

Celebration Series

Living Victoriously in the End Times

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*When Satan tempts
you to be skeptical
and doubtful,
have faith in the
promises of the
Lord Jesus Christ
and enjoy victory.
You will overcome
and be supremely
rewarded.*

—Lesson 7, page 53

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Adult Teacher's Manual

Spring
2014

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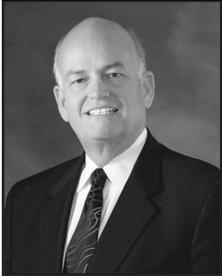


Adult Teacher's Manual

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A Victorious People in a Victorious Church in the End Times

by Richard M. Davis

Of all their characteristics, one of the most pronounced characteristics of God's people is that they are victorious. God has called His people and destined them for victory—not with individual predestination, but as part of a predestined body, the church of Jesus Christ. When believers become and remain a part of the church, they cannot help but be victorious because they have aligned themselves with a group destined for ultimate victory. That includes those who find themselves a part of the church in the last days, the end times.

I cannot tell you for certain these are the end times, but I can say without any reluctance they surely seem to line up with the biblical prophecies about the last days. I will leave it to you to judge for yourselves, but this quarter you will have many opportunities to consider the characteristics of the end times and contemplate whether those traits appear to describe our day. Surely we must be drawing near the Lord's return.

One thing is certain: these are some exciting lessons about end-time attitudes with which believers must contend, and they are prevalent attitudes today. Not only will we study the attitudes of the world, but we also will consider how victorious believers can deal with these negative attitudes and have victory in the

midst of them. We are in this world, but we are not of this world. Further, this world is not our home; we're only passing through. Our home is awaiting us in another realm!

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you"
(John 15:19).

With every lesson and end-time attitude presented, we will study an antidote for successfully dealing with each attitude. The biblical antidotes we present are the keys to maintaining victory as believers every day. Some of the end-time attitudes will cause us discomfort as believers and many will cause us to be weary, but we can keep our head high and our confidence securely fastened to our Savior. It is He who is empowering us daily to be victorious in the midst of pressing circumstances and annoying attitudes.

The good news for believers is that no matter what negative and detrimental attitudes we may encounter in others, we are victorious through the power of Jesus Christ within! May this quarter of study enrich you, bless you, and anchor you steadfastly in the Savior.

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**UNITED PENTECOSTAL
FOUNDATION**

Love God amid Idolatrous Times

1
week of
03.02.14

Lesson Text

Psalm 135:15-18

15 The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

16 They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not;

17 They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths.

18 They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them.

II Timothy 3:1-4

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

Mark 12:30

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

Focus Thought

In the end times, idolatry often shifts from objects made by humans to the human himself. However, genuine love for God shatters humanism.

Focus Verse

II Timothy 3:4

Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

Who Do You Love?

by Gary D. Erickson

US Vice-President Joe Biden defended the recognition of homosexual unions as marriage during the 2012 presidential campaign with this question: “Who do you love?” (originally the title of a rock-and-roll song written and recorded in 1956 by Bo Diddley). That pleasant-sounding question was parroted frequently in the media in defense of this social and cultural anomaly. By interjecting “love” into the debate, he made another destructive furrow in the eroding moral foundation of America. Even in these days of deteriorating moral commitments, people still have respect for the power of love. Incorporating love into the debate was a clever trick used to confuse people who lack a good moral footing.

Affection itself is not pure or virtuous. We can love the wrong things. Our love for them does not make them or us pure. If our love for something or someone causes us to break God’s law, it is not wholesome. For most of us, this is an obvious truth; but today many people are confused. Having a love for God and His Word are the only things that can save us from the crosswinds of postmodern confusion. Perverted affections and false philosophies can appear virtuous to an unsanctified heart. This reminds us why Jesus emphasized the first commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38).

I. END-TIMES ATTITUDE—IDOLATRY

- A. Love for Self
- B. Hate for God’s Order

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE GOD

- A. The Greatest Commandment
- B. The Greatest Power
- C. The Greatest Motivation
- D. The Greatest Privilege

Contemplating the Topic

There is in every person a need to worship. It is an innate desire placed there by the Creator. Over the centuries humans have responded to this need by worshiping either God or an idol—the true God or a false god. Sadly, in our day idolatry often involves not only the worship of false gods, but also the elevation of material possessions, human stars and personalities, and self. Many individuals, who would never worship a carved or molded idol, unwittingly are guilty of worshiping these contemporary things. Simply, a carnal Christian can be guilty of idolatry even though he may never bow to an image or enter a heathen temple.

The word *amid* in the title of this lesson not only defines the location of our love, but it underscores our involvement in life with all its cultural challenges. We are caught in the middle of everything that comprises the last days. Yet, while we are in the midst of evil

surroundings, God’s goodness is in our midst. For He said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). If we have God in our midst, it will not be difficult to love Him and be faithful to Him in the midst of idolatrous times.

II Chronicles 13:14-15 illustrates the solution to being surrounded by the enemy: “And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind: and they cried unto the LORD, and the priest sounded with the trumpets. Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah.” When surrounded by evil, we should shout our praises unto God, trusting for His deliverance!

In this lesson we will study idolatry and its by-products. We will observe how idolatry produces love for self and hatred for God’s order. Further, we will study idolatry’s antidote, the love of God, which is the greatest commandment, power, motivation, and privilege.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 states, “An idol is anything that receives worship and veneration belonging to God alone.”

Simply stated, idolatry is the worship of an idol, and an idol is anything that receives the worship and veneration belonging to God alone. It is also extreme admiration for, or devotion to, anything other than God. Christians must not allow their worship to include anything other than the one true God.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIMES ATTITUDE—IDOLATRY

It seems every generation reflects its own attitude. Only a psychologist could explain why this occurs, but we do not have to be psychologists to observe the phenomenon. Unfortunately, this age exhibits an attitude of idolatry—idolatry that appears in the form of humanism, which focuses on and worships humankind and their achievements.

Idolatry is motivated by the spirit of antichrist. As the end nears, Satan knows his time to work is limited. Consequently, he has launched an all-out effort to defeat righteousness through subtle forms of idolatry. He and his demonic minions are doing everything they can to discredit God and everything godly.

Consider, for instance, numerous efforts to ban public displays of crosses, public prayer, and Bible reading. The idolatrous sympathizers of this atheistic agenda parade under the banner of the so-called separation of church and state. Christians, however, should recognize this concerted attack of Satan and resist it in the name of Jesus.

A. Love for Self

According to Wikipedia, “In 1956 psychologist and social philosopher Erich Fromm proposed that loving oneself is different from being arrogant, conceited or egocentric. He proposed that loving oneself means caring about oneself, taking responsibility for oneself, respecting oneself, and knowing oneself. He proposed further, that in order to be able to truly love another person, a person needs first to love oneself in this way.” (See *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm, 1956.)

In Greek mythology Narcissus was a beautiful youth who fell in love with his reflection. Narcissism, then, is excessive interest in oneself. Without proper discipline this can develop into abnormal love and even worship of self. Humanism is an atheistic philosophy that elevates humankind as their own savior and attempts to eliminate all need of God or

religion. When narcissism and humanism operate in tandem, an idolatrous attitude forms.

Idolatry produces the wrong kind of self-love, for when God is not the object of our love and devotion, the discipline of righteