

Darkness of Mind

by Ray C. Stedman

What a baffling and confusing world we live in today. So many conflicting ideas and concepts are thrust upon us from every direction and many of them seem directly contradictory. Authorities of equal repute tell us one thing and then another and what they say clashes violently. It is hard to know what to believe today. In the last few weeks people have said to me:

- “I don’t know what to believe about Vietnam. I don’t know what is going on out there, or what kind of a position to take on it.”
- Others say, “I don’t know what to make of civil rights, and this civil rights program. I don’t know what position to take. There seems to be two sides to this.”
- Others say, “We don’t know what to believe about the present political outlook and our present administration.”
- Others are concerned about the philosophy of education of our day, the matter of training children, or the great and pressing issue of sliding moral standards which is brought before us so frequently today.

Who knows what to believe? Listen to all the voices around and you will come up with many kinds of conflicting philosophies. No wonder that many are confused and ready to follow any voice that seems to offer a way out.

Now, to a Christian living in this confusing, baffling, bewildering world, the Apostle Paul has a very definite word to say. It is not another vague, uncertain word of advice, simply another of the voices on every hand today, but it is clear and pre-

cise and right to the point of the problem that you and I are facing.

In the opening verses of the 4th chapter of Ephesians, the apostle has been dealing with the nature of the church and the part each Christian has to play in its operation and its growth. But now, with Verse 17, he turns to the Christian in relationship to an unbelieving world, a world in which that Christian must live. Though this account was written almost two thousand years ago, it is impossible to read this thoughtfully without seeing that the world today is exactly the same, and the Christian’s reaction to it must be exactly the same.

Following Paul’s usual pattern in presenting a subject, he begins with a general statement, then breaks it down into a more analytical study of the various aspects of the statement he has made. Here is the general statement, in Verse 17:

Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; {Eph 4:17 RSV}

Notice the force of that exhortation. The apostle says “I affirm and testify in the Lord.” That means this is not merely a piece of apostolic advice. This is not simple human reasoning, this is a result of divine revelation. This is part of that whole revelation of the mind of God that was given to the Apostle Paul in what he calls “visions and revelations of the Lord” {2 Cor 12:1}, when the Lord Jesus himself appeared to him and instructed him as to the message he should give to the church of his day, and, through it, to the church of our day as well.

This then is not mere human advice. Paul says, “I testify and affirm in the Lord that this is what must be done.” This is the finger of God placed squarely at the root of a human problem.

Well, what is it he says? He says, “You Christians must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.” It would perhaps be helpful to translate the word *Gentiles* here by the word *nations*. It is often translated that way elsewhere in Scripture and is the same word. It simply means “the nations,” worldlings, those outside of Christ. This has no reference to the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, it refers to anyone who is outside of Christ. “You Christians,” he says, “must no longer live as they do.” How is that? “In the futility of their minds.” Paul is saying, “The place to start in living as a Christian is to recognize you must think differently than the world does.” Notice, he does not start with actions. He is not one of these do-gooders who moves in and tries to change the outward scene only. He starts with the thought-life, with the mind, and he declares that the world’s thinking is futile, i.e., empty. This is the vital appeal that he makes to Christians, “You must not think like the worldling does, you must not adopt the world’s philosophy of living, or follow the world’s systems of value.” Why? “Because the worldling,” he says, “lives in futility, emptiness of mind.”

The word for *futility*, in the original Greek, means “void of purpose or appropriateness,” i.e., pointless. Phillips, in his modern paraphrase puts it very accurately and beautifully: “Do not live as the gentiles live. For they live blindfold in a world of illusion,” {Eph 4:17b-18a J. B. Phillips}. The New English Bible says, “Give up living like pagans, with their good-for-nothing notions,” {Eph 4:18a NEB}. That is exactly it, “good for nothing.” Impressive, perhaps, clever, oftentimes startling, provocative, but pointless! The world in its thinking is pointless.

If this is true you can see why there is such a fundamental cleavage between Christianity and the world, and why the Lord Jesus drew a distinct line of demarcation between the thinking of the world, the direction of the world, the destiny of the world, and those of the Christian. This is why the Christian is told he cannot love the world and the Father at the same time. John makes that crystal clear in his first letter {cf, 1 Jn 2:15}. There is a fundamental difference between the two. This is why “friendship with the world,” in the words of James, “is enmity with God,” {cf, Jas 4:4 KJV}. Notice, not friendship with *the worldling*, that is something different, but friendship with *the world*, with its

ways of thinking, its philosophy. That is enmity with God.

Now this needs to be made very clear, because it is a very important distinction. As we all know, fallen man prides himself on his ability to reason. We consider this the highest function of humanity and take great pride in the ability of man to ferret out knowledge and to put various items of knowledge together to produce very practical gadgets. We point with pride to the technological perfection of our modern developments, to the skill with which science has harnessed the forces of nature and made them the servants of man. Man exalts his reason, but the writers of Scripture universally agree, though all this may be very impressive, clever, and remarkable in the eyes of men, in the eyes of God the reasoning of man is pointless, empty, vain. As the Lord Jesus himself put it, “What is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God,” {cf, Luke 16:15 KJV}. Now that is putting it very strongly, is it not? That is speaking plainly.

But see how the apostle brings Christians face to face with the fundamental issue? We must face this very squarely. Either God is right or the world is right, one or the other. It cannot be both. The Christian must choose on which basis he is going to live his life. If he is to follow Christ, he must be willing to have his thinking changed. When you become a Christian this is the first issue you face. You must be willing to have your whole fundamental outlook on life drastically altered. Christianity is not merely a change in outward actions, a bit higher moral or ethical level. Christianity is a revolutionary change of government which results in a radical change in behavior. Paul certainly brings this out very plainly here.

Now he moves on to analyze more closely this problem of faulty thinking. What makes human thinking so pointless, so without ultimate significance? The answer he gives is in Verse 18:

... they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; {Eph 4:18 RSV}

He is tracing a chain of cause and effect here. Beginning with the most immediate effect he is tracing it back to that which causes it. The first step is that worldlings think futilely because their

understanding is darkened. Just as a cloud, passing over the sun, darkens the light of it, so the thinking of man in his fallen state is shadowed, obscured, darkened. Scripture continually uses these terms, light and darkness, as metaphors for truth and ignorance. Truth is light; ignorance is darkness. Paul's figure declares that men's thinking is shadowed with ignorance, it is pointless because it stems from ignorance. That is rather arresting, is it not?

We think we know so much, and we do. We know so much, but we never know quite enough. That is what the apostle is saying.

Again this relates to a truth that we find widespread throughout the Scriptures: Man is ignorant because there is a part of his being that does not function. It is his spiritual life. His spirit is blank, darkened, obscured. In that part of his being which was intended to function as the key to his life there is nothing taking place. As a result, all his knowledge is broken, unrelated, incomplete. That is the picture Paul draws. What man thinks, though it may be very clever, does not bring him anywhere, does not produce anything, does not better him.

We are haunted these days with the question: Has this tremendous civilization really done anything for us?

Last week I wandered among the ruins of an ancient Mayan civilization in Guatemala, viewing half-covered temples just now being excavated from the dirt and dust of centuries. The more archaeologists uncover the Mayan ruins, the more we learn of the remarkable civilization of that day. But modern man is continually haunted with the question, "Are we really any better than they?" We may be better off, but are we any better? Have we really advanced in any way? The understanding of man is darkened and it is especially evident in his thinking about himself and about God. It can be seen in his value systems, his evaluation of the power structures of life, in the way he determines what is important and what is not important.

Illustrations abound for this. Coming back from Guatemala last week I had to go through customs in Los Angeles. While waiting for the plane to be reloaded, I sat in the lounge and picked up a discarded newspaper. (That is the Scottish way of reading newspapers and I take advantage of it every chance I get.) Reading through the headlines, my attention was caught by an article headed, *Religion Fading, says Psychiatry Professor*. I read on and saw that the associate professor of

psychiatry at the University of California at Los Angeles Neuro-Psychiatric Institute had said that religion is fading away from modern civilization, and he calls this the most hopeful sign of our times. In the article there was this almost incredible paragraph,

The decline in religious feeling among civilized people is an indication that man is steadily becoming more rational and less subject to superstition and therefore less likely to kill and maim those who disagree with him.

That in a day when crimes of violence are at an unprecedented height, when the streets of our cities are no longer safe to walk at night, and when the great cities of America literally seethe with suppressed hate and incipient riot and bloodshed! What a confirmation of the apostle's analysis of human thinking. The mind of fallen man is darkened, blinded, and does not see things as they really are. It can ignore obvious facts that thrust themselves upon us constantly and blithely dismiss them with a wave of the hand to pronounce that man is getting better and better. That is a sign of the ignorance and consequent darkening of the human mind.

This unaccountable darkness is seen in the glib talk today about *situational ethics*, i.e., morals determined by situation, expediency, also in *the relativity of morals*, and the widespread acceptance of the idea that sexual promiscuity is an expression of personal freedom, even though those who indulge in this kind of living inevitably show themselves to be increasingly the slaves of human passion, and suffer in their own lives the consequent inevitable restlessness of spirit and torment of heart. How can man be so blind? It is the darkening, the shadowing of the fallen mind:

- It is seen in Communism with its emphasis on the material and economic, and its ignorance of the emotional and spiritual forces at work in mankind.
- It is likewise evident in American materialism, with its passion for new and better things while ignoring the hunger of the spirit in man, concentrating only on supplying the needs of the body and the soul, especially the body.

- It is seen in our admiration for aggressive, hardheaded men who get to the top at all costs, and for our belief that power is measured by how many men you control, how many people are subject to you, how many you can get to serve you instead of how many you serve.
- It is seen, perhaps most clearly, in the naive ignoring of the basic twist of human nature that is evident in panaceas and programs that are continually offered as solutions to the problems of mankind.

I read the letters to the editor in the newspaper quite frequently and I am almost amused at how many people offer simple answers to complicated problems. They come out with very idealistic, wonderful sounding programs based on the naive assumption that human beings can be good if they want to badly enough. If they can just be shown that a thing is wrong they will all immediately stop it, yet the record of history is mankind is continually stumbling over its own footsteps. Man is his own worst enemy, and the basic problem is the twist of universal human evil.

In their ignorant blindness, men think themselves all right, and, therefore, fancy they do not need God. The next step is inevitable. They are “alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them.” Paul is not blaming men for this, any more than God blames them for it, he is simply analyzing a situation that exists. Because their understanding is darkened, shadowed, incomplete, in their ignorance they reject the life of God and therefore cut themselves off from the one thing man needs to be man! Both nature and Scripture concur that man is incomplete without God. Man was made to be the dwelling place of God. It is *God in man* which makes *man a man*. This was fully demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ. It was because he was so fully indwelt of the Father that he was able to be fully and wholly a man, man as God intended man to be. Therefore the life of God is essential to manhood and without it man is blinded, weak, and ignorant.

Some of the world’s great psychologists have seen the truth of this rather clearly. In a letter to E. Stanley Jones, the great Austrian psychologist Carl Jung wrote:

Those psychiatrists who are not superficial have come to the conclusion that the vast neurotic misery of the world could be termed a neurosis of emptiness. Men cut themselves off from the root of their being, from God, and then life turns empty, inane, meaningless, without purpose. So when God goes, goal goes. When goal goes, meaning goes. When meaning goes, value goes, and life turns dead on our hands.

Jung also saw this evil within himself. He said that the man who used psychology to look behind the scenes of his patient’s lives must also use it more especially to look behind the scenes in his own life. If he does not do this, says Jung, he is merely an “unconscious fraud.”

But there is yet more here in Paul’s great analysis. If men were cut off from God only because of ignorance of him, they might well excuse themselves, for no man can be blamed for not having what he doesn’t know exists, but now we learn the whole truth. It is all “due to their hardness of heart.” Man is born ignorant and cut off from the life of God, but he remains in that condition only because of the hardness of his heart.

A young Christian said to me recently, “Why is it, when we have the world’s greatest product, it is so hard to sell?” The reason is because man resists the truth, rejects light, turns from God’s love, clings to his error, and thus renders his heart gradually harder and harder and more unable to respond.

All of this marks the twisted, shadowed, empty thinking of the world. Paul says, “You Christians must not think this way any longer. If you are going to live a Christian life, the first place it must become evident is a change in your thinking. You must not follow these philosophies, you must not agree with these attitudes, you must not adopt these value systems.” For, if you do, you will go on to demonstrate the inevitable outcome, the next step in Paul’s analysis here, Verse 19:

... they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. {Eph 4:19 RSV}

He says the same thing in Romans 1, “God gave them over to a reprobate mind” {Rom 1:28b KJV}, that they might practice the awful list of evil

deeds that is so frankly and bluntly described there. It sounds like it was culled from the pages of any morning newspaper today. Why do people do these things? Why is moral licentiousness so rampant? Why are our standards so constantly deteriorating? It is because men are futile in their thinking; it is because of this shadowed thinking, this incompleteness, this ignorance from which men operate, even the best of them, even the finest of minds, unredeemed, unregenerated.

But the good news of the gospel is that God reaches even these kind of people. He draws and softens and melts. The amazing love of Christ penetrates even the hardness of men's hearts. Therefore, we are not to blame people like this, or to withdraw from them. We are to remember that we, too, had the same mind, the same outlook on life. As Paul says in Colossians 1:21, "... you who once were estranged and hostile in mind," that is the way we thought too, until God's love reached us. So we are not to be judgmental, not to be hard and harsh toward these who think this way. This is the basic condition of humanity to which the gospel makes its appeal.

Now the apostle goes on to trace one other thing. The only hope of helping these people is to demonstrate a wholly different pattern of thought, a wholly different set of values. The implication is clear that if we live like the world lives, even though we are Christians, there is not a thing we can do to help them, not a thing!

You remember the story of the boy who thought he would teach some sparrows to sing like a canary, so he put them in a cage with the canary, hoping the canary would teach them to sing. In a few days he found the canary chirping like the sparrows. This is always the case, is it not?

If we give ourselves to the attitudes and ways of thinking of those around us, we will inevitably do the same things, there is no avoiding it. The only way to help them is to demonstrate a completely different level of life. Many of us have been astounded this past year at leaders who have gone through moral breakdowns. Why? Because somewhere along the line they succumbed to the futile thinking of the world. They gave way in their thought life. This is what makes a man turn from the things of Christ to pursue materialism or personal ambition: He succumbs to the philosophy of the world around.

But now we come to the reason why Paul speaks so strongly. He says, in Verse 20,

You did not so learn Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. {Eph 4:20-21 RSV}

In other words, you must not live like the Gentiles because you need not. In Christ, you have a different principle of living, a different way of thinking. In Christ, you have the truth by which you can test everything else, the truth as it is in Jesus. That is a wonderful phrase. That ought to form the basic concept of all Christian thinking. You have found in Jesus Christ the truth, the simple truth:

- About life,
- About yourself,
- About the world,
- About the makeup of science and nature,
- About human behavior.

"In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," {cf, Col 2:3}. You have found in Christ the truth. I wish to stress that, for this is the point the apostle is making.

The Lord Jesus said these challenging words. "If any man follow me, he shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life," {cf, John 8:12}. That means a Christian does not need to walk in uncertainty about things, in lack of knowledge. It means that, in Christ, we have the truth that reveals. It is popular today to think that nothing can be known for sure. That is part of the futility of the world's thinking, to think that there are no final answers, no ultimate knowledge, no ultimate truth. Recently I heard even a Christian pastor say that all knowledge must at last be reduced to the tentative, we can only think we know but we never know for sure. Now Christianity repudiates that concept utterly. The New Testament denies that. Christ has come that we might know – not everything, that is true. We do not become paragons of knowledge automatically spouting out revelations of ultimate truth about everything. We do not know everything, but what we do know, **we know!** Christ said to his disciples, "If you continue in my word ... you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free," {cf, John 8:31b, 8:32}.

That is what the truth always does, it sets men free. Truth, even though it is hard truth, difficult truth, is realistic and therefore it sets us free and tears away the veils of illusion.

Perhaps I should add this qualifying word here. Not everything a worldling thinks is wrong, because obviously God's truth is at work in the world as well, and the world has picked up a good deal of it. The world knows quite a bit of truth, but the point is, it is so intermingled with error that it is indistinguishable until you lay it alongside the truth as it is in Jesus. That is the only measuring stick we have.

- How can you tell what is true?
- How can you tell what is wrong?
- How can you tell what is error?

There is only one way, the truth as it is in Jesus. That truth is always to the point, it is purposeful, it leads to significant, useful, appropriate living. It is this the apostle is stressing. We must learn to test all our thinking by what the Lord Jesus has revealed, either directly himself or indirectly through the apostles whom he has sent to tell us the truth: The truth as it is in Jesus.

Tested by this, we discover there is much we must reject today. I do not have any problem with this "God Is Dead" movement. It does not bother me in the least. I know it is one of those things that sweep like cyclones across the landscape of human thinking and then is gone again, to be replaced next year by something else – one of those fads or fashions in theology that come and go. But do I give any credence to it, do I think it has any weight or merit? Of course not! For the Lord Jesus has said that God is not dead. God is an eternal Father, God is Spirit, eternal, immortal, invisible, constantly underlying all of life. Measured by the truth that is in Jesus all such nonsense is immediately rejected as unworthy of consideration.

There are *so* many things we can measure this way. Today the theological world, and many Christians, are troubled by the rise of the idea of universalism again, the hope that all men will be saved, that no matter what they do, all are redeemed, all will be saved. But, measured by the truth as it is in Jesus, we reject that statement – much as we would like to believe it. For, you see, Jesus says something different, and, though it is hard, he is the authority we accept.

Reading an article in *His Magazine* recently on this very subject, I found deep agreement with these words. The writer says,

I am deeply impressed by the argument of brilliant thinkers like Tillich, Ferre, Bultmann, Bruner and Barth, not to mention John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, the Pope, Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Bertrand Russell, and many more. But what do these men know? What are the data on which they base their judgments? When it comes to the important question, "What is man's destiny after this life?" I prefer Jesus Christ, the God-man, to Paul Tillich, as my authority. I prefer Jesus Christ to Rudolf Bultmann. And above all, lest you misunderstand me, I prefer Jesus Christ to my own blind human guesses based on woefully inadequate data.

Exactly! Christ is the authority. The truth is revealed in Jesus, therefore

- We reject all philosophies that urge the necessity of "getting even" as a way of living with one another.
- We reject all philosophy that says that trials are tragic occurrences for which we ought to feel sorry for ourselves, and act as though we have been offended when they come into our lives as though we had been specially singled out for difficulty. We are to remember, in the light of the truth as it is in Jesus, that these trials and sufferings are part of the program, part of God's ministering to us, part of that which it takes to make us what God wants us to be.
- We are to reject the common philosophy of the day that others are to blame for our weaknesses, that if we lived in different circumstances, with different people and had to face different problems, we could be different. The truth as it is in Jesus says that there is adequacy in Christ for any situation, any place; that God has put you where you are because he wants you to live the Christian life right there; that those around you will never have the chance to see the tremendous, revolutionary difference that being a Christian makes unless they see it in your life right where you are right now.

That is where we are to begin to live, and this is why Paul says we “must no longer live as the Gentiles do,” in the emptiness of their minds, for we “did not so learn Christ.” There are resources in him far greater than any worldling every dreamed of. There are possibilities of fruitfulness and glory and grace in Jesus Christ which, if they begin to manifest themselves in your life, will set your neighbors and friends saying,

- “What has this person got?”
- “What kind of a faith is this?”

- “What do these people have that makes them able to live like this?”

Now, that is the challenge the apostle sets before us.

In the rest of this chapter he will detail it for us in specifics, bringing it right down where we live. As we go through this, we shall see that what we do is itself witnessing, telling what we are.

Therefore, *what we are* must be *what Christ is*, for that is the only life that arrests and changes and challenges men.

