Perhaps the younger David could not have breathed or survived outside his mother’s womb, but he was alive and had a relationship with God. There are cases of children surviving birth with medical care as young as twenty weeks. Some proponents of abortion want to extend the legal right for abortion through nine months.

Value of Life

Humans have genetic and birth defects. And, some create their own impairments later in life. Although not referring to abortion at the time, my friend, Cindy Childers, expressed the value of life this way, “Does your life have purpose? Does our life have hope? Our life doesn’t have to be perfect in order to have these things. In fact, God usually takes the least from among us who have truly humbled themselves to take on His greatest plans. But it is hard to see this while in the middle of a trial or a painful situation.” (Cindy Meyer Childers, Personal Facebook Page on 1/23/18).



I am not perfect. Nor are my children perfect. My oldest son is autistic. However, no matter the imperfection, I am such a proud father of both my children. I also have a friend who has a wonderful child with Down syndrome. Many parents have children who have problems with their health or neurological status, but you typically do not hear these parent lament that they had this child.

I have observed many children, but the happiest and most smile causing child I have seen has Down syndrome. When the abortionist suggests we terminate these children, my heart fills with horror and indignation! These children have a life worth living, even with their impairments.

If you take the time to query “abortion survivor,” you can read the testimony of women such as Gianna Jessen and others, who survived a failed abortion and went on to lead strong, productive lives. All humans, no matter their less than perfect status, have a place and purpose. As with the blind man who Jesus put mud on and commanded him to wash in the pool, God had a purpose to use this man to His glory (John 9:4).



I have worked inside maximum security prisons; clearly, some men have become like brute beasts. However, if they are created in the image of God, then they have worth when redeemed. God created humans in His image (Gen 1:27; Gen 9:6; James 3:9). All humans have the same soul and an opportunity to use their lives to serve or not serve Him. You might think impressive wealth, athletic prowess, scholarship, or skills in a particular area will impress, but God is interested in what you did with the soul He gave you. Too many forget the widow who gave her small amount was greater than those who gave and filled the treasury; She gave her all (Mark 12:39-42). In reality, God does not need a person’s help, but a person needs God to recognize their efforts.

There is no example of abortion in the scriptures. However, David and Bathsheba had an unwanted pregnancy in 1 Samuel 11 and 12. King David committed adultery with Uriah’s wife. To hide the illegitimate child, David had Uriah killed. David’s plan to kill the innocent to protect the guilty is similar to what many do today, except he killed an adult man through his status as king.



The Way of the Transgressor

Proverbs 13:15 says the way of the transgressor is hard. Living with the guilt of abortion is indeed hard. David sought repentance in Psalms 51 for his past sins. Those involved in abortion from their past can as well.

David begs for repentance in Psalms 51:1-14, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.”



God no longer requires an eye for an eye, but this part of the Law of Moses helps us to understand the evil that abortion is. God still offers His mercy and grace to those who repent.

Conclusion

American culture is often identified in Romans 1 as a culture where the perception is darkened, and people move beyond feeling as brute beasts. Such a life is hard and sad. Abortion is part of Satan’s distortion and blinders. One should be strong to make sure Satan does not fool them with his lies.

An eye for an eye was the call of punishment for an unintended secondary event in Old Testament times. Today, the hope for those who have been involved in abortion is God’s grace and mercy through repentance.

If you are contemplating taking a life, please consider the hard road ahead. Satan lies and packages the falsehood convincingly through many others, even very caring people. “Abortion is just getting rid of some unwanted cells” or “It is your body to do with as you want” are examples of his packaged lies. In reality, abortion terminates a life.

Darkness Lesson 17 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: Eye for An Eye - Abortion

1. In Exodus 21:22-25, what was the standard for injury of a pregnant woman from two men fighting?
2. What is “without natural affection” in Romans 1?
3. From 1973 to 2018, how many abortions have been performed in the United States?
4. What are some of the reasons Margaret Sanger promoted abortion in the United States?
5. How common is abortion in the United States?
6. How does David describe himself before he was born in Psalms 139:13-16?
7. Does a genetic or neurological defect mean a person’s life cannot be used to serve God?
8. What was the reason the man was blind in John 9:4?
9. What did David do to hide his adultery and Bathsheba’s pregnancy? What was the ultimate cost to David and his kingdom?

Darkness Lesson 18

Devil's Dark Distortions:

The Insidious Nature of Sin and Diabetic Retinopathy

by Brad Burkhart, P.A.

"The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness." Luke 11:34

A Case Study

Let's start with a case study: A 67-year-old male comes to visit you in your family medicine clinic. He presents today with complaints of occasional blurry vision and black spots floating in his vision. He denies ever having issues with his eyes in the past, although he has not seen an eye doctor since he was a teen. He has not been to a family doctor in 5 years. He states he thinks he may have had high cholesterol and high blood pressure, but he is not taking medicine to treat either. He does admit to smoking for the past 30 years. He denies having any weakness in any of his extremities, headaches, eye pain, or any trauma to the eye. Upon further questioning, he does also have occasional burning in his feet and feels like he never can get enough to drink.

In the course of a month, I will typically see someone with similar symptoms to this. There are specific things that bring people to the doctor, even individuals who do not like to come to the clinic. Vision is one of the biggest. Everyone sees the value in clear vision. We see beauty with our eyes; we take in memories; we use our eyes to do our jobs effectively. We even go to the point to make sure we have the highest resolution TVs and cell phones, so everything is picture-perfect. You could see why someone like our patient would want to see what is going on. His fundus (picture) reveals hemorrhages and exudates of diabetic retinopathy, the leading cause of blindness in the United States.



Upon further evaluation, our patient is found to have very uncontrolled diabetes. He also has elevated blood pressure, and his cholesterol is high. Our patient likely has had diabetes for many years. His vision has been stirring up problems for years and only shows itself when the retina in his eye has suffered serious consequences. The question now becomes, “What do we do about it?”

Eyes in Our Heart

Paul in the letter to the Ephesians states **“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”** (Eph 1:18, NASB). What an interesting statement. He tells us our heart has eyes. In any anatomy class ever taught, you will not find the eyes located in the heart. So, what is Paul talking about? Paul is trying to get to the root of the problem. He is praying for the group of Christians so that with their heart they see they have been called to live like Christ with the expectation of receiving the glorious inheritance God is guarding for His people. He is hoping they can see that through God’s promises, they can escape worldly corruption and become partakers of the divine nature.



So often in our lives, we see the consequence of our sins. When we struggle with lust and see the destruction it has caused in our life, we think to ourselves, “I need to fix the lust so I can get my life back.” When we struggle with drinking and now have a DUI, we think, “I need to fix the drinking so I can get my license back.” When we struggle with gossip and have lost our best friend, we determine, “I need to fix this so I can get my friend back.” All of this is true, but what is the cause of the consequence? Ultimately it is our heart. Often Christians say they struggle with a sin. Unfortunately, too often we are a few letters off as we actually snuggle our sin. That two-letter difference is a lie that Satan is getting us to practice. If we are completely committed to God, then we want to cut off sin, to be holy as God is holy. What is the difference between “involved” and “committed”? The hen is involved in breakfast, but the hog was committed. Too often, we fail to continue to give the Lord our all, starting with our heart.

There is an underlying problem that has been present for quite some time that we likely have not addressed—the heart. So often, we see with our eyes in such a physical way but do not address the real issue. We fail to see with the eyes of our heart.

Back to our case study, our patient can receive laser therapy or injections into the eye to help the progression of his vision loss. But ultimately, he must control the underlying problem—diabetes. It would be much easier to take a pill or receive a shot to fix the issue. But really addressing the problem requires going back to the beginning and figuring out what the real underlying issue is. Sometimes this is hard. He must change the way he eats. He will need to quit smoking. He will need to exercise. In the same way, when we have sin in our lives, the resolution may not always be simple, but we must go back to the heart of the matter and fix the underlying issue. We must draw close to Christ and remember the hope that is in us.

Insidious Nature of Sin

Diabetic retinopathy is insidious. Too often, patients think they are great when they really need to be treating their diabetic retinopathy and their diabetes. Sin proceeds in a gradual, subtle way with harmful effects too. Sin is insidious. Sin is often insidious for many reasons. First, Satan's best frontal lies appeal to our lusts – using addictions, pride, fleshly desires, covetousness, and greed.

Someone once likened sin sometimes capturing us like boiling a bullfrog alive. Drop a frog in a too warm pot of water alive, and it jumps out. Turn up the heat very gradually, and they are reputed to be able to be cooked alive. Another illustration of how sin acts is our head and birds. Someone once explained it this way: You cannot prevent the birds from flying over your head, but you do not have to let them nest on your head.



Second, Satan also attacks us with lies in our weakness about God not being enough when we have doubts and despair. Christians must recognize God is their Ebenezer or stone of help (1 Sam 7:12), praising Him for His blessings and seeking Him. Christians must humbly recognize their dependence on Him while living joyfully in service to Him. This trust is often in opposition to a self-reliant American culture.

Third, one of Satan's more common set of lies is to just slightly modify teaching from God's word. This often allows a Christian to justify themselves rather than seek God's righteousness and holiness. "The devil has many designs, but one of them is this: to adulterate the teaching of the church with worldliness until the church becomes indistinguishable from the world." (Matthew Bassford).

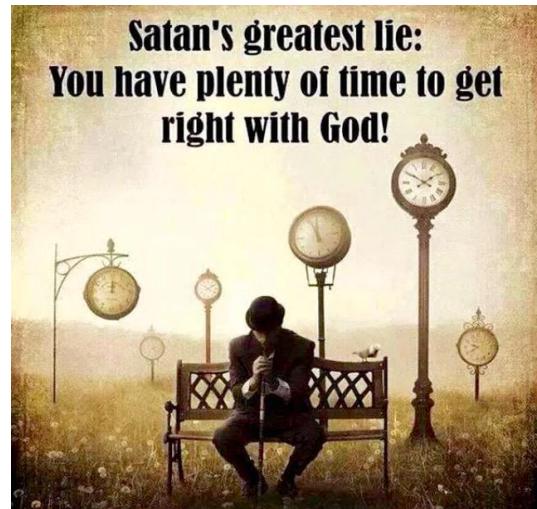
Fourth, some of Satan's best lies are more insidious because of their subtle nature. One lie He tells us is we have time, even though the time of salvation is now. "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor 6:2).

Fifth, another lie Satan uses is in changing terms. He is especially good at redefining terms making good evil and evil good. It is not sin; it is an "alternative lifestyle." "There must be many roads that can lead to heaven." Another example of a lie Satan tells is, "God would want you to be happy." Again, Satan is manipulating terms. God has prepared joy for His children and wants them to have it, but it may not be the way they think it ought to be. Redefining terms remains a battle often within Christians. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" (Isa 5:20-21; See also Rom 7:19; Rom 12:9, 21.)

Sixth, Satan causes us to substitute our righteousness for God's righteousness, and thus in hypocrisy, keep living a lie. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom 10:3-4; See also Phil 3:9). Satan uses just a seed of doubt, a single added word, a simple twist to manipulate. Christians must be aware of their weapons. Someone once wrote that the cruellest lie is the truth told in such a way that it cannot be believed. Satan is very good at manipulating us in such a way.

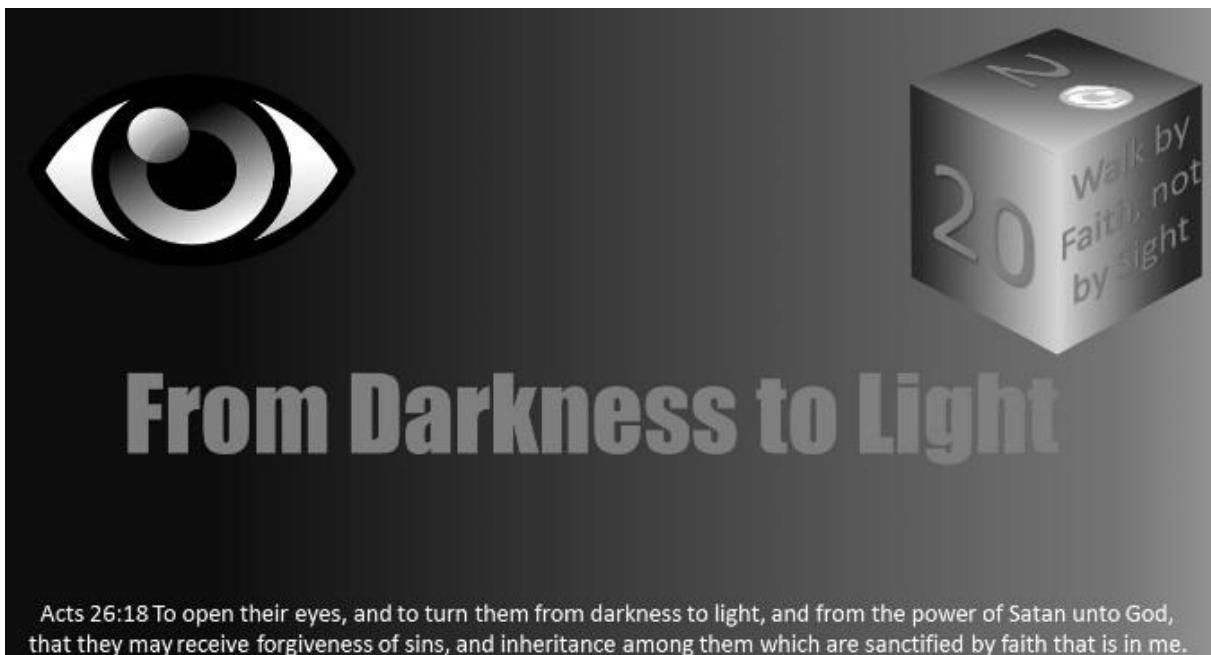
Conclusion

As discussed above, the base problem is what we allow to put into our heart. What are we feeding the eyes of our heart? Christ admonished in Matthew 12:34-35, "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." Satan is seeking to give us a lie to deceive and



blind us, allowing us to exalt ourselves against God's wisdom. The eyes of our heart can reveal hard truths.

Sin is insidious, and we must guard against Satan's many dark deceptions and manipulations. The end road for uncontrolled diabetics often includes blindness because of its insidious nature. It is the leading cause of blindness. In the same way, the insidious nature of sin often blinds people spiritually. Self-examination and brutal honesty with ourselves are necessary. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor 13:5; See also 1 Cor 11:28.)



Darkness Lesson 18 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: The Insidious Nature of Sin and Diabetic Retinopathy

- When dealing with your personal sins, what steps do you take in fixing the problem?
 - When you are studying with a non-Christian, where should you begin?
Example: My friend drinks beer. When I study with him, should I start with drinking?
 - Find examples in scripture where people returned to the Lord. What caused them to do this? Ex. Revelation 2:4
 - What are the signs our heart is becoming more acceptable to the sins around us?
 - Discussion: In what ways can we get to the root cause of a sin problem? How can we work together as a congregation to help one another conquer our sins? What prevents us from doing this?

Darkness Lesson 19

Devil's Dark Distortions: Casting Off the Works of Darkness and Putting on the Armor of Light

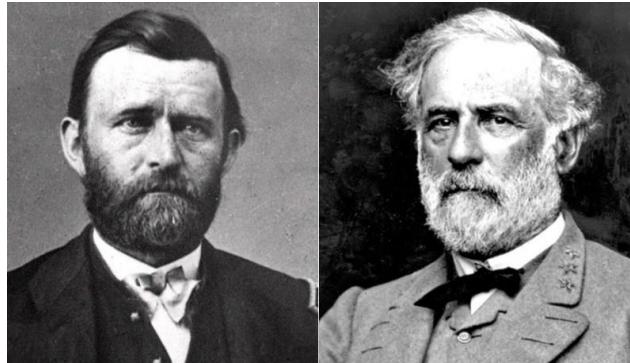
(Romans 13:11-14)

by Andrew Roberts

In the final major battle of the U.S. Civil War, General Ulysses S. Grant met General Robert E. Lee at the battle of Petersburg, VA, June 1864 – April 1865. Though recorded as a single battle, it lasted for ten months and involved a siege of Petersburg. Five railroad lines converged at Petersburg, which, in turn, supplied the Confederate capital, Richmond, VA. Grant understood that if he took Petersburg, he would cut off the provisions to Richmond and the war would end. However, the stout defenses around Petersburg meant that in order to take it, Grant must first cut off the provisions to Petersburg and General Lee's army.

An amazing fact of this battle is tactically, General Lee won almost every day of actual combat. That is, he lost fewer troops and inflicted greater casualties upon the Union forces. In some cases, 2 to 1. However, neither Grant nor Lee would concede the battle or surrender their positions. In this manner, the battle continued for the better part of a year. But General Lee was nearly surrounded, and most of his supply chains were cut off. While Lee lost fewer troops in each skirmish, he was unable to replace any of them. Meanwhile, General Grant sent a renewed force to each encounter. The Union had provisions.

After Petersburg surrendered, a mere two weeks passed before both Generals met at Appomattox Court House, VA where General Lee surrendered the war. The military lesson is sobering. A war is not always won by momentary tactics or valor, but with the ability to continue, persevere, make provisions, resupply, and go another round. The side who is supplied will be victorious. Who has the proper provisions? The side who has provisions will be victorious.



In warfare, the difference between victory and defeat can come down to provisions. If one army can cut off the other army's line of supply, communication, and/or reinforcement, then victory is only a matter of time.

We are at war, and the victory will go to the side with the greatest provision.

When one considers *Casting Off the Works of Darkness and Putting On the Armor of Light*, the Holy Spirit directs our attention to the importance of “provision” in spiritual combat.

“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom 13:11-14, NKJV).

Christians are called to urgent action. Today Christians choose to equip themselves and make provisions. Shall they take up weapons of light or provide for the works of darkness? The side that is supplied will be victorious in their lives.

The Holy Spirit and Paul will not have Christians failing in their spiritual service and warfare because of a lack of provision. A quick reading of Romans 12-13 provides ample actions and attitudes befitting God’s people capped off by these final exhortations to cast off works of darkness and put on the *armor of light*.

Put on Jesus in your life. Make provision for the right side – the Light – and cut off supplies for the enemy. “Light” wins over “Lust” because “Light” is well supplied. Yet the spiritual defeats, the sins Christians may practice, are because they make provisions for the lust of the flesh. They fail to cast off the provisions for the lusts and therefore fail to cut off the works of darkness themselves.



Do not make provision for the “Lust” but supply the “Light.”

Three Steps to Casting off the Works of Darkness

There are three steps to casting off the works of darkness and putting on the *armor of light*: wake up, suit up, and throw down.

Wake Up – Know the Time

For any Christian who did not understand the time or what day they were living in, the Roman letter made it clear. It is the hour to arise. Actually, it is past time to wake up. It is time to get dressed and go to war. It is time for battle.

“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:11-12, NKJV).



The word of God is always true. “Thy word is truth,” John 17:17. So the apostle’s mention of “knowing the time,” “salvation,” and “the day is at hand” here should not be understood as a misguided overstatement regarding an imminent return of Jesus Christ. Some readers (and several commentators) have jumped to an eschatological lens when reading these phrases. For instance, F.F. Bruce, writing the installment on Romans for *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, explained:

...‘when these things begin to take place,’ Jesus had said, ‘look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near’ (Luke 21:28). And Paul echoes his Master: ‘salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.’ The events of AD 64 and 66 – the beginning of imperial persecution of Christians and the outbreak of the Jewish revolt, which was to end with the collapse of the Second Jewish Commonwealth – were already casting their shadows before. That these events would not be the immediate precursor of the Second Advent and the final salvation of all believers was something which Paul could not have foreseen; if knowledge of that day and hour was withheld even from the Son of man, it was denied *a fortiori* to his servant.²⁴

This line of interpretation casts doubt on Paul and the inspiration of his writing. How could Paul be predicting the imminent Second Coming of Christ in Romans 13 without being completely wrong on the matter? Bruce suggests Paul was mistaken, but it was not his fault. He spoke out of turn, swayed by the

²⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans an Introduction and Commentary- Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1985 reprint 2002), 227-228

headlines of political unrest in Jerusalem. Yet, if Paul was wrong about Jesus' return, what other errors might we find in his letters? Today's skeptics love to latch on to such *interpretations* of scripture to malign Paul (and Jesus) as failed apocalyptic prophets. The skeptic says, "Paul said the world would end in the first century. Jesus did not come back then, and it has been two thousand years and counting. That's why I do not believe in the Bible. They got it wrong."