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Putting On, Putting Off

by Ray C. Stedman

One way or another, put in their own way, Christians everywhere are asking the same question. They do not ask, "How can we be sure that when we die we will go to heaven?" Those who are newly introduced to Christian life are concerned in these areas, and quite properly so. But for the most part Christians are everywhere increasingly aware that there is far more to Christianity than a promise that when we die we will go to heaven. They are not even asking the question, "How can I know that the sins of my past are forgiven?" Again, this is an area of proper concern to those first entering the Christian faith. But the question I find Christians asking, arising from a deep concern evident almost everywhere, is this question: "If Jesus Christ can really live and love through me, then how do I let him do this? What is the process, what must I actually do, to have this happening in my life?"

I am greatly encouraged by the fact that question is being asked, for it reveals that Christians are getting away from the concept that Christianity is merely a way to escape hell and go to heaven some day. True as those facts are, they are not the essential issue in Christian faith. It is very encouraging to see Christians becoming aware at last of all the great provisions in Jesus Christ for living today, right now, that this is what he is primarily aiming at in our lives. Christianity is intended to change men to love differently in the midst of the kind of world in which we are now living. There is a hunger being created by the Spirit of God everywhere for this kind of life. There is a spreading discontent with mediocrity and it is a very welcome change. There is a dissatisfaction with the anemic, pallid, lukewarm, lusterless Christian living that so many have experienced for so long and which is disgusting both to men and to God. In the book of the Revelation the Lord Jesus puts it plainly to the

church at Laodicea. He says, "because you are lukewarm I will spew you out of my mouth," {cf, Rev 3:16 RSV}. That kind of Christianity is the reason for the restless movements of our day which challenge and charge the church with impotence and irrelevance.

Now Paul gives the answer to this basic Christian question in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. He has declared already that the place to begin living the Christian life is with a change of thought. We saw before, in Verses 17-20, that we must begin by having our mind changed. Our thought life must become different. We cannot go on thinking the same way we did before we were Christians. We cannot imitate or adopt the thinking of the non-Christian with regard to life in general, the thinking of the world. Paul showed us why. He traced the darkened, pointless thinking of the world and he bluntly terms it "ignorance."

Now that is a hard word to many to accept. There are those who ask, "How can you say this in the face of the intellectual achievements of men today? How can you deny the tremendous accomplishments of science in our day and age? How do you dare say this in a community which has more Nobel Prize winners and Pulitzer Prize winners per square inch than perhaps any other place on the earth? How can you say that the thinking of the world is ignorance? How can you set aside so easily the careful study and impeccable logic of the great thinkers of the world?" The answer, of course, is: "We are not attempting to deny logic or brilliance of intellect at all." These are very obvious in the world's thinking.

The aspect which the apostle is challenging is not the world's logic, but its premise, i.e., its underlying assumptions and goals, what it is aiming at, what it thinks will be accomplished by its present

thinking. Therefore, there must be a change in our thinking, for the thinking of the world is faulted, it is imperfect, shadowed, darkened with error.

Any of you who have learned the clever art of balancing a checkbook (I never have mastered it myself) know how one error can change the whole picture. You do not have to have a lot of errors in a checkbook, you need only one, one slight transposition in figures, one error in subtraction, and the rest of your addition can be absolutely faultless, perfectly logical, arithmetically correct all the way down the line – but it is all wrong. There is nothing quite as disheartening as to come to the end of a long column of figures and discover that you are three cents off and do not know where it is.

In that same way, error underlies the thinking of the world. There is much truth in the world's reasoning, there is a lot of logic. As we pointed out before, there is much genuine truth which the world has picked up through exposure to the truth of God through many centuries, but it is intermingled with error, and the problem is how to distinguish the true from the false – how to tell what is false. But the apostle is pointing out there is a fundamental error which has crept into human thinking which reveals itself in the basic assumptions with which people begin. It is here we must start in making changes in the Christian life. Christianity is a totally different way of life and therefore we must think differently.

Now, how do you do this? This is the question. Paul comes to grips with this question in Verses 22-24. In a very practical way he puts the answer before us, as he always does, first in a general statement that reveals the principle involved. This general statement is all we shall have time for now, but he goes on in the chapter to apply this principle to various situations, all practical applications of this basic, underlying principle. Now let us look at the principle itself.

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. {Eph 4:22-24 RSV}

Now there it is. You cannot put it any plainer than that. Put off the old and put on the new. That is the principle by which the possibilities which are

in Christ can become evident in terms of our experience. It is by following this specific procedure of putting off the old and putting on the new. It only needs to be thought through carefully for us to understand exactly what this means.

Notice, first, there is a recognition of the pull of the old life on the Christian. There is the presence of the old nature recognized, this “old man” – as it is, literally, in the Greek. The admonition of the apostle is to be constantly recognizing and rejecting these false, underlying assumptions which come from the old man, the old life, the old way of living. It is not merely deeds, you will notice, but outlooks, attitudes. This is what causes the problem and this is what we must reject.

The Apostle Paul here uses a very helpful figure in these two phrases, “put off” and “put on.” *Put off* means to divest yourself of something, to take it off. When you go into your bedroom at night to get ready for bed you put off your clothes, you divest yourself of them, and lay them aside. If you have a soiled garment, you put it off and put on something new. He is using the very simplest of terms to illustrate what we must do in the realm of thought, of the attitudes of life. We must reject those basic assumptions which have caused our trouble, putting them off, rejecting them, divesting ourselves of them, just as you would put off your dirty clothes.

We must do this because, from these wrong attitudes, the corruption of life comes. He says the former manner of life is corrupt – decayed, dead, foul, selfish, unhappy, restless. These are the things which have made life unhappy or miserable. He points out we can recognize these attitudes by the way they operate. They are “deceitful lusts.” Unfortunately this word *lust* is greatly misunderstood in our day. We invariably associate it with something sexual. Lust is sex desire, that is the way we usually interpret it. But this word is much broader than that. It does not mean only sexual desire, although it does include that, but it means any urge or basic drive. We will get closer to the essential meaning of this word if we use the term *urge*. These *deceitful urges* are constantly coming to us as we react to various situations in which we find ourselves.

For instance there is the urge to fulfill yourself by indulging in an orgy of spending. That is one kind of urge he is describing here, the urge to make

yourself happy by owning things. Such an urge is deceitful, as the Word of God tells us, for man was never made to be satisfied with owning things. Yet who of us does not daily experience this kind of an urge? We flip through the pages of a magazine and see the beautiful gadgets and remarkable gimmicks that science has made available to us. We look at the drab, worn out gadgets and gimmicks in our house and we feel an urge, do we not? We want to go out and buy a color TV set. We cannot any longer be satisfied with that black and white set which once so enthralled us when we first got it. We simply must have a new car – the old one has gotten dusty! There is a continual exposure to this kind of urge, is there not?

You see how he is talking about life? These basic urges seem to promise much but never deliver. Therefore they are deceitful, they do not come through, they do not really satisfy. It is possible to live our lives, as many Christians do and as worldlings invariably do, trying continually to satisfy these urges which never satisfy.

I think in this connection of riding on the commuter train to San Francisco some years ago, and I saw a young woman sitting across the aisle from me chain-smoking. She lit one right after another all the way to the city, and finally she crumpled up the pack and threw it on the floor. I noticed that it was the brand that has written across the face of it “They Satisfy,” and I thought to myself, “I wonder how many it takes?” Thus, these are *deceitful urges*:

- There is the urge to use others for our own advantage. Did you ever feel the urge to manipulate others, to maneuver them in subtle, devious, cleverly hidden ways to get them to do what you want them to do for your advantage, with little concern for them? You do not have their interests at heart, but yours. Such an urge seems to offer us much. We think if we can be clever at this, or be unusually subtle, we can get people to do what we want, and then we will have the world at our fingertips – we can have whatever we want. But it does not happen. It is a deceitful urge.
- There is the urge to nag others into compliance with what we want. This is a different approach to the same thing. It is the urge to keep after them, pester them, picket them, surround

them, hound them, beat them, badger them into getting done what we want done. This is another way of satisfying the ego, ministering to the basic urge of life. It looks like it is going to make us happy because we are constantly feeling this basic urge to satisfy ourselves, to be an empire builder, king in our own dominion. But this is the basic lie, the deceitfulness of life, because it does not work. It never has worked, and it never will work.

- Perhaps the urge we feel is the urge to lie or cheat to get by, to gain an advantage. All these are basically urges to do the same thing, to satisfy that basic desire to be in the center of things, the center of attention, the focus of life around us.
- There is the urge to criticize what we do not understand, the urge to have our feelings hurt and indulge in self-pity, the urge to adopt a martyr attitude and feel humiliated at any failure on our part.
- There is the urge to be impatient with others, or the urge to be irritated when our opinion is not accepted, and the urge to defensiveness when our position is attacked.
- There is the urge to fight those who do not think as we do, to despise or to blame others.
- There is the holier-than-thou urge which makes us feel righteous, better, cleaner, more respectable than someone else.

These are the urges the apostle is talking about.

The Christian is to put off these things because he has discovered a secret. He still feels these as strongly as he did before he became a Christian. He feels them as strongly as the worldling does, but he has learned a secret: They are part of the old life, the old man, which was judged on the cross of Christ.

That is what the Lord’s Supper portrays. It is a pictorial reminder to us that in the cross of Jesus Christ God did an amazing thing. It is recorded for us in Second Corinthians 5:21, “He who knew no sin became sin for us.” He became our old life, our old egocentric life. Jesus became that on the cross.

If the Word of God did not tell us that we would never know it and we would never be able to understand anything of the depths of the mystery of the cross. Why this terrible judgment on this holy man? Why this awful darkness, why this terrible convulsion of nature? Why these impenetrable mysteries? It comes down to this basic thing, "he became sin for us." He was made to be what we are as born of Adam. When he became sin, he died, he was put to death. The sentence of death was executed upon him. It is God's eloquent way of saying to us that all these urges that arise out of the self life, the old man, are utterly valueless. They do not do anything for us, they are deceitful. They promise much, they deliver nothing.

Therefore, the first step in experiencing what God intends for us is to recognize that. Put off the old, divest yourself of it, lay it aside, refuse to accept it, no longer justify it or give it place in your life. That is the first step, but it is only half the picture. The other is to recognize, as Paul does, the wonderful possibilities of the new life, of the new man. He says (let me translate it a bit differently here) "being renewed, having been renewed in the spirit of your minds put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." In that phrase, "having been renewed in the spirit of your mind," you have the fundamental difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. It is true, or course, that non-Christians sometimes realize that things are wrong in their lives, that the attitudes they show are destructive, and there are things they are doing that are wrong, and so they change them. But they merely change to another expression of the same basic egocentricity. That is the problem. They change the outer form, but the problem remains basically the same. They manifest a different expression of the basic pride of life.

But the Christian, alone of all human beings (and I do not hesitate to say this because it is clearly the teaching of the Word of God from beginning to end), has the possibility of doing something entirely different, living on an entirely different principle, a different level, because he has been renewed in the spirit of his mind. That describes the regeneration of the life by the Spirit of God coming into the heart that believes in Jesus Christ. When we believe in Jesus Christ and receive him as our Lord, our Savior, we are renewed in the spirit of our mind. Our basic, fundamental life is changed. In Verse 22, the RSV translation says,

"put off your old nature." I reject that word, "your." It is not in the original. It is "put off *the* old nature." The point is, it is no longer yours. It is there, but it is no longer identified with you. Christ is your life now, a radical difference has come in. You are now identified with him. If you want to leave that word *your* in the passage itself, pick it up and move it out of Verse 22 and put it down in Verse 24, "put on *your* new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

There is the word of deliverance. The new man is in the likeness of God, it is the life of God, it is the image of Jesus Christ, it is his life lived in you. So put on that kind of life because it is available to you, it is yours. If you are a Christian, you have Christ already and these new urges to love, to patiently endure, to understand, to accept even difficult, hard people, to gently correct those who need correction, to be faithful in a difficult time, all these are part of the new nature. Notice how it is described as resulting in a true righteousness in contrast with the false, a pretense, a posture, a facade. But this is real, it is genuine, it is love unfeigned. It is not something put on the for moment, it is not a smile painted on the face with a hostile heart behind it, but it is a genuineness of heart, true righteousness, right behavior that is purposeful.

And, not only that, it is holy. Now there is a word we squirm at, *holiness*. We usually think of some pious Joe who looks like he has been soaked in embalming fluid. That is our picture of holiness. But let me use another word that is an accurate translation of this word – *wholeness*.

That means health of being, wholeness of personality, a whole man, as God intended man to be. Now, that results from the life of the Lord Jesus within. But the process to it is twofold: Put off, and put on. Our problem is that we are afraid to put off the old man, for fear we will be left with an empty husk of life. It never seems to dawn on us that the Holy Spirit is simply waiting for us to put these things off in order that he might rush in and fill us with the wholeness that is God's intention for man, the wholeness of Christ.

Putting off the old man is like squeezing the water out of a half-drowned man's lungs. You do not do that because you want his lungs to be empty, you do it because you want the air to get in so that he can live. What the Scripture reveals to us is that this old egocentric life of ours, this old man, the

self, has been asphyxiating, killing us. It has been cutting off the breath which we were designed to breathe. The only air we were designed to breathe is God. Yet we find such difficulty believing this and therefore we do not experience it. The whole matter comes down to an appeal to the will. Put off, put on. That is a choice you are asked to make whenever you recognize the deceitful urges that come from within – put off and put on. Reject the old and turn to the Lord within and say, “Thank you, Lord, for the fact that you in me are able to do through me and in me that which you have desired to do.” Put off the old, refuse to let the old nature manifest itself or to have any place, and then the new will be right there to take its place.

Now right here we meet with some timeworn, familiar excuses. Someone says, “Well, I’ve tried this, but it doesn’t work for me. It works for other people, I can see that. But I’ve tried it, and it doesn’t work.” Now that statement needs to be very carefully examined, for it is one of the subtle ways by which the flesh, the self-life, blames God for our failure. It is really saying that God is partial, he gives some people help but he will not give you help. He plays favorites. Some he lets in on the great secret, but for others, like you, he makes it so difficult and complicated that you cannot catch on to it. That is a lie. The truth is, you never really wanted it, at least not badly enough to do what the apostle says, to put off the old. You still try to cling to the pleasure of manifesting this ego-centric flesh. And as long as you cling to that, then of course you cannot put on God, you cannot put on the new life.

“Well, I do my best,” someone says, but from the results, it is not much better than your worst. Your best, you see, is still only refined flesh, the refined old man. That excuse is a way of justifying our unwillingness to give up, our reluctance to reject these ideas and really treat them as what God has labeled them in the cross, sinful, evil, wrong, but under the guise of at least making an effort in this direction. “Well, we tried.” But this is not an experimental matter, this is a process that is absolutely sure. There is no question about this, this is not subject to half-way results. This works. Put off, and you can put on. Put on, and you must have put off. There is no other way. These are utterly contradictory principles, but the choice is ours.

Yesterday, in Southern California, a man knocked on my door and asked to talk with me about a problem. He was a Christian man and his problem was this: He had gone into business with some other Christian men and the business, through circumstances that were not wholly his own fault, had failed and he had to go into bankruptcy. Now he was facing the urge within to accept the position that he had before the law and write off his debts and let his creditors suffer the loss. He was facing the urge to take advantage of that. All his friends were telling him it was the thing to do and even his wife agreed to this. But he was troubled. He wondered if he had the moral right, as a Christian, to do this and to ask his creditors to bear the loss. As we went over the Scriptures together it became clear that he did not have that right. The Word of God says, “Owe no man anything, but to love one another” {Rom 13:8 KJV}, and “Provide things honest in the sight of all men,” {Rom 12:17 KJV}. As he faced that he was confronted with a definite choice – to put off the urge to take the apparently easy way out at the price of the peace of God within the heart. As we talked, he made that choice. He said, “I see what I need to do. I will accept this obligation to pay back those men. Not one of them will lose a dime over this business. It will take me some time, but I am going to pay them back.” At that his face brightened and he looked at me and said, “What a load has been lifted from my life. I know this is going to be hard to do, and even my wife is not going to accept this, but already I have a sense of peace over this whole matter, and that’s worth it all.”

Now that is exactly it. The Christian is called to live on a different basis. When he does, he will discover there is an adequacy from God that sustains the inner life, that keeps him poised, adjusted, happy, whole, in the midst of the problems and pressures and demands that are made upon him. That is what Paul is talking about, and that is where we must live.

As we come to the table of the Lord, we are being reminded again, in God’s graphic way, that this is the basic principle of Christian living. We are cut off from the old life by the acceptance of the death of Jesus Christ as a valid experience for us, cut off from these false, egocentric philosophies of living. And we are exposed now to the manifestation of a quite different attitude of life, a quite different way of reacting to situations.

Prayer:

Father, grant to us now clarity of understanding of this great principle, as we gather about this table today. May it have new meaning for us. May we realize that this is not concerned only with making it possible for us to go to heaven when we die, but it is declaring something that

makes it possible to be free from the inner tensions, the nagging, plaguing, neuroses, the inner divisions and fightings and fears that plague us in our Christian life. Help us to be single-eyed, whole people, manifesting in our lives the fragrance, the love, the compassion, the understanding, the acceptance of Jesus Christ our Lord. We ask in his name, Amen.

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Practicing Christianity

by Ray C. Stedman

The question we are facing in the present series, centering on Paul's letter to the Ephesians in Chapter 4, is, "How to live a Christian life in the midst of a confused world."

That was the problem in the 1st century and that is the problem in the 20th century. It is the same kind of a world, demanding the same kind of a life. Perhaps we could put it very well in the words of the title of one of Dr. Tournier's books, *A Whole Person In A Broken World*. That is a very expressive way of facing the question that is before us in this present series.

Now the answer of the world itself to that question is, basically, "Express yourself," i.e., live for yourself, take all you can while you can, get it all now. You only need look at the deteriorating fabric of life in our day to see the inadequacy of that solution, and the darkness and poverty of that approach.

The answer of religion in general (and I include faiths besides Christianity) and even oftentimes the church itself is: "Try your best to do what is right." Much of the preaching that will go forth from pulpits across this country can be reduced to this one phrase, "do your best," try your best, try harder. This sounds very good but it never works, because the self that tries is the very self that is causing the problem. That is why those who attempt to solve the pressures and demands of life on this basis inevitably find themselves caught up in a vicious circle of despair, in which they find they are not able to do what they thought they were able to do. They set out to do it but find themselves unable to accomplish it and gradually drift into despair.

Now the answer of the Scriptures is a wholly different thing. We never have begun to understand Christianity unless we see this. The Christian message is not a way of saying, "try better, try harder, do your best to live a good life." If anyone thinks

that, he has misunderstood the whole point of Christianity. The answer of Christianity is a personal experience of a living Lord, to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, as a Person; to enter into a personal relationship with him, and to learn to let him live his life through you.

Now that is a completely different principle, but that is exactly what he offers to do, to live his life again in you.

I know, to many, this is difficult to grasp. To them, it seems that this is advocating a kind of supine passivity. Christians are exhorted to sit and wait, to put their minds in neutral and wait for God to do something. Christians, in their earnestness to set this teaching forth, have often given that impression, that it is simply to "let go and let God," "a he'll do everything, and you don't have to do anything" kind of thing. Of course, it is true that we must face the clear statement of Scripture that, "we, in ourselves, can do nothing," {cf, John 15:5}. We do not add to God's working, but that does not mean that we do not have a part in it. This is not a mystic neutrality where we simply are waiting for God to do everything. As Paul makes clear in the passage we are looking at, especially in Verses 22-24, the great principle by which the Christian life is lived involves the will, a continual exercise of the human will. "Put off the old, and put on the new," he says, that is the process. That is, reject the appeal from the old life and act instead on the wonderful possibilities of the new life in Jesus Christ.

This is something that must go on repeatedly. That is why the Christian life is called a walk, because it is two steps repeated again and again.

How do you walk? Well, you put one leg ahead of the other. That is one step but that is not a walk. Then what? Then you put the other leg ahead of that one. You have now utilized both the parts of your body designed for walking. You have

taken two steps. Then what? Well, you start all over again. You take the first step again and then the other one.

Thus it is described as a process of putting off (that is one step) and putting on (that is the other). And the whole life is to be lived by the continual exercise of this principle. That is a walk, and that is why the word comes to us, “Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh,” {cf, Gal 5:16}.