Romans 13:11-12 demands no such interpretation. Now certainly the weight of New Testament teaching is that Jesus will return and judge the world in righteousness (cf. John 5:26-29; Acts 17:30-31; 2 Cor 5:10). Even in other places of the book of Romans, "day" is used declaring Christ's return and judgment upon the wicked (Rom 2:5, 16). But the judgment in Romans 2 is not said to be imminent. Furthermore, Paul is not returning to that judgment message in Romans 13:11-12. He is not declaring Jesus' imminent return before the second century. What is he saying?

We read, "for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed." Paul is laying down an axiomatic truth. Every day in Christ is a day nearer salvation. Paul is verbally shaking Christians to understand it, remember it, and act in light of it. Know the time. In other words, Paul is not saying, "Remember, Jesus could be here tomorrow." Rather, Paul is saying, "Remember, you committed to living for Jesus today."

Paul is rousing them to alertness. Soldiers have a morning muster. What happens to the soldier who is undressed and asleep in the barracks when it is time for him to be at formation? How will a Drill Sergeant rouse him? Here is the Holy Spirit's reveille. Wake up and go to arms.



Throughout Romans 13:11-12, Paul writes in common spiritual metaphors. Notice "day" and "light," which symbolizes truth, justice, holiness, purity, clarity, and God. He contrasts this with "night" and "darkness," which symbolizes deception, blindness, wickedness, shamefulness, and evil.

- *Wake vs. Sleep* (Rom 13:11) It is "high time" (NKJV), "already the hour" (NASB), to wake up. Too much time has been wasted in slumber.
- *Near vs. Far* (Rom 13:11) Again, the axiom is laid down, which undergirds the paragraph: salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Today is not farther from salvation, so wake up.

- *Day vs. Night* (Rom 13:12) This is day in contrast with night. Night is over. Christians cannot persist in the activities of night. Oversleeping when we are to be at attention is the least of the nighttime evils of which Paul writes in this context.
- *Light vs. Darkness* (Rom 13:12) Nighttime allows for the clothing and activities of night, i.e., works of darkness. However, daytime requires the clothing and activities suitable for the day. Put on the *armor of light*.

By making these contrasts Paul, in effect, draws lines. He draws sides. Wake up and know the time. Wake up and see what side you are truly on. Who are you fighting for in spiritual battle? Be mentally awake.

Suit Up – Go to War

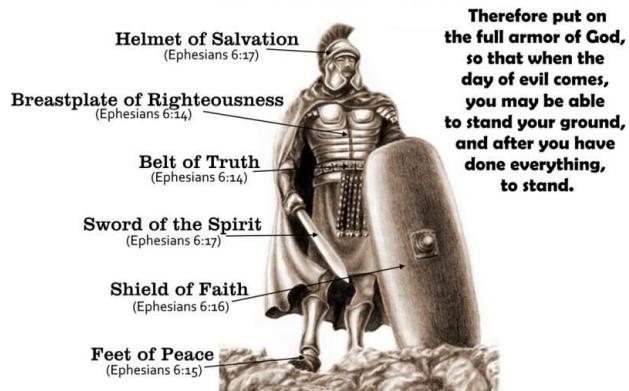
“The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:12, NKJV).

There are sides, and Christians choose one through their attire and activities. In reality, the Roman readers had chosen their side when they became Christians (Rom 6:3-4). Now they must act like it. Now they must manage the decision and remain on their side.

Additionally, warfare language like “armor” always introduces the idea of opposing sides. We understand this in any other conflict. You have to pick a side and stick with that side and dress for your side. Do you recall the importance of uniforms in the U.S. Civil War? If an actual Union soldier was captured dressed as a Confederate, or vice versa, he was tried as a traitor or a spy, and then he was hanged.

Thus, understand Christian, this is the time, the day, the moment to serve Christ and war for Christ. All that was night is past. All the debaucheries of night and evils of a sinful life before the gospel are over.

So, what does the Christian soldier look like? How is he recognized? What is the uniform? A Red Coat was significant in the American Revolutionary War. A Green Beret was meaningful in the Vietnam Conflict. How is a Christian identified?



Those Christians who look like the world because they indulge and practice the lust of the flesh do not know the time. They must think it is night. But it is not night! You would be completely out of place wearing pajamas during the day. Just as wearing a Confederate uniform means you do not belong on the Union army side of the battle line. It is the wrong uniform for that side.

Christian, are you wearing the uniform of light or the uniform of lust?

Being enlisted in the side of Christ, the side of Light, Christians must put on the *armor of light* (Rom 13:12). Interestingly, the Greek word *HOPLON* is rendered “armor” in most English translations. However, *HOPLON* means weapons, instruments, tools, or “arms,” as in armament. It is actually the same word used in Romans 6:13 rendered “instruments.”

“And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God,” (Rom 6:13, NKJV).

A Christian’s body and life should be tools and weapons of righteousness to God. A very similar idea is communicated in Romans 6:13 and Romans 13:12. Put on weapons of light so you can truly be useful tools for God.

God issues the proper equipment. The task is warfare. Consider some of the arms, the spiritual equipment, and suit God gives Christians to fight the good fight for Light.

- Christians have a *Leader*, King Jesus, who vanquishes every enemy – even death (1 Cor 15:54-57; Rev 1:18; 19:11-16). Follow Him! He leads the charge with His perfect example (1 Pet 2:21). He leads His people to victory over temptation and sin (Heb 2:17-18; 4:15-16). He leads Christians into everlasting life (Heb 12:1-2; 1 Pet 1:3-9).
- Christians have excellent *Communication*: prayer (1 Thes 5:17-18). Messages always get through. They cannot be intercepted or lost. God hears His people and answers them with what they need in His time (Matt 6:5-8).
- Christians follow an inspired *Battle Plan*: the Bible, the scriptures. The Holy Spirit has revealed every word, and it is sufficient (2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Tim 3:16-17). This guidebook is never wrong. It renews minds (Rom 12:2).

- Christians have the whole *Armor of God* with a belt of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, feet shod with the gospel, the shield of faith, a helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit – the word of God (Eph 6:10-17).
- Christians have *fellow soldiers*, that is, the church (Rom 12:4-5). God's soldiers are in this together! Brethren in the local church have to be there for one another. Fellow soldiers bear each other's burdens (Gal 6:2), strengthen the weak (1 Thes 5:14), protect one another (Acts 20:28-31), and encourage one another (1 Thes 5:11). The church shares the victories and the heartbreaks (Rom 12:15). They pray for each other and sacrifice for each other because they love each other (1 John 3:16; 4:19-21).

Together, Christians march forth in the *armor of light* to go to war. The task is war – spiritual war. Paul gives a particular tactic to battle lust for the sake of light: Cut off the enemy's provision.

Throw Down – Cut Off the Provision

Cast off (or throw down) works of darkness and make no provision for them at all.

“Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom 13:13-14, NKJV).

Cut off provision for the flesh. Do not supply lusts of the flesh. Remember the Battle of Petersburg? General Lee lacked provisions. He had fewer soldiers and could not replace any of them. General Grant lost more soldiers at any given engagement but replaced all of them. Many battles have been won, and strongholds were overtaken because the supplies were cut off.

Notice the parallelism: “Cast off the works of darkness” (Rom 13:12) and “make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts” (Rom 13:14). “Works of darkness” are paralleled to lusts of the flesh. “Cast off” is paralleled with “make no provision.”



The Greek *PRONOIA* is rendered “provision” in most English Bibles. It means forethought, supply, providential care. Proper thought and supplies are required to accomplish certain works, aren't they? So Paul warns Christians not to supply the flesh. He is not prescribing

asceticism. However, indulging the lust of the flesh supplies works of darkness in one's life. Remember, the side who is supplied ultimately wins.

Paul gives three couplets as examples of works of darkness. This is not an exhaustive list of all sin. Yet these crimes against the soul are often perpetrated at night.

“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, NKJV).

Notice the provision aspect within these couplets. How can Christians continue practicing such works of darkness? Observe what supplies them – what *provides* for them – so evil work can be done. This is especially obvious if you inverse the order of each couplet.

- Drunkenness *provides* for Revelries
- Lust *provides* for Lewdness
- Envy *provides* for strife

Drunkenness provides for Revelries

One would be hard-pressed to morally defend the debauchery of riotousness and excesses of revelries. Not only were they raucous parties but they were often associated with the idolatry of licentious pagan gods.

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon explains *KOMOS* (revelries),



A nocturnal and riotous procession of half-drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honor of Bacchus or some other deity, and sing and play before the houses of their male and female friends; hence, used generally, of feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry.²⁵

A soldier of light has no business in that scene. How embarrassing and damaging to a reputation to be caught at such a party when the police show up and arrest people for disorderly conduct, public intoxication, and disturbing the peace. A Christian forfeits godly influence in the lives of his fellow carousers. As long as

²⁵ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1886, 1889) 367

he parties along, he compromises the integrity of his own faith and discredits the church.

Of course, intoxication is a significant component of revelry. One must provide for, that is, supply drunkenness to accomplish revelry. So how does one defeat revelry? Cut off the supply of drunkenness. If one does not start down the path of drinking alcohol and other substance abuse, they do not arrive at carousing and wild, out-of-control parties.

Let's not be content to simply cut off the provision for drunkenness and revelries though. Let's be sure to provide ammunition for the other side – the weapons of light!

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21, NKJV).

What is some good that can be brought to bear on these works of darkness?

Christian, wake up! If you find an association with a particular group of people invariably leads to weekends of drinking and drug-infused parties, it is high time to cease being around those people. Choose weekend activities with other people. Develop friendships with Christians who do not pursue drinking and drinking parties, but instead those who seek God’s love, righteousness, and holiness.

Some people’s lives are tragic. If you see them on a Monday and ask, “How was your weekend?” Too many times they reply, “Well, we were drinking and...” or “There was this party, and you should’ve been there...” It is simply tragic how they celebrate and aggrandize their own self-destruction. What is truly happening is they are losing the ability to enjoy life and relationships without the crutch of addictions. It’s heartbreaking to know someone’s humanity is being destroyed weekend by weekend, and they are only too delighted to sacrifice it for a few hours of high with worldly peers.

It is high time to take up a new evening hobby or weekend entertainment. It is high time to surround yourself with people of different interests and shared spiritual values. Just the influence of people with different social norms and expectations can go a long way in cutting off the supply to such works of darkness and filling our lives with the light of God.

But if enough time has been spent with alcohol and other substance abuse, one will find it difficult to cast it off. The flesh develops an insatiable hunger for such poisons. Some habits and routines are comfortable now. Feeling grief, stress, or perhaps even joy without the filter of dissipation seems unnatural. Personal relationships have been defined through all of this lifestyle of behavior. Perhaps the word to capture the various struggles is addiction.²⁶

Not apart from prayer and church fellowship but in addition, obtain focused help through an alcohol or substance abuse program. Enlist brothers and sisters in Christ for support and accountability.

Throw down drunkenness and revelry and all that provides for them.

Lust provides for Sexual Promiscuity (NASB)

While the NKJV renders the Greek *KOITE* as “Lewdness” other translations help the English reader better understand what the Holy Spirit is saying, such as the ESV’s “sexual immorality” or the NASB’s “sexual promiscuity.” *KOITE* is the Greek root for the English word, Coitus.

Illicit sexual relationships, driven by lust, are sinful works of darkness. As the supply of lust continues, it eventually works sexual immorality. What should the battle plan be to defeat such promiscuity? Cut off the supply of lust.



Doubtless, lust and promiscuity walk hand in hand with drunkenness and revelries. Orgiastic parties are fueled by inhibition-lowering intoxicants. But not always. Many teetotalers fall prey to lust and sexual sin.

Again, let us not simply cut off the provision of lust and immorality, but let’s replace it with ammunition for the light. Let’s provide for the light. Let’s overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21).

It is generally acknowledged today that consuming lust-inducing pornography has the potential to be as addictive as consuming alcohol or pills. In like manner, the flesh develops an insatiable hunger for explicit imagery. Habits, routines, and coping mechanisms become entwined with carnal passions. Personal relationships have been colored, and the heart deadened to natural sympathies,

²⁶ For more on *Addiction*, see lessons in this series by Adams. See also lesson by Hardin and Rouse earlier in this series.

through the continual objectification of people – even if the lust is indulged in secrecy. A terrible cycle of guilt, shame, and relapse become difficult to break.

Thus, not apart from prayer and church fellowship but in addition to, enrolling in a sexual addiction program may be the most strategic step to take in casting off lust. Confession and prayer with other Christians who will walk through a difficult season with you are necessary. Other lessons in this series stress the importance of an accountability partner. Furthermore, resources like filtering software or content-blocking apps are helpful.

Of course, minds and hearts warped by exposure to pornography seek to act out the images they have feasted on and fantasized about. Lust provides for sexual promiscuity. But what provides the continual temptation to pornography? Few seem to realize the regular bombardment of sensual images on television continually tempt people to seek out pornographic images beyond what the FCC allows for public broadcast.

With every foolish sexual encounter and wickedness of pre-marital sex and “hook-ups,” the side of darkness and night wins. It’s high time to wake up and grow up in Christ and seriously seek to honor, biblically love, and marry a spouse. Understand that one aspect of marriage is for the fulfillment of sexual expression (1 Cor 7:1-9; Heb 13:4). The sexual relationship is a beautiful and good union, as God designed it, in the context of marriage. But being loose with your body and casual, if not nearly anonymous, with sexual partners is sin. As a result, it brings the severest consequences emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Such will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor.6:9-11, 18-20).

Throw down lust and sexual promiscuity and all that provides for them.

Envy Provides for Strife

Are their hard feelings, disputes, and strife among men? It would not be hard to imagine that in the darkness of a group of “friends” sharing alcohol, drugs, wild parties, and sexual partners that quarrels and contentions – strife – would arise.

But without all the other, certainly a supply of envy or jealousy (NASB) accomplishes strife among men. How could strife be tempered? Cut off the supply of envy.



Envy and jealousy in the heart betray a lack of gratitude for the blessings God has given His people. Greed and covetousness are growing in the heart. These attitudes color our perception of others. Our interactions only become negative with them, and we perceive them as an enemy. It is hard to love an enemy we actually envy.

Soldiers of light are peacemakers. Romans 12 teaches us actions and attitudes that cut off envy, which in turn, cut off strife.

- “He who gives, with liberality” (Rom 12:8).
- “Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality” (Rom 12:13).
- “Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse” (Rom 12:14).
- “Repay no one evil for evil” (Rom 12:17).

When Christians concern themselves with giving, sharing, and aiding others, it creates an attitude of gratitude. Thanksgiving is fostered for what we have and all the good we can do with it. Jealousy focuses on what others have and how we wish we had it. Envy judges people unworthy of having what they have. How selfish and misguided Christians can be.

But when Christians repay evil with good and return blessing for cursing, they use weapons of light.

Throw down envy and strife and all that provides for them.

These observations about cutting off provision in spiritual warfare are not to suggest one error or sin is better than another or less than another. Let us see there is a compounding relationship, and one thing easily leads to another and can sustain another. But be encouraged for the good things – the *armor of light* – compound as well. This realization can help us understand to use our tools and weapons to attack and control the enemy’s provision. Cut them off!

Cut off even the provisions for envy, lust, and drunkenness. Again, Paul does not give an exhaustive list of sin, but these pairs certainly show us how we do not want to provide for any of the lusts of the flesh.

The side that is supplied wins. You choose your side.

Put on Jesus Christ

This paragraph of scripture ends with an exhortation to put on Christ.

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom 13:14, NKJV).

As Christians put on the Lord Jesus Christ, they must act to make provisions for His side and not for the lusts of the flesh.

One puts on Christ, initially, through baptism – immersion in water (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27). In this response of faith and obedience to the gospel message, a relationship with God is changed, and one becomes a child of God and a soldier of light.

As Christians grow in faith and learn His word, they continue to add to, understand better, and expertly handle all the weapons of light. Christians put on Christ in baptism and continue to put on Christ each day as they *cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light*.

Preachers have long exhorted Christians along these same lines. In the early second century, they wrote encouraging saints to arm themselves in Christ and rally to spiritual combat. Resisting lust has always been a battle. Ignatius wrote to Polycarp on the duties of the Christian Flock.

“Please ye Him under whom ye fight, and from whom ye receive your wages. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism endure as your arms; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as a complete panoply.”²⁷

Likewise, according to the Shepherd of Hermas, Christians must fight evil desires.

“You must refrain from evil desires, that by refraining ye may live to God. But as many as are mastered by them, and do not resist them, will perish at the last, for these desires are fatal. Put you on, then, the desire of righteousness; and arming yourself with the fear of the Lord, resist them. For the fear of the Lord dwells in good desire. But if evil desire sees you armed with the fear of God, and resisting it, it will flee far from you, and it will no longer appear to you, for it fears your armor.”²⁸

²⁷ Ignatius, “Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp, VI. 2” in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson ed. *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 1* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1885, Reprint 2012), 95.

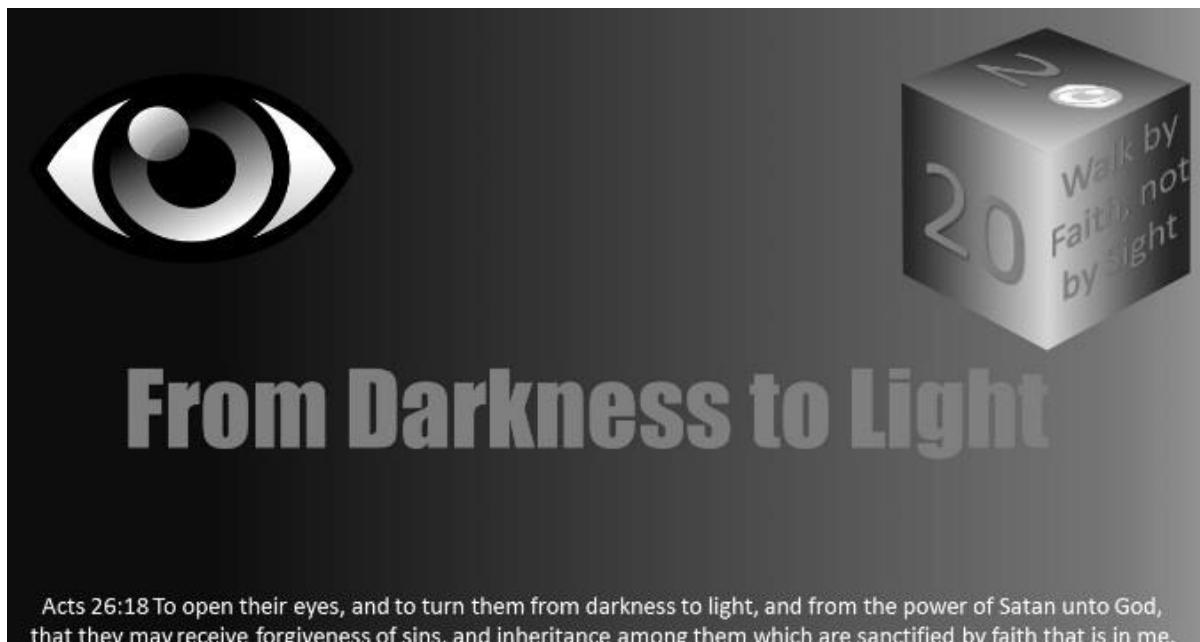
²⁸ “The Shepherd of Hermas Book II, Commandment 12, Chapter 2” in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson ed. *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 2* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1885, Reprint 2012), 28-29.

Through the ages, Christians have dressed themselves through baptism, faith, love, and patience. They have also clothed themselves with the fear of the Lord. It has not changed because scripture (such as Romans 13:11-14) has not changed.

Cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. It's your choice today.

Further Reading

Brent Moody, ““Put on the Armor of Light”: Imitating Christ” in David McClister, ed., *Light Shall Shine Out of Darkness* (Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College Press, 2015) 179-196.



Darkness Lesson 19 Questions

Devil's Dark Distortions: Casting Off the Works of Darkness and Putting on the Armor of Light

(Romans 13:11-14)

1. What did you find most useful in this lesson?

2. What can lull Christians into a spiritual lethargy that tempts them to forget the time?

3. Who can you depend on to “wake” you from spiritual slumber?

4. Compare Romans 6:1-14 to Romans 13:11-14. List and discuss the similarities and also differences between these two sections of the Roman letter?

5. List some works of darkness. How do we use the weapons of light to defeat them?

6. We’re told to make no provision for the flesh. How can we make provision for the spirit?

7. What is the best part of being nearer to salvation now, than when we first believed?
|
8. BONUS: Do a character study on king Asa (2 Chron 14-16) in light of what you have learned from Romans 13. Explore parallels between Asa’s victory over Ethiopian forces and the Christian’s armor of light. Note parallels between Asa’s failure with king Baasha and the Christian’s temptation to provide for the flesh with its lusts.

Darkness Lesson 20

Lust of the Eyes:

Covetousness: Pornography

By Stephen Rouse²⁹

Introduction

This lesson starts the last section of Darkness half of our study. It is titled “Lust of the Eyes.” I appreciate you reading this lesson. This isn’t easy to hear or to speak about, but it is desperately needed. I am passionate about this subject because this was my struggle for a large part of my walk with the Lord. By God’s grace, after struggling with this sin for 10 years, it has been over 7 years since I’ve been freed. I say that not to exalt myself but to offer hope to those who feel none. I want to try to give the lesson I wish I had heard years ago.

Pornography is covetousness. At its root, you are mentally taking what is not yours to use for your own purposes. In the Ten Commandments God said, “You shall not... covet your neighbor’s wife, ...or anything that is your neighbor’s.” The root of covetousness is: I want something that is not mine, and I will take it for myself. Maybe I didn’t act on it outwardly, but inwardly my heart has still fallen to the sin of lust and covetousness. This is why Jesus said, “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:28).

The Spiritual Poison of Pornography

If you want to overcome slavery to pornography, you must first realize the sinful abomination it is to God. It is spiritual poison that will kill your soul eternally.

Pornography is lust. Pornography is sin. Jesus said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed



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adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (Matt 5:27-30).

It's easy to try and draw artificial lines about sexual sin. "Well, as long as I don't do *this*, then I'm still ok." Jesus says clearly you are already sinning when you allow your mind to dwell on lustful things. This is the very essence of all pornography. It is sin. It will separate you from God.

It is important to note pornography *is not just a men's problem*. Women struggle as well and need support as they fight for sexual purity. I started out feeling so isolated, so helpless and alone. From my limited perspective, the church community has grown tremendously in awareness and resources for men during my lifetime. We need to make sure the same help is offered to everyone who is struggling. If you are struggling with this sin, whether a man or woman, *you are not alone!* There is help and hope for everyone willing to open up and seek it.

Even "less explicit" material is lustful. Even if it's not "hardcore." Even if they have some clothing on. Even if it's a cartoon or computer-generated animation. When you get on Facebook to scroll through pictures hoping there will be something provocative, don't kid yourself—that's lust. Even those romantic novels that don't have pictures—they can be a form of emotional pornography that not only causes you to lust after the mental images you form but entices you to lust after the relationship, the emotional intimacy.

When trying to draw lines, it may be helpful to define sexual purity this way: *sexual purity is only receiving sexual pleasure from your spouse.* Anything outside of your spouse is sin.

But pornography has more spiritual consequences beyond separation from God. (However, this is, of course, the worst consequence of all sin). David wrote in Psalm 32:3-4:

"For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer."

The guilt of sin, and especially “hidden” pornography can cripple you. If you’ve ever struggled with this, you understand. Even on a Sunday morning, you can be outwardly worshipping God, but the guilt of what you looked at last night or even that morning is eating you up inside. David understood this crippling guilt and turned to God with his sin (Psa 32:5), and God forgave him! But we must remember that pornography isn’t self-contained. It will touch every other part of your service to God and His people. Too many good servants of God have been incapacitated by this sin.

We must see the ugliness of what pornography does. It completely destroys God’s good gift of the sexual relationship. In Gen 2:24-25 we read, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” The solution to sexual immorality is not to think that sex is dirty or wrong. Sex should be celebrated within the God-created limitations. (See Song of Solomon.)

Pornography destroys every component of romantic love. I once heard it said in a sermon by Gary Henry: Romantic love can be described as having 4 components:

- 1) We begin with physical attraction, which God has built into men & women from creation.
- 2) Add to that a personal attraction—not just their appearance, but their personality, interests, etc.
- 3) Add to that the marriage covenant, which is a lifelong commitment to each other.
- 4) And this is the most important part: when both people have the Lord as their first priority, the relationship can reach its full God-given potential, for it is guided by His divine wisdom.

What has been happening in our culture for quite some time is each of these layers has been stripped away one at a time:

- 4) Far too many people are not committed to marrying a Christian, and a marriage/household that is divided spiritually will face terrible challenges.

- 3) In the last several decades, we have seen a steep downturn in the culture's value of marriage—no-fault divorce and a lack of seriousness have led to the crumbling of millions of homes.
- 2) When we remove personal attraction, just “hooking up” with a “consenting adult,” the relationship has essentially become prostitution, an empty shell of what God intended romantic love to be.
 - 1) Pornography essentially falls into this last category, and in some ways even takes away the natural physical attraction, because one is not interacting with a real person, but with pixels on a screen or a picture in a magazine.

In short, pornography takes God’s good gift of human sexuality in marriage and destroys it—an empty parody that promises fulfillment while perverting every dimension of what God intended romantic love to be.

The Physical and Mental Poison of Pornography

Even beyond spiritual carnage created by pornography, there is a host of physical and mental damage done.

Pornography is often addictive and progressive. Peter wrote about the false teachers in terms that are applicable to this sin as well: “They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! …They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved” (2 Pet 2:14, 19).

Pornography, like all sin, but especially so, is not stagnant—it is addictive. Even the world is realizing this through movements like “Fight the New Drug,” a non-religious website devoted to raising awareness about the addictive and destructive nature of pornography. When you start looking at pornography, you need more and more to satisfy your lust. It will lead from “normal” types of fantasies to terrible things you never dreamed you’d be looking at. It will destroy your mind.

Pornography often doesn’t stop with looking at pictures but seeking ways of acting out what has been seen. Consider David in 2 Sam 11:2, “...he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.” David’s problem at first was essentially a pornography problem: he saw a woman and looked. But the desire didn’t stop there. David never dreamed where giving into lust would lead

him, and we are foolish to think we are exempt. I've heard it put this way before: What struggle did David, Solomon, and Samson have in common? Women. Unless you are stronger than Samson, wiser than Solomon, and more godly than David, you aren't exempt either.

The Lie of Pornography

But perhaps the most twisted and long-lasting damages done by pornography is the distortion of our thinking: *Pornography is a lie*. It is a lie about men and women. You may not realize it, but when you watch pornography, you are learning. You are submitting yourself to a more-and-more twisted sex education class. Imagine a health class being taught by a cigarette salesman. He wouldn't teach what was true, but whatever would persuade you to buy his product more. Pornography makers are no different. Pornography teaches lies about how men's and women's bodies are supposed to look and react, creating discontentment with real people. It teaches lies about how men and women should treat each other, often endorsing dangerous and violent behavior, and making it seem normal or fulfilling.

Pornography is a lie about the nature of the sexual relationship. Many of the people seen in pornography are *literally actors*—they are making up, and often forced to make up their reactions. Pornography makes you think these actors are finding fulfillment when even for them, it's not just empty but degrading, painful, and even in some cases deadly. These lies don't just affect the person viewing pornography. Many sexual perversions come from young people trying to recreate what they've seen in pornography, many times against the will of their partner.

Pornography is a lie about you. Pornography tells you lies about yourself, what you deserve, and what you think you should be receiving in a relationship with another person. *Pornography is completely and utterly self-centered*. You are the center of the universe and should be given whatever you want, whenever you want it. It's not surprising many people start to believe and act on these lies.

Pornography is a lie about consequences. Pornography makers intentionally cut out the horrific consequences of what is happening on screen. It's like cigarette companies not featuring all the lung cancer, disease, violence, and poverty that can come with smoking. Pornography lies to you and tells you that you can get away just fine—no harm, no foul. This could not be farther from



the truth. Pornography has terrible and lasting consequences for the people that make it and the people that view it.

How Do I Get Out?

Thank God the lesson doesn't have to end here! There are a host of practical strategies to overcoming pornography, more than we have time to discuss in this lesson, but I want to share three of the most important.

1) Cut Off Sources

Jesus gave us the most fundamental strategy. This sounds extreme, but we must first open our hearts to Jesus and listen if we truly want to be free. Let the words of the Lord sink down into your heart:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” (Matt 5:27-30).

Jesus is pleading with us here. He knows what the punishment will be if we are not willing to do whatever it takes to be pure. No, Jesus is not talking about literally plucking out an eye (you can sin just as well with your left eye) or literally cutting off a hand (left hands can sin, too). But He is talking about literally getting rid of anything that causes you to sin, even if it's a very useful thing otherwise!

It is so easy to make excuses. Oh, but I need my computer/smartphone for school/work... What will I do without email/social media...? But, I pay my bills online... If you cannot handle an internet connection in your house, *there are other options!* Go to the local library or other public places that offer internet in an environment where anyone can see what you're doing. You do not need a smartphone to go to heaven! You do need to be holy.

I know this sounds extreme, but this is what our King Jesus Christ said. You must be willing to follow His orders if you want Him as your Savior and Lord. Yes, your “right hand” and “right eye” may be useful for lots of good things, but Jesus said *if it causes you to sin, cut it off!”* Not “keep it around a little bit.”

You must think of the consequences. You will not have been in hell for one instant before you think, “*I would give anything to go back! It is not worth it!*” And you will not have been in heaven for an instant before realizing *it was so much more than worth it! I would have given up even more to come here!*”

Practically speaking, here’s what you need to do:

- 1) Make a list of all the access you have to pornographic material: computers, tablets, cell phones, friends’ devices, magazines, etc. Unfortunately, you may have to get creative. As with many addictive sins, once your main source is gone, you may try extreme things to get access to what you crave.
- 2) Once you have a list, cut off your ability to sin with each one. Have someone else set up a password so you can only use it when supervised. Set up filters like “Covenant Eyes” that will help prevent accidentally visiting sinful sites. Get accountability software like “Ever Accountable” that will send a report of all your internet activity to a trusted friend. We know God is always watching, but when you know a fellow Christian will see where you went, it is a powerful deterrent.
- 3) If you can’t handle it, cut it off. Get rid of it, sell it, destroy it. Do what you need to do. “Strive for... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

2) Get Accountable

Wise people open up about their sin. This is biblical wisdom: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (James 5:16). “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Prov 28:13). Note carefully the proverb says it’s not just about telling someone, but about turning away—repenting. This is the strategy most helpful for me in my battle with pornography.

Practically, here’s what you need to do:

- 1) Find a strong Christian who is doing well in this area. There is some value in talking to someone who is also struggling, but there’s only so much help a blind man can give a blind man. Jesus said they would both fall in a pit (Luke 6:39). Only reach out to someone who is the same

gender as you. Your significant other should not be your accountability partner. Coed accountability invites a host of other temptations.

- 2) Commit to reaching out early and consistently. This is huge. Most accountability happens by confession after this sin. Truly effective accountability happens *before you sin*, while you're still being tempted! This means praying to God and texting or calling a friend at first sign of temptation—*the moment you start to think about sinning*. Don't wait and let the temptation get stronger. Shine a light on it—Satan will flee. Reaching out doesn't mean the temptation will go away, but it will give you strength to fight. In your message or call, state the nature of the temptation and “battle plan.” For example: “Tempted to look at a classmate. Praying and focusing on homework.” or “Family left and I’m at home with the computer. Praying and taking a walk.” Basically: Here’s what I’m being tempted to do—get on the computer, fantasize mentally, contact old girlfriend, etc. Here’s what I’m going to do instead—take a walk, pray, read my Bible, etc. I suspect if Joseph could have texted, he would have said something like, “Potiphar’s wife again... Running.”
- 3) Identify “triggers” and vulnerable situations. Ask yourself: Am I most tempted in the evening? In the morning? When I’m at work? When I’m at home? In the shower? Is stress a trigger for me? Certain situations or certain people? If it is possible to cut off your triggers or avoid those situations entirely, *do it*. If not, it is wise to seek extra accountability in preparation for those times. Let your accountability partner know you’re entering a time or situation that’s been a problem in the past. Tell them your plan.
- 4) The person struggling should initiate the communication. At the beginning it can be helpful for the person helping to check up and ask “how are you doing?” but it needs to turn into the person struggling saying “here’s how I’m doing.” This is far more effective and places the responsibility on the person needing to change.

These are just a few possible strategies. Figure out what is helpful to you. And if what you’re doing isn’t working, change! We are not meant to fight sin alone. If cutting off the sources or accountability continues to be ineffective, keep working at it! Don’t give up. You may need a more radical measure, or you may

need different measures. This is a war—Satan can change his tactics, and we need to adjust to find what is effective against his schemes.

3) Renew Your Mind

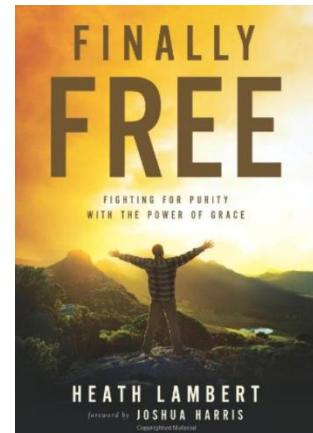
After you have taken the measures mentioned above, the ultimate goal is to reclaim your mind that has been twisted and distorted by sinful thinking. Consider the following strategies as you fight to renew your mind.

From Delighting in Sin to Hating Sin

The long-term goal with fighting this sin (or any sin) is to not just cut off access and get accountable, but to ultimately *not want the sin anymore*. God wants to transform us by the renewing of our mind until we hate sin and love good like He does. We need to learn to say, like David,

*“I will walk with integrity of heart within my house;
I will not set before my eyes anything that is
worthless.*

*I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.
A perverse heart shall be far from me; will know nothing of evil”
(Psa 101:2-4).*

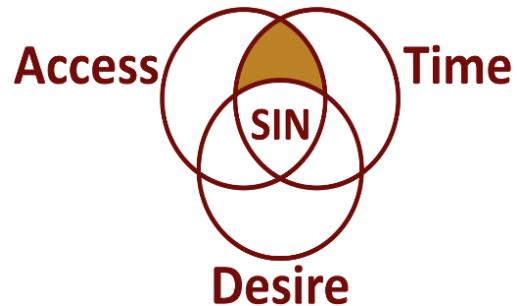


The following illustration comes from a book I want to recommend: *Finally Free*, by Heath Lambert (available on Amazon and other booksellers). This is an excellent resource on overcoming pornography. If you or a friend are struggling and you don't know where to begin, this is a good place to start. This book is pure, biblically focused (though I do not agree with all of the author's theology outside the book), very practical, and easy to read. Not all books on pornography are pure, and I have regretted reading other books in the past due to their graphic descriptions (including *Every Young Man's Battle*). I highly recommend this resource.

The illustration is this: Three things must come together for you to sin.

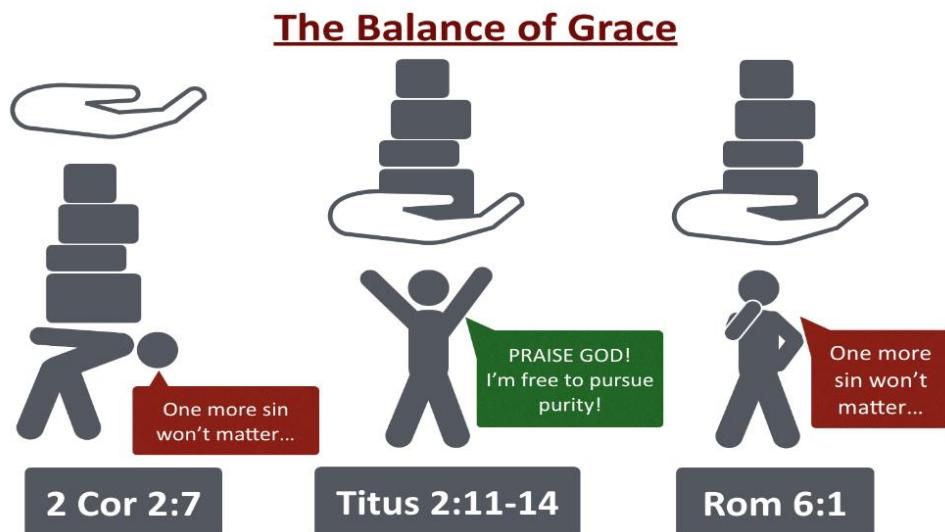
- 1) You must have access to the sinful material.
- 2) You must have time in which to sin.
- 3) You must have the desire to sin.

Unless all three of these things come together, you cannot commit the sin. The first two strategies in this lesson deal with cutting off access and time to sin. But the ultimate goal is represented by the shaded area—to change your heart until even if you were in a room full of pornography, you wouldn't want to look anymore. You start off with radical measures in #1 and #2, so you can ultimately work on #3.



Understand God's Grace

Another lesson we must learn is to understand God's grace. Consider this chart:



Like the guy on the left, there are times when we feel so burdened by the guilt of our sins that we begin to despair. We might repent and confess, but if we don't trust that God has actually forgiven our sin, we can have a mindset that we're still somehow guilty. We feel dirty. We can start thinking, "Well, I'm already

sinful, so one more sin won't matter..." This is like the man in 2 Cor 2:7 who Paul warned might be "overwhelmed by excessive sorrow."

On the other extreme, like the guy on the right, we can start to presume on the grace of God. We can start to think, "God's will just forgive my sin when I pray, so one more sin won't matter... If God is paying the bill, I can just rack up the debt." This is the twisted mindset Paul corrected in Romans 6:1-2 "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"

Both extremes lead to the same problem—continuing in sin. We find the correct understanding of God's grace in Titus 2:11-12, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age..." Freeing us from guilt, but not being a license to sin, God's grace instead teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly passions. Out of gratitude for God's forgiveness, we are motivated to pursue a life of purity.

Combat Lies with Truth

Another helpful strategy when combatting temptation is to do what Jesus did when He was tempted in the wilderness—turn to scripture. The psalmist said, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psa 119:11). Learn to combat specific lies with answers from God's word. Here are a few examples:

LIE: A little fantasizing won't hurt.