Now this works right out into life. Christian faith is not designed merely to get us involved in religious activity. There is nothing God dislikes more than religion. He is interested in life. True, life has religious aspects and then it is all right, but religion alone is an empty and distasteful thing to God. He says so repeatedly, both in the Old and the New Testaments. But he is interested in seeing true principles being applied to the situations where you live, and, when they are, they create an obvious change of behavior in your life.

Now, in Chapter 4, beginning with Verse 25, the apostle applies the principle of “putting off and putting on” to specific areas of living.

Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. {Eph 4:25-29}

See how practical this is, how specific, how it encourages us to let our faith come into focus in our deeds. This is always God’s intention.

Now, before we look at these more closely, there are three things that press to be said:

1. First, this kind of living is not possible unless you are a Christian, unless you have been born again, regenerated, you have passed from death unto life, from darkness into light. These words of Paul are not addressed to men in general. Oftentimes, much misunderstanding of

Christian faith comes from the fact that people read their Bibles who are not yet Christians themselves, and they read passages such as this and think it means this is addressed to them, that they are to do these things. Now, the fact is, the Word of God recognizes clearly that no one who is not yet a Christian can live like this. It may seem to them they can, and this is the deceitfulness of the natural heart. It will suggest you can do this, and live on this level, but if you try it you will discover that you only can do so in very limited aspects, and that even in those areas there is an incomplete demonstration of these things. The inner life, the hidden life, remains unchanged, it is only the outer life that changes.

In each one of these exhortations the great principle that Paul has outlined is manifest. In each there is a putting off, and a putting on. Now the non-Christian cannot put off his old life because it is not an old life to him, it is his present life, it is his only life, it is all he has. That is why every appeal to a non-Christian to put off the things that arise out of the old life is to demand an impossibility. Jesus said, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adultery, etc.” {cf, Matt 15:19 KJV}. How can you put it off if that is part of your life? You see how impossible it is?

Also, of course, if the non-Christian has no old life to put off, he has no new life to put on. The new life is Christ. If we do not have Christ we do not have a new life, therefore the appeal to a man to live on this basis is absurd if he has not yet begun with Jesus Christ. I wish to make that unmistakably clear. If you are here and you have never had the experience of having Jesus Christ enter your life and giving you his life, that is the place to begin. Then these exhortations will fit into place, but without that there can be no fulfilling.

2. Now, the second thing is that even the Christian, to whom this is addressed, must understand that he is not actually putting his old self to death when he denies the urges that come from it, for that has already been done in the cross. Certain Christians have the idea we are to go about crucifying ourselves, putting the old self to death. They think we must personally do this and it is a very painful process.

They are constantly concerned about it, and it shows on their faces in anxiety and tension and morbidity. But the Christian is not told to put the old man to death, he is told that it is done in the cross. What we are doing here is claiming, in personal experience, what God has already done in the reality of the cross and the resurrection.

Now this is very important. Someone has well put it,

“All progress in the spiritual life comes from the simple apprehension of a fact already true in God’s plan and purpose. It is not something you have to make true, it is believing something God has already said is true, the apprehension of what has already been done in Christ. Not something to be done when we ask it, but faith laying hold of what already is, in Christ.”

That is helpful. It means that this process of putting off and putting on is based upon the reality of what Christ did for us in the cross and the resurrection. We simply make it ours in experience, but it has been done already.

3. Now a third thing, and this is very important, a mental understanding of this process of putting off and putting on, this doctrine of “walking in the Spirit” is not enough – it requires the actual practice of this. Here again many Christians go astray. They learn these truths, they grasp with their minds the wonderful deliverance God has come to give, they see there is something to this in the lives of others around them, and because they understand the doctrine they think they have the experience. Unfortunately, many Christians learn the language of the spiritual life, but their lives manifest that they do not know what it really means to live on this basis. But it is not knowledge that does the trick, it is practice. Truth known does not help anyone, it is truth done which delivers. Truth known puffs you up with pride, as Paul points out to the Corinthians {see 1 Cor 8:1}, but truth done, Ah, that is a different thing. The fact that you can go away, and say, “I understand now, I know now how this is done, I know how this works,” does not mean that you are experiencing it. These things must be put into prac-

tice. Put off, and put on – these must come right out at the level of life.

Now let us look more closely at these examples he gives, for, in doing so, we will not only understand how this general principle applies in life, but we will understand the principle itself more clearly. Putting off the old life, the one we had in Adam, and putting on the new life in terms of actual experience, is not a vague, mystic thing. It is not some kind of mental gymnastics. It is not something you think of for a moment and then relax and everything takes care of itself. It is not a pat formula. It is done in terms of whatever temptation faces you at any given moment. That is what Paul makes clear here.

The apostle begins with what is probably the most universal temptation in human experience, the temptation to lie, the misrepresent or exaggerate the truth.

Now why does he start there? Because that is the most evident characteristic of the old life – lying.

He has already said the old life is characterized by deceitful urges. These drives, these urges within us, are lying to us, they deceive us. Therefore, we find it easy to lie to others, to deceive others. Lying is the basic characteristic of the old life since it traces back to the devil. Jesus said, “He is a liar and a murderer from the beginning,” {cf, John 8:44}. All of us have discovered this without difficulty.

Did you go to school to learn how to lie? No, of course you didn’t. You came by it quite naturally. We have learned even as little children that though a lie is an abomination to the Lord, it is a very present help in time of trouble! At least that was our philosophy, that was what we thought.

But now as a Christian we are to put off the old man, the urge to lie. Put it off deliberately, definitely, purposefully – reject it. Why? Because it will get you into trouble? That is the reason the worldling does not lie. I am not suggesting that every worldling invariably lies and all Christians invariably tell the truth. Of course not. It is quite possible for worldlings to tell the truth. We all did before we were Christians. We had times when we told the truth, as well as times when we lied. But the issue is the motive behind it. Why does the worldling tell the truth? Why did we, before we were Christians, tell the truth? Largely because we

felt we would get in trouble if we did not. We were concerned lest the lie catch up with us. We lived in a society and on a level of relationship with others that demanded this. We found it was the thing to do, we were expected to do it, so for our own advantage we told the truth.

But the Christian is on a different basis. He is to stop lying not because to do so will get him into trouble, but he is not to lie because it is part of the old life which in the cross has been totally judged and rejected. It is true that it will get him into trouble. "If we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption" {cf, Gal 6:8}, so there is no question about that. But the Christian is not to lie because that is what he has rejected, in Christ, that is what has been judged in the cross, that is part of the old life. Though it makes its subtle appeal to the heart as it did of old, suggesting that if we tell a lie we will get out of this difficulty, or get this blessing, or obtain that desired end, yet the Christian knows that is all a lie, that it will not do that, will not produce the end that is desired. He sees it in the light of the cross. This is why the Christian is expected to put away these things, and then to put on the new man, i.e., put on Christ.

Now how do you do that? Well, Paul says, "Let every one speak the truth with his neighbor." That is putting on Christ. You see how practical that is? If you reject lying, and, instead, you deliberately, intentionally, purposefully speak the truth, even though it may hurt, even though it is sometimes hard truth, then you are "putting on Christ" when you speak the truth. That is walking in the Spirit, in practice. There is nothing mystical about it at all. It is exceedingly practical. You reject lies, you do not speak falsehood, but you speak the truth for Christ's sake, because he is the truth. When you do, you are putting on Christ. That is what walking in the Spirit means.

Now he adds a special reason for doing this. "Because," he says "we are members one of another." That means that, in the body of Christ, as members of Christ's life, we do not live to ourselves. Therefore, if we lie, we not only hurt ourselves, but we hurt others as well. Obviously, here, he means other Christians, because we are members one of another in the body of Christ. But this does not mean that it is fine to lie to worldlings, but not to Christians. He is not saying here, "Stop lying to Christians, but with someone who is not a Christian, go right ahead, that's all right." No, he

is saying, "If you lie to anyone you hurt the whole body of Christ, not only yourself, but all who are Christians." The cause of Christ is injured by even one lie. Christianity is made contemptible in the eyes of the one to whom you lied. He not only sees you, but he sees the whole cause for which you stand, and he writes it off as worthless.

A man said to me the other day, "You know, when a man tells me that he's a Christian, I get nervous and cautious. I've been burned so many times by Christians, I've decided I can never trust a Christian." What brought him to that place? Christians who lied! When we lie we injure the cause of Christ. This is the point he is making.

Now he goes on. We are not only to put off falsehood, but to put on the truth. It is that positive side of speaking the truth in all aspects throughout life, consistently, which the worldling is unable to do, and many Christians follow this. It is not that they always lie. As I have suggested already, it is quite possible for a worldling or a Christian to refrain from lying, but then what? Does he go on to speak the truth, or does he say nothing? Does he resort to what the world calls "white lies"? They are called that because they are considered harmless. But, when you see this in the light of the Scriptures, you see that oftentimes a white lie, so-called, can be the most terribly cruel thing you can do to an individual.

What are white lies? Well, they usually occur in circumstances where we are asked to give our opinion about one's dress, or personality, and we feel negative about it but do not want to say anything for fear of hurting their feelings, so we lie, we say the nice thing, the pleasant thing, and their feelings are not hurt. We think, "I've saved them from hurt, therefore no harm was done in lying to them." But that is often the cruelest thing we could have done. As a result of this practice of lying to one another in these areas, there are many who go long years and never know the problems that are making them miserable. No one ever points these out to them, and they go on suffering needlessly because no one will tell them the truth.

It is like the halitosis ads in the paper. We have all seen certain advertisements. Some lovely girl is standing at the door with a frown on her face saying goodnight to her beloved. He is looking puzzled and she is looking angry and underneath it says, "Even your best friend won't tell you."

But that is not kindness, it is cruelty. Christians are exhorted to put off this kind of thing and to speak the truth.

It is an arresting thing to recall that the Lord Jesus not only commanded us to forgive one another, but also to rebuke one another. In Luke 17 the disciples came to the Lord with a question, and in answering, Jesus said, "If your brother offend you, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him," {cf, Luke 17:3}. We hear the "forgive," but we do not hear the "rebuke" – but one is as much a command as the other. "If your brother offend against you, rebuke him," tell him so. Of course it is not necessary to say something every time we feel annoyance, otherwise there would be no room for the exercise of Christian forbearance and long suffering. If we can put the annoyance away with a quick thought and dismiss it, fine, do that by all means. There is no need to be touchy. But if something causes continual annoyance, even though we try to forget it, but find we cannot, then say something. That is our Lord's command, "rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him, and if seven times in the same day he turn to you and say 'I repent' then forgive him seven times," {cf, Luke 17:3b-4}.

Now, what kind of sin is that which requires forgiveness seven times in the same day? I heard Dr. Henry Brandt tell of an incident in his own ministry when a couple came to him with problems in their marriage relationship. It turned out that she was a door slammer. She had formed the habit in her childhood of slamming doors and every door she went through she slammed behind her. This was a continual grating on the nerves of her husband. For you it may be leaving the top off the toothpaste tube, or hanging nylons up in the bathroom. It can be anything. She happened to be a door slammer. He put up with it for a long time, gritting his teeth and feeling upset and annoyed every time she would slam a door, but he did not want to say anything about it, it seemed so trivial. Finally after Dr. Brandt pointed out to him that this was a continual annoyance, he did go to her and told her that this bothered him and asked that she would not do it. She was instantly repentant. "Oh, I'm sorry," she said, "I really didn't realize that I was doing this, but now that you point it out I see what I have done. I do slam doors, and I'm sorry, I won't do it anymore." Then she got up and walked out of the room and bang went the door behind her.

She said, "I'm sorry." I do not know if that occurred seven times that day, but I would not be surprised if it did.

Thus we are to tell the truth to one another. These things that irk and annoy us are to be shared openly. Let us say they annoy us, and be quick to forgive when there is any sense of concern about it on the other's part. We are to speak the truth. The only way we can grow is if someone tells us the truth about ourselves. Truth is the sign of a new life. You can never get worldlings to live on this basis. They are so concerned lest they offend others or lest they be a problem to others that they will not come out and talk as openly as this. But in Christ we can learn to give and receive on this basis.

Now he moves to another practical matter, one of the most common problems of life, anger.

Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. {Eph 4:26-27 RSV}

That is no misprint. He did not leave out a negative here as many think. He did not say, "Be not angry." He said, as it reads here, "Be angry." That is arresting, is it not? Many people never read their Bibles that closely and do not see that this is what it says. Be angry! The capacity for anger is part of the image of God in man. God gets angry, and rightfully so. If a man cannot get angry there is something wrong with him. The man or woman who never gets angry is subhuman, is denying their essential humanity. Be angry, the apostle says, there are things that ought to make you angry, many things that ought to make you angry today – but do not sin. There is a sinful kind of anger. What is that? He does not tell us here, but we see it in other places.

Sinful anger, of course, is anger that is self-defensive, i.e., centered in the self. It is always wrong. Sinful anger is part of the old life, it is to be put off. If you are angry because your feelings have been hurt, or your pride has been injured, or you have been mistreated in some way, perhaps you have not been given the position of the place or the favor that you think you ought to have – this is sinful anger and is to be put off. It arises out of the old life, it is part of the life of Adam.

Well then, what is true anger? True anger is that which is concerned with others' wrongs. You can see it in Jesus:

- He was angry at the Pharisees when they opposed his healing of men on the Sabbath day. "He looked upon them with anger" {cf, Mark 3:5}, we read, "and was grieved in his heart" over their stubborn indifference to the needs of suffering humanity. It made him angry.
- He was angry when the disciples kept the children away from him. He spoke with anger. "Let them come unto me" {cf, Mark 10:14}, he said, and his brow was dark with anger because they were keeping away the ones for whom he came.
- He was angry at the cruelty of the devil when he was at the tomb of Lazarus. His heart was moved, and he spoke with bitter anger. He was angry at the devil for the destruction and the heartache and the heartbreak that sin brings into human life. He was longing to lay hold of it and do something about it.
- He was angry at the shameless greed of the money changers in the temple and he knotted a cord and drove them out of the temple. Believe me, he was angry. He was very angry because they were ignoring the purpose of the Father's house. They were teaching men wrong things in the name of God. They were carrying on destructive activities in the name of religion.

Yet we read that when he was reviled, when people said things against him personally, "he reviled not again," {1 Pet 2:23 KJV}. When he suffered he did not answer back but he committed himself to God who was able to handle all things. The apostle teaches us, "Avenge not yourself, but commit all vengeance to God," {cf, Rom 12:19}. Therefore, we are to put this off, this sinful, self-centered anger that arises from a deceitful urge.

Ah, yes, but go further still. Even when your anger is righteous (unrighteous anger is always wrong and should immediately be put away), but even when it is righteous anger, then "let not the sun go down upon your wrath." That is a common

parable out of the life of that time, and it simply means do not nurse your anger, do not hold a grudge, do not let the sun go down upon it, do not let it carry over to another day. Now do not take this in a crassly literal fashion. This does not give one license to get angry at nine o'clock in the morning and go about saying, "Well, I've got twelve hours left when I can enjoy this and be angry at someone until the sun goes down." It is simply a way of saying that when the first flush of righteous anger has passed then do not nurse it, do not perpetuate that anger. That was the explosion that was designed to set in motion the engine of your will, but it is not the fuel upon which it is to run. That is to be love and concern. Anger is needed at times to prod us into action, to get us moving along lines of proper concern. We hear of some gross injustice and we get angry, and rightly so. Do not condemn yourself because you get angry like that, but do not let it carry over, do not act out of anger. Act rather out of the love that has made you angry.

He adds another word of warning. If you do carry anger over, no matter what kind it may be, you give the devil an opportunity. An opportunity to do what? To create bitterness, to let that anger ferment until it turns to revenge or burning resentment. In Hebrews the writer warns us not to let any branch of bitterness spring up and trouble you. That is precisely the point. It troubles others, but primarily it troubles you. Others are sometimes unaware of your anger and your disturbance, but you – you cannot eat or sleep. You are all upset, you turn sour inside. The thing goes on day after day and your enemy, the one that made you feel this way, may be totally unaware of it, blissfully going on his way. But it is not troubling him, it is troubling you. Therefore, give the devil no opportunity, because he will move right in.

Put off the old, put on the new. You see how practical this is? We shall go right on from here to see how this applies to other areas of life. Remember that it is all the application of a basic principle – resist the old. Oh, you will feel it, you will feel the lure of it, the pull of it, the desire to give in, but resist it with your will. It is God's will that your will stand against that thing. And then turn to Christ. Cast yourself upon him. Say, "Lord, I feel like doing this but I know it is wrong, I don't want to do it. Lord, meet me with your strength and your grace and your love." Put on the new, and

Practicing Christianity

when you do you will discover there is an impartation of his life, his strength. He is love, he is your strength.

Do not sing,

I need thee, oh, I need thee,
every hour I need thee.

Sing,

I have thee,
every hour I have thee.

I have his life, I have his strength, I have his grace. That is the secret of living in a troubled world.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this practical look at life. Let us not escape its full implications in terms of our own experience. Show us how these matters touch us right where we live. Help us to see how we can be changed by this transforming secret that has taken place within us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Living in Focus

by Ray C. Stedman

A number of years ago at Stanford University, Arnold Toynbee, the prominent historian, said that most people today have rejected Christianity on the basis of a caricature. What did he mean? He meant that most people have never seen the real thing. They have never seen real Christianity. What they have seen was a blurred, distorted and twisted picture of Christianity, and they turned away disappointed and indifferent to the claims of Christ. Well, what were they looking for?

Perhaps more than we professing Christians may realize, men and women in the world today expect to see in Christians some likeness to Christ. If you listen carefully to the protest movements that are so vocal today, and which have captured the ear of the press and the nation, you will see that the heart of their complaint is that they do not see in Christians, and the church, that likeness to Christ which they have been led to expect. That is why they turn away so disappointed, often bitter in their antagonism.

Now the fault, of course, is with the church. I know how easy it is for us to read the papers today and, seeing the spreading tide of restlessness, riot, and lawlessness in our day, point the finger in self-righteousness at this, go “tut-tut,” and decry it as a terrible thing. Yet, I am increasingly convinced that the finger of blame, if it must be pointed anywhere, should be pointed at the church. It is the church that is at fault – not the rebels, not the world in its evil ways. For the image of Christ in Christians has been terribly blurred. That is the essential problem. It is like a picture that is out of focus, where everything is fuzzy, undefined, blurred.

Fortunately, this is not always the case. One of the encouraging aspects of our time is the increasing degree to which Christians are recapturing the image of Christ. He is coming into focus again for

the world to see. Men and women everywhere are taking down their religious facades, their posturing pretensions, their self-righteous images of themselves, and are becoming real people again, and, through them, the love of Christ is beginning to show. Jesus said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me,” {John 12:32 KJV}. A Christ that has touched the life of a man, and crucified him, will always draw men unto him.

That is what these studies in Ephesians 4 have been telling us. Here, in this chapter, among many other places in the Word of God, we see set forth the secret of living in focus. How is it done? How can a person live in a confused, bewildered, pathetically blinded world, where false ideas and false philosophies are trumpeted abroad on every side, and still be in touch and live in focus? The apostle tells us in Ephesians 4 that it is by a repetitive walk of two steps. By continuously fulfilling the process of putting off the old life and putting on the new. That is possible to a Christian because he has received a new life. “He that has the Son has life, but he that has not the Son of God does not have life,” {cf, 1 Jn 5:12}. There is no use trying to live on this level if you have not begun with Jesus Christ, have not received him. But if you have invited him into your life and heart, and he dwells there, as he promised he would, then you can live in a new life and it is that kind of living that captures people’s attention. Put off the old, put on the new. Put off the deceitful urges of the old life that still come with all their alluring power. Put them off by a deliberate choice of the will. Agree with God about the old life and then put on the self-giving qualities of the new life in Jesus Christ, by a deliberate act and choice of the will. They are available to you in him.