TRUTH: **Job 31:1-4** - "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? ...Does not he see my ways and number my steps?

LIE: I can keep this hidden... no one has to know...

TRUTH: **Ecclesiastes 12:14** - "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."

LIE: Porn will satisfy me.

TRUTH: **Jeremiah 2:13** - "...for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

LIE: I don't have to take radical action against this sin.

TRUTH: **Matthew 5:29** - "...If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and

throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.”

LIE: I can control this sin. I won’t allow it to get worse.

TRUTH: **2 Peter 2:18-19** - “...they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.”

LIE: This sin won’t have serious consequences for me.

TRUTH: **Galatians 6:7-8** - “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

Try identifying the lies that are most often in your head when you’re being tempted, and memorize scriptures that you can turn to in those moments.

Why Am I Turning to Sin?

In Jeremiah 2:13 God says: “for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” The image in Jeremiah shows Israel was trying to make broken cisterns because they were really thirsting after God’s living water—but what they were doing could never satisfy them. Pornography promises satisfaction, but it is like drinking salt water—it only makes you want more.

When seeking long-term healing from pornography, one vital question you need to ask yourself: *Why am I turning to pornography to fill me up?* It may be surprising for you to hear that pornography is often not the deepest problem but is a symptom of a deeper one. Many people turn to pornography like they would turn to drugs or alcohol—to numb a deeply felt pain in their life. Until this deeper pain is identified and dealt with, pornography (or whatever sinful outlet is pursued) will continue to be a recurring temptation. Do you turn to pornography simply for pleasure, or does it stem from loneliness? From pride? Is it a form of stress relief? Am I trying to “medicate” some other pain in my life or in my past? Until you

figure out what you’re trying to “medicate” and take that to God, it can become a vicious cycle of treating the symptom, not the disease.

Flee and Fill

Another important reminder we need when feeling sin is that it’s more than just saying “No;” it’s saying “Yes!” to something much better. Don’t just get bad things out of your life—fill it with pursuing God. Paul wrote to Timothy “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22). Don’t focus so much on the first four words that you forget the rest of the verse! Yes, get the sin out of your life, but then pursue good things. Fill your time with serving, study, and prayer.

Proverbs 5 contains the same lesson: verses 1-14 are dedicated to fleeing the forbidden woman, but then verses 15-23 are dedicated to delighting in the wife of your youth. Are you married? Nurture your relationship with your wife or husband! Are you single? Rejoice in the Lord and the undivided attention you can give to His service (1 Cor 7:32-35)!

Seek Pleasure in God

Pornography is covetousness, lust, and spiritual poison. Sexual purity is only receiving sexual pleasure from your spouse. The biggest consequence of pornography is separation from God. It completely destroys the good gift of the sexual relationship as well as romantic love. Pornography also yields physical and mental poison. Pornography lies about men and women, the nature of the sexual relationship, and about a self-centered you.

Getting out of pornography involves cutting off its sources, becoming accountable, and renewing your mind. This requires extensive practical efforts and planning. The ultimate goal is to remove not only the access and time for pornography but the desire for the sin. One must start by understanding God’s grace and combat the lies of pornography with scripture to correct attitudes. Ultimately, one must understand why they sought pornography to start. Then, one can flee from the sin and fill their lives with pursuing and pleasing God.

Finally, to defeat pornography, we need to seek a superior satisfaction—the Lord Himself. John put it this way in 1 John 3:2-3: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” Can you imagine what it

will be like to “see him as he is”? That is motivating! As we often sing, “Just one glimpse of Him in glory will the toils of life repay” (Eliza Hewitt, *When We All Get to Heaven*). It is so much more than worth it to do whatever it takes to see God!

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8).



Darkness Lesson 20 Questions

Lust of the Eyes: Covetousness: Pornography

1. List at least 3 scriptures that address sexual purity.

2. What are some of the consequences of the sin of lust, particularly pornography?

3. What lies do we sometimes tell ourselves to rationalize our sin?

4. List at least 3 scriptures that help us to fight the temptation of lust.

5. What practical strategies can we use to combat the sin of lust?

6. Why might someone turn to pornography (or drugs/alcohol)? What void in their life might they be trying to fill?

Darkness Lesson 21

Lust of the Eyes:

Seeing with My Father's Eyes, Requires My Father's Heart

by Jason Hardin

So why? Why do we sin? Having counted the cost, why would we choose to do what we know to be wrong? Why would we be willing to gamble so much for so little? Simply put, we make horrible trades.

When Potiphar's wife tempted Joseph, a paraphrase of his response in Genesis 39:8-9 is:

"I've got almost everything; why would I trade all of that for the one thing I don't have? Why would I trade this big thing for that small thing?"

If that sounds familiar, it should. Adam and Eve faced the same type of temptation in the Garden of Eden. They had everything. They had it all. Adam was the Joseph of God's house. He was in charge of naming all the animals (Gen 2:19)—an amazing honor. Do you know how badly scientists desire to discover a new species and name it after themselves? Naming something is a high honor, and that was Adam's responsibility. The garden was theirs to live in and love.

But then Satan came into the picture, and he did something to Adam and Eve that he has done for thousands of years. He offered Eve a single piece of fruit when God had already given them an orchard. Adam and Eve had the whole garden and traded it for a single piece of fruit. Joseph had the entire household of Potiphar and was offered Potiphar's wife. And we, created in the image of God—invited to be representatives of His intentions for His glory on the earth—get tempted to trade it all for small and eternally insignificant things every day. It's an "orchard-for-a-piece-of-fruit kind of trade."

- Trading the beauty of God's intended gift of sex for pornography is an orchard-for-a-piece-of-fruit kind of trade.
- Trading the peace of honesty for the quick fix of a lie is an orchard-for-a-piece-of-fruit kind of trade.
- Trading the friendship of a neighbor for the short term hit of gossiping is an orchard-for-a-piece-of-fruit kind of trade.

Each day, we are faced with dozens of orchard-for-a-piece-of-fruit kinds of trades. We have something so big and true and wonderful in us, and we give it away for a handful of temporary trinkets. In those moments, we prefer other things, other people, and other pleasures more than we prefer God.

That is precisely why something as addictive as pornography is so difficult to defeat. We can readily identify the shortcomings; we can easily pinpoint the bad habits; we can drill encouraging slogans into our heads; we can establish a variety of accountability safeguards ... and continue to be sifted as wheat! How? Why? We have failed to accurately diagnose the root of the problem.

- Pornography is a problem, but it is not THE problem. Pornography is a sinful symptom of the problem.
- Lying and gossip are problems, but they are not THE problem. Lying and gossip are ugly manifestations of the problem.
- The adulterous affair is certainly a problem, but it is not THE problem. The adulterous affair is a wicked reflection of the problem.

THE problem is treasuring other things, other people, and other pleasures more than we treasure God.

“Against You, You Only, Have I Sinned...”

Take a moment to carefully read and truly meditate upon Psalm 51. The subtitle reads, “To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words



and blameless in your judgment.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
 and in sin did my mother conceive me.
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
 and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
 wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
 let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
 and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
 and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
 and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
 and uphold me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
 and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
 O God of my salvation,
 and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
 and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
 you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
 a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;



build up the walls of Jerusalem;
then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Isn't it interesting what is not in Psalm 51? David had committed adultery, lied, manipulated, and murdered. And yet, in his classic psalm of confession, not one of those sins is specifically identified. Neither Bathsheba nor Uriah is named. Why is that? Because David's transgressions were serious symptoms of the greatest ailment of all—not treasuring God above every other person, pleasure, and thing. Look at these key sections again:

I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.



Like Paul after him, David's sin did not stem from ignorance. David's shortcoming was not the result of a long-held, deep-seated disagreement with the laws of God. He was a man after God's own heart! But on that night, David wanted illicit sexual gratification more than he wanted God. In the days that followed, David guarded his sinful secret more than he guarded his covenant with God. When the situation grew desperate, David feared the awful truth being revealed more than he feared God. When backed into a corner, David demonstrated more of a willingness to shed innocent blood than to honestly and penitently cast himself before the feet of the God who already knew what David had done. David was exactly right when he confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam 12:13).

The Personal Side of Temptation

The same is true for us.

“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor 6:13).

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:14).

“God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you” (1 Thes 4:7-8).

Every day we are faced with decisions, opportunities, tests, and trials. We know what God has said, but will we supplement our knowledge with integrity? We know what God expects, but will we fortify Biblical truth with personal character? We hear preaching about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment on Sundays, but will we reinforce the facts with faith on Mondays?

- Are the blessings that flow from your connection with God more gratifying than the sinful images that can flow through your connection to the Internet? That is the question! If not, you can so easily find yourself enslaved to pornography.
- Late at night, when everyone else is in bed, is the urge to pray stronger than the tugs of sin on the garment of your flesh? If not, sin can so easily seize an opportunity to deceive you.
- “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8). Does that blessed assurance of seeing God mean more to you in the moment than self-centered, self-gratifying immorality? If not, you will continue to do the very thing you hate (Rom 7:15).

Until he treasures God as more precious than pornography, he will continue to be in bondage to pornography. Until she cherishes God as more satisfying than the lying and the gossip, she will continue to be enslaved to sins of the tongue. Until the pain of being separated from God is greater than the pain of repentance, he will not give up the adultery.

God’s Personal Invitation and Challenge

And so God invites you to personally accept the challenge of Psalm 34. Make these words your own. Turn the verbs like *bless, magnify, exalt, sought, cried, fear, taste, and see* into the verbs that will control your own conduct.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
 his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
 let the humble hear and be glad.

Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
 and let us exalt his name together!

I sought the LORD, and he answered me
 and delivered me from all my fears.

Those who look to him are radiant,
 and their faces shall never be ashamed.

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
 and saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the LORD encamps
 around those who fear him, and delivers them.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
 Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
 for those who fear him have no lack!

The young lions suffer want and hunger;
 but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Come, O children, listen to me;
 I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

What man is there who desires life
 and loves many days, that he may see good?

Keep your tongue from evil
 and your lips from speaking deceit.

Turn away from evil and do good;
 seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous

and his ears toward their cry.
The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.
Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.
Affliction will slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

In the moment of temptation, which taste buds will you gratify? The seductively-engraved invitation of illicit indulgence entices you to taste and see. But remember,

The lips of a forbidden woman drip honey,
and her speech is smoother than oil,
but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a two-edged sword. (Prov 5:3-4)

How desperately we must tell ourselves in the moment of trial, “You are being told a *lie*! There is a sweeter alternative. There is a superior satisfaction!”

Oh taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!



The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

God invites us to delight in him. Savor him. Crave more than bits of intellectual knowledge about Him. Fearfully avoid the temptation to confine Him to the margins of your life. Refuse to act as though you can use Him in whatever ways you choose and whenever you find it convenient. Taste and see that the LORD is good!

How refreshing and liberating are the words of David in Psalm 63:1-3:

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.

An intimate relationship with God is better than the highest illicit high. Purposeful communion with him is more enjoyable than any earthly gratification. A consistent walk with him is more thrilling than any fleeting deviance. His refining fellowship is more exhilarating than anything this world will ever offer. Forsake the mirages and flee to him! Respond to his compassionate call in Psalm 81:13-16:

“Oh, that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!
I would soon subdue their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes.
Those who hate the LORD would cringe toward him,
and their fate would last forever.
But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat,
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

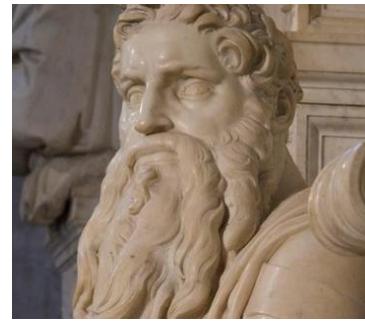
Quit shoveling the feces of sin into your mind and joyfully fill your soul with the bread of heaven (John 6:33-51). Walk away from the toilet water of iniquity and drink deeply from the living water that has the power to satisfy your greatest thirst (John 4:10; 7:37-38).

Sin will continue to promise gratification, but it is lying to you. It is lying to me. Oh, how it lies to us! Confront your temptations and conquer them with the superior satisfaction which flows only from a deep, rich, intimate connection with God. Make your prayer the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90:12-14:

So teach us to number our days
that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Return, O Lord! How long?
Have pity on your servants!

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.



Temptations will come, but let them come. God is more powerful. God is more satisfying.

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (1 Cor 10:13)

Follow in the footsteps of Joseph and refuse the horrible trades. Do whatever you must every day to develop eyes that recognize how small and shriveled and worm-infested the fruits of temptation are. Remind yourself every day how bright and expansive the orchard of God is. There are acres of fruit waiting for us. Miles of rows of opportunities to be at peace and serve and surrender and conform to a God who gives and gives and gives.

Darkness Lesson 21 Questions

Lust of the Eyes:

Seeing with My Father's Eyes, Requires My Father's Heart

1. What are some other orchard-for-a-piece-of-fruit kinds of trades not mentioned in the lesson?

2. How have you personally shown in the past that you prefer other things, other people, and other pleasures more than you prefer God?

3. Why is making David's words in Psalm 51:4 so pivotal to being forgiven of your sins?

4. Until a person treasures God as more precious than pornography, he or she will continue to be in bondage to pornography. Why?

5. Until a person treasures God as more precious than lying and gossip, he or she will continue to be in bondage to lying and gossip. Why?

6. Until the man and woman caught in the snare of adultery treasure God as more precious than the adulterous relationship, they will continue to be ensnared in adultery. Why?

7. Regardless of the sin, until the pain of being separated from God is greater than the pain of repentance, we will not give up our sin. Why?

8. Practically speaking, what does it mean to "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psa 34:8)?

Darkness Lesson 22

Lust of the Eyes:

Sexuality and Sanctification

by Edwin Crozier

The Law on Sexuality and Sanctification

When God separated Israel from the rest of the world and established His covenant with them, He started with ten commandments. He spoke them from the mountaintop amid thunder, lightning, and smoke. The Israelites cried out that God would never speak to them like that again.

Two of those commands connected specifically with sexuality and sanctification. The seventh command: “You shall not commit adultery.”³⁰ And the tenth command: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.”

Have you ever asked why God chose those ten? Are these the ten most important of the 600+ laws in the Old Testament? Were these the laws that really distinguished Israel from the world? Why wasn’t circumcision on this list? Why weren’t the dietary laws on this list?

Preceding this covenant, God had demonstrated His power over the gods of the Egyptians with ten powerful and mighty plagues, bringing Israel out of bondage so they could be in covenant relationship with Him. Now, in ten powerful and profound directives, He summarizes and explains what it means to be in a covenant relationship with Him.

Commandment #1: The covenant relationship with God is exclusive. God will not share His place in our lives with anyone or anything else. This cuts to the heart of what makes every sin actually sin. All sin is wanting something more than we want God.

Commandment #2: God defines the relationship. We are not entitled to design and define God from the art of our imagination. (See Acts 17:29.)

Commandment #3: While this command includes a prohibition of using God’s name as an exclamation, Leviticus 19:12 demonstrates the main concern was vainly using the name of God in an oath in the context of stealing from and lying to your neighbor. That is, the oath taker was

³⁰ Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

trying to seize something from his neighbor he could not obtain through honest means. The heart of this command: God is the ultimate goal and not the tool we use to get what we really want.

Commandment #4: The Sabbath, whether the day or the year, explains man needs God. God does not need man. Man must rely on Him. But, praise the Lord, He is looking out for our benefit and blessing.

Commandment #5: This relationship with God was not for one generation only. A generational legacy of faithfulness to God is established by honoring those He has placed in our lives to teach us about Him.

Commandments #6, 7, 8, 9: Don't take your neighbor's life, wife, property, or reputation. While this seems to move in a new direction, talking not about our relationship with God, but mostly about our relationship with one another, that is not the case. The rest of the commandments have pushed us to realize God, as He is in reality, as He defines the relationship, is enough. Having Him and having what He has given us is enough. As David wrote, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psa 23:1). The person who murders commits adultery, steals, or bears false witness against his neighbor, however, is saying God is not enough. What God has given is not enough. "The LORD is my shepherd; but I want more. Therefore, I will take it from others by sinful force."

Commandment #10: This commandment leads us right back to commandment #1. We are not in good relationship with God by merely avoiding some external activities. Rather, we are to overcome the desire that leads to these activities. God is the Lord. He is more than enough. Sin is wanting anything more than or in place of God.

With the above summation in mind, we see the heart of sexuality and sanctification. As Proverbs 18:22 declares, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD." The one who is faithful to his wife is declaring God's gifts are good. God's gifts are enough. The sexually immoral are declaring God's gift is not enough, God's timing is not enough, and therefore, God is not enough. The sexually immoral are declaring they want something



more than they want God. They are declaring they do not trust God, His timing, His blessings. They are actually abandoning their faith in God as the greatest good and the greatest blessing.

Sexual immorality is not wrong because God is trying to limit our fun. It is not wrong because God arbitrarily decided to establish a rule to see how we would measure up. It is not wrong because God wanted an excuse to condemn us. It is wrong because sexual immorality says God is not enough.

The Meaning of Marriage

Regrettably, I have for too long read Genesis 2:18 through the lens of the Romanticism that has dominated the last 300 years. I have too often read this verse based on Wordsworth and Tennyson, Shelly and Austen instead of Jesus and Paul, or even Moses and his actual context. Moses did not cite God as declaring, “It is not good that the man should be lonely, I’ll give him a companion.” But rather, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” The aloneness is in the context of the mission God had given Adam. “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). Notice how it was worded in the previous creation account: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion...” (Gen 1:28).

Have you ever noticed Eden is not actually the garden? Rather, God planted a garden in Eden, in the east of Eden to be precise (Gen 2:8). Man’s mission was to work and keep the garden, to be fruitful and fill the earth, to subdue the earth. That is, Adam, having been created in the image of God (Gen 2:27), was to work and keep the garden in such a way that the garden of God filled the earth, and it was in turn to be filled with image bearers of God as Adam fruitfully multiplied.

In context of this mission, God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” God didn’t give woman to man to simply provide a companion or playmate. He provided woman or wife to be a helper to accomplish this mission. This word, “helper,” is used 19 other times in the Old Testament. All but three of those times it refers to God Himself (e.g., Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29; Psalm



33:20). In other words, woman is the physical embodiment of God’s help to man to accomplish his mission of subduing the earth, making all of it the garden, and filling it with God’s image-bearers.

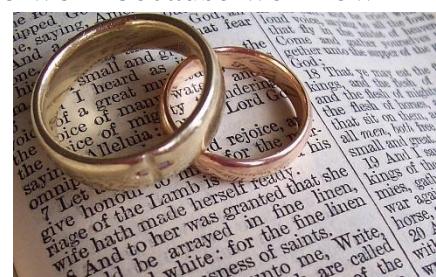
The garden was the very first sanctuary of God. It was the first meeting place between God and man. Though not made of stone and mortar, it was the first temple of God. It was built around and guarded the way to the tree of life. Man's job was to spread that sanctuary throughout the entire world. He needed God's help through woman to accomplish it.

Of course, man and woman violated their mission. Rather than guarding the way to the tree of life and filling the earth with the garden, the tree and the garden were taken from the earth and the ground was cursed. However, through Jesus Christ, God had a plan to redeem man and woman and to rebuild His sanctuary. God has not replanted a garden. However, He has replanted His kingdom, His church, His temple, and His sanctuary. We, God's church, are the stones that make up that temple; we are that sanctuary (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-5).

This brings us to Ephesians 5:22-33. Wives are to submit to and respect their husbands as the church does Christ. However, more fundamentally and more shocking in Paul's day, husbands are to love their wives as Christ does the church, sacrificing self for her. This passage translates and transports for us God's meaning and purpose for marriage from the garden to the gospel.