The key to this is to face the fact that you never can be half-and-half at the same time. That is the

whole thing. You can never put off part of the old man at any given moment. You must reject it in totality, then you can put on the new. Paul says this also in that wonderful 13th chapter of Romans where he is dealing with the practical level of Christian living. He says there, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof,” {cf, Rom 13:14}. If you honestly put off the old, then you can truly put on the new, but you cannot do the second until you have done the first. As we find ourselves clinging to part of the old life, hanging on to areas of it that we particularly enjoy, wanting to defend these and excuse them, and therefore we cannot put on the new. If we honestly put off the old, we can put on the new; but we cannot put off only the outward actions of the old while the heart remains the same. If we do, we shall discover we are unable to put on the love, the compassion, or the joy of Jesus Christ, but we will try to imitate it, and when we do we become a phony and our phonyness is evident to everyone but ourselves.

Now Paul gives four very practical examples of the areas of life where this process must apply. As we saw previously, he talks about lying, temper, stealing, and evil conversation. We have already looked closely at the first two of these. We saw that, as Christians, we must take these very seriously. This is not simply good advice; it is basic to living as Christian – put off these things! We must never permit ourselves the luxury of continuing in any of them. These are elementary. The fundamental change which Christianity will make in you should be evident at least in these areas: Lying, temper, stealing, and evil talk. He is dealing with elementary things, not advanced Christian living. We must start there.

These include all the subtle variations of these things. As we have already seen in the matter of lying, it includes even the so called “white lies,” and in the matter of temper such things as pouting, resentments, and harboring grudges. All these must go, and go early, in our Christian experience.

We need to be reminded from time to time that there is something wrong with a Christian who can say “Well I know I have a bad temper, I’ve had one for years, but you will just have to make allowances for it.” That reveals that such a person does not want to deal with his problem. There is something wrong in his thinking, he is kidding himself. He really wants to hang on to his temper, he does

not want to get rid of it. That is the problem, and that is why it keeps on year after year. No, the apostle says, we must come to grips with these, we must put off these things, and put on the new. It takes a while to change our thinking, but we must begin and start changing our thinking and our attitudes. We cannot allow them to continue on and on.

Now we come to the last two of these practical areas.

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. {Eph 4:28-29 RSV}

“Let the thief no longer steal.” As the King James Version puts it, “Let him that stole, steal no more.”

(Perhaps you recall the clever way someone got around the admonition of this verse by discovering that in the early manuscripts of the Bible, the Greek letters were not divided up into sentences and paragraphs as we know them but were all run together unbroken on the page. Scholars have had to break them up into the sentences and the paragraphs that are familiar to us. When this person discovered this, he felt that since the punctuation was not inspired, he could punctuate it to suit himself. Rather than reading it, “Let him that stole steal no more.” He read it, “Let him that stole steal, no more let him labor with his hands.” Perhaps that indicates the extent to which the fallen heart will go to justify itself.)

But here is a categorical demand that the Christian stop stealing, and that means stealing of all kinds. This is not a word addressed only to the professional thief, but includes all amateurs as well, and covers all amateur forms of stealing, no matter how sophisticated they may be. It includes shoplifting, tax dodging, shady bookkeeping, borrowing without returning, obtaining money on false pretenses, false advertising, shifty promotion schemes, and whatever else may be the means of depriving another of his property without giving him true value in return. “Let him that stole steal no more.” Stop it! Why? Because, as this whole passage is telling us, this is an expression of that

old, egocentric, fallen, Adamic life which seems to offer much immediately. That is the motive that drives a person to steal. He wants something now, and stealing looks like the short cut to get it, but it is a deceitful urge. It lies to you. You will get what you are after, the immediate goal, but with it you will also get what this old life always gives you: It will produce tension, discord, heartache, frustration, defeat and death. There is no way to avoid it. But the whole thing has been judged in the cross of Jesus Christ. When the Lord Jesus hung on that tree, the Scripture tells us, he was “made sin for us,” {cf, 2 Cor 5:21 KJV}. He became a thief, he became a murderer, he became a liar, a drunkard. Oh, he did not do these things himself, but he assumed them – he became, he was made, sin. He who did none of these things himself took our place – that is the whole meaning of the cross. And when he was made what we are, God put him to death, because that is what this old life deserves. There is nothing good in it, nothing good can come from it, because it is flesh, egocentric, self-centered. That is what stealing always manifests – an utter unconcern for someone else and a totally self-centered desire to satisfy your own needs and wants. That is stealing, therefore it is not to be part of a Christian life because that has been judged and must go.

Do not be fooled by all the modern talk today about relativity of morals. There are many who would tell us that stealing is right if it is for a good cause. Unfortunately, there have been thousands of Christians who have fallen into that trap and felt that if the cause was good enough, true enough, holy enough that any kind of means were justified in fulfilling it. It is a kind of Robin Hood philosophy, of stealing from the rich in order to give to the poor. Perhaps even worse is the concept that it is not wrong to steal, it is only wrong to get caught. There is plenty of that abroad today. But all this points up the difference between what we might call the conscience of convenience versus the conscience of conviction. The conscience of convenience is that conscience which is controlled or limited only by what it thinks it can get away with. That, by and large, is the conscience the world lives by. You are working in an office and you have access to the stamp drawer. As you are working away you discover it is possible to write personal letters and use some of the office stamps. You say that everybody in the office does it, so you justify it

on that basis. Now supposing one of your fellow workers comes along to you and says “Look, I have devised a scheme by which we can safely embezzle \$10,000 from this office. I’d like you to join me in this.” You say “What do you mean? What do you think I am, a thief? I only steal stamps!” But there is no perceptible difference in principle between stealing stamps and \$10,000. That is the conscience of convenience.

You can produce that same kind of conscience in an animal. You can train your dog to run out in the morning, and bring in your newspaper from the front lawn. You teach him how to put it in his mouth, and you work on him for awhile, giving him a piece of candy every time he does it. After awhile the dog catches on, and he knows that bringing in the newspaper from the front step is “candy right,” he gets candy every time. But then he gets overenthusiastic and begins to bring in the neighbors’ newspapers. When you discover this you smack him alongside the head. This puzzles him for awhile, but, if it goes on, he will catch on that it is “candy right” to bring in your newspaper, but it is “smack wrong” to bring in the neighbors’, and there is a distinction here. He learns there is such a thing as “candy right” and “smack wrong.” Now that is a conscience of convenience. It merely reacts to the realities of a situation. If you change the circumstances you can change the dog’s habits, and eventually make him do the exact opposite. He has a conscience about it, but it is a conscience of convenience. That is the level upon which most people seem to live today.

But a conscience of conviction is the awareness that is produced in the Christian heart that it is basically wrong to deprive another of his property by any manner other than what the lawyers call, “due process of law.” Why? Because it injures the other person. It arises from the old life that does not care for anyone else but you. But let me point out something. The world is not impressed by Christians who simply stop stealing, for, at that point, it is very difficult to distinguish between a conscience of conviction and a conscience of convenience. Even worldlings will stop stealing if the liability of getting into trouble is clear enough, and yet they may be operating only from a conscience of convenience as do many Christians, too. So merely to stop stealing is not particularly arresting. Many Christians stop right here in their Christian experience and expect the world to be amazed, to

be impressed by this fact. We are honest. We do not steal. We do not deprive another of his property. There are many Christians who have reached only this stage. They are honest, they do not steal, but no one is impressed. Why? Well, because that is only half the process of living as a Christian. That is putting off the old, but go on, put on Christ.

What does the rest of the verse say? "... rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he will be able to give to those in need." Now that is putting on Christ. That is what is impressive. It is not the negative virtue of being honest, but the positive one of being generous, of pouring out to those who are in need, of helping those around from a positive concern and compassion, that is when life begins to come into focus. When the image of Christ is no longer blurred, the heart gives joyously, generously, hilariously. That is why Paul writes to the Corinthians, "God loves a cheerful giver," {cf, 2 Cor 9:7}. There is no joy like the joy of giving, for it manifests a heart that is concerned with others' needs. And that is positive Christianity. Put off the old, yes, but put on the new, put on Christ.

Now the fourth area he speaks of is that of evil conversation.

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. {Eph 4:29 RSV}

Literally, in Greek, it is, "let no rotten words come out of your mouths." That covers the whole range of evil talk, from obscenity and filth to idle rumors and gossiping. Rotten words, words that are corrupt, that smell, that have become decayed. Today we are facing a rising tide of pornography and lewdness in both literature and speech. The tendency of the world today is to fling off all bands, all restrictions, as though these were creating slavery. Some are so blinded, so deceived, as to think the freedom to say ugly, filthy, rotten things is a sign, a manifestation of true freedom. But in the light of the Scriptures (the truth as it is in Jesus), you see how foolish, how wrong this is. It is not a manifestation of freedom at all. It is a manifestation of utter slavery, of being bound, of being held in the grip of something that destroys and deceives.

Therefore Christians are to shun this. This is part of the old life. You cannot put on Christ and

indulge in loose talking, filthy speech, rotten words, corrupt conversation, whether it be obscenity, vulgarity, or idleness and gossip. Paul will come back to this subject later on, and we will take it up more fully then, but, in Chapter 5, Verse 4, he defines this a little more fully.

Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting, but instead let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. {Eph 5:4-5 RSV}

There is no choice for the Christian about this – evil talk must be put off.

Years ago a friend of mine who owned his own print shop had a stranger come into his office who handed him a card and asked to have it reproduced. When my friend read the card he saw it was one of those obscene, lewd things that are in such wide circulation today. He handed it back to the man and said, "I don't print this kind of thing." The man looked at him and he said "Ah, come on! Don't be like that. You know you like this kind of things." And my friend looked him right in the eye and said, "You're right, there is something about me that is inflamed when I see something like this. I am tempted to look at it and read it. There is an old part of my life that responds to this – but I don't intend to feed it."

Now that is putting off the old, putting off the flesh life. When you refuse to read a sexy book, or turn a deaf ear to some gossip or rumor, that is putting off the old life. "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths."

But again, that is not enough. If that is all you can say, that you do not do these things, you are still not living the complete, full, Christian experience. Put on! Put on Christ, "such as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear." That is always the true sign of Christianity. It is a concern for your influence on others. Say something positive, say something fitting in that situation, say something helpful. The whole matter turns on the quality of your influence. What are you doing to others by what you say? That is the question. Are your words like flaming darts that light fires in other hearts which smolder and burn and inflame their passions and after you have left them they have a battle to put down the flame that has been awakened, lighted by your words? Or are your words clean and wholesome, helpful and faith-

ful, building up and encouraging people? The most sobering words Jesus ever uttered had to do with this matter of influence on others. James also speaks of this. The tongue, he says, is like a fire setting a whole forest aflame {cf, Jas 3:5-6}. If any man can control the tongue he can handle the rest of his life without difficulty. This is the test. The Lord Jesus said to his disciples "If any of you offend one of these who believe in me, it would be better for him that a millstone be hanged about his neck and he be cast into the sea and drowned," {cf, Matt 18:6, Mark 9:42, Luke 17:2}. Think of that. It is better to be drowned than to let your tongue be an offense or a cause of offense to someone else.

Yet how we Christians cling to these thoughtless ways of speaking. We fail to remember the influence we may have on someone else. One of the serious problems we have had in our Home Bible Discussion groups has been Christians who insist on talking about things that are an offense to non-Christians who may be present. But Christians insist on doing this, as though they had some right to it and are offended if they are asked to desist.

This last week Dr. Dick Halverson told me of an incident that occurred during Leadership Week. He was at one of the home meetings and was so captured by what was being said that he found himself saying in a rather subdued voice but loud enough so that others around him could hear, "Amen, Amen." The next morning a man came up to him, and, very graciously, in an obvious attempt not to be presumptuous, took him aside and said, "Dr. Halverson, last night you were saying 'Amen' at the meeting. Did you ever think that perhaps some non-Christians around might have been offended by that, that that kind of language was so totally alien to them that they would have misunderstood it. They would have thought they were with a bunch of religious fanatics and misunderstood?" And Dr. Halverson said to me, "I appre-

ciate that man coming to me like that. It was true. I was carried away and didn't think. I'm so grateful that this man would take the time and effort to tell me that, and I'm especially appreciative of the spirit in which he told it to me."

This is all part of the whole process of Christian living in the world today.

This is what the world is waiting to see: Christians who are concerned about how others react to what they say, and the way they act.

I heard a story of a man who, one day, visited both heaven and hell. He went to hell first, and there he saw people who were starving and wretched and miserable, in terrible condition. He noticed that the problem was that everybody in hell had stiff arms. They could not minister to their own needs, they could not clean themselves up, or feed themselves, they could not do anything, so they were in misery. It was depressing to him, and he was delighted to have an opportunity to visit heaven. There he found people who were well fed, sleek and happy, enjoying themselves. It was just what heaven ought to be. But he noticed something remarkable. They too were suffering from the same problem. They all had stiff arms, and could not minister to their own needs. The difference was that, in heaven, they were feeding each other.

Prayer:

Our Father, we ask that Thou wilt make us aware of the world in which we live and the Christ who lives within us and in practical, existential terms we may put off the old and put on the new. Help us to arrest the attention of people, not with pretense, not by a phony posture, nor with a facade of orthodox doctrine but by a genuine, authentic Christian life. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Forgive and Live

by Ray C. Stedman

There is an oft-quoted prayer of an anonymous child who prayed, "Lord, make the bad people good and the good people nice." I think we all empathize with that prayer. So often it seems that being religious has a souring effect. We all know people who are undeniably "good" in the sense that they are moral, honest, upright, and truthful, but so often they are cold, rigid and unpleasant to be with, not nice at all. These are the kind who moved that child to pray that way.

If you are that kind of Christian, then you can be sure that you have not yet entered into New Testament Christianity. Such an experience indicates an incomplete Christian experience and, therefore, a counterfeit one. It indicates such have learned to put off certain negative things, certain wrong things, but have never yet gone on to put on the warmth and graciousness and love of Jesus Christ. You cannot read through the Gospel records without noting that the Lord Jesus was never gloomy or forbidding. People loved to be with him. Little children ran to him and enjoyed his company. Though he often felt deeply the hurt of others and so entered into the sorrows of men that he was known as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" {Isa 53:3b RSV}, yet he continually manifested a spirit of warmth and graciousness that drew people out after him. I have often wondered how many days of work were lost during the days of our Lord's ministry, as people would leave their jobs and homes and whatever they were doing, even sometimes without adequate preparation for lunch, to follow him and hear the gracious words that proceeded from his lips.

Now that same character is reflected in the one who learns to put on Christ. Being a Christian makes a definite difference in your life. It must. A true conversion is immediately evident in changed actions. There are certain things that must no

longer characterize your living, as Paul makes very clear. This is probably the aspect of Christianity that is best known to the world. They know that Christians do not do certain things. As we read here in this 4th chapter of Ephesians, a Christian must no longer lie or steal or fly into a temper, a selfish rage, or indulge in rotten talk of any kind.

But Christianity is not merely stopping these things. That is the mistake of so many. Even Christians feel that if they stop doing certain things which are prohibited as wrong by the Word of God, this marks them as Christians. It does not at all. This is where so much negative Christianity has arisen and why Christians are often stigmatized as being against everything. We are all acquainted with the five taboos which Christians are expected to avoid: no smoking, no drinking, no dancing, no gambling, and no bad movies. But it is unfortunate if Christians are known simply for being negative. The world ridicules that and is not impressed by it. I remember as a young Christian hearing a satirical jingle concerning Christians like that. It goes,

Rootytoot toot! Rootytoot toot!
We're the boys from the Institute.
We don't smoke and we don't chew
And we don't go out with girls that do.

That is the kind of impression that the world gets of Christian negativism, a kind of simpering pietism that is completely wrong.

The trouble is that such Christians have not learned to go on and put on Christ. As we have been seeing in Ephesians 4, we are not only to stop lying but to be positive, to put on Christ by speaking the truth in love with one another. That is quite a different thing. That opens up a whole new area of living. We are not merely to restrain our selfish tempers, but to seek the restoration of relationship with the one whom we have offended or who has

offended us. There is to be a positive action. You have not acted as a Christian until you have sought out the one with whom you have a difficulty, and have made peace, if you can. We are not only to stop evil talk but we are to seek to speak positively, helpfully, and graciously in all situations. We are not only to stop stealing but to start giving. There is where Christianity begins to show itself.

Now it goes even deeper than changed actions. In Chapter 4, Verse 30, the apostle goes on to show us that the presence of the Holy Spirit in a Christian must not only change his actions, but his attitudes as well.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. {Eph 4:30-32 RSV}

In that opening sentence the Apostle Paul puts his finger on the heart of the whole matter, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." The key to all human behavior lies in man's relationship with God, not with his relationship with his fellow man. The latter is an effect which comes after the cause. The key is in our relationship with the God in whose presence we must live.

All of us, Christian and non-Christian alike, are daily embroiled in problems of human relationships. We have difficulties in getting along with people. There are those who irritate us, those who rub us the wrong way, those whose personalities clash with ours. There are those who are constantly sabotaging our plans by their thoughtless actions, and we react to them, everyone does. The world is giving a great deal of thought these days on how to deal with what the psychologists call "inter-personal relationships." They are trying as hard as they can, with all the wisdom they can muster, to get people to sit down and talk things out, try to understand one another, and thus create a spirit of understanding and sympathy. But the Scriptures always go deeper, always go to the heart of a matter.

The place to begin in solving our human relationships is not with other people but with our relationship to God. Our relationship with our brother will reflect our relationship to our God. It always

does. There is always a vertical problem that must be taken care of first before the horizontal problem can be solved. So let us start with this vertical problem with God. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." That is the place to start.

The word *grieve* here is a word that is related to love. It is impossible for you to grieve someone who does not love you, nor can you be grieved except by those whom you love. If someone who does not love you is offended by what you do, he is not grieved, but angry, enraged. Grief is always an indication of the presence of love. Therefore this word reveals that God loves us. The Holy Spirit is in us, as Christians, in order to help us, to bless us, to strengthen us, to teach us how to live. The activities that grieve him, therefore, are those that hurt us and harm us and therefore hurt his love.

And why are we not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God? The apostle suggests a very significant reason: Because, he says, Christians are *sealed* by him unto the day of redemption. What does that mean? These reasons, after all, are not put here merely to fill up space. When the writers of Scripture add a phrase like this it has deep significance, it has real meaning. It is a challenge to us, as we read our Bibles, to think these things through and try to find out why he says such a thing. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom [or by whom] you were sealed for the day of redemption."

A seal, as you know, is a protective device. It is designed to prevent loss or invasion. I spent part of my boyhood in a little town along the main line of the Great Northern Railroad in North Dakota. It was one of the busiest lines in the nation; trains kept coming constantly day and night along that busy railroad. We boys often played along the tracks and we early discovered that the railroad employed seals to seal their box cars with. They used a long aluminum strip with a ball on the end and a slit in the ball. When the free end of the strip was brought through the door and then fastened in the slot of the ball, there was no way to pull it out again. The box car was sealed for the length of its journey. It was protected from being broken into by that little aluminum strip which was designed to keep it until it got to its destination.

That is exactly the thought of this phrase here. The Holy Spirit is given to Christians to seal them, to guarantee that they will arrive at their, journey's destination, which is called here, "the day of redemption," the day of the resurrection of the body,

the day of the completion of God's activity of salvation for human beings. You have this brought out very clearly in the first chapter of this letter, the 13th verse. The apostle says there,

In him [i.e., in Christ] you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. {Eph 1:13-14 RSV}

We learn from this that the Holy Spirit has been given to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. This is the mark of a Christian. This is why it is wrong to use the word *Christian* of someone who is not indwelt or possessed by the Holy Spirit. As Paul says in Romans 8, "If you do not have the Spirit of Christ, you are none of his," {cf, Rom 8:9}. You may be a church member, you may have been religious all your life, but unless you have believed in the Lord Jesus and received the gift of the Holy Spirit (this is not anything you feel; it is the quiet taking up of residence within the believer of the Holy Spirit of God at the moment you commit your faith and trust to Christ), you are not a Christian. If this has happened then you are a Christian, born again, and the Holy Spirit has begun his residence within you.

Now Paul makes clear that he has done so in order to bring you to your journey's end, to bring you to the day of redemption. He will never stop his work. As Paul writes to the Philippians, "I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ," {Phil 1:6 RSV}. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are reminded in very clear, forthright language, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you,'" {Heb 13:5 RSV}. The point the apostle is making here is that the Holy Spirit, in taking up his residence within us, does so permanently. Therefore, if you grieve him and offend him, though you might normally think that he would leave you, he has promised he will not. He will not leave you even though you hurt him, even though you grieve him, even though you disobey him. He will never leave you, that is the promise. But then you must live with a grieved Spirit.

Do you know what that is like? Have you ever sensed what it means to live with a grieved Spirit, the Holy Spirit within, grieved? Well, let me describe it to you. I am sure you will recognize it if you have felt this, as a Christian:

1. There is, first, a sense of inward conflict, a tension develops, a restlessness. The Holy Spirit is pulling us in one direction but the lusts of the flesh, the desires of the self-life, are pulling us in another direction. You remember how beautifully this is described in Galatians. Paul says there is a civil war that rages within us. The Spirit lusts against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things we would {cf, Gal 5:17 KJV}. There is a sense of turmoil, of tension, of restlessness. If nothing is done about it, if this goes on unheeded, we are no longer whole persons, we are divided against ourselves, we are fragmented.
2. Soon we begin to feel unhappy and depressed, joyless, heavy and listless. This is why Christians oftentimes drag themselves along to do things they know they ought to do. But we should not have to do that. Christianity is not intended to be a process of dragging ourselves, making ourselves do something God wants us to do, out of a sense of duty. The Spirit of God is described in Scripture as energy, energizing. In Paul's letter to the Colossians he speaks of his own ministry beautifully along this line. He says he is, "striving with all the energy which he [the Holy Spirit] mightily inspires within me," {Col 1:29 RSV}. So the Spirit is a driving force, and there is something wrong, something is the matter, if we find ourselves continually having to make ourselves do something that we know we ought to do. No, the Spirit of God is designed to be a driving energy. When we are listless, lethargic, apathetic and lukewarm, it is indicative there is something wrong; we may be grieving the Spirit of God.
3. Furthermore, once this inner peace is gone we soon discover we are beset by fears and anxieties, worries, nameless dreads. There are Christians, unfortunately, who live whole years at a time in this relationship. They are haunted

by fear. Read your Bibles and you will see that the one thing the Christian must not do is be afraid. The word of the Lord Jesus repeated again and again to his disciples is, "Fear not." Why? "For I am with you," he said. Fear not! "Fear not those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul," {Matt 10:28 RSV}. "Be not anxious," he said, be not troubled about things. When you see terrible things happening on the earth, when the nations begin to fall apart, when wars and rumors of wars spread across the face of the earth and men's hearts are failing them for fear of looking after the things that come upon the earth, what does he say to the Christian? Fear not! Lift up your heads and rejoice.

Now what he asks us to do he expects to energize us to accomplish, and he will. Walking in the Spirit means that we can fulfill these demands. And if we do not, if we are experiencing anxiety and dread and fear, it is a sign that we are grieving the Holy Spirit. "Perfect love casts out fear" {1 Jn 4:18 RSV}, John says, and if there is fear gripping our hearts it is a sign that something has interfered with the flow of the perfect love of the Holy Spirit within us. That is why we are so cold and loveless toward one another, so hard. It is an indication something is wrong. The Spirit is like a fire and fire is warm and attractive. The Christian who is always cold and unpleasant to be with obviously has something interfering with the flow of the Spirit's love in his life. He has grieved the Holy Spirit.

Let us go further: What is it that grieves the Holy Spirit? He tells us in Verse 31:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice. {Eph 4:31 RSV}

Certainly, the wrong actions he has described before grieve the Holy Spirit, but they are relatively easy to spot. More subtle, and, therefore, more deadly are these wrong attitudes, the things we harbor within us that we do not let others see. We can cover these over with a happy smile or temporarily subdue them and keep them hidden by an effort of the will, yet beneath are bitter attitudes and wrathful feelings, anger, clamor, slander and malice. It

is these which are grieving the Holy Spirit. Look at them:

- *Bitterness*, what is that? Well, that is a hard, cynical hateful outlook toward someone else.
- The word *wrath* means "rage," hotheaded passion, losing your temper, in other words.
- *Anger* is a related word that means an inward boiling resulting in a desire to punish somebody, to strike back, to seek revenge.
- The word for *clamor* here is a word that means "to shout, to rail, to bawl someone out."
- *Slander* is speech that is injurious to someone else – gossip, rumor spreading.
- *Malice* is malignity, i.e., the desire to injure someone else.

What a terrible list this is. Yet these are the things the Holy Spirit sees in us. You see how superficial many of us are in judging our own lives? We think because we keep out of trouble and stay within the law that we have pleased God. Not at all. As the Holy Spirit looks at us he sees these things that are shocking to him, grieving to him. We look at them and we justify them. But let us be honest and admit they are there, and often there, in our Christian lives. This is what is producing weakness in our Christian living, these very things.

They may be present in your heart right now. You may be boiling with rage at someone right now, you may be seething at some possible fancied injury or insult that someone said to you just this morning, your husband or wife, or someone else. Well, if so, put it away. That is the word of the Lord. Put away these things, let them all be put away. That means to repent of them, change your mind about them, stop justifying them to yourself, stop saying you have a right to feel this way, stop defending them. Immediately when you do this, an ungrieved Spirit within will release to you the love of Christ, the kindness of a God who, as the Lord Jesus himself said, "is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish." That is what Christianity is, tenderheartedness, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave us.

“Well,” someone says, “you don’t know what I’m up against. You don’t know what so-and-so has done to me. If you were in my shoes you wouldn’t be able to forgive, either. I can’t forgive, don’t ask me to.” I have had Christians say this to me, “I just can’t forgive this person.” Now there is a sense in which this is true. You cannot, you really cannot forgive them. Why? Because forgiveness is Step #2 and you have not done Step #1 yet. You cannot take Step #2 until you have done Step #1, that is for sure. Number 1 is to put away this wrong attitude. There are always two problems involved whenever a Christian holds a grudge or feels resentment against someone else. There is the situation that caused your feeling, that is one problem. But there is a closer, more immediate problem, and that is your reaction to this, your attitude toward him. That is where the Christian always has to start. This is our difficulty. We always want to start with the problem that caused the situation, that caused our feeling. But God says, No, first remove the beam that is in your own eye, then you will see clearly how to remove the mote that is in your brother’s eye {cf, Matt 7:3-4, Luke 6:41-42}. Start with yourself, first. What is your attitude toward this other person? That is where you must start.

First, put away bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice. Put it away. This is where the difficulty comes. When we get right down to that place we discover, oftentimes to our own shock, that we do not want to do it. We want to be bitter, we want to be vengeful; we enjoy it. We want to make people squirm. We want to make them crawl back to us and ask our forgiveness. We want revenge, that is what we are after. Why? Because if we talk to them about it, it will all be brought out in the open and the thing will be settled, and we do not want it settled. Someone senses our coldness, our inward fury, our silent, frozen attitude and says, “What’s the matter?” And we lie, and say “Nothing, nothing’s the matter.” “Oh, I know something’s the matter or you wouldn’t act this way. What’s the matter?” “OK, nothing!” Until finally we are driven to open up.

Why are we so reluctant? Because we enjoy it. That is what the Word of God reveals. These things are pleasurable to us, and this is where the problem lies. If we will obey God and put them away, then immediately the Holy Spirit who dwells within, whose task it is to give us that character of

Jesus Christ which made him the world’s most attractive man, will immediately begin to release to us the tenderheartedness and the kindness of Christ and we can forgive as God in Christ forgave us. That is a wonderful measuring stick, is it not? Forgive, as God in Christ forgave you. That rules out such things as, “Well, I can forgive him but I won’t forget.” God forgot! It cuts out anything like, “I’ll forgive him but I’ll never speak to him again.” God speaks to you again, does he not?

How did God in Christ forgive you? Have you forgotten that? That is what the Lord’s Supper is designed to remind us of, how God in Christ forgave us. Think of it. He forgave you before you repented, did he not? He forgave you before there was any sign of turning on your part. You discovered that the moment you began to respond to him. His forgiveness was already there. You see this so beautifully in the parable of the Prodigal Son. That father’s heart was yearning after the offending one, the son. He had been looking for him, watching for the slightest turning so that the father’s heart of forgiveness could be opened up to that boy, and the moment he saw him a long ways off he ran and flung his arms around his neck and showed him his forgiveness.

Not only did God forgive us before we repented, he forgave us despite the hurt to himself. This is our problem. We say, “I know I should forgive, but he doesn’t know how he’s hurt me, and I can’t forgive that hurt.” Well, God did. There is no desire for revenge on his part. He does not try to pay us back for what we have done. He forgives it; he wipes it out. He forgave us completely, did he not? Is it not wonderful that God never gets historical about our sins? He is not forever bringing them up and throwing them in our faces. We shall never forget them, and that is quite right. Paul never forgot that he was a persecutor of the church. But God did.

Now this is the word for us. This is where Christianity begins to be manifest. “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

We are going to come to the Lord’s table and this table speaks to us in very eloquent terms of how we were forgiven in Christ. We sang a little while ago of the wonder that we would ever be forgiven.

Forgive and Live

And can it be that I shouldst gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused his pain,
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, didst die for me?

Perhaps there may be some who are even now harboring unforgiving attitudes toward someone else. The Word of God says if you come to the altar to offer a gift and there remember that you have ought against your brother, leave your gift at the altar and go and first be reconciled to your

brother. Then come and offer your gift. You may not be able to do that physically at this moment, but if there is something in your heart against another you can go in spirit. You can put it away, you can forgive him, and then come and offer your gift of praise and thanksgiving unto God.

Prayer:

Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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The Call of the Hour

by Ray C. Stedman

The task of Christianity is not primarily to get us ready for heaven. Though this has been the emphasis in past generations, it is, in itself, a relatively simple task as far as God is concerned. He gets us ready for heaven by an act of faith in Jesus Christ. The major task of Christian faith, however, is to equip us for life, to live life.

The message of the Scriptures, therefore, is how to handle life. I am not talking about ideal life, life as we can think of it on Sunday morning when we are removed from much of the rush and pressure of our days. No, I am talking about realistic life. Life with its pressures and problems, its joys and challenges, its heartaches and tears, its confusion and bafflement, its possibilities of greatness. We don't come here on Sunday mornings to huddle together and learn how to hang on. We come here to learn how to handle life so that we can go out and face the worst and still stand, undefeated! That is what Christianity is about.

Therefore, the purpose of the church (and this perhaps will help clarify our thinking these days when so much is troubled and confused in this area), is not to make the world a better place to live in – it is to make a better people to live in it. Then, as a kind of by-product, and always as that, these better people will make the world a better place. So to the church is given the secret of life.

Christians are the only ones who have that secret. I know that sounds conceited and arrogant, yet it is based upon the teaching of the Word of God from cover to cover. Christ is the secret of life. Christians have Jesus Christ, that is what makes you a Christian. Therefore, to Christians is given the secret of life. That is why the message of the church never changes no matter what the age, or the century, in which we find ourselves. That is also why it is always up-to-date. Only that message will meet the need of the world in which we

live. When the church forgets this and wanders off into peripheral paths, trying to produce the by-product directly, it loses its influence, its power, and its effectiveness.

Now Paul is very anxious that his readers never forget this fact. As we have been looking at the fourth chapter of Ephesians together, we have seen how he works out in practical detail the effect of this transforming secret in daily life. We learned that as this secret is put into practice, not simply believed, but put into practice –

- It makes a Christian stop lying and start telling the truth.
- It makes him stop losing his temper and start healing his relationships with those around him.
- It makes him stop stealing and start giving.
- It makes him stop talking dirty and start speaking wisely and helpfully and wholesomely.
- It even makes him stop harboring inner attitudes of hate, resentment, bitterness, envy, and malice and to start forgiving and being gracious and kind to those around him even when it is difficult to do so.

Yet the apostle never wants us to get so wrapped up in the results that we forget what produces them. That is the danger, isn't it? So many times we are so anxious to get to the end that we forget the pathway that leads to it. So in the midst of this practical dissertation of Chapter 4, the apostle breaks off to restate the great secret of Christian living.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. {Eph 5:1-2 RSV}

That is a great declaration.

Perhaps we can analyze it best by gathering it in about four words:

The first is to note the apostle's exhortation to us here. "**Be imitators of God,**" he says. He put it flatly, bluntly, openly: "Be imitators of God." The word for *imitators* is the Greek word that means "to mimic," to be a mimicker of God. Mimics are those who follow the pattern or the example of God. Here is what Christians are to be. If you want to put it in one word, you can say it this way, "Be godlike." That is the goal of Christianity. It is to produce men and women, boys and girls, who are godlike in the midst of an ungodlike world. That is what it is all about.

Now notice, it does not say, "Be gods." That is what the cults say. That is the lie of the devil. That is the satanic twist to the original declaration of God. He distorts the truth and makes it come out as a promise to us that if we follow our own desires, throw overboard all restrictions, cast aside the bonds of authority, and do what we want to do, we can be gods. For, after all, isn't that what God does? He does what he wants; he is sovereign; he does what he likes. But that is a lie. This is not what the Christian faith says. It says rather, "be godlike," i.e., reflect the one true and holy God. There is only one God. There only can be one God. It is impossible to have more than one God. By definition, God is a supreme being. How many supreme beings can you have? Only one.

Therefore, the Christian message is to be like the one true God. Reflect him in your humanity. Be a godlike man. Be a godlike woman. From this we get our English word *godly*. After all, this word *godly*, which makes many of us cringe and feel uncomfortable, is simply a shortened form of the word *godlike*. That is all. It originally came from that word *godlikeness*. Godlikeness is godliness; godliness is godlikeness.

Now think about that for a minute.

What a challenge this is. I submit to you that there has never been a higher challenge ever set before human beings than this. Be godlike! Some

of you young people are looking for a cause you can follow. Youth everywhere today is seeking a cause. Well, what is better than this – be godlike? There it is. What a challenge! Be godlike in the midst of a world that is out to destroy godlikeness as far as possible. Be different. "Come out from among them" {2 Cor 6:17 KJV}, the Scriptures exhort. Be godlike. You can see this all through the New Testament. In the closing part of this letter the apostle puts it another way. He says, "Be strong." Everyone wants to be strong. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," {Eph 6:10 RSV}. The Lord Jesus put it this way. He said, "Be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect," {cf, Matt 5:48}. Be godlike. That is the whole exhortation of Scripture.

Well, what is God like? What will you be like if you are godlike?

- Will you be strong? Yes, of course. We have already seen that. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." There is no strength like God's strength. His is the greatest strength there is. And to be godlike is to be strong.
- Will you be filled with power if you are godlike? Oh yes, but be careful. It is a different kind of power than the power the world desires. It is quieter, less apparent, but it is far, far mightier. The power the world admires is the power to destroy. The power of God is the power to unite. The Lord Jesus said, "He that is with me gathereth, but he that is against me, scattereth abroad," {cf, Matt 12:30, Luke 11:23}. In those two terms he describes the only two kinds of power there are in the world – power to gather, power to heal, power to bring together, to unite, or power to destroy, to break up, to shatter, fragment and divide. But that is what it means to be godlike. It is powerful.
- Will you be realistic if you are godlike? If there is anything that is the desire of youth today, it is to be realistic. The one sin they can never forgive is phoniness, unreality. Will you be realistic if you are godlike? Of course. God is the greatest realist there ever was. He is the utter realist. God always looks at life exactly

as it is. He treats people exactly as they are. He is forever tearing aside the veils of delusion we build around ourselves and revealing to us what we really are. That is realism.

- Well, will you be happy if you are godlike? Oh yes, but a different kind of happiness than the world is seeking after.
- Will you be attractive to others? By all means. There is nothing more attractive than God. He is the most dramatic, compelling, attractive Being that ever existed. Yet you will make some people hate you immediately if you are godlike, though at the same time they will respect you. That is what godliness always does.
- Will you be wise and kind? Of course, wiser and kinder than you have ever been before, because that is what God is.

I think we can sum all this up in two words. Despite all the works of God that are evident around us, both in the natural world and in the world of thought and ideas, there are really only two things that God ever does in human history: God creates and he redeems. Those are the two things. Everything in the whole universe gathers about these two. God creates and God redeems. God makes things live and God heals that which is broken. It is because God is life and God is love. He is therefore our Maker and our Healer. And that is what you will be if you become godlike. You will learn how to live, live as God intended life to be lived, to the fullest capacity of your humanity. And you will learn how to love and to heal, to restore and bring together instead of to scatter and fragment and break apart. For that is godlikeness. It is very desirable, isn't it? Who does not want to be like this?

But the question is, how does it happen? The apostle goes on from this exhortation to an explanation. There are two phrases here that tell us how. "Therefore," and then he adds, "as beloved children." "Therefore, ... as beloved children." One is the process of godlikeness and the other is the prerequisite to godlikeness. Let us take the last one first.

The **prerequisite to godlikeness** – "as beloved children." Why does he put that in? Because that is the only kind of people who can be imitators of God. It is his beloved children. Why only they? Because they alone have what it takes to be godlike. You see, you can never be godlike without God's life. After all, no man by himself can be like God. How can he? God is infinite and we are finite; he is perfect in all his ways and we so imperfect; he is unlimited and we so limited; he is wise and we so foolish. How can man be like God? Well, he can't in himself. The only one who can be godlike is God.

But the gospel, the good news, is, when by faith in God's promise you receive Jesus Christ, God's Son, into your life, his life becomes your life. That is the good news. "Christ in you, the hope of glory," {Col 1:27b}. His life becomes your life, as the Apostle John says, "He who has the Son has life, but he who does not have the Son of God does not have life," {cf, 1 Jn 5:12 RSV}. If you have all that he is, then you have all his resources, and that, of course, is how you can be godlike. By his strength, by his resources, not yours. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might," {Eph 6:10 RSV}. That is how strength comes.

Now, that is the prerequisite to godlikeness. That is where you must begin. If you want to be godlike, start there. Receive Jesus Christ, God's Son. Invite him into your life. When you have his life, you can have what he is, godlikeness.

Now let's look at the **process to godlikeness**. "Therefore," he says – "therefore." That is a word that always looks back on something. He has already explained it once and he is simply referring to it again. Addressing Christians, God's beloved children, those who have been born into the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ, he says to them in Chapter 4, Verses 22-24,

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. {Eph 4:22-24 RSV}

This is what his “therefore” looks back upon. “Put off the old life,” he says. This is the natural human life we all receive by being born into the human family. We obtained it from Adam. Put off the old life as it manifests itself, and put on the new life “which is created after the likeness of God.” It is godlike! We learn from Scripture how to recognize the old life. We have already been looking at that. We have seen that the old life is always self-centered. Our desires, our aims, our ambitions, our program, our goals, our life – that is the old life. It expresses itself in lying, stealing and immorality, also in bitterness, hate, revenge, envy, unforgiveness, malice, fear, anxiety, boredom, restlessness, cruelty and a whole host of things. These are signs of the old life.

Now, again, let me say this. If you are not a Christian, don’t try to put these things away. You can’t do it, because you are part of the problem. Don’t try it on that basis. You’ll simply deceive yourself and shift from one form of it to another form, but you won’t get away from the problem.

You can’t. The way to be delivered is to come to the Deliverer, come to Christ. Begin there. I have already stressed that.

But now, if you are a Christian, and have come to Christ, you can do what he says. You can put away these things. Your will is involved in this: You look at this manifestation, and you put it away.

Someone says, “How do you do that? That is my problem!”

A woman said to me last week, “About this matter of putting off and putting on – how do you do that?” Well, if “put away” means nothing to you, let me use another term that Scripture uses. How do you put off the old life? The Scriptures say elsewhere, “confess.” That does not mean to say you are sorry. That is not confession. It means to agree with God about something. Label it what God labels it. Name it. Say it with God: *Con* means “with,” and *fess* means “to say.” To confess is to say with God what he says about it. That is confession.

The Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see yourself and you will become aware of these things in your life. You didn’t know before that they were there. You didn’t realize you were acting in these ways until you became a Christian. That is why you often become more miserable and unhappy at times as a Christian than you ever were before.