The original purpose of marriage was to spread the garden sanctuary of God throughout the world, filling it with God's image-bearers. The transcending meaning of marriage is to spread the gospel sanctuary of God throughout the world, filling it with God's image-bearers. The fundamental way marriage does this is by visibly representing Christ and the church to the world. Marriage is intended to be a picture of the gospel, drawing folks into the sanctuary of God. Paul is not saying we know how marriage is supposed to work because we know the gospel. He is saying people should see how the gospel works by seeing how marriage works.

Marriage is intended to pave the way to the tree of life. That is, it is to pave the way to the cross of Jesus Christ—the tree which on the surface seems to be a tree of death, but it is actually the source of all life in God's kingdom.



Understand, this is why God has laws surrounding marriage and sexuality. Marriage is to bear the image of Jesus and His bride, the church. The meaning of marriage is the gospel itself, and all forms of sexual immorality distort and pervert the picture of the gospel.

This is why living together outside of marriage is a sin, premarital sex is wrong, and multiple sexual partners(even serial monogamy) is unlawful—not because God is trying to limit our fun or sexually stunt us, but because these sins distort the picture of Christ’s covenant relationship with His church. These pictures set an expectation of having the blessings of the covenant without surrendering to the covenant. Further, they deny the exclusivity of Christ’s covenant with His church as if He showers His salvation and covenant on any and everyone instead of just upon His church.

This is why divorce, in general, is sinful – not because God wants us to be miserable in unhappy marriages, but because it distorts the picture of Christ’s commitment to His church and the church’s surrender to its Savior and King. Divorce paints a picture that Christ loves His church so little that her shortcomings, struggles, weaknesses, and sins would cause Him to abandon her. And, it depicts Christ’s love for the church is so weak that the church does not appreciate it, long to surrender to it, and remain under His covering.

This is why the only lawful divorce is for the cause of sexual immorality—not because a cheating spouse causes so much more pain than any other sin in marriage, but because sexual immorality has long represented worshiping idols and was the only reason God ever put His people away. (Photo: Ashteroth idol).



This is why same-gender sexual relations and marriages are wrong – not because God is trying to keep people from loving relationships, but because they distort the picture of Christ’s relationship with His bride the church. Christ did not sacrifice Himself for one like Himself. Nor did Christ pursue personal satisfaction in a relationship because it was merely what attracted Him. Further, the church cannot be saved by one who is merely like her, but can only be saved by Jesus, the Christ: one who is different from her.

Hebrews 13:4 says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” God is not trying to limit our fun. He is not establishing arbitrary rules to see if we’ll measure up or because He is trying to establish such high standards that we are certain to fall. God established the commands because marriage and the beauty of sexuality within marriage represent Christ and His church. Sexual immorality distorts it, perverts it, and destroys it.

If you think making this parallel of marriage and sexuality within it to the church's relationship with Jesus is tawdry or base, consider God's use of this very imagery in Psalm 45. It is a psalm of love between God's King and the King's bride. It is not a song memorializing a wedding between David or Solomon and any of their wives. It is a song foretelling of Christ and His bride. Every marriage is supposed to tell that story. Thus, sexuality is beautiful and holy in marriage, and it is destructive and sinful anywhere else.

Sexuality and Sanctification

With this understanding of marriage in mind, we come to 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Further, we can now understand it in the context of the biblical picture of sexuality and sanctification.

Sexual immorality was a common practice among the pagans and even part of their worship. This may be part of the reason sexual immorality and prostitution were common metaphors for idolatry in the Old Testament (e.g., Ezek 23) and a metaphor for friendship with the world in James 4:4. Paul, however, wants to make it clear they are not at all part of the Christian worship or life. No disciple had the right to his brother's wife (or, for that matter, a right to her sister's husband). There are no cult prostitutes in Christianity. There is no spouse swapping among the brethren.

Relationships within Christ's church run deep. Spiritual intimacy is strong among a close-knit group of people set upon by the world. Those who mutually support each other in such unique living as gospel living draw close to each other. Spiritual intimacy is just a hop, skip, and a jump away from romantic intimacy. Disciples are to guard against those connections. Paul explains such relationships are sinful. God will avenge such a wrong done to one another.

While Paul's ultimate application in this passage is about potential sexual immorality between brethren, he bases his point on a more fundamental and broadly sweeping principle. Unlike in paganism, God has not called us to self-expression, sensuality, and immorality. God's will for us is sanctification and holiness. God's will for us is to be separate from the world and from worldly activities and relationships. God's will for us is to become like Him. And He, above all, is faithful. He, above all, is love. He, above all, is holy. Christians are not to pursue sexual immorality with anyone, let alone with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The forgiveness that is given in Christ is not a cloak for the passions of the flesh. We do not enter as Christ's bride and then act as if immorality will be winked at. We cannot say, "Well, just this once won't hurt." As Galatians 5:13 says, we are called to freedom, but we are not free to pursue the works of the flesh. Rather, we are to lovingly serve one another. Sexual immorality is the exact opposite. Seeking the benefits and blessings of the marriage covenant without engaging in the commitment of that covenant can never be seen as real love. It is selfishness. Violating the commitment of your covenant to your spouse can never be seen as love toward your spouse or the person you are violating the covenant with. It is self-seeking.

Sexual immorality is stealing for ourselves what does not belong to us. By that very definition, it is not love. It is not the fruit of the Spirit, but a passion and work of the flesh. Thus, Paul explains in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, not only is the actual acting out of sexual immorality sinful, but living in the passion of lust is living like the world, not like Christ. When Christians have eyes and hearts full of adultery (2 Pet 2:14; Matt 5:28), they are not becoming like Jesus, they are going back to their worldly sinfulness. The clichéd justification, "Just because I'm on a diet doesn't mean I can't look at the menu," is bogus. We are to look to Jesus and Jesus alone. The idea that we want to get away with as much as we can, but still go to heaven is a sham. Heaven is the presence of Jesus, and when we allow or pursue sexual immorality, we are running from Jesus.



In Galatians 4:19, Paul explained he was in the anguish of childbirth until Christ was formed in the Galatians. From his letter to the Thessalonians we learn, sexual immorality, sensuality, lustful passion is the exact opposite of Christ being formed in us. It is Christ being kicked out of us.

As 1 Peter 1:14-16 says, we must not revert to the passions of our former ignorance. Our God is not a philandering, sexually immoral deity like so many of the Roman and Greek gods. Rather, we have been called by a holy God. Therefore, we are to be holy as He is.

At the end of Paul's instruction in 1 Thessalonians 4:8, he drives his point home. "Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you" (1 Thes 4:8). In other words, Paul says, "If you disagree with this, you aren't disagreeing with me. You are disagreeing with God. If you argue with this, you are not arguing with me. You are arguing with God. If you

rebel against this, you are not rebelling against me. You are rebelling against God.” And many today want to disregard this. However, Christians must not.

Do Not Be Deceived

The world tells us we are Victorian and prudish for abstaining from sexual immorality. They claim we are sexually stunted. They maintain we are denying our evolutionary journey and then conclude we are missing out. They also say we might be making a mistake if we don’t live together before marriage and declare we should get out of marriages because God wants us to be happy. They argue same-gender sexual relationships are another expression of true love, and, after all, God is love.

We must, however, remember Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 5:1-14. Especially in vs. 6 he writes, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” Because of what things? Because of sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, and covetousness. Not only that, but also because of filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking.

I would like to give illustrations of inappropriate joking, but doing so would cross the lines of propriety. However, you know the kind of joking. The world says such joking is not harmful. I know I have attempted to blur the line on this one, wanting to take as much part in the fun the world offers without actually crossing the line. But Paul says the line is closer than we think. Gutter talk, locker room conversation, crude and sexual jesting is not to be known among us. Certainly, sexually playful conversation between spouses is allowed and good for marriage. The marriage bed and expressions of it are honorable. But dirty and filthy joking is not to be known among us.

Homosexuality

Further, we must not become partners with the world in immorality. In today’s American culture, we must mention a very specific sin that the world wants Christ’s church as a partner: the sin of homosexuality. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul once again says, “Do not be deceived.”



He continues to explain that those who practice homosexuality will not inherit the kingdom. In 1 Timothy 1:8-11, those who practice homosexuality are listed among the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinful. Such practice is contrary to sound doctrine and is not in accordance with the gospel. The gospel of grace does not condone or wink at the sin of same-gender sexual activity. This is

not to say that those who are tempted by this sin are bad people merely for that fact. Nor is it to say those who commit this sin are worse sinners than anyone else. The scripture, however, is clear this sin is just as bad as every other sin.

Some will tell us the word used in these two passages has been mistranslated, and we can't really know what it means. They will muddy the waters with all sorts of discussion about possible definitions. However, allow me to show you where this word comes from.

The word in both passages is “ἀρσενοκοίτης/arsenokoites.” These are the only places in the Bible this word is found. Apparently, it is used infrequently in all of Greek literature. So much so that some even claim Paul himself coined this word. That is entirely possible. I'll explain. This word is a compound word, combining two words: “ἀρσεν/arsen,” meaning “male,” and “κοίτης/koites,” meaning “bed.” However, we can no more determine the meaning of this word by combining the meanings of these two words than we can believe “butterfly” refers to an airborne dairy product or to “understand” means to actually stand under something.

So where did Paul get this word? We especially ask if Paul coined it. Consider two Old Testament passages:

Leviticus 18:22: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”

Leviticus 20:13: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination...”

Now please consider the Septuagint (hereafter: LXX) rendering of these passages. The LXX is the ancient Koine Greek rendering of the Old Testament which Paul often quoted. I will give you two renderings of each passage. First, my own literal translation of the pertinent parts of the verse. Second, the transliteration of the Greek text into English characters. A transliteration means to take the letters in the Greek words and substitute them with their corresponding English letters. This will help you see the connection we need to see here:

Leviticus 18:22: “...and with a man not you shall lie lyings of a woman...” (my translation)

Leviticus 18:22: “...kai meta arsenos ou koimethesai koiten gunaikos...”

Leviticus 20:13: "...and whoever shall lie with a man the lyings of a woman..." (my translation)

Leviticus 20:13: "...kai hos an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gunaikos..."

Do you see the two words compounded to make the word "arsenokoites"? In the second passage, they are next to each other. They are ripe for being taken together and compounded into a single word as Paul apparently did. However, just seeing these words doesn't solidify the case for us. Is there a good reason for thinking Paul took the terms from these passages to make his compound word? I believe there is.

In 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Paul is making a case about the Law. The Law was laid down for people who had committed certain ungodly, sinful, unholy, profane acts or ones like them. Then he lists some examples. Please note that every example Paul uses is taken directly from the Law. There are actual regulations in the Law of Moses against these actions. Exodus 21:15 condemns those who strike their parents. Exodus 20:13 outlaws murder. Leviticus 18 goes to great lengths to prohibit sexual immorality. Exodus 21:16 denounces kidnapping or enslaving. Leviticus 19:11 decries lying. Leviticus 19:15-16 rebukes perjuring. I repeat, every statement in Paul's list is specifically mentioned in the Law. Naturally, we expect "arsenokoites" do be mentioned as well. However, we never find that word in the LXX of the Law. The closest we come to it is Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 as noted above. It is quite clear Paul derived this compound word from these passages to summarize the law against men lying with men as they would with women. Paul is very specifically condemning same-gender sexual interactions.

The world is arguing vehemently in favor of homosexuality. Our culture is completely opposed to any teaching that claims homosexual behavior is sinful. The world is shaming Christians for believing homosexual behavior and activity is unlawful, ungodly, and unholy. But we must not be deceived. We are not helping anyone by condoning or "sanctifying" same-gender sexual interactions and marriage because such activity and behavior are not sanctified. In the same way, we cannot condone serial heterosexual marriages that also violate God's Word. The arguments in favor of such behavior are empty arguments. If we participate in these behaviors or condone them, we will lead others away from God and straight into God's wrath and condemnation (Rom 1:18-32).



As Ephesians 5:1-14 states, we must not be deceived about any sexual immorality: homosexuality, premarital sex, extramarital affairs, sensuality, passions of lust, crude joking. God's wrath is coming on account of these. Do not let the empty words of the world lead you to them. We are not to partner with them. Rather, we are to expose them as sin in hopes of saving the souls of those involved.

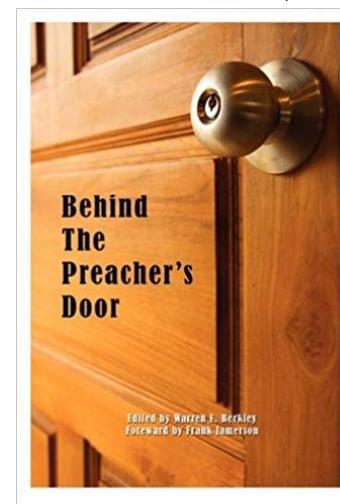
Overcoming Sexual Immorality and Pursuing Sanctification

How can we gain victory over sexual immorality and walk the path of sanctification? It takes more than simply repeating all that is above. I imagine everyone reading this lesson knows the sinful nature of sexual immorality. Further, I doubt there are many disciples who have fallen prey to sexual immorality who did so because they were unaware it was a sin. While I hope I have adequately expressed that sexual immorality is unlawful and have explained why it is unlawful, I doubt little I have written up to this point will actually help anyone avoid sexual immorality.

Most disciples do not simply fall into sexual immorality. Perhaps there is a Christian somewhere who simply woke up one day out of the blue and decided, "Today, I'm going to commit sexual immorality," or was hit with such an overpowering temptation void of any preceding escalation that he/she just fell on the spot without preamble. However, that number is going to be very, very small.

On the one hand, some people are plagued by the sexual sins they committed before becoming a Christian. Those sins can impact our inner man, and as a result, give our control to sin. We are Christians now and must start a journey of growth and victory, but the psychological and spiritual impact of those sins still linger to tempt us.

On the other hand, some disciples, not realizing the path they are on, by small increments and in small measures, walk a path that leads to sexual immorality. They may not even realize it leads there until it is too late. If you would like to know more about the path many take that leads to sexual immorality, I outlined a way of considering it in my chapter on "The Preacher's Temptation to Commit Adultery" in Behind the Preacher's Door.³¹



³¹ Behind the Preacher's Door, Warren Berkley, ed., Spiritbuilding Publishing, 2009, pp 44-47.

Two Principles to Overcome Sexual Immorality and Temptation

In that same chapter, I outline 8 principles that help me overcome sexual immorality and the temptations to it.³² Below are two principles to find victory found in Behind the Preacher's Door.

Principle #1: Rely on the strength of God. The first principle is revealed in Philippians 4:13. “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Paul says this in the context of covetousness and contentment. Just a few verses earlier, he wrote, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” This is fascinating, because if I understand Romans 7:7-11 correctly, Paul explains that one of his great sins for which he needed the Savior is covetousness. Covetousness of all kinds, he said. That is, coveting his neighbor’s house, wife, servants, property (cf. Exodus 20:17). As a disciple, he had learned to be content. This brings us full circle to the first section of this lesson. Paul had learned God is enough. He had learned God’s gifts and timing are enough. He had learned contentment. Paul was not born with it; he learned it. He could face what others would consider lack and need. However, he could only do it through “Him who strengthens me.” In other words, he could only do it by the power of God through Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. Paul had not learned contentment because he was awesome. He had learned contentment by the grace and power of God. Paul could face plenty and lack by the grace and power of God.

Please, grasp this principle. If you think your job is simply to get your sexuality in control in hopes to present all your hard work to God in the judgment and prove you are worthy, it will not work. You can get your sexual temptations under control and pursue sanctification, but only by the strength God supplies.

Therefore, do everything you can to access the strength of God. Understand what I am saying. Do not do everything you can do to make yourself strong enough. Do everything you can to connect to the strength and power of God. Pray. Read your Bible. Memorize your Bible. Meditate on God’s Word. Pray some more. Worship. Participate in the assemblies of a congregation. Participate in all of them. Develop relationships with other disciples. Develop relationships with other disciples where there is safety to confess your struggles and even your falls. Pray some more. It is only when we realize how weak we are and how much we need the strength of God that we can be strong. (See 2 Cor 12:9-10.)

Principle #2: Pack the right bags. The second principle is found in Romans 13:14. “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the

³² Ibid. pp 47-53.

flesh, to gratify its desires.” Paul says this in the context of overcoming sexual immorality and sensuality, among other sins. “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy” (Rom 13:13).

Making provision for the flesh is not the same as pursuing a work of the flesh. It is not necessarily the same as sinning. But this is exactly how Satan traps us and leads us down his primrose path to this sin and many others. Making provision for the flesh is doing things that pave the way for the sin. Satan leads us to say in our minds, “There is no harm in this. You can’t prove it is a sin. I’ll do this and stop short of the sin line.” After standing next to the line of sin, we wonder why the temptation was just so strong and why we fell across it.

“Making provision” is a word picture. It calls to mind preparing for a trip. Whenever you go on a trip, you make provisions. You must gather your money and pack your clothes. You prepare food or make sure you can access it along the way. You research for a place to stay while you travel. You pump gas in your car or buy a plane ticket. None of these things is the same as taking the trip. They are all part of the process of planning and preparing for the trip. Paul says not to “make provision” for the flesh and its desires. Do not gather the money for sin, pack the clothes for sin, prepare the food for sin, find a hotel to sin, put gas in your car for sin. Do not do the things that lead you to sin.

On some rare occasions, we make the provisions for a trip, but the trip gets canceled, and we do not go. However, about 99% of the time, when we make provisions for a trip, we take the trip. In like manner, there are some occasions when we make provisions for the flesh and its desires, and we avoid the trip into sin and the works of the flesh. I think Satan allows this sometimes because he knows that by doing this, he perpetuates our own “stinking thinking” that we are actually strong enough to make all the provisions for the flesh and its desires, but still avoid the sin. After all, there was that one time we got right up to the line but were able to walk away. Now, we just cannot understand why last night we did not.



If we want to avoid the trip into sin, we must pack the right bags. We have to pack the bags for sanctification. We need to gather the money for sanctification,

pack the clothes for sanctification, get the food prepared for sanctification, find a hotel for sanctification, put gas in your car for sanctification. It is, no doubt, possible to pack these bags and then at the last minute decide to go back to sin. However, I believe the metaphor still holds. If you pack your bags for sanctification, by God's grace, strength, and power, you'll take the trip of sanctification.

Pack the right bags—bags that are about drawing closer to God, not to sin. I recently heard someone describe the way she often dieted that I think applies to this principle. She claimed she often dieted to see how much unhealthy eating she could enjoy and still attain some weight loss. It is not surprising; none of those diets actually worked for her. I think I have approached my battle against sin in just the same way sometimes. Have you? How much worldliness can I enjoy and still go to heaven in the end? How close to sin can I get and still have Jesus? When I approach it that way, I find out pretty quick that it does not work. So, pack the bags that are about drawing near to Jesus, not the line of sin.