Then you were drifting on totally oblivious that you were like this, but now the light is on and you begin to see yourself. When you do, agree with it. That is confession.

Our immediate reaction is to defend ourselves, to react, to say, “Oh no, this isn’t me. You are talking about my neighbors. They are the ones. Look, I can give you a whole list of people who fit these qualifications, but not me.” But that isn’t confessing. Confessing is agreeing with God about what you are. Name it. Don’t argue with God about it.

And name it aloud. Bring it up out of the subconscious into the conscious and look at it and name it. The strange thing about human life and the thing, of course, that God knew about us all along is that what we verbalize, we are able to put aside. If you don’t name it, it has a strange power over you; it can go on forever. But if you look at it and name it, verbalize it, you can put it away. That is why the Scriptures say, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” {cf, 1 Jn 1:9}.

A German pastor friend of mine gave me a treatise he wrote on the cure of anxiety which I have found to be very helpful. In it is an illustration I would like to borrow. He says that Christians are like a pond in the woods on which the leaves are constantly falling. These leaves fall one at a time, quietly, almost silently, upon the surface of the pond. The leaves are the manifestation of the old life. A little vanity, a little envy, a bit of prideful ambition, some unkindness, a sharp unlovely word spoken to another, a lie, some impurity, a bit of egotism; these are constantly falling upon the pond of our life. We don’t think they are very important. We think they are trivialities, mere passing things. They sink to the bottom and are forgotten, but they are still there. That is the problem. They are still there. There they lie and rot, and soon, in the deep subconscious part of our life, there is a foulness, a fetidness, a rottenness that stops the flow of the water and stagnates the pool. This foulness becomes fertile soil for anxiety. Fears arise within us. Nameless dreads and worries constantly throng us and bother us. In the quiet moments of our lives we seem to be able to master these better. When a pool of water is quiet, though the bottom is very dirty and foul, it isn’t very apparent. But let something agitate the water,

let something bother us, some circumstance irritate us, and the water of our lives is troubled and the dirt at the bottom whirls up and clouds our minds, befuddles and confuses us, and we act in panic, a panic of anxiety. But the Holy Spirit of God brings to our attention the things he is lifting up out of the bottom of our lives, dredging out the foulness. One by one these things are brought to our attention, and, if we name them, if we say, "Yes Lord, that is what I have done, that is what I do. Thank you for showing it to me," then we can put it away. Bit by bit it keeps coming up, all this foulness, until gradually the pool becomes clear again, sunlit, sparkling, and open. We have nothing left to hide. We don't try to cover over and pretend that we are something else. Then that pool, that pond that has been lying stagnant becomes a trickle of living water growing into a river at last that flows out in blessing to others.

That brings us to the third word here. Paul is going back, and looking over what he has covered, and giving it to us again. There is the exhortation, "be imitators of God." There is the explanation, "therefore, on the basis of putting off and putting on Christ, as beloved children." Now there comes the demonstration of this. "**Walk in love**" he says. That is the characteristic of a truly Christian life. I have discovered that here is another word that everybody thinks they know the meaning of and very few do: Love.

Do you know what it means to love? Well, it means that you begin to see others as people instead of things, instead of being objects of usefulness to you, or obstacles that hinder, you see them as people like yourself with the same problems you have with all the difficulties and all the yearnings and the heartaches. They are no longer people doing something to you. They are people you can do something for. That is the difference.

You discover, as you put on Christ in this way, and as you put off these old and ugly things, that your attitudes are changing. Once you wanted to use people and love things. Now you discover you are starting to love people and use things. That is the way God intended it:

- You suddenly are aware that the one you previously felt inferior to whenever you were with him, who always seemed to be so poised, so confident and certain, you now see to be but

putting up a front. But behind it is a lonely, needy person. You see that he has been assuming this poise, and behind this shell of assurance is a needy life. Perhaps you invite him out to lunch and you discover that this person who was such an obstacle to you is someone like yourself.

- Or the one that you feared or thought was cruel, indifferent, hateful and harsh, you see now as someone who has been badly hurt by life, who has grown defensive, who is afraid to let anybody in, who builds a rough wall around himself in order to protect himself. So you ignore the roughness and speak kindly to the man inside and you get a favorable reaction, one that you never expected. You find that if you continue, he responds.
- Or the one you saw as despised and weak and worthless, that useless person you never had any use for all of a sudden you see qualities of worth that you never saw before.

You are now learning to love. Christ is loving through you, though it feels like you doing it.

- You discover that there are things about people that you had never noticed.
- You have a new appreciation for them. Oh, you still see the old faults that bothered you once, but with them you see something else – something new. That is what it means to love.
- You want to help them, to uphold them, and, when you do so, without being aware of it, all of a sudden you discover that your life has become vital and interesting, fascinating and exciting. Now that is what God does. That is what godlikeness is.

Paul closes this with a wonderful illustration. He says,

Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. {Eph 5:2b RSV}

That is what Christ was like. He was godlike.

In fact, the Lord Jesus Christ in his life remarkably reveals both God and man, the only person in all history who ever did. As the Son of God, he empties himself and endures the cross in order that he might save man. He is outgoing. He gives himself up, as Paul reminds us here. He is forever thinking of someone else. He is always reaching out toward someone else. And he went to the cross because he was forgetful of himself. He endured the cross, he emptied himself in order to save man. But as the Son of Man, he denies himself and takes up his cross in order to glorify God. There you have the two brought together. God, always reaching out to bless man, and man, if he learns the secret of his life, lives to glorify God.

When you have that, you have a harmony that is constantly working together to produce the won-

der of the age, a godlike man. A man in whom God dwells. "Be ye imitators of Him."

Prayer:

Our Father, what a magnificent theme you have set before us here. Our imaginations are captured by it. Our hearts respond to it. This is what we have always wanted to be like. We can hardly believe our ears that here in this book which by the Holy Spirit is given to us, you are telling us how this can be possible. Lord, teach us to listen. "He that has ears to hear, let him hear," that there might break out in our lonely, bewildered, confused age the wonder of godlikeness. We pray in his name, Amen.

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New Morality or Ancient Foolishness? (Part I)

by Ray C. Stedman

One of the burning issues of our day is sexual morality. A college coach in a Christian school told me not long ago of a young man in his school who said, "I'll follow the school rules in almost everything, but nobody is going to tell me what to do with my sex life." Once that kind of an attitude would have been an exception, but today it is almost universal. Even churches today are advocating what is called the "New Morality," the idea that what formerly was regarded as misconduct be tolerated, and even, in some cases, be directly approved of by religious authorities.

Yet is it rather deeply significant that exactly the same problem arose in the 1st century in the midst of strikingly similar conditions to those which prevail today. Listen to this familiar passage from Romans 1, a 1st century description of life in the Roman Empire:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobe-

dient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them. {Rom 1:26-32 RSV}

That sounds up-to-date doesn't it? That could have been written in this decade of the 20th century. It is as up-to-date as tomorrow morning's newspaper. In the face of that fact I should like to ask, "Where is all our vaunted progress in twenty centuries?" If this 1st century document can so accurately describe what 20th century life is like, then where is the progress we say we have been making? What becomes of the claim that proper education will cure conditions like this? Why is it that after two thousand years of research, and of growing human knowledge, these conditions are as rampant as they ever were? And not only rampant among the poor and the uneducated, the so called lower classes, but equally rampant among the cultured, the privileged and the highly educated today.

With those questions ringing in our ears, let us come to Paul's treatment of this theme in Ephesians 5 – the problem of sexual morality. I shall read the whole passage that we may compare it with the description I have just read from Romans 1, and see how totally diametric the Christian position is:

But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor lewdness, which are not fitting; but instead let

there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light [or, rather, "anything that makes visible is light"].

**Therefore it is said,
"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ shall give you light." {Eph
5:3-14 RSV}**

The apostle is here declaring the absolute incompatibility of sexual looseness with the Christian faith. The two cannot mix. There is no mincing of words in this passage. Here we have the truth as it is in Jesus, i.e., the reality of things as they are. This is an enlargement by the apostle on the teachings of the Lord Jesus himself. Remember that, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that adultery and fornication were evil. Even the eye that is attracted or the hand that is involved should be cut off (in a figurative sense), lest it lead us into evil. Even the thought, he says, that leads to these activities, is wrong. Paul is simply enlarging upon this teaching of our Lord. God's intention for man is either marriage, with complete faithfulness to the partner, or total abstinence from sex.

The Bible allows no deviation from this. It makes it clear that this is the Christian position: Nothing less; nothing more.

Now here Paul shows why this must be so. This is one of the most helpful passages in all the Bible to enable us to get our bearings amidst the confused and muddled thinking that exists today in this area of sexual morality. Here the apostle gives us five illuminating and consistently logical reasons why sexual looseness is wholly incompatible with a

Christian profession. We shall examine them one by one. I shall not try to cover them all in one message, but let us make a beginning.

The first of these reasons is given to us in Verse 3.

But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. {Eph 5:3 RSV}

Here he is saying that sexual looseness is incompatible with Christianity because it is defiling and debasing of humanity. Look at the terms he uses to define what we have called, in general, sexual looseness: *Immorality*, that is the most common and widest term in the Bible for any kind of sexual misbehavior. It is the most frequently used term for sex misconduct. *Impurity* is literally "uncleanness," and refers to anything that is rotten, or filthy, or obscene. "All impurity," he says. The word *covetousness* we frequently take to refer to greed about money, but here it refers to greed for another's body. Perhaps the better translation would be *passion* or *lust*. It is explained in that connection in Verse 5 where he refers to "one who is covetous (that is an idolater)." One who makes an idol of another person's body, that is the idea. All this we shall lump together under the term, "sexual looseness." You will notice that these things are forbidden to be even named among saints. It is not only the acts themselves which are prohibited, but even to talk about them.

All these terms, of course, refer to sex outside of marriage. There is never any prohibition against discussing sex. The Bible never condemns that. It is the distortions of sex that are prohibited. We are told not to talk about or discuss them in general conversation, but we are never told not to mention or discuss sex. The twisted concept of many about Christianity is that it forbids even the discussion of sex, but anyone who has read the Bible knows that it freely and frankly discusses sex. It approaches it in the most open way, and never sanctions Victorian prudishness about it. The Bible reveals the fact that sexual powers are God-given. God likes sex. He engineered it. He designed it. The fact that our sexual drives are among the most powerful in human life is God's idea, not ours. He made us that way, therefore he has a purpose in it. The Bible faces these facts. It never treats sex as deplor-

able or shameful. Christianity, almost alone among all the great religions of the world, thoroughly approves of the body. It tells us that God once entered into time in a human body, a body complete with sex organs, and it finds no shame or cause for shame in that fact. The Bible makes clear that within marriage sex is beautiful, wholesome, and God-approved.

But the Bible is equally clear in its declaration that sex outside of marriage is debasing and defiling; it is harmful to our basic humanity. God's prohibitions about sex are therefore not designed to keep us from something helpful and good, but to make possible something helpful and good. They are to keep us from that which would prevent us from enjoying the best. Sex outside of marriage is so injurious, in fact, that, as the apostle makes clear here, even passing references to it among Christians can be inflaming and dangerous. The Christian position is exactly what the Apostle Paul says here. There must be a putting aside of even the desire to talk about the sordid, lurid details of these wrong acts.

Now this statement was made in a day when sexual looseness was even more widely tolerated and accepted than it is today. In this very city of Ephesus, to which this letter is addressed, there was a temple to a pagan goddess, the worship of whom was made possible by a multitude of young priests and priestesses who gave their bodies to whoever could pay the price, as an act of worship. The whole city accepted sexual intercourse as an act of worship and regarded it as normal and proper, even religious – a sign of dedication. That was going on in this city of Ephesus. That is how tolerantly they looked upon these things. Yet to these Christians, living in such surroundings, the apostle addresses this admonition:

Immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. {Eph 5:3 RSV}

That charge to Christians must have seemed even more unrealistic and incapable of fulfillment to the pagans of Ephesus than it does to Americans today. But there it is.

Well, why is it there? Not because, as we are often told, Christianity is negative and prudish. It is never that. The whole of Scripture is written for the welfare of man. God's whole purpose in telling

us the truth is that we might fully enter into life. Jesus, said, "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly," {John 10:10 KJV}. We have already seen that Christianity is not negative about sex.

Well, then, why is this passage here? It is because, as Paul says, the absence of this kind of activity and of this kind of talk among Christians is fitting among saints. The word he chooses is a word that means "becoming," "wholesome," "attractive," "refreshing." Who of us has not had the experience of being exposed, either deliberately or involuntarily, to something filthy, obscene, or improper in sexual matters, and coming from that experience feeling dirty and unclean. What a refreshing thing it has been to come into a company of people who talk about wholesome matters. Their time and talk is filled with that which is wholesome, healthy, and refreshing. Now that is what the apostle means. By implication, of course, to indulge in improper talk is unwholesome, unfitting, uglifying, debasing, defiling.

That is an idea that is being directly challenged in our day. We are being told today that all sex is beautiful and natural, that it is in the same class as any of our bodily desires or urges, and, therefore, we should feel free to satisfy it as openly as we do any other of our bodily needs, without shame or apology. We are subjected to a constant barrage of propaganda which links sex acts with the idea of wholesomeness, naturalness, frankness, youth, and vitality.

Therefore, we are told, we can perform a sex act with whomever and whenever we find it mutually agreeable. The only thing wrong with it, we are being told, is if we force it in any way upon someone else. As long as it is mutually agreeable, it is right. This is the propaganda of our day.

Now this idea that sex, all sex, any sex, is natural and beautiful is a lie. It never was true. Like all powerful lies, it derives its strength from being based upon a partial truth. It is true that sex is a natural urge. It is true that sex is related to our physical body like hunger or thirst, or the need to urinate, or to sleep, or any other physical urge. But what is never said is that these other urges also require regulation and control. They are not indulged in at will, any time, any place. We don't eat in any manner that we choose. We don't sit down at the table and begin to grab with our hands and stuff food into our mouths, we learn to eat with a knife

and fork that we might not be offensive. We learn to regulate our eating, and control even the way we eat as well as what we eat. We don't sleep whenever we please, even though we may be awfully sleepy. (Some of you may be controlling that instinct right at this very moment!) And even though we see many signs and pickets demanding the right to sexual freedom, we never see people picketing for the right to urinate publicly, or any time they will. We even insist that our puppies and kittens learn to do otherwise.

Therefore, just because sex is like our other natural desires, because it is nothing to be ashamed of, then, like these other natural urges, it requires regulation and restraint. And the intended regulation of sex is marriage! That is all the Bible says. Marriage is the way to regulate sex so that it is right and wholesome and beneficial. Anything else becomes a violation, not only of propriety in Christian society, but of elementary humanity as well.

One thing is clearly true: Sex is obviously much more complicated than any other of our natural urges. It requires a partner, which no other urge does. And it is not only a physical union, but a psychological union as well. In fact, and this is what is so often forgotten, it is the psychological union which is the more important of the two.

All you need do to prove that is to sit in a marriage counseling room and listen to the dreary stories, repeated endlessly, of married couples who experience physical union but have never known what it means to enter into psychological union in sex. Their lives are empty and barren as a result. Sex is a complicated process, intended to be a total union of two beings, and only in marriage is such a total union possible. It is not merely a physical union; it is primarily a psychological union. It is the giving of two people to each other totally, body, soul and spirit, with all their possessions, their name, everything they own. Only in marriage is that kind of a union possible.

C. S. Lewis says something very helpful along this line:

The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside of marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the physical) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union. The Christian attitude does

not mean that there is anything wrong about sexual pleasure, any more than about the pleasure of eating. It means that you must not isolate that pleasure and try to get it by itself any more than you ought to try to get the pleasures of taste without swallowing and digesting, by chewing things and spitting them out again.

C. S. Lewis goes on to point out that, today, our sexual instincts are horribly inflamed and distorted, even in the best of people, because of the age in which we live, and the generations of sexual distortion to which we have been exposed. Suppose we treated our other urges as we do the sex urge. Imagine a country, he says, where you could fill a theater by bringing a covered plate onto the stage and slowly lifting the cover to let all see, before the lights suddenly go out, a lamb chop or a bit of bacon. Imagine the whole audience titillated by this sight of a bit of food exposed to them. Would you not think that there was something terribly wrong with their appetite for food, that it had become awfully distorted? There is nothing to be ashamed of in enjoying food, but there is everything to be ashamed of if food is your main interest in life, and you spend your time looking at food pictures in magazines and smacking your lips and drooling over every page.

The apostle has more to say about this inflaming character of sexual evil in the next verse. But, before we leave the point he makes here, that all sex outside of marriage is debasing and defiling, look at a further argument suggested in this verse: Note that Verse 3 is a continuation of the thought of Verse 2. It begins with a conjunction but, and is really part of the same sentence. His complete thought demands they be read together:

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, {Eph 5:2-3a RSV}

That adversative conjunction, but, puts everything in Verse 3 in contrast to Verse 2. What the apostle is saying is that any sexual looseness is a violation of love. You cannot truly love another and practice sex with him or her outside of marriage. It is impossible; they are mutually contradictory.

Now, that directly contravenes one of the major contentions of the New Morality cult of our day. They say that sex relations are justified as long as love is present, that true love makes everything right. This is heard on every side today. But, Paul says, that is impossible. If anyone really loves another, he would never practice sex outside of marriage. To do so would injure the other because sex outside of marriage is incomplete, abortive, unfulfilling, injurious. Therefore, you cannot combine the two. There is no such thing as sexual relations outside of marriage done in love.

Dr. Henry Brandt says, "Becoming involved sexually short-circuits the judgment, and one of the most important decisions of your life – whom you will marry – is made under pressure of disappointment, one-sided affection, or over-involvement." Every psychologist, psychiatrist, or marriage counselor has heard endless stories of what has happened when young people, refusing to believe this, think that because the first two or three acts were so wonderful, and felt so great, nothing is happening, nothing is wrong, and they go on to end up in the inevitable sequence of injured feelings, over-involvement, frustration, and, often times, impotence in sexual matters. It is easy for a boy to tell a girl that he loves her. But if that is not accompanied by a desire to do her no harm, and a willingness to exercise self-restraint till the proper conditions are obtained, then he is simply deceiving himself and her. He doesn't love her. He loves himself, and he wants her to satisfy his own desires. That is why sex outside of marriage is, as the apostle makes clear, totally incompatible with Christian love. True love is concerned about another's welfare and desires no harm in any way to the other individual. Therefore, sexual looseness and love are irreconcilable:

- Sometimes we hear that it is necessary to experiment with sex before marriage in order to see whether or not marriage will work. This is another common argument of our day. But again this is a lie. It mistakes the physical union of sex as the primary thing in marriage which, as we have already seen, is not the case. Physical union is not the most important thing about marriage by any means.

- Second, it is impossible to test marriage that way because the essential conditions that make up marriage are not there.
- Therefore, it is impossible to tell whether or not marriage will work by sexual union before marriage. It doesn't prove anything. It is beside the point.

As someone has well pointed out, it is like trying to test a parachute by jumping off a 30-foot building. That simply isn't enough room for the parachute to operate. The only way to test a parachute is to go up and jump out of an airplane. And the only way to test the proper function of sex is to be married.

The apostle goes on to point out another reason for the incompatibility of sexual looseness and Christianity.

Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. {Eph 5:4 RSV}

That is, sexual looseness is incompatible with Christian faith because even the talk that leads to sexual looseness is inconsistent and pointless. He says, it is not fitting. In Verse 3 he had said, "These things must not be named among you, as is fitting among saints." Here in Verse 4 he says, "These things are not fitting." But this is a different word than the one in Verse 3. The first word meant something that was a disgrace, a defiling thing, as we have already seen. This word means something that is not consistent, inappropriate, wasteful, pointless. In other words, the apostle is essentially asking the question,

- What do Christians gain by this kind of an exposure?
- What can you expect to gain by reading sexy literature or by attending lurid movies or discussing sexual perversions or indulging in dirty stories or double-meaning jokes?
- What can you get out of that?

His answer is, "Nothing. It is pointless, wasted. You learn nothing of value from such kind of talk."

Here again this contradicts one of the common arguments of our day. We are being told that if we don't explore these distortions of sex, if we don't attend sexy movies, if we don't understand what people are doing and why they do it, we cannot properly defend against these. We cannot understand what sex is, and, therefore, we cannot defend against these abuses. We must expose ourselves, we are told. We must learn how the world thinks. We must share its views in some degree, in order to understand, and even to help. But the apostle directly challenges that. He says it is not true. Those things are "not fitting." They are not appropriate. They are pointless. They are a waste of time. You do not learn how to avoid sexual looseness by talking about it, or by joking about it, and laughing about it, and exposing yourself. He says this is a dead end street. It is wasted time and effort. You never learn the true nature of sex by studying its perversions or its distortions. You learn the true nature of sex from the revelation of God. There we see what sex was intended to be. That is where we learn the truth, the truth as it is in Jesus.

Someone has well said, "Virtue, even attempted virtue, brings light, but indulgence brings fog." The truth of this is amply manifest by the times in which we live.

When we indulge in this kind of talk or this type of activity, through movies, books, and ribald literature, then the sex drive which is designed to be channeled and kept within bounds, to make us men and women as God intended men and women to be, breaks over its boundaries, overflows its banks, and becomes a flood which inundates the whole landscape, in which we find ourselves wading continuously. Eventually sex loses its attraction and its power to attract.

What do the facts reveal?

- If the trouble lay in Christian prudishness,
- If it is true, as we are being told, that the cause of declining morals is that we have hushed up sex and no one has talked about these things,
- If what was needed was awareness of sexual practices and the knowledge of what was taking place in secret places in our great cities,

then God knows that during the last thirty years we have had plenty of exposure. What have the results been?

Well, for one, we know no more about sex now than we did thirty years ago. We do not understand true sex any more than we did then. We know no more about true sex after the Kinsey Report was published than we did before. As Paul says, these things have proved to be empty, vain, profitless. Rather than stopping these abuses, they have increased until today our cities are flooded with sexual emphases, and our own area has gained a reputation across the country as one of the centers of sexual perversion.

Here are but two of the five mighty reasons Paul gives why every type of sexual looseness is totally incompatible with Christian faith. He makes the position absolutely clear. There is no doubt left.

If we take his words at face value, Christians have no choice in this matter. If any man takes another position than what the Apostle Paul takes, he is thereby declaring that he knows more about life than the apostles of our Lord knew and that Jesus Christ himself knew. The apostle's position is only the enlargement and further explanation of what the Lord himself has said. Anyone who takes a different position is challenging the authority of the Lord Jesus, the One who knew life as no other has ever known it.

Christian people, this is an important subject and we must regard it with all solemnity. We are being engulfed by a tidal wave of sexual propaganda designed to undermine the foundations of morals and Christian faith. Unless Christians are ready to take a stand in obedience to what God has said, there is nothing we can do to stem this tide.

History has shown that wherever the gospel of the grace of God has gone, and men and women have believed this gospel, then, even in the midst of the most depraved sexual practices, islands of purity have been created which have spread and touched whole cities and ultimately transformed the sexual practices of empires.

This is where the power of the church lies, in the willingness of its people to obey the word of the living God.

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that we may heed these important words and take them to heart, not to read them lightly as we have read them in the past, or to go out and forget them and give ourselves to improper

practices, improper thoughts, improper reading, and improper viewing. Grant to us Lord that we be free and open and frank in our discussions of sex itself, but teach us Lord to beware these dangerous areas, these areas of defilement, of debasement, of harm. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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New Morality or Ancient Foolishness, (Part II)

by Ray C. Stedman

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are considering the section where the apostle relates the great principles of life to the thoughts and practice of a pagan world. He tells us how to live a Christian life in the midst of a blinded, confused, and sick society. You cannot read this section of Paul's letter without seeing that the world has not changed essentially since the apostle's day. Oh, I know we can send messages around the world in two seconds. We can view events that happen anywhere in our world today by means of satellite television, and we are able to put men on the moon. These seem to be impressive capabilities, but there is not one whit of difference between the moral problems we face in this 20th century and those faced in the 1st century. We confront the same issues in society that they confronted; we struggle against the same forces they struggled with, and react in exactly the same way. Human nature has not changed one bit in twenty centuries. You only need read this ancient account to see how true that is, and also, therefore, to see how up-to-date, relevant, and pertinent the Scriptures are to our own time.

It is not surprising, therefore, that we face today a crisis in sexual morality, for the world has had such crises in the past, from time to time. Paul's letter to Timothy says there will come recurrent times of stress throughout history. We have had sexual crises from place to place and from time to time in the world history before, but now we are facing one of world-wide extent. There is a great revolt going on everywhere in this matter of sex mores. Long-standing restraints are now being challenged as they never have before. Long-accepted standards of sex conduct are being overturned.

Now, as always, the New Testament cuts through all the fog and haze and distortion, down to the basic facts. This is what makes the Bible such

an exciting, marvelous book. Because it is the truth, and reveals facts as they really are, it helps us to measure and evaluate the trends, the currents, the sweeping movements of our day or any day. Here we have "the truth as it is in Jesus" {cf, Eph 4:21} who is the ultimate revelation of truth, things as they really are, the foundational reality of life.

In the section we are looking at, the apostle gives us five great reasons why sexual looseness is wholly incompatible with Christian faith. In our last message on this passage, we examined the **first two** of these reasons, suggested in Verses 3 and 4 of Ephesians 5:

We saw that the word he uses to describe the unfitness of sexual misconduct suggests that all sex outside of marriage, and even all discussion of the lurid, sordid details of it, is debasing and defiling to our essential humanity. It is not that it is merely proscribed by Christian society, it goes deeper than that, it affects our basic humanity.

Then, further, it is pointless and profitless. Nothing is learned from it. It does nothing to cure the problem. Despite the Kinsey Report and its attempts to explore the sexual malpractices of the American male and female, and other such quasi-serious studies, and despite the tons of sex literature that have flooded this country for the past thirty years, we know no more about what sex really is, and can do no more about sexual misconduct, that we could before all this began.

In other words, what we have tried to discover by investigating the wrong practices of sex has been pointless, just as the Apostle Paul said it would. It has not achieved anything. The problem instead grows worse. Pornography, and even serious studies of sexual distortions and deviations, are essentially a waste of time, as far as curing the problem is concerned. That is the apostle's claim, and that is what our experience has amply con-

firmed. That is arresting, isn't it? Men think they can diminish the problem by learned studies, but they do not. Instead we are faced with a continually increasing problem in this direction. Sexual deviations and immorality are spreading rapidly and widely in our country and in other countries of the world, and all our efforts to arrest them seem to be unavailing.

Now we come to the last three of Paul's five great statements about the Christian and improper sex: The **third** of these is given to us in Verse 5:

Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. {Eph 5:5 RSV}

Notice that he takes up the same three categories he refers to in Verse 3 – immorality, impurity, and covetousness. As we have seen, *covetous* here is not greed for money, as it is frequently in the Scriptures, but is “passion, greed for another's body, desire to possess another for exploitative use.” Any man, he says, who practices immorality, impurity or body-greed – and he puts it flatly and bluntly – has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God!

In other words, sexual looseness is incompatible with Christian faith because continuance in it reveals an unregenerate heart. Notice how he reinforces this. “Be sure of this,” he says, and he goes on in the next verse, “Do not let anyone deceive you about this.” You cannot be a Christian and knowingly, deliberately practice sex outside of marriage, for the one cancels out the other.

Oh, I know a Christian can do these things. God knows, the record is all too clear in this regard. Even in the Scriptures we have the account of David who, after years as a believer, as a man after God's own heart, fell into the sin of adultery and took another man's wife. We have other accounts of it in Scripture, and there are plenty of modern examples. How often the Christian world is startled and shocked by some prominent pastor or Christian leader who succumbs in this area and stumbles and falls into sexual immorality. I know this can happen. But the point the apostle is making is that no professed Christian can do this repeatedly, certainly not defiantly, or shamelessly, and really be a Christian. The true Christian, if he does fall into this kind of folly, will abhor himself

and loathe his sin and will repent and turn back and forsake it. The man who defends it, and who justifies and excuses this kind of activity, or even glories in it, as some do as a mark of their personal liberty or freedom is, in the light of this statement of the Apostle Paul's, not a Christian despite all his profession, and he never has been a Christian. Let me read it again.

Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. {Eph 5:5 RSV}

That does not mean such cannot come into the kingdom of Christ. There is a passage in Paul's letter to the Corinthians that refers to sexual sins – homosexuality, and other things that are listed there – which goes on to say,

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. {1 Cor 6:11 RSV}

God's grace reaches out to those who are practicing these things, true, but the point the apostle is making here is that no man can profess to be a Christian and continue in these things, for if he does his practice denies his profession.

I know of a man, raised in a Christian family, graduate of an evangelical seminary, whose brother is a fine Bible-teaching pastor, who himself was a professed Christian for many years. Recently he startled his friends by renouncing his faith, abandoning his family, and going off with another woman. He confessed, after the matter had come to full investigation, that he had been sleeping with other women all during the time of his studies in seminary and during the years he was making a Christian profession. That activity proved, in the light of this statement of the apostle, that he never had been a Christian, that he had been deceiving his own heart as well as others. He remains as one example among many today of those pathetic, pitiful slaves of their own passions who have never been delivered from the bondage of Satan by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The point the apostle makes is that a Christian can have nothing to do with sexual immorality or he disproves his claim to be a Christian.

There is a **fourth** reason also, following immediately on this,

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn [or rather, in one word, “discover” or “discern] what is pleasing to the Lord. {Eph 5:6-10 RSV}

This argument asserts that all sexual misconduct is incompatible with Christianity because a Christian no longer has any excuse for indulging in it. He is not a child of ignorance anymore; he is not caught up in the web of deceit that is spun widely across our age; he is not self-deceived or brainwashed by the subtle propaganda that is abroad. He knows the truth about sex. That is what becoming a Christian has introduced him to. Therefore it is unthinkable that he should deliberately go back from light into darkness.

Notice again how clearly the apostle draws this picture. If a man or woman is born again by faith in Jesus Christ he has, as the apostle makes clear in this letter, been translated out of the kingdom of darkness, out of the power of Satan, and brought into the kingdom of light, into the power of God. He has been removed from helpless bondage to the deceiving, alluring propaganda of the satanic lie that has kept him helpless, and he has been brought into the power of God. This is the whole Christian gospel. If that has not happened then you have not been born again, for that is what the new birth does. Now, he says, it is unthinkable that a Christian who has been delivered from darkness and brought into light should turn his back on the light and go into the darkness; it is wholly incompatible with Christian profession.

He suggests very plainly here that a Christian knows things that a non-Christian does not know. The Christian in his confrontation with society is always to remember that he knows secrets about human life that those around him who are not Christians do not know. That is why he is expected to act differently, to think differently, and to react differently than they.

Well, what are some of the things in this particular area that the Christian knows or should know?

For one, he should know that sexual misconduct will be the subject of subtle and deceitful, but very powerful, propaganda. That is why the apostle warns, “Let no man deceive you with empty words.” They will certainly try!

We are being assaulted today by a tremendous barrage of propaganda, all subtly designed to make us think that the standards and evaluations of sex that the world in general holds are right, proper, true, helpful, and wholesome. We can hardly realize how powerful this propaganda is. There are whole magazines in our society today openly dedicated to making improper sex look manly and sophisticated:

The Playboy philosophy is the basic outlook of many of our young people today. I do not say this in blame, I am merely stating the fact. They are under the control, in their thinking, their attitudes, and their mentality, of a subtly devious propaganda system that presents improper sex in an attractive and alluring light that makes a powerful appeal to them.

One book, among many that might be mentioned, *Sex And The Single Girl*, assures unmarried girls that they can enjoy sex with a long line of attractive, eligible, handsome males with never a care about losing status or damaging their reputations; nothing evil is going to happen to them.

This is the current philosophy about sex that is widespread in our day. It is a reflection of the most ancient lie the world knows, the lie of the tempter in the Garden who said to Adam and Eve, “You shall not die; nothing is going to happen to you. God said you would die if you sinned, but you’re not going to die, nothing will happen,” {cf, Gen 3:4}. The Christian ought to know that in this area there is going to be loosed against him a specially successful and powerful barrage of propaganda. Therefore, do not let anyone deceive you with empty words.

But the Christian knows something else that the world never cares to remember, which the apostle goes on to state for us. It is particularly sexual wrong which evokes the wrath of God against the society which permits or encourages sexual misconduct. That is why he says, “for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

This term, *the wrath of God*, is greatly misunderstood today. Almost invariably people think of it in terms of lightning bolts from heaven, sudden catastrophes, or a great judgment day that is coming eventually when all these things will be brought to account. Now it is not that there will not be a day of judgment, the Scripture makes that clear, but that is not what is in view here. The apostle Paul declares in his letter to the Romans that the wrath of God is going on right now. In his opening chapter to the Romans he says,

For the wrath of God is now revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. {Rom 1:18 KJV}

The wrath of God is something happening now. What is it? Well, as the apostle goes on to make clear in that first chapter of Romans, it is simply God saying, "All right, if you want to have it this way, go ahead." It is God giving men up to their own passions, refusing to exercise his gracious restraint of man's evil. In other words, it is the inevitable effect of moral wrong on the individuals who indulge in it, and not only the effect upon them, but upon their children and their children's children. We live as part of a great bundle of life tied up together and what one generation does directly affects the generation that follows, and the one that follows that. To put it as plainly as I think I can put it, the wrath of God is the animalizing of humanity, the brutalizing of our essential manliness or womanliness, and the disorientation of human personality which results.

The manifestations of it are boredom, restlessness, a sense of despair or uselessness, a sense of emptiness within, accompanied by neurotic fears and unexplainable anxieties, sudden urgings to violence or injury to others, among any other things. Man was never intended to know these things; he was never intended to live like this. It was never God's intention that we live out our days in a tempest of anxiety and neurotic reaction. These are a result of God's withdrawing, and restraint, of grace when he gives men up to their passions. In extreme forms it results in a total loss of manliness or womanliness.

As Paul makes clear in Romans 1, in the case of sexual deviants, it results in an exchange of manliness for womanliness, or womanliness for

manliness. It is a result of God's giving them up, permitting them to have their way, refusing any longer to restrain the evil of man's heart, in order that man might see for himself the hideous results of human folly.

This too is why society has always sought to regulate sex, and why this present revolt against the restraints of society in this respect is the mark of a sick and dying civilization. We are being told today that sex is something private, that it is a matter which no state or institution has any right to regulate, it is a purely private matter. That again is part of the great satanic lie. God has given society the urge to regulate sex because it is society which suffers when sexual misconduct becomes widespread. Just as society regulates every other phase of its life where its best interests can be threatened, so it is right that it should regulate this. Sex is not a private matter. It never was and it cannot be. No man is an island, living unto himself. It is amazing how liberals love that philosophy when it applies to civil rights, and other things, but absolutely renounce it when it comes to the matter of sexual conduct. They say sexual matters are private and we have only ourselves to regulate. But no man can live unto himself. What each one does affects all, and, furthermore, affects the next generation, and the one after that. Humanity is one unbroken stream of life. What we do, and what we think, in private relationships is not private at all, for our influence and the attitude of our life is constantly rubbing off onto others, touching others. That is why a moral infestation, an infection like this, rapidly spreads throughout the whole fabric of human society. And that is why it is quite right that these things should be regulated, as far as regulation can be obtained, through law and ethical restraints on society.

Now, lest you think this is merely a crabbed, Christian point of view, let me share with you a quotation I ran across in a memorandum issued by the Provost of a nearby university to his students:

The sex act is the most complex and precarious and personal, despite Shaw, of all personal human relationships. Just as it is potentially the most rewarding, it can also be the most damaging. Entered into carelessly or casually it can have devastating effects on individuals involved. This is why all societies have surrounded the sexual relationship with moral codes or taboos of various kinds. These

are testimony to the importance of ordering and defining the relationship in such a way as to protect both the individuals and the community of which they are a part. For young unmarried persons to enter into sexual relations not intended to culminate in marriage is, at best, to take chances with their own psychic health. One hears frequently of idealistic young people who begin sexual relationships with solemn promises not to hurt each other, with assurances of mutual respect and, often, affection. But it is very naive indeed to believe that such assurances can be counted on to protect the individuals involved from acute unhappiness. The sexual relationship needs the support, the nourishment, and the stability that marriage provides. What is involved basically in a successful sexual relationship is what is – or should be – involved in all human endeavors: a strong sense of decency, a regard for the personal worth and integrity of others, and an understanding of the nature of obligation. You seriously diminish your own humanity when you engage in casual and ill-considered relationships. A man's careless or carefree sexual use of a woman is simply exploitive. Correspondingly, the foolishly promiscuous woman trivializes and degrades her deepest self.

That is but a reflection of the truths and basic realities set forth here by the Apostle Paul. A Christian is to understand these truths. He knows this about sex, that it is a very sensitive, a very important area of human life, drastically affecting our entire society.

Also, the Christian knows, or should know, that he cannot identify himself with these false ideas. As the apostle says, "Do not associate with them." Now this does not mean association with people. In his letter to the Corinthians he makes that clear. He says, "I can't tell you to withdraw from contact with the adulterer and immoral person of the world, for that would mean escaping the world, going out of the world," {cf, 1 Cor 5:9-10}. When he says, "do not associate with them," he does not have people in mind, but their practices. Do not become a partaker with them in these things. That is what he is saying.

Well, someone says, "Look, if I don't go along with these practices my friends will think it's strange and I'll lose status with them."

Well, which do you prefer? Are you interested, as a Christian, in pleasing deceived, deluded, dark-

ened and foolish people, or pleasing the Lord of light and glory? That is the essential choice the apostle sets before us. "Walk," he says, "discerning what is pleasing to the Lord, for the fruit of light is good and right and true." Don't go back on the light now that you have been called out of darkness.

His **fifth** and last reason why sexual looseness is incompatible with Christian faith is given in Verses 11-14:

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that makes visible is light. Therefore it is said,

"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." {Eph 5:11-14 RSV}

Sexual looseness is incompatible with Christian faith because the Christian is directed to expose the true character of sexual evil. You cannot expose something and indulge in it at the same time. It is utterly inconsistent. The church of Jesus Christ is directed by the Holy Spirit to be a source of correct information on matters of sex. Paul says the church is, "the pillar and ground of the truth," {1 Tim 3:15 KJV}. I do not hesitate to say today that it is only the church which can teach the world the true nature of sex. As the apostle makes clear in this letter, even the serious worldling, intent in utter sincerity on trying to alleviate the problems of society, does not see clearly; he is deluded and deceived. Therefore, we cannot accept statements from the world and worldly authorities in these matters without checking them against the truth of Scripture.

But the job of the Christian is to speak up in these areas. Let him challenge these false ideas. He is to tear away the mask from these wrong concepts, and reveal the truth, God's great truth about sex.

If we needed any justification at all for a message like this, here it is: The apostle says, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." Bring them to the light, make them visible. It does not mean to denounce them. The world is utterly unimpressed by people who go

around denouncing. What the church ought to do is helpfully to show the truth about these things, tear away the lies, reveal the basic facts, and let men see that what God has intended for sex is wholesome, beautiful, wonderful, and only properly protected by the bonds of marriage. Within that area there is no limit to the enjoyment of man in the areas of sex. God has made provision amply for it.

Young people are always looking for a cause to espouse. In common with much of our society, they want to rebel against something. Well, may I suggest something? Rebel against the rebellion! That is exactly what Christians are called to. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed..." Revolt against the masquerade of truth that is so current today. Tear away the veils from these elusive phantasmas that grip men today and make them hope that they will find something beautiful and healthy and wonderful in the exploitation of sex. They will not find it at all. Help them to see that. Tear away these veils.