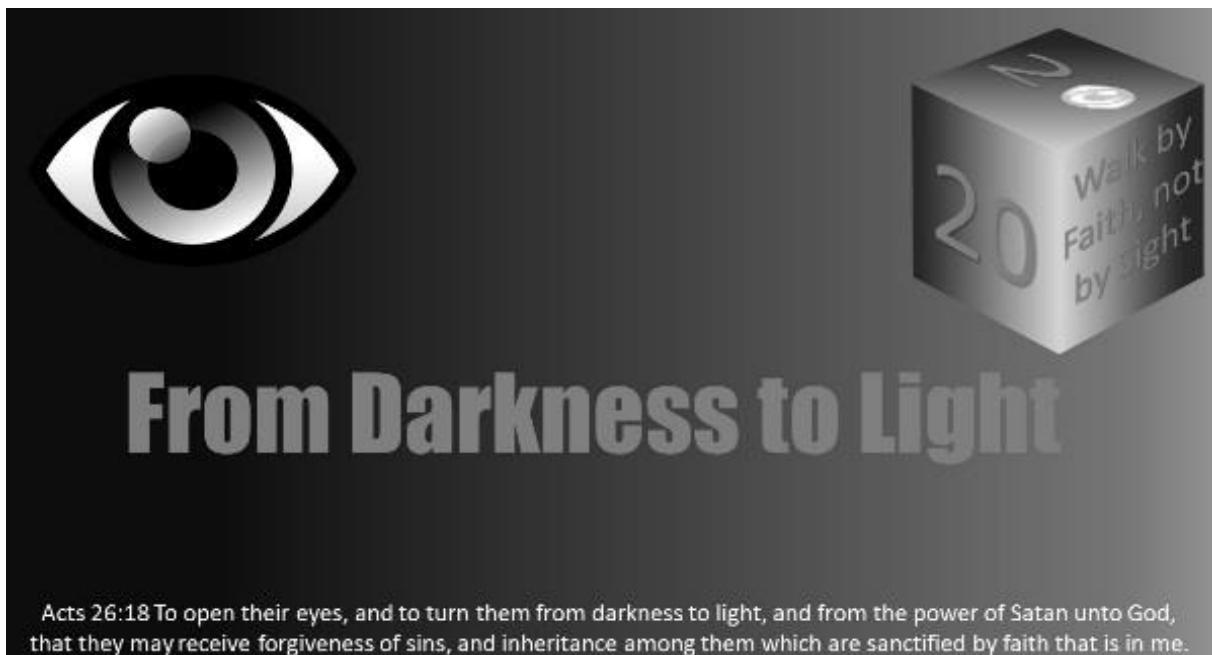
In the 12-step addiction recovery world, they have a great mantra. If you want to change your behaviors, you must change your play places, your playmates, and your playthings. If a recovering alcoholic continues to hang out with his drinking buddies, go to his drinking hangouts, and hang on to his favorite drinking paraphernalia, he is going to keep drinking. If you need to escape sexual immorality or avoid it, you must pack your bags with the healthy and sanctifying play places, playmates, and playthings. It may mean changing jobs because you had an affair with a co-worker or came close. You may need to discard your computer or smartphone because you cannot seem to stay away from pornography. "Packing your bags" may mean changing friends because their own immorality keeps leading you to be involved. Dropping certain television shows or all television altogether may be needed because you find yourself wrapped up in lust that leads to immorality when you watch them. It may mean never carrying cash or credit cards because every time you have access to money, you find yourself at a strip club or with a prostitute.

Keep in mind, of course, your bags are not necessarily God's laws. Someone once pointed out to me that Matthew 5:29-30 says, "If." "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away...If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away." In other words, if your right eye and right hand do not lead you to sin, you do not have to throw them away. The bags I have to pack may not be the same as yours. Just because my bags work for me does not mean I can now codify them into law. The same is true for you. But neither

should you let this principle keep you from packing the right bags for you. Do not let Satan lead you down his primrose path using the justification, “You can’t prove this step is a sin.” Be completely honest about what has led you to sin in the past. Be completely honest about what leads you to sanctification. Then...

Conclusion

I imagine you want sanctification. I imagine you want to avoid or escape sexual immorality. There is good reason to do so. God deserves it. There is nothing greater than God. May we all grow to the faith that says along with Asaph, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you” (Psa 73:25). May we all overcome our covetousness and learn to be content. May we all rely on God and pack the right bags for the journey of sanctification.



Darkness Lesson 22 Questions

Lust of the Eyes: Sexuality and Sanctification

1. What is sanctification?
2. When we see the 10 commandments given to Israel as markers, pointers, defining characteristics of a covenant relationship with the one and only God, why is sexual immorality condemned?
3. What was the meaning and purpose of marriage in the Garden? What is it under the gospel?
4. With your answer to the last question in mind, why is marital sexuality sanctified? (Remember Psa 45.)
5. With your answer to the previous questions in mind, how does sexual immorality destroy the meaning and purpose of marriage?
6. Consider 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18, why is sexual immorality between brothers and sisters in Christ an ever-present danger that must be guarded against?
7. What are some ways you have witnessed the world try to deceive us with empty words about sexual immorality?
8. How would you advise your brothers and sisters to overcome those empty words?
9. What ways would you suggest to your brothers and sisters to rely on the strength of God?
10. What packed bags have you found helpful in overcoming sexual immorality and pursuing sanctification?

Darkness Lesson 23

Lust of The Eyes:

Covetousness, Greed, Mammon, And Generosity

by T.S. Stephens

The lust of the eyes is about greed. 1 John 2:15-17 warns, “Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” Thus, the way of Balaam or greed remains one of the most powerful influences in time. Christ taught in Matthew 6:22-25, “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness! “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Mammon is wealth or possessions that exert an evil influence or is a false object of worship and devotion. I have been greedy, as most have at some point. Greed is one of Satan’s tools to blind to the spiritual and eternal.



Greed Defined

Greed is defined by the American Heritage dictionary as “an excessive desire to acquire or possess, as wealth, or power, beyond what one needs or deserves. Mignon McLaughlin once wrote, “We’re all born brave, trusting, and greedy, and most of us remain greedy.” It seems the seed of greed is in the human heart. Those seeds can grow giant and mammoth in a person’s life. Miserly Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, as an example, embodies greed in attitude as well as all that it cost him. Although many are greedy without being miserly, more than ever, our society has a problem distinguishing between needs and greeds.

Greed is a powerful blinder of one’s spiritual sight and one of Satan’s most powerful dark distortions.



Greed is the desire or longing for something that creates a willingness to do whatever is required to acquire the object of desire. The object of desire can be power, fame, even sexual gratification (eg, King David regarding Bathsheba); but it is most often money and material possessions. Greed, in short, is **idolatry** (See Col 3:5-6). It puts God's plan and direction for life on hold for one's own desire. Greed grows like cancer in the human heart. When working as an oncology researcher, I saw tumors that took years to take a person's life and those that gave a person only a few days. Greed can do the same depending on how someone lets it impact them. Ultimately, greed robs one of their life and that which they value most. Greed, which grows out of coveting, is never satisfied. The attitude of greed is more, more, and more – never content or satisfied. Greed causes one to compromise their values and priorities, yielding a spiritual blindness.



One should not misunderstand. There is nothing immoral about wanting success. In fact, Solomon is full of advice on how to achieve success, especially in Proverbs. Business experts have often suggested reading a chapter of Proverbs every day of the month, and that by applying the advice, it yields financial success. Wanting success can become immoral when desire is overtaken by greed, or the willingness to do anything, instead of applying labor and diligence. Greed's nature is insidious, and it easily grows. One cannot change its nature. Recall the story of the scorpion and the frog. The scorpion needed to cross the stream. It asked the frog for a ride. The frog refused saying, "You'll sting me." "No, I won't. I would drown." Thus, the frog agreed to carry the scorpion across. About three-fourths of the way across, the scorpion stings the frog. "Why?" asked the frog. "It's just my nature," responded the scorpion. The nature of greed is similar in that, in the end, it always stings its victim.

The Results of Greed: What Greed Steals from Its Victims

To understand the reasons to avoid greed, requires us to understand the results of greed. Often, a person's greed or covetousness blinds them to the consequences of their inordinate desire. Greed has many severe consequences.



First, greed steals one's life. Proverbs 1:17-19 explains:

“Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.”

Greed results in one being consumed by it. The owner is possessed by the possessions. When possessions own the owner, the result is an empty life, robbing one of the joy and happiness of fulfilling labor, family, and service to God.

Writing about his journey under the sun in Ecclesiastes 5:10-13, Solomon explains:

“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.”

Second, greed results in financial disaster, which the greedy person cannot see coming. Proverbs 28:22 explains, “He

that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and

considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.”

Every professional scam artist knows the best ways to get a mark to lower his defenses is dangle some prize in front of him. When the mark goes for it, the scam is completed by emptying his bank account



into the scammer's account. Ever received the email explaining someone will get \$50,000 for helping transfer and distribute money to some charity? They just need an account number, right? Another illustration is the mark who was helping a man (scammer) "hide his assets during a divorce." The scammer has the mark buy some diamonds for him. The scammer promises to pay the mark a 50% profit for just carrying out the transaction. The scammer takes the diamonds and skips town.

Another example is the get rich quick schemes that come and go. These almost always play on the idea of greed. Proverbs 28:20 teaches, "A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished." Likewise, from a practical perspective, greed is the I-have-to-have-now approach

too. Too impatient to earn something, we can use the credit card. Maybe even justifying it with the initial 15% discount. Ultimately, the creditor expects to make up that loss. I have spent years enslaved to banks at high-interest rates on credit cards. This willingness to use credit is likewise part of the problem. Please avoid this mistake. Remember Proverbs 22:7b: "...the borrower is servant to the lender." Chase and Citi are not good masters, and I still suffer from the results of their enticements.

Third, greed can rob one's spiritual life. Proverbs 13:7 explains, "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." Verse 11 also notes, "Wealth *gotten* by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase." We can have many riches materially and be morally and spiritually bankrupt. This is apparent in the names of many famous people. Elvis Presley had great wealth and fame. He pushed the envelope of desire without any apparent restraint. He had to escape into drugs, which eventually took his life. Howard Hughes, full of avarice, had great wealth, power, and fame. Yet, in the end, he had nothing that he valued.

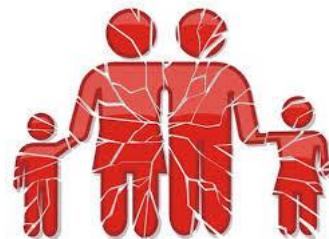
Paul warns Christians in Ephesians 4:17-19 to not walk as the Gentiles who because of the blindness of their heart have given themselves over to work all uncleanness with greediness. Instead, one must keep God at the center of their life. Jehovah cannot be just first in life, but God must be at the center and purpose of one's life (See Gal 2:20, Rom 12:1-2). The Lord explains the proper attitude toward material possessions in Matthew 6:19-34:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly

Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

The idea of a single eye is one focused on God and eternity. Ultimately, one has to answer the question of Matthew 16:26: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Fourth, greed destroys one's family. Greed results in such a selfish attitude that it contagiously spreads. Proverbs 15:27 (NKJV) explains, “He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.” Most individuals start out their career working to help their families. It is only when greed, that whatever it takes attitude, consumes an individual that they become devoured by the want for more, and neglect their family and service to God. Greed steals our real purpose as a desire for money or possessions becomes our mistaken focus. Does the status symbol of a particular car really matter? Does the bigger house make us happy? Does fancy jewelry really make for joy?



Fifth, greed robs one of their integrity. Again, greed is a willingness to do whatever is required to get an object of desire, typically wealth. Proverbs 28:19-20 explains, “He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough. A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.” Again, Solomon advises labor. If one follows after the vain, get rich, greedy people; then

Solomon warns that poverty is coming. Solomon also teaches that one in a hurry to get rich will be guilty.

The justifications for greed are easy to make for individuals. “It’s just a little lie. “It won’t hurt anyone.” “So I missed going to church, I really need the



money.” “This will help so many once I get this going.” God also warns the student of His word about the need to treat those who work for one with appreciation and not deceitfully. (Prov 3:27 explains, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do so.”) The greedy person is often blind to these changes.

The small loss of integrity comes in so many forms. Suddenly, all integrity can be lost. Many have seen this occur with a product line. At first, a manufacturer makes an excellent product. Then, the goal of more profit causes a cheaper production. It is just a small decrease in quality, but then it grows. In the end, the product is junk. The consumer does not buy it anymore. Even if the quality is renewed, it may take sometime before the customer base returns. The reputation remains tainted. The same is true for those who compromise their integrity because of greed. Recovery on that slippery slope is very difficult. Proverbs 28:6 instructs, “Better *is* the poor who walks in his integrity Than one perverse *in his* ways, though he *be* rich.”

Lastly, greed gives one a false sense of security. In the United States, despite the efforts of some, most of the currency reads “In God We Trust.” Money, power, fame – all that greed offers fails quickly. Greed’s companions seem so strong and comforting, but they can quickly fly away. Proverbs 11:28-30 explains, “He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.² He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of the righteous *is* a tree of life; and he that winneth souls *is* wise.”

Christ in the parable of the seeds and the soils in Matthew 13:22 warns that the seed that fell in the thorny ground was those who heard the word, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choked out the word. We must be careful that is not us. Confidence in wealth blinds us to our true dependence on God.

Success Without Greed

We can be successful without greed. **First, be diligent and get to work.** Apply God's word to life and be persistent. Do not let greed compromise your values, purposes, or priorities. Work, but do not become a workaholic, neglecting more important parts of life. We must focus on achieving a purpose without compromising. **We cannot focus on money. We can ambitiously achieve without greed.** Proverbs 14:23 advises, "In all labor there is profit, But idle chatter *leads* only to poverty." Labor is the road to financial success, not chasing quick wealth. John Berry once wrote, "The bird of paradise alights only upon the hand that does not grasp." If one works, especially at something they enjoy, success is in the process. The extra bonus of economic blessing often comes on its own. In other words, we must work hard at something we love to do and enjoy. If we do that, focusing on doing well, then we will profit.

Further, when possible, we should be patient for our success to merit our wants. I understand businesses need to take capital to purchase equipment or a price that pays for the cost of the loan as points of argument. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to justify our decision out of our desire.

The second guide for success without greed is basic. **Do not make your focus on being rich, but focus on Christ.** Proverbs 23:4-5 clarifies, "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for *riches* certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." Perhaps, the best illustration of this is the lottery. Millions will play, and very few will win. Most lose. These people are violating God's principle of labor. The lottery is a theft by consent program. People often defend gambling under the guise that if they lose it will help some project in the state. If one really wants to help a particular project, then a donation is appropriate, not a lottery ticket. A friend of mine calls the lottery a "stupid tax." "Do not try to get rich" does not prohibit achieving financial security or success. It does prohibit the love of or improper attitude toward riches. Perhaps, many are even worldly rich and fail to see it?



The third help in success without greed is to **focus on helping others**.

Proverb 14:21 teaches, “He who despises his neighbor sins; But he who has mercy on the poor, happy *is* he.” Further 14:31 notes, “He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.” Proverbs 28:27 encourages to help those who are in need: “He who gives to the poor will not lack, But he who hides his eyes will have many curses.” Psalms 37:21



explains, “The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth.” If we focus on giving generously to those who have a need, then we often act to squash greed. Zig Ziglar is famous for saying, “If you help enough other people get what they want, then you can get what you want.”

What we truly want in life is not the new boat or piles of green-inked paper with pictures of dead presidents, but we want fulfillment and joy. Hopefully, Christians seek happiness by trying to be pleasing to Jehovah. This is the focus Christians must have. Greed and materialism will not fill that hole no matter how much advertisers and Madison Avenue tells society it will. Serving God does provide joy and fulfillment beyond carnally-minded people’s understanding. Proverbs 21:25-26 explains, “The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.”

Paul in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 was inspired by the Holy Spirit to command:

“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; ⁹Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

Similarly, Ephesians 4:28 instructs, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”

The fourth guide for success without greed is seek to **serve God’s purposes**. Many times the scriptures warn Christians to avoid those who are covetous, knowing they will not inherit the kingdom of God. (See Rom 1:29, 13:9; 1 Cor

5:11; Eph 5:3-5.) Nevertheless, greed is powerful. It is easy to become ensnared and infected by greed. Christians must put away the idolatry of greed and covetousness, and seek to live a life for Christ. Colossians 3:1-5 teaches:

*“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, **inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:**”*

Hebrews 13:5 admonishes: “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*” Christians must put their trust in God. What if something close to that was printed on the money to help people remember?



Jesus’ teaching in Luke 12:15-21 helps us to understand that we need to seek God’s purposes above the things of this life:

“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

The fifth guide to prevent greed is Christians must recognize the riches they enjoy as a faithful servant of God. Sometimes, greed comes from the desperation and despair of debt.³³ The we must focus on the spiritual first -- the Light of God. The great debt of sin has been covered by the Christ. The Christian

³³ Consider the example of the wicked servant in Matthew 18:24-34.

knows they have a greater inheritance, that their Father's house has many mansions, and they seek a crown of righteousness and the treasure of eternal life. The Christian was redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. 1 Peter 1:17-19 explains:

"And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; ¹⁸knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

The Christian knows that "*God shall supply all you need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*" (Phil 4:19).

The full assurance of understanding is great riches to the Christian. Colossians 2:2-3 explains, "that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (See also Col 1:27.) Paul calls this the "*unsearchable riches of Christ*" in Ephesians 3:8. Ephesians 1:7 makes the point, "*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*" The Christian must be strengthened by this understanding.

Ephesians 3:16-17 instructs, "*that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love.*" Further, one can consider the relationship of the temporal to the eternal. Jesus taught in Matthew 19:29, "*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.*"

Summary

Greed as a lust of the eye is a spiritual blinder that Satan frequently uses. Greed grows out of covetousness and is idolatry. Some might even define the words similarly. Some like the term "materialism" or "mammon." No matter the terminology, it is dangerous. It can rob us of our life, yield financial disaster, steal our spiritual life, destroy our family, and cheat us of our integrity, even though it gives a false sense of security. It yields spiritual blindness. Achieving without

greed requires work and labor. We should not focus on getting rich or money, but rather on helping others in need and serving God's purpose. To prevent greed, Christians must recognize the riches they enjoy as a faithful servant of God. Greed is not a part of the godly life. Paul in 1 Timothy 6:6-12 summarizes well:

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."

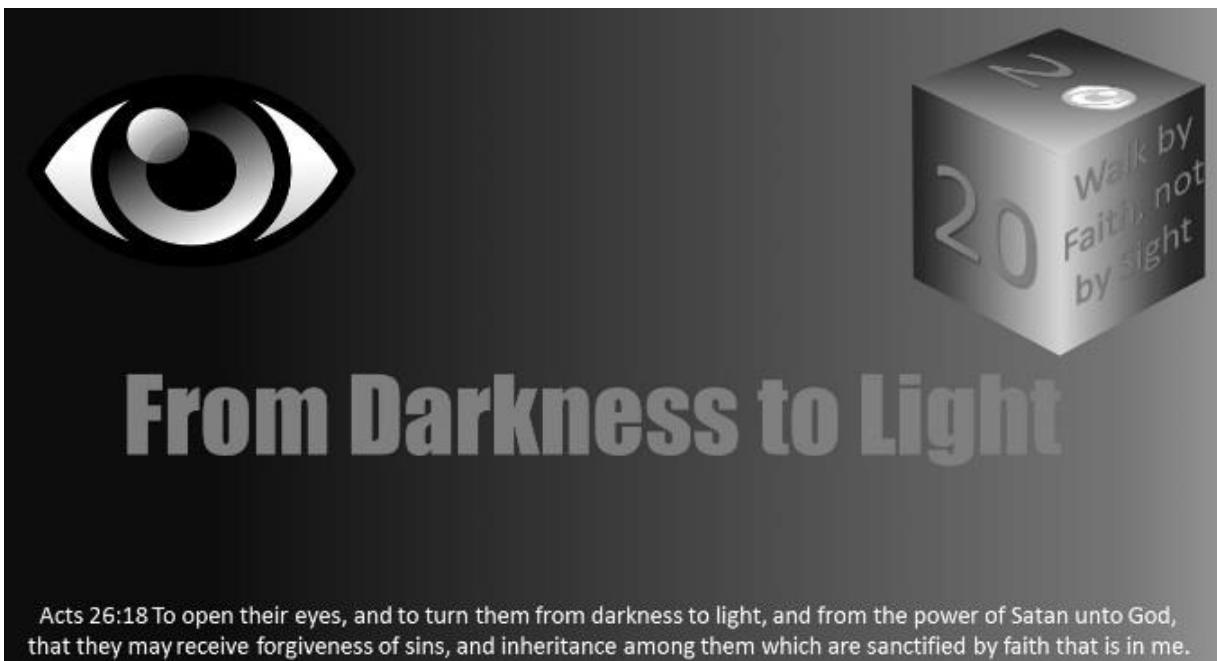
Underview: Generosity

In antithesis to greed, there is generosity. The child of Light should be generous. One can give and still fail to be generous. Generosity is not tied to the affluence one may have, or even the value of a gift. It is tied to the nature and attitude of the person. Proverbs 22:9 explains, "He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor." Generosity begins in caring for those in need. Proverbs 14:31 and 28:27 pointed this out earlier.