But wake yourself up first, that is the word here. "Therefore it is said, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead...'" Alert your minds and hearts. Realize that in the Word of God you have the facts as they are, truth as it really is. Christ will give you light. Then tell somebody about it. Blazon it abroad. Talk about sex. Capitalize on the universal interest in this subject today – it is perfectly proper. Help people to see that this is part of God's great yearning heart of redemptive love which is ever seeking to draw men away from that which destroys and ruins and blasts and creates unhappiness and misery, back into wholeness and fullness and joyfulness and the living of life as God intended man to live. Expose these things. "Anything that makes visible is light." Anything that tears away the false, the masquerade, and exposes the facts, is light. There is nothing wrong with that. Paul calls us therefore to crusade positively against sexual lies and to talk about these things.

Notice how he puts it in his letter to the Philippians. In Philippians 2:14 he says,

Do all things without grumbling or complaining, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish ... {Phil 2:14-15a RSV}

"Oh," you say, "in order to do that we must go into a monastery somewhere or get away in a Christian conference ground, that's the only safe place." No, no, look at it!

... children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, {Phil 2:15b RSV}

Or as the Amplified Version puts it, "in the midst of a generation of crooks and perverts."

What a cause! What a call! What a challenge! Can you not hear the sound of the trumpet in that?

I am rapidly moving beyond that period of time known as youth, but I feel in my veins this call to young blood to respond to a cause that demands everything of a man or a woman, a boy or a girl.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for this truth, so factually, so plainly, so bluntly put to us. What a joy it is to realize that every time we come to this Word this is what we experience, the blunt truth, the revelation of things as they are, the facts about life. Help us then to have the grace to believe, because it comes from One who loved us and who gave himself for us, who has withheld nothing from us. May we therefore walk as this verse suggests we walk, shining as lights in a dark place. We thank you for the privilege of it in this, our day or darkness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Watch how you Walk

by Ray C. Stedman

We have been looking together at the great passage in Ephesians where the Apostle Paul is dealing with the preparation of the Christian for living in a sick society. We have seen that the problems the 1st century Christians faced were the same problems we face today, and the world in which they lived was essentially the world in which we live. We now come to the summary passage on this subject, found in Ephesians 5:15-20:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and in everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. {Eph 5:15-20 RSV}

This passage is in the nature of a review. The apostle is describing how to walk as simply a figure, a symbol, for how to live.

This passage began in Chapter 4, Verse 17, with the apostle's admonition to live no longer as the Gentiles do. He then describes how that is and goes on to exhort, rather, that Christians live as they have been taught to live in Christ – that is to put off the old nature and put on the new. That simple process of putting off and putting on is what the apostle means by walking. Everyone knows that a walk consists of two steps repeated over and over again. You never take more than two steps in walking, one leg forward then the other leg. But do

that again and again and you are walking. This is an apt simile for how to live the Christian life. We are to be continually putting off the old and putting on the new. That is what Christian living is all about.

Now, as we have already seen, he has gone into some detail in this. He has shown us something of the practical application of this process in various normal and expected situations of life. He has come to grips with some of the great issues of his day and ours, especially in the matter of sexual morality, which we have been looking at in the last few messages. Now he summarizes this for us in an attempt to put the emphasis upon the supreme things.

He begins with one statement that says it all, "Look carefully then how you walk." That is the supreme thing, not where you walk, but how you walk. Where you walk is a relatively easy problem, but how you are applying this principle in every moment of your life. That is what is important.

Last night I drove down from Mendocino County along the Redwood highway. I had no problem as to where to drive. The highway was well marked, I knew where I was going, and there was very little danger that I would get off the road. But how to drive, that was the constantly recurring problem – how to relate the principles of good driving to every changing situation along the road.

Watch a man walking a tightrope and he has no concern as to where he is expected walk; the rope is there. But how, that is the problem.

This is, then, the exhortation of the apostle here, "Look carefully how you walk." Then he goes on to give us the two characteristics that constitute walking rightly, accurately. We can

gather them around two wonderful words that describe the Christian life. The first one is *understandingly*, and the second is *overflowingly*. Walk understandingly, and then, overflowingly. As we develop this, you will see how these words describe what he is saying.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. {Eph 5:15-17 RSV}

First, **walk understandingly**. Well, understanding what? Understanding the character of life. Paul comes to grips here with a problem that is personal and present with all of us. He is dealing with the matter of the times in which we live and he says, "Understand this, be wise; don't be foolish but act as a wise man." How? By making the most of the time, because the days are evil!

Now that is setting forth for us a principle that very few Christians seem to really grasp in practical living. What he is saying here, essentially, is that evil days create opportunities, and, therefore, understanding this, we must make the most of those opportunities which are created by evil days. The word for "making the most" is one word that is used in the New Testament for *redeeming*. It means to buy up. It is a word from the market place. You go down to your supermarket and look for bargains because you know they will not last long; they are passing, changing. Therefore, make the most of them and buy them up. This is exactly the word he employs here. Buy up the opportunities which are created constantly by the evil days.

What a far cry that is from the outlook many Christians have toward evil days! Most of us look at evil days as obstacles, as defeating circumstances, as pressures which tend to make us unable to be Christians. Recently, at a Christian conference, I spoke on certain relationships within the Christian home. After a message on, *What Every Wife Should Know*, a woman came up to me and said, "What would you do if, as a wife, you wanted to do the right thing, and you know what the right thing is, and you want to be a good wife, but you just can't do it because your husband won't let you? He makes it so difficult for you that you just can't do it?" I looked her in the eye and said to her, "You are deceiving yourself. The Word of God

says you can be what God wants you to be, regardless of what anyone else is around you. In fact, it is our responsibility to be what we ought to be regardless of what anyone else is. We cannot blame what others do to us as an excuse for not being what we ought to be."

This is exactly what the apostle is saying here. We are not to be unwise, but wise, making the most of the opportunity because the situation around us, which seemingly is against us, is really making the opportunity possible. If you were not under pressure, how could you manifest the overcoming grace of God? If you did not go through trials, how could you ever show that he is sufficient for every trial? If we are not always needing to make demands upon him for help, how would we know that we can never touch bottom in the resources that are in Christ? It is the evil days that create these opportunities. Now, I know, if you had been in Ephesus at the time that Paul wrote this letter, and you said to the people of that prosperous city, with its great commercial activity and material abundance, "Aren't these evil days?" they would have looked at you and laughed. They would have said, "Why, we never had it so good. Evil days? These are the best days we have ever had." But the apostle is talking reality. He is saying that whenever material prosperity abounds, and creature comforts are on every hand, and you live in an affluent society, then there is tremendous pressure being exerted to cancel out the true values of life. The spirit is often hungry and empty and hollow.

This is the explanation for the fact that, in our own affluent society, we find so many who are experiencing an inward emptiness. These are evil days, not only because of the widespread fears and tension and violence, but also because of the materialism that creates such hollowness and emptiness within. But what is the result? It is the evil days that make people want to know the truth about God. It is the evil days that give us opportunity to demonstrate Christian life. Therefore, buy up the opportunities. Understand, as you look at life, that this is the way life is.

These difficulties do not come in order to set you back, they come in order to advance you. Therefore, look at them that way. Do not regard them as some strange, unusual circumstance that you alone are called to go through while everyone else has it easy and has a delightful time. Do not feel that you only are being called to be a martyr

and must go through difficult and unusual circumstances and live with horrible people. No, no. Peter says, “Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial of faith which has come upon you as though some unusual thing happened to you,” {cf, 1 Pet 4:12}. Oh, no, these are designed to an end. We could never demonstrate what it is to be a Christian if it were not for evil days. Therefore understand this. Do not be foolish; do not strike back and complain and grouse and gripe because of problems. Understand this. That is the first important thing about living life – walking understandingly.

The second thing is, “do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” That is, be aware of what God wants out of every situation. Now, almost always, when one uses the phrase, “the will of the Lord,” most people, including most Christians, understand it in terms of guidance. They think you are referring to what you ought to do next, where you ought to live, what job you ought to have, whom you ought to marry, or how you can decide a problem that is before you. But guidance is not the major problem, or the major factor, in understanding the will of the Lord. God is not half so much interested in what you do as what you are. Therefore, the will of the Lord does not concern itself primarily about what you do. That is a rather simple matter. Once you get the real issue straightened out, what you do is relatively unimportant and can be handled very easily. What you are – that is the big thing, what you are in every situation. This is what the apostle is talking about.

As you are thinking of your life (not just your life in church, but your life at home, in business, at work, in relationship to the friends you run with or the crowd you go with, your social life), understand what it is God wants out of that situation.

Back in Verse 10, the apostle says, “Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.” That is the same thing as understanding what is the will of the Lord. Learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Well, what pleases the Lord? Only one thing: Faith! “Without faith it is impossible to please him,” {Heb 11:6}. Faith is believing God, believing what he says about life, believing what he says about people, about yourself, about the need of people, analyzing and understanding what is going on around you in terms of what the Scripture has revealed, that is faith; acting on that basis. This is

what the apostle is referring to: Not trying to get guidance as to where you go next or what you should do or what your job should be, but remembering that in every situation you are to act on the basis of what the Word of God says about it; reflect the viewpoint of God, his analysis of what the need of human life is, his evaluation of what the great values of life are. Acting on faith means to reject the success image that the world is constantly holding before us, the image of the man who is able to manipulate people, move them at his command and thus gain riches for himself and everything else he wants. That is the world’s evaluation. But God’s is quite different. He says you can have all these things and still be a pathetically poverty-stricken individual. If you are going to measure life by its true values, you will understand that which really counts is being a gracious, love-filled person in the midst of demanding circumstances, manifesting the grace of God toward others, the love of Christ, the compassion and sweetness and self control of the Spirit-filled life. These are the important values. This is what Paul means here.

Here is a very apt quotation by Keith Miller, taken from his book, *The Taste of New Wine*. It helps tremendously to illustrate what I am seeking to say:

It has never ceased to amaze me that we Christians have developed a kind of selective vision which allows us to be deeply and sincerely involved in worship and church activities and yet almost totally pagan in the day in, day out guts of our business lives ... and never realize it.

What is that saying? It is saying that we live by faith on Sundays and in religious matters, but we do not apply it to business or to our relationships with our neighbors or to our children and our homes. We have a strange dichotomy of vision that divides life and says in business we act one way and on a quite different principle than we do in church or in relationship to Christians. He goes on,

Sigmund Freud has said, very perceptively, I think, in his *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, that these unchanged areas in our lives are like nature parks which the city fathers in large metropolitan areas fence off and allow to grow wild just as they always have, so the citizens will have a little piece of the old

life to wander through to remember how it used to be.

In the case of far too many of us these are not little parks – they are Golden Gate Parks that occupy the biggest part of the city and in which we still live most of the time!

Paul is saying do not be foolish, that is the way the Gentiles live, that is the way the non-Christian world lives, blindly swallowing the evaluations and moral codes that are propagandized around and accepted by everyone, making no testing of them as to whether they are genuine or not. This word “foolish” is the same word Paul uses in the letter to the Galatians, “O foolish Galatians!” {Gal 3:1a RSV}. (Or as one version has put it, “You stupid Galatians!”) “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now continuing in the flesh?” {Gal 3:3b RSV}. Did you understand that you were to begin your Christian life by believing God in faith, but now are you going to attempt to live it by accepting the principles of the world around you and its way of thinking, and thus be successful? Oh, you foolish Galatians! It will never work. Do not be foolish, but understand that in every situation, day or night, twenty-four hours a day, God expects faith from you. “Without faith it is impossible to please him,” {Heb 11:6a RSV}

If you are trying to live your life as a Christian by going along with the general character of those around you, you are not living by faith. Even though you may be trying your hardest to work things out with the best of intentions on your part, and you feel that you are giving it all you have got in trying to analyze every situation and plan ahead and work to the best advantage, you are not pleasing to God. Your life is missing the mark, totally. The life that pleases him is the life that believes what he says, and acts on it. Look beyond the immediate to the eternal things; look beyond the visible to the invisible and walk in the light of that which is real. That is what our apostle means. Be careful how you walk. Walk intelligently, understandingly. As a Christian you have immense advantages over every other person who is not a Christian, because you know the truth, the truth as it is in Jesus, the basic, fundamental reality of life. Walk in that way.

Now the second word he gives us has to do with our resources. I have expressed it with this one word, **overflowingly**. Live life, not only un-

derstandingly, but *overflowingly*. He says, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.” It is interesting that he puts these two things in contrast, one to the other. Don’t get drunk with wine, he says. This recognizes there are things in life that tend to drive you to drink. There are pressures in life, there are demands made upon you so severe that you will feel the need of some stimulation, something that will undergird you a bit, give you some confidence and add help and strength. But don’t let it be wine or any other artificial stimulant because, he says, the trouble with that is, it so easily leads to lack of control.

The word here translated “debauchery” in our RSV is the Greek word *asotia*, which means “without any limits, with reckless abandonment.” It refers to escapism and the tendency to throw all restraints overboard and live without control.

But in contrast to that he says, satisfy that need for something to stimulate and strengthen you by being filled with the Spirit, for that is God’s provision for this need in human life. There is no need to feel ashamed over the sense of need. We were not made to be self-sufficient, independent creatures. We were made to have a sense of need. Because you feel like you need something to help you, to strengthen you, to make you feel adequate to face life, do not be troubled by that. You do need something. But do not swallow any of these senseless lies that are all around us today that you can be independent and self-reliant and have everything in yourself and you do not need anything else. You do need something. Ah, but let it be the right thing. “Be filled with the Spirit.”

Now here he touches the great secret of real Christianity, the possibility of being filled with the Spirit. I am sure all of you know that when you became a Christian, when you believed in Jesus Christ and received him as your Lord, the Holy Spirit came to live in you. You have the Spirit, but the interesting paradox is that, though all Christians have the Holy Spirit, we constantly need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit is the momentary taking from him of the resources you need for the situation in which you are. It has nothing to do with an experience, or a feeling or a crisis; it is a quiet drinking again and again of an inner supply of strength.

Our Lord Jesus put it beautifully when he sat at the well in Samaria, dusty and tired after a long

day's walk. A woman came up to draw water from the well and he said to her, "Give me to drink," {John 4:7}. She looked at his garment and the issue of race immediately came to the fore. "You're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan. How is it that you, being a Jew, ask drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" {John 4:9 RSV}. This was contrary to the accepted mores of the day. Jesus said, "If you knew who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would have asked of him and he would have given you a well of living water," {cf, John 4:10}. She said, "You don't have any water, what are you talking about? The well is deep and you have nothing to draw with," {cf, John 4:11}. Having piqued her curiosity, he now says what is perhaps the most revealing thing ever said in the ear of mankind, spoken to a lonely woman by a well in Samaria, "If you drink of this water you will thirst again" {cf, John 4:13}, that is, you will have to come back to the well over and over again. You know how that is, every day down to the well and back home. You must come back again and again. "But the water I shall give you shall be in you a well of living water springing up unto the experience of eternal life," {cf, John 4:14}. The key words there are the two little words "in you." The well, he says, is no longer going to be outside of you, so that you have to go somewhere else, but it will be in you.

This is a truth, again, that many Christians seem to miss. They think that Christianity means coming to church, getting a blessing and then going away to try to live in the light and warmth of the blessing until it leaks away and then they must come back and get filled up again. But that is not Christianity. The well is to be in you, and you are to take of it any moment, all the time. It is the Holy Spirit that is the well. When Jesus said of the man who drinks of him, "Out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" {cf, John 7:38}, John says, "This spake he of the Spirit which they that believe in him shall receive," {cf, John 7:39a KJV}. That is the strengthening that comes from within, and there is plenty there for any situation. There is adequate resource for any demand made upon you.

I am not talking now about religious demands. I am talking about tomorrow morning when you will be at work, and the phone rings, and your boss is on the line, and he is asking you to do something difficult. Just then your pencil breaks, or you dis-

cover that someone has mislaid all of your papers, and you cannot find anything, and you already have a headache, and things are just falling apart. That is the moment you make demands upon the Holy Spirit, the well of living water that is within you.

Our problem is that we are still living on the basis of that woman at the well who thinks she must go to a meeting to get something from God. We feel that unless we are reading our Bibles we cannot draw upon his resources. Or that if we are not with Christian friends in Christian surroundings, we cannot live the Christian life. No, no, Paul says life is to be lived constantly with the recognition that these demands and pressures come all the time. Do not try to meet them with artificial means, with alcohol or tranquilizers or any of the more modern substitutes, but meet them by being filled with the Spirit, making demand upon the well that is in you which goes with you everywhere you go. Drink from that.

The marks that you are doing that will be made evident by what follows here. He gives three things that will result:

... addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. {Eph 5:19-20 RSV}

Notice the three verbs there. Addressing yourselves, or literally, speaking, then singing, and giving of thanks. Those are the marks of one who is drawing every moment upon the well of the Spirit within.

- **"Speaking** to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." We get help on that if we look at the parallel passage in Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom," {Col 3:16 RSV}. In other words, one mark of the Spirit-filled life is that you will be talking about what you have read in the Scriptures, what the Lord has taught you from his Word. You will talk with one another about these things that God has shown you in the Word and how they relate to life. That is the first mark.

Now if you do not have a love for the Bible, do not try to work it up, do not try to force yourself. Drink from the well of the Spirit, because loving the Bible is a manifestation of something that is happening within you. We reverse the whole process and put the cart before the horse by trying to work up a love for Bible study. Learn first how to draw from his strength within. Believe that he is there and count on him to be working through you.

- The second thing is “**singing**, making melody to the Lord with all your heart.” Now I am sure that means actual singing, but I am so grateful that the apostle put it, “with all your heart,” singing from the heart.

I have a great deal of trouble singing with the voice. I used to sing in a choir until one day when I missed and someone thought the organ had been fixed! But I can sing from the heart, beautifully. You know what this means, that inward bubbling that means that no matter how bad things are outside, inside they are wonderful. You know God is in control and he is working things out and you cannot be troubled even though they are all wrong on the outside.

- Third, **giving thanks**. Notice how he puts it, “always and for everything.” Now if we take that literally we shall discover that it eliminates every attitude of complaining or murmuring.

I remember when I was in the Navy we all took our meals in the mess hall. (If you could see the food trays after the serving men had plopped the food on them you would know why they called it a mess hall.) I recall sitting with a Christian friend across the table from a great, burly quartermaster who was a complete pagan, with one of the foulest mouths I have ever heard; that is not uncommon in the Navy. As we always did, we bowed our heads and gave thanks for the food. It happened that my friend disliked the food and began to complain about it. Suddenly this fellow sitting across the table spoke up and said, “Look, didn’t you just give thanks for that? Then eat it and shut up!” This was a word in season.

You cannot give thanks and complain at the same time. The word to us is, “in everything give thanks.”

Now why does it say that? Surely it does not mean in everything? But it does mean in everything, because of what he has just said here. The will of the Lord is that we be put in difficult situations and have unpleasant circumstances in order that we might have opportunity to manifest the life of Jesus Christ. Therefore, do not complain about it. Give thanks, because it will do something to you that nothing else could do. This is what Paul tells us in Second Corinthians, “this light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us a far exceeding eternal weight of glory,” {cf, 2 Cor 4:17}. Also, “no chastening for the present seems joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those that are exercised thereby,” {cf, Heb 12:11}. God has purpose in all these things. Therefore, give thanks in all things.

The Lord Jesus did exactly that. In Matthew 11 we see Jesus facing the cross and facing the failure of his ministry. I do not know if you ever thought of it that way, but his earthly ministry was, as far as human standards were concerned, a total failure by the time he arrived at the cross. In Chapter 11 of Matthew he is faced with the disbelief and the questioning of John the Baptist. There he remarks that wherever he preached he was rejected and the children of Israel refused to give credence to him. He upbraids the cities where most of his mighty works had been done and tells them they are in danger of judgment because of this. Then, in Verse 25, the Scripture says,

At that time Jesus declared, “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.” {Matt 11:25-26 RSV}

That is, in spite of all the failure and the opposition, the Lord could say, “I thank you, Father, that no one can see what you are doing. You have hidden this from the wise and understanding, but I can give thanks, for this is your gracious will.”

That is understanding what the will of the Lord is. It is to give thanks in all circumstances.

Watch how you Walk

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that you will teach us to draw upon the well of water within, to know that every demand made upon us is a

demand made upon you, and that you are prepared, ready, to live your life through us in every situation and thus manifest your grace. We thank you in Christ's name. Amen.

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