Similarly, Proverbs 11:24-26 instructs, "There is *one* who scatters, yet increases more; And there is *one* who withholds more than is right, But it *leads* to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, And he who waters will also be watered himself. The people will curse him who withholds grain, But blessing *will be* on the head of him who sells *it*." The Christian must care for those in need as they have the opportunity. The Christian honors the Lord with their generosity. Proverbs 14:21 made this point. Proverbs 3:9-10 further explains, "Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; ¹⁰So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine." God's response to one's generosity is also clear. Consider Proverbs 22:9 again.

Further, Proverbs 19:17 teaches, "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given." If one is not

generous, his pleas will not be heard. Proverbs 21:13 explains, “Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard.” Proverbs 25:21-22 (and Rom 12:20) teaches about how far one’s generosity should go: “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; ²²For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the LORD will reward you.” Does one have a generous eye?



Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Darkness Lesson 23 Questions

Lust of The Eyes:

Covetousness, Greed, Mammon, And Generosity

1. Define Greed. Define mammon. How is greed more than a desire for money? What is the difference between greed and need? Between greed and ambition? How is greed really idolatry? (See Col 3:5-6.) What is the nature of greed?

2. How does greed steal one's life? Proverbs 1:17-19; Ecclesiastes 5:10-13

3. How can greed lead to financial disaster? Proverbs 28:20-22; Proverbs 22:7

4. How does greed rob one's spiritual life? Proverbs 13:7-11; Matthew 6:19-34; Matthew 16:26

5. How can greed destroy a family? Proverbs 15:27

6. How can greed rob one of integrity? Proverbs 28:19-20; Proverbs 3:27; Proverbs 28:6

7. How can greed give one a false sense of security? Proverbs 11:28-30; Matthew 13:22

8. Look at questions 2-7. Make a list of what greed steals from its victims.

9. How can we be successful without greed?
 - i. Proverbs 14:25
 - ii. Proverbs 23:4-5
 - iii. Proverbs 14:21; Proverbs 28:7; Proverbs 27:21; Proverbs 21:25-26; 1 Timothy 6:17-19
 - iv. Colossians 3:2-5, Hebrews 13:5; Luke 12:18-21; 1 Peter 1:17-19; Philippians 4:19; Colossians 2:2-3; Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 3:16-17; Matthew 19:29
10. Meditation and Pondering
 - i. In your experience, what causes a lack of contentment?
 - ii. Consider examples of greed in the Bible, such as Balaam (Num 22 and Jude 11). What was the result?
 - iii. What did Jesus teach the Pharisees about “greed and wickedness” in Luke 11:38-39
 - iv. How can you apply this discussion?

Darkness Lesson 24

Lust of the Eyes: Greed

by Justin Brewer

Introduction

In the previous lesson, the author spent a great deal of time accurately depicting the most common understanding and application of “greed.” This is a worthwhile study, and it would be beneficial for every Christian to consider their attitude concerning the acquisition of wealth. For so-called success, our society places unhealthy demands on individuals to be overly ambitious. As noted in the previous lesson, Christians can be successful (even financially) without falling prey to the sin of greed, but it requires proper management of attitude and spiritual priorities.

For this lesson, our attention will focus primarily on the secondary applications of greed in order to better understand how it can impact both our physical and spiritual lives if we are not careful. What is human nature, and how does the concept of greed fit into it? How is greed often depicted within society? Consider a few secular applications prior to examining the scriptures further on this subject. Many fictional narratives throughout history are based on mankind’s desire for great treasures. For instance, in Robert L. Stevenson’s well-known novel, *Treasure Island* (1882), the main characters are all driven by their intense desire for treasure. They pursue this desire to the detriment of their own lives and relationships; they are each willing to betray even their friends and comrades along the journey to achieve the rights to the treasure. They are driven, in essence, by that nasty, all-encompassing, ever detrimental *greed*. Greed is defined as “a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (such as money) than is needed.”³⁴ Clearly, this concept can be tied to monetary gain, but should the application cease there for Christians?

Other definitions for greed include an “excessive or rapacious desire, especially for wealth or possessions” and an “excessive desire, as for wealth or power.”³⁵ Consider also Alexandre Dumas’ novel, *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844). In this novel, most of the characters are driven by some form of greed, although not all by greed for money. While it is true some do desire great wealth, others prefer power, and still others are covetous for unobtainable women. When

³⁴ Greed. (n.d.). Retrieved November 19, 2018, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/greed>

³⁵ Greed. (n.d.). Retrieved November 19, 2018, from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/greed>

we consider the respective novels of Stevenson (1882) and Dumas (1844), it is easy to realize they merely depict normal human nature or at least human nature as the Devil would have it be. (Reference also Rom 1:18-32 & 2 Tim 3:1-9.) Like in these fictional narratives, mankind frequently yearns for that which they most often cannot obtain. Wealth, power, fame, and possessions (houses, cars, and even ungodly, carnal relationships) often drive individuals to act contrary to the will of God. Fiction typically falls short of reality, however. Remember, for example, the brothers of Joseph delivered him to be a slave because of their greed for the attention of their father (Gen 37, 39) and the Jews (specifically the priests and elders) handed Jesus over to Pilate because of their own greed and envy of His power (Matt 27:18).

One of the most misquoted passages in scripture is 1 Timothy 6:10; typically, it is quoted as saying “money is the root of all evil.” However, the text actually reads, “For the love of money is the root of all *kinds* of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” While the difference may seem minute, the stress of the word “love” accentuates the distinction. Money in and of itself is nothing, but having an overwhelming love for money is what distracts so many individuals from obeying God. This is equally true of the concepts already briefly mentioned in this introduction. For example, sexual relationships within the dictates of God’s will are both good and healthy, yet allowing inappropriate sexual relationships to invade your life falls into the same category as having the love of money. (Reference the lesson pertaining to pornography written by Stephen Rouse for further exploration of this topic.)

The key is to question where the heart really resides. Does our heart rely on God, or does our heart rely on riches, relationships, possessions, fame, power, or the like? If the heart is in the wrong place, then those elements of our life will lead only to our own destruction. (Reference Psa 37:12-15.) In Proverbs 1:16-19, King Solomon wrote, “For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird; but they lie in wait for their own blood, they lurk secretly for their own lives. So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners” (NKJV). Likewise, he wrote that “He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live” (Prov 15:27). The unhealthy pursuit of each of these mentioned actions, acquisitions, and relationships will only harm our eternal soul.

For the remainder of this lesson, let us consider two primary points concerning greed; first, how the greed for power can turn our heads from God and second, how greed for fame and popularity distract from God's goal for our spiritual lives. Following these discussions, we will further consider where our own hearts reside (with God or with the world?) and the futility of the worldly possessions and goals when compared with eternity.

Greed for Power

Ambition is frequently pushed within modern society as being a positive attribute to have, especially within the business world. Moderation should be applied even in such circumstances because not all ambition should be considered ungodly. Ambition is defined as "an ardent desire for rank, fame, or power,"³⁶ and ardent means "fiery, hot."³⁷ In other words, the primary definition of ambition denotes an unhealthy desire to achieve something such as "rank, fame, or power." However, the secondary definition is the "desire to achieve a particular end," which clearly projects a significantly milder demeanor than the previous definition. If we carefully control our ambition, then there is certainly nothing wrong with being successful even by worldly standards. We can seek promotions or better our business without crossing the line into unhealthy ambition.

How would you define "ambition"?
Is ambition always a bad attribute?

How might we stray from the acceptable into the unacceptable when it comes to ambition? In Matthew 16:26, Jesus asked a few rhetorical questions that should be considered. He asked, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" If we ask ourselves these types of questions, it is easier to discern when we've crossed the line into unhealthy ambition.

Are we willing to sacrifice spiritual things of value in order to obtain that promotion? Or that second car? That boat? Unfortunately, many of the young Christians with whom I grew up are now unfaithful. Looking back, I can easily see that they or their parents had unhealthy ambition; sports or school-related events were never missed, yet worship services and Bible studies were neglected with reckless abandon. Children were frequently told via word, insinuation, or attitude that they were more intelligent than anyone else (especially anyone within the church), and therefore academics were more important than anything for their

³⁶ Ambition. (n.d.). Retrieved December 20, 2018, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambition>

³⁷ Ardent. (n.d.). Retrieved December 20, 2018, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ardent>

eventual financial well-being. Those children are now adults, and very few, if any, are successful by worldly standards. Not a single one is a top expert in their field, nor are any of them professional athletes. While athletics and academics, or similar activities, are not sinful in and of themselves, they can all too easily be turned into sinful actions when we are willing to give up our souls or the souls of our children from them.

Ambition often leads an individual to want to be the most powerful person in their job or in their social groups. While it may be easy to find an application of the greed for power in the secular world, might it also be applicable within God's church? In 3 John 9-10, John stated, "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, but forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church."

By definition, preeminent means "having paramount rank, dignity, or importance."³⁸ Was this preeminence authorized by God? Did Diotrephes have the authority from God to put others out of the church of his own will? Note that everything John wrote concerning Diotrephes was negative; his love of preeminence (power), his rejection of faithful brethren, and his prating with malicious words. On the other hand, Paul wrote that "If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work" (1 Tim 3:1). This desire, however, is balanced out in the context by the qualifications for a bishop (elder); must be sober-minded, of good behavior, able to teach, not violent, not greedy for money, gentle, and not quarrelsome to name but a few (1 Tim 3:1-7). This is a healthy desire, not one based upon preeminence and a thirst for power over the brethren, which is a concept echoed in 1 Peter 5:3 where we read, "nor as being lords over those entrusted to you [elders], but being examples to the flock..." The distinction is between the desire to have preeminence (power) and the desire to be a servant (which is the goal of any man desiring to be an elder). While Diotrephes did not have the authority for his actions, it should be noted a qualified group of elders does have authority over an autonomous group of Christians, much like a shepherd (and thus the connection in Scripture to this concept) has authority over a flock. (See the context of each included verse.)

³⁸ Preeminent. (n.d.). Retrieved February 23, 2019, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/preeminent>

Greed for Fame, Popularity, & Blending In *Fame & Evangelists*

The desire for fame is well-known and recognized within the secular world; many people jump into acting, singing, or even politics because they want their name to be known in every household. On the other hand, it seems preachers, teachers, and evangelists could be particularly vulnerable to this desire among brethren. How many evangelists have fallen prey to wanting to be well-liked and well-known and have, therefore, altered the message of God to accomplish such a worldly goal? Although we could easily point to TV “evangelists,” such as Joel Osteen or Francis Chan to establish this point. However, it would be beneficial to instead make an application from a personal standpoint.

It should be noted the desire to be well-liked is perhaps ingrained in most or all human beings, but what we are willing to do or become in order to obtain this defines who we are. Further, even Peter and Barnabas were not above struggling

*How might the desire
for fame and/or
popularity impact the
message an
evangelist preaches?*

with this issue. Consider Galatians 2:11-13 where the Apostle Paul wrote, “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.” Here, Peter’s desire to be well-liked or

included took control over what he knew to be right, and then even Barnabas (known as the “Son of Encouragement” in Acts 4:36) gave in. The lesson we should each learn from this is if an apostle of Christ could become involved in this, then we are equally as vulnerable. Being liked is a common human attribute, so the temptation to avoid confrontation will occasionally overcome what we know to be right. Too often, evangelists will avoid any topic that could be deemed controversial so as not to offend anyone, which in turn means avoiding taking a stand or perhaps even studying that issue. We should not, as with Peter and Barnabas, be caught up in such hypocrisy; we are not here to be famous or well-liked, but rather to preach the truth.

Paul also warned Timothy that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4). Although the

primary subject of this statement is the hearer/audience who desires a pleasing message, there are other considerations to keep in mind. For such a pleasing message to be presented, by necessity there must be someone willing to present it. Additionally, Paul was warning Timothy not to be carried away and become willing to tell people what they wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear. In fact, Paul charged Timothy “before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom” to “Preach the word!” and to be “ready in season and out of season.” All of this was to be done in order to be faithful to God, to do His will, and to fulfill Timothy’s ministry. (Reference 2 Tim 4:1-5.) Contemporary evangelists would do well to adhere to Paul’s advice to Timothy.

Secular Fame & Christians

So-called common people are often enamored with the life of celebrities. There is often a picture painted if someone can sing or act, they could “make it big” and then “live the good life.” Christian parents often push the talents of their children in order for them to make a career in the entertainment industry, and then send them off to New York City or to L.A. to “make it.” This is often done at the detriment of their spiritual well-being. Hours are spent developing these secular talents; degrees are sought in acting and singing, or lessons are paid for. Yet, no time can be spared to develop them spiritually. In the greed for fame, how can the ungodly lives of those who have achieved such fame be overlooked? How many of those celebrities have taken their own lives because they were unable to fill the void they believed fame would fill? In the film and music industries, drugs, pornography, drinking, adultery, fornication, and nearly every other form of debauchery are prevalent. In many instances, those sins must be engaged in before “making it” can occur. How many young women have had to “put their time in” and do nude and/or sex scenes in cheap films before they are “successful”? Yet, some Christian parents encourage their children to achieve such status in this life. Is this a healthy ambition for a Christian? Is that life really worth the souls of our children? Too often, Christian parents labor under the false assumption their child will be the exception to the rule, and they will be able to achieve success without tarnishing either their spirituality or their reputation. Such is foolishness; is it worth the risk?

*Are we willing to
sacrifice our souls or
the souls of our
children to achieve
earthly fame?*

Christians & Blending In

A threat to Christians everywhere is the desire to blend in with the world rather than being distinct from it. For many people, arguably even most, wanting to be accepted by friends, co-workers, and peers is a common attribute. So, going against the grain does not come naturally. Unfortunately, what all too often happens is this attribute overwhelms God's commands for Christians to be separate from the world. Some will, therefore, twist the principles established by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 and 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Are Christians to pretend to be like the world? Are Christians to portray themselves as being no better off spiritually than those to whom they would preach the gospel?

Take a few moments and consider the arguments and examples presented in the following paragraphs; ask whether joining in and blending with the world establishes a Christian as a child of God or if it aligns them with Satan? John wrote, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:28-29).

"And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

Are we the children of God, or are we the children of the Devil? John also wrote that "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). Should we not, as the children of God, want to be recognized as such? What has the world offered to us that can be compared to what the Lord has offered to us? It is further written, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (1 John 3:1). When comparing the love of the world with the love of God, the world certainly falls short each and every time.

Under the guise of "not offending" the world, some Christians argue we should "blend in" with the world. Each year, there are numerous marches for "rights" that take place in both Washington, D.C. and around the country. One such march was the "Women's March" in which the following ideologies were promulgated: homosexuality, transgenderism, and "reproductive rights and

justice,” among other agenda-driven goals. Some Christians chose to drive hundreds of miles in order to participate in this event and proudly wielded signs declaring not just their “tolerance” for the aforementioned ideologies, but their support of them. These Christians argued this approach should be used in hopes someone might eventually obey the Lord. And therefore, homosexual/transgender and “reproductive” rights were “stood up for” in the name of Christ. Additionally, these Christians argued this is exactly what Christ would want them to do, and the Bible supported this perspective.

Any opposition to this view was shot down as uncaring, unloving, and uncompassionate and any use of scripture used to correct the view was condemned as a twisting. Arguments such as these are nothing new. In fact, the Corinthians were puffed up in their so-called tolerance for a brother in sin in 1 Corinthians 5. However, did the Apostle Paul applaud their tolerance of sin, or did he condemn it? The question was clearly answered in the context when Paul wrote, “And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you” (1 Corinthians 5:2). To argue that the Apostle Paul, who was directly inspired by the Lord God Himself, would have condoned this man’s sinful lifestyle would be a blatant twisting of scripture (2 Pet 3:16).

“For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh...”

2 Peter 2:18

To accompany the opening discussion, people often argue that Christ would not have wanted to offend those who might become Christians. It should be asked, do the scriptures support this claim? One clear example is that of the “rich young ruler” in Matthew 19:16-22. In this passage, Jesus dealt with the specific sin in which the young man was entangled: materialism. Jesus instructed him on exactly what he would have to do, and that was to give up that which was separating him from God. The young man “went away sorrowful” because he did not like the answer. Did Jesus change the answer? Did Jesus comfort this man’s ungodly sorrow? (Reference 2 Cor 7:8-12.) The message was the same, and Jesus did the man the service of being clear and forthright about what obedience would cost him.

John 6:60-66 presents another clear example of this principle. In this passage, Jesus taught very difficult concepts, and the result was the offending of many of His disciples. In John 6:61, Jesus turned to the twelve and asked, “Does

this offend you?” The indication is that the majority had been “offended” by His teachings, and we are told that from “that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (John 6:66). Those who chose to leave Him at this time were not justified in their walking away merely because He had “offended” them. Hiding the truth under the guise of “compassion” is not compassionate in the least, but rather it is to the detriment of those who need salvation.

What about treating sin as something disdainful? Often, people argue it is more compassionate not to say anything than to address what sin really is in the eyes of God. Sin is an abomination and not an “alternative lifestyle.” (See Prov 6:12-19 and 2 Pet 2:18-22.) The inspired Apostle Peter compared sin to “a dog returning to his own vomit” and “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.” Which of these depictions of sin leaves the impression with the reader that they are acceptable or something to be desired and advocated for? This is, in fact, how God sees sin. Further, Paul wrote that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). At what point in God’s wrath has He ever condoned sin? Paul also wrote that “God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful” (Rom 1:26-27). While some argue advocating for homosexual “rights” is the moral thing to do, Paul defined these as “vile passions.” Vile means “morally despicable or abhorrent,” “physically repulsive: foul,” and “disgustingly or utterly bad.”³⁹ How can something defined by God as morally despicable, abhorrent, disgustingly, and utterly bad be the “moral” thing to advocate?

Additionally, Paul wrote that “they did not retain God in their knowledge” (Rom 1:28). If we willfully choose to support sin when God has so clearly condemned it, then we have certainly not retained Him in our knowledge. Paul continued the thought and wrote that “God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting,” after which he included a rather extensive list of sins. Paul did not call these sins “alternative lifestyles,” nor did he depict them as something to be advocated. Rather, he stated taking part in them was due to a “debased mind” that came from not retaining God in our knowledge.

³⁹ Vile. (n.d.). Retrieved February 23, 2019, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vile>

But what about supporting those who commit such sins? Can we not advocate for their “right” to commit these sins in hopes they will one day turn to God? Paul actually addressed this in Romans 1 as well. In Romans 1:32, Paul wrote, “who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.” Advocating for sin is the approval of sin and clearly fits with what Paul wrote. Earlier in Romans 1, Paul wrote, “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light...”

Ephesians 5:8

dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom 1:22-25).

While some claim moral superiority and great wisdom because they advocate for such “rights,” Paul defined them as “fools” because they have corrupted the glory of God. They have “exchanged the truth of God for the lie” in an effort to fit in and not “offend” sinful men. In doing so, they have

exchanged God for the worshipping and serving of the lustful desires of mankind. Why does such happen? As Paul wrote, “because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21).

Contrary to an ever increasingly popular argument, standing opposed to sin is not a twisting of scripture. The passages utilized here clearly condemn sin and the advocating of such lifestyles, and these are but a few among many. The twisting of scripture is not, in this instance, found among those condemning such lifestyles, but among those who advocate for them. For the words of Paul in Romans 1 to be misunderstood, they must be twisted. Peter wrote concerning Paul that “untaught and unstable people twist” his words “to their own destruction, as they also do the rest of the scriptures” and he then warned us to “beware lest” we “also fall from” our “own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked” (2 Pet 3:16-17). Finally, Paul wrote, “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thes 5:22, NKJV). In the KJV, this is translated as “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” Christians cannot advocate for sinful lifestyles and choices without partaking in such evils, and we are foolish to believe such is acceptable to the Lord

God above. Such sins are not “what is acceptable to the Lord,” but they are rather “the unfruitful works of darkness,” and it is “shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret” (Eph 5:8-14).

Why would Christians become involved with such movements in the secular world? Because they would rather blend in with the world than be known as something different. Are Christians meant to blend in with the world? In 1 Peter 4:4, the inspired author wrote that in “regard to these [sins], they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.” If we blend in with the world, why would they think anything about our lives “strange”? Why would they speak evil of us if they cannot distinguish between a Christian and a non-Christian? The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 1:10, “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.” It is essential we be pleasing to God, which means by necessity, the world will not be pleased with our lives, our actions, or our teachings. (Reference again the section pertaining to the messages taught by evangelists and Paul’s advice to Timothy.) We should be more concerned with what is acceptable to God (Eph 5) than we are with pleasing men, and so we should not be greedy for friendship with the world (James 4:4).

Where Your Heart Resides

A prevalent theme throughout the scriptures concerns where an individual’s heart resides and how they either open it or harden it in relation to the Lord. In the Old Testament, we are provided with numerous examples where hearts were hardened against the Lord (Exod 8:15, 32, 9:12, etc.). Likewise, the Apostle Paul wrote there were those who rejected the Lord and therefore, “their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21). The concept of where the heart is can be traced through many accounts of individuals, including the Old Testament kings of Judah, such as Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah. In 2 Chronicles 34:27, the Lord told Josiah because his “heart was tender” and because he had humbled himself before God, God would reward him by not allowing the punishment of Judah to occur until after his death. From this example, we can follow the line of thought back to Josiah’s father and grandfather. Of Manasseh, it is written the Lord humbled him, which presumably means his heart as the term is often used in scripture. (Reference 2 Chron 33:10-20.) Amon, who reigned after Manasseh, “did not humble himself before the Lord, as his father Manasseh had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and

*Where does our heart
reside?
Do we daily seek to
please the Lord or to
please men?*

more” (2 Chron 33:23). From these examples, we can draw the conclusion we control our heart, and we must keep it from that which can degrade it.

Greed can all too easily encompass a Christian’s spiritual life, and our society advocates greed in every aspect of our lives. Advertising frequently targets consumers by perpetuating the myth that if you have not acquired the fanciest house, the nicest car, and the newest mobile device, you are not as cool, not as successful, and not as valuable to society as those who have attained them.

*“For what profit is it
to a man if he gains
the whole world, and
loses his own soul? Or
what will a man give
in exchange for his
soul?”*

Matthew 16:26

While in school, I worked for an electronics retail store in Pittsburgh. While I was there, the company changed its mantra to “the latest and greatest.” Additionally, they created “buy back” programs that would pay customers very little of the value of their electronics in order to get them to “trade up.” Given that new technology is released constantly, keeping up with the “latest and greatest” is a rather daunting task, but many customers bought into the concept wholeheartedly. Frequent customers fell prey to the “need” to update their iPhone or Android device every six or eight months, sometimes at the cost of \$600 or \$800 each time. In many instances, these customers were “upgrading” two or three lines each

time as well, but they were viewed as successful if they had the latest technology. Recently, in an almost satirical news article, a young man was reported to have sold his kidney in order to purchase such devices. The article stated in “April 2011, 17-year-old Wang Shangkun made headlines when he sold one of his kidneys so he could buy an iPhone 4 and iPad 2.” If it were not so saddening, the story would be amusing, and the article truly reads as though it were satire. However, it is further stated almost “immediately after the surgery, Wang began dealing with complications. Now, nearly eight years later, his decision seems to have cost him his quality of life.” Shangkun now spends every day in bed because his other kidney is failing, which means that he must depend on a dialysis machine. How could such a thing happen? It was reported that the “place his surgery took place was so unsanitary, he developed renal deficiency which led to an infection,” all of which happened because the “surgery was illegal.” Shangkun brought about this life-long condition for a mere “22,000 yuan, equivalent to \$2,500 in the United

States.”⁴⁰ While we may balk at the extreme nature of this story, it should be remembered the Lord was betrayed for a mere thirty pieces of silver. (Reference Matt 26:14-15, 27:3-5.)

Greed, when it is allowed to take control of the heart, will carry the individual to extremes. There is nothing innately sinful in owning an iPhone, or any other material items such as clothes, purses, shoes, cars, houses, and the like. However, it must be asked where the heart truly resides. Are we keeping these material possessions in their proper place, or are they taking the place of God? If our goal is to own such possessions merely for the status symbol they provide, then we need to realign our perspective of this earthly life with God’s view.

In Matthew 6:19-21 (NKJV), Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Even among Christians, too many parents push their children towards “success” in this life, which generally translates into having lots of money, high-paying jobs, large homes, expensive cars, etc. In order to achieve this goal, their heart has to be set on carnal ideologies rather than on the spiritual. What good are these things in the end? They fade away, and nothing is left of them. Yet many have neglected salvation for them. Solomon wrote better “is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred” (Prov 15:16-17).

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Matthew 6:33

The underlying concept of Matthew 6:19-21 mirrors that which is found in Proverbs 15:16-17; the amassing of wealth in this life brings trouble to that person because they are constantly worried about thieves and economic downfalls. Furthermore, many so-called “successful” individuals are devoid of true friends. If their money disappeared, so would the vast majority of their friends. However, the God-centric person is content with the blessings given them and will, therefore, be happier. Solomon also wrote that “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with

⁴⁰ Smith, J. (2019, January 23). Man who sold kidney to buy iPhone now bedridden after organ failure. *Cleveland News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cleveland19.com/2019/01/24/man-who-sold-kidney-buy-iphone-now-bedridden-after-organ-failure/>

silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity" (Eccl 5:10). The desire to obtain worldly riches does not bring contentment because it will never be enough. In Ecclesiastes 5:12, it is written that the "sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep." Initially, there is the worry of trying to obtain the wealth, compounded by the worry of trying to maintain it. And finally, the fear of thieves will interrupt the sleep of the wealthy. How many rich people hire private security, and why must they do so? Constant worry over possessions will remain on the earth when they depart. On this concept, Solomon wrote that "Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind? All his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger" (Eccl 5:16-17).

When considering greed for possessions, power, fame, and similar things, it is important to consider the life of Solomon. As he wrote the passages quoted above, it is possible and/or likely he had corrected his previous misdeeds and that he sought to help others avoid the pitfalls that he had fallen prey to. Of Solomon, it is written that "when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David" (1 Kings 11:4). His greed and indiscretion with ungodly relationships lead him down the path of sinfulness. Earlier in the same passage, we read that "King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh...from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart" (1 Kings 11:1-3).

Although Solomon's example clearly fits under many different categories, we can easily overlay the definition(s) of greed and see how applicable they are in this circumstance. Remember our definition from Merriam-Webster's dictionary which states greed is "a selfish and excessive desire for more of something...than is needed." Even most of the world would acknowledge that having "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" is most excessive, even though many would disagree with God about having multiple relationships.

Where, then, does our heart reside? Is our heart humbled before the Lord like Josiah's, or is it prideful like that of Amon? Are we focused on the greed of this world (fame, fortune, etc.), or are we focused on a spiritual life? The world

will entice us to give up God and to have excessive desires for the things of this world, yet God is openly available to us in order to combat such.

In Proverbs 1, Solomon personifies Wisdom and points out that it is readily available. God does not hide wisdom from us, but rather He has made it readily available in the pages of His word. Having godly wisdom helps us combat the ungodly desires of this world. Solomon wrote that “Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares. She cries out in the chief concourses, at the openings of the gates in the city she speaks her words” (Prov 1:20-21). Why avoid it? Such was the purpose of the writing of Ecclesiastes; Solomon composed it to teach us what he learned through experience so we would not have to experience it personally. Finally, he wrote that the “Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, Equity and every good path” (Prov 2:6-9).

Futility

While there is a need to have some money and possessions in this life, an overdependence upon them leads us away from God. One of the many concepts Solomon addressed in the book of Ecclesiastes is the futility of earthly wealth and accomplishments. Solomon was an extremely accomplished king in Israel. Of these accomplishments, he wrote of himself, “I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem” (Eccl 2:4-9). During his time and throughout history, Solomon was famous because of his wealth and his accomplishments. This was so much so that many came from all around to see if he was really as wealthy and accomplished as the stories stated. (Reference 2 Chron 9:1-28.) After acquiring so much wealth, building so much, becoming famous, and possessing so many women, what did Solomon write? In Ecclesiastes 2:11, he wrote, “Then I

“The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile.”

Psalm 94:11

looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.”

In Luke 12:14-21, Jesus said, “But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Our life should not consist of our accumulation of wealth and possessions, but rather of laying up treasure in heaven. The possessions of this life will decay and remain on this earth long after our souls have left it (should the earth persist that long). What eternal value do they have? What will greed in this life achieve for us?

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation...”
Romans 1:16

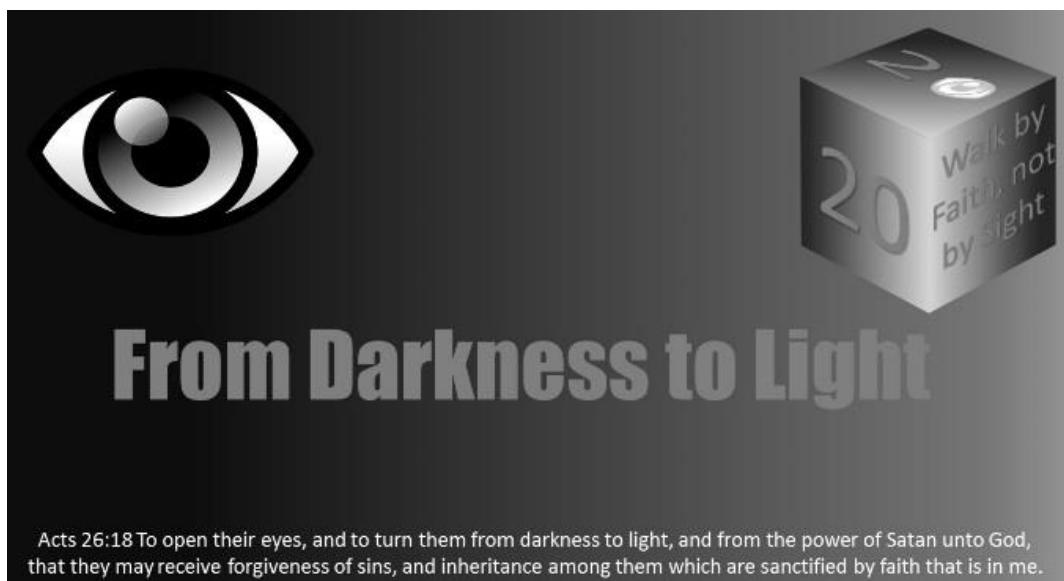
Conclusion

In Psalm 101:3, King David wrote, “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me.” We can each choose what we set our eyes upon, which will in turn impact the importance of those things in our own spiritual lives. Likewise, Solomon wrote, “Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven” (Prov 23:4-5). This echoes the point about the futility of material things in this life that does not carry over into the life that is to come for those who believe in, trust in, and obey Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote that if “then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:1-3). We are to set our eyes on the things from above and focus on what God

would have us to do in this life. There is no futility in seeking the things of God, but rather the deepest of meaning. These are true riches! These are the things which persist to eternity!

Do not let the world distract you from obeying and pleasing the Lord God above. John wrote, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17). All those things for which so many strive and waste their lives will fade away, but the true riches of God will never fade.

In Romans 8:31-39, the Apostle Paul presents the fact the Devil and his followers cannot physically remove us from the presence and love of God; we can make the decision to remove ourselves from His presence, but no other entity can do so. Why would we make such a decision? Instead, our own attitude should mirror that of John who wrote, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1). Let us be known as the children of God, and let us, therefore, overcome this world and the wicked draw of greed for what it offers. (Reference 1 John 4:4.)



Darkness Lesson 24 Questions

Lust of the Eyes: Greed

1. What is the most common usage of the word “Greed”? How might it apply beyond that definition?
2. Should Christians seek power for the sake of having power? What impacts might this desire have on their spiritual lives?
3. What are the downsides to seeking after fame and popularity?
4. Should Christians try to blend in with the world? What do the scriptures say about this concept? (Please provide a passage an example.) What arguments do some Christians put forth to justify blending in? How might such arguments be answered from the scriptures?
5. What principles do the scriptures teach concerning our hearts? What examples were used in the lesson, and what do we learn from those examples?
6. How long do earthly treasures persist? What did King Solomon write concerning earthly treasures, possessions, and accomplishments? Does this mean possessions and achievements are inherently sinful?
7. What does it mean to be a child of God? What passages would you use to help establish this perspective? How do the contexts of those passages help support it?
8. Where should our dependence and reliance be

Darkness Lesson 25

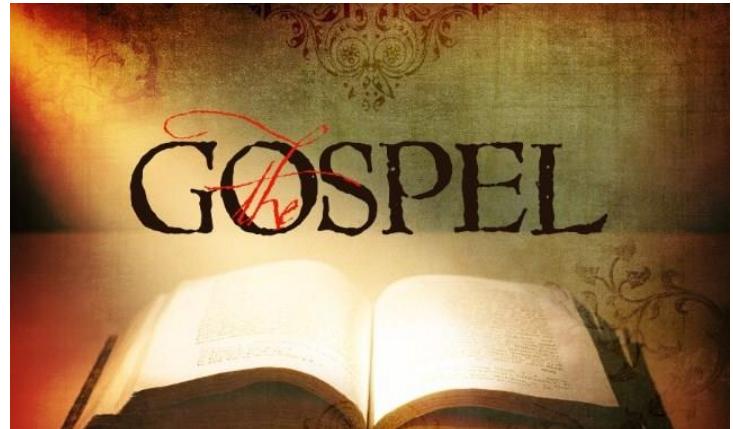
Lust of the Eyes:

Being Blind to the Light

by Kevin Gilbert

Isaiah 42:18-19 “Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who *is* blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger *that* I sent? who *is* blind as *he that is* perfect, and blind as the LORD’S servant?”

Light is used to help us see the way in dark locations. It frees us to do many things that are impossible to do in the dark. Light in the Bible is compared to God the father, Jesus, and His word. In 1 John 1:5, we read, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” Also, Jesus said of Himself in John 8:12, “Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’” Finally, in 2 Cor 4:4, the word of God is referred to as the “light of the gospel.” God’s word lights our way in a world darkened by sin. So how, or why, do people become blind to the light of the gospel?



Let us compare spiritual blindness to physical blindness. How can a person’s eyes be physically blind to the light that is around them? They may be born blind. Their blindness may be the result of an injury or illness. Or, they may simply choose to close their eyes or to wear a blindfold so they cannot see the light.

Let’s discuss these in the opposite order from how I have them listed. There are different situations where we may choose to blind ourselves to the light. For example, children will cover their eyes to what is happening around them when

they are scared. When flying long distances, I have worn blinders to block the light because it bothered me and kept me from sleeping. But why would someone want to spiritually blind themselves from the light of truth? Jesus speaks of this in John 3:19-21, “and this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be

exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” People may choose to be blind to the truth because they do not want the evil in their lives to be shown to themselves or others. Acknowledging your sin can bring guilt and the need to change. Many believe they can avoid this by hiding from the truth.

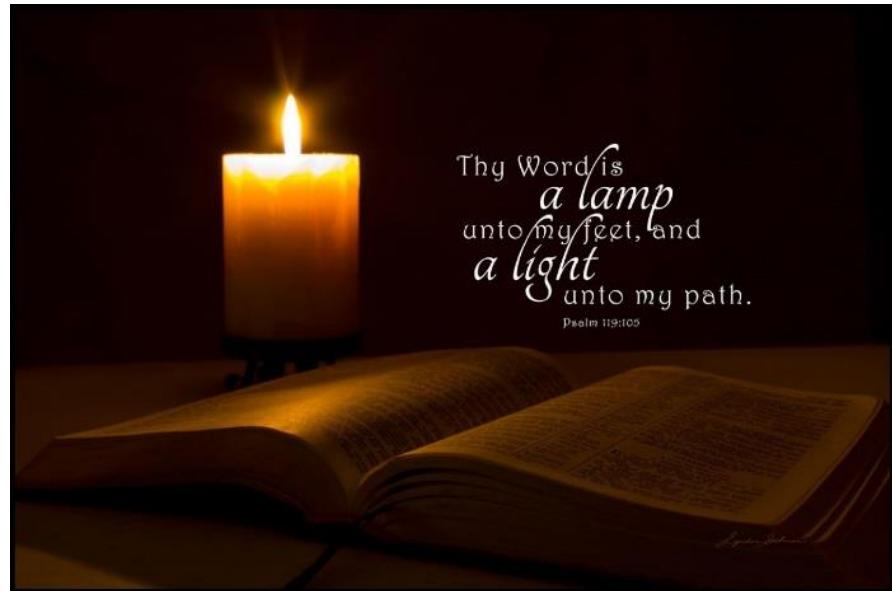
Next, physical blindness may result from an injury or illness. Spiritually, I would equate this to being led astray by false teaching, whether from a false teacher or our own wrong use of God’s word. False teaching is a form of spiritual injury from which the injured person may never recover. The damage caused by false teachers is described in 2 Peter 2:1-2. “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.” To recognize these false teachers, we need to test the spirits as instructed in 1 John 4:1, which requires knowledge of God’s word. A lack of knowledge of God’s word can also result in our own misuse of the scriptures. As Peter spoke of the epistles from Paul in 2 Peter 3:16, he commented there are “things hard to understand” and that “untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the scriptures.” To guard against falling into this trap, we must “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).



Finally, a person can be born physically blind, but as far as being born spiritually blind is concerned, this is where the analogy fails. The Bible teaches God wants all to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9) and that Jesus died for all (Rom 6:10).

Therefore, there is nobody who is born completely blind to the truth and has no hope of ever seeing the truth. Fortunately, spiritual blindness does not have to be permanent. It can be corrected, but it takes a softening of the heart and a willingness to submit to God.

Let us open our eyes to the truth and allow it to light our path. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psa 119:105).



Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Darkness Lesson 25 Questions

Lust of the Eyes: Being Blind to the Light

1. Why would someone want to remain spiritually blind?

2. Can you give a few specific illustrations of your answer to question 1?

3. Ultimately, can one hide from the truth of God or His judgment?

4. How do we avoid those who would blind us with false teaching?

5. Can you give a few specific examples to illustrate your answer to question 4?

6. What is the appeal of false teaching?

7. Considering false teaching, why must Christians remain diligent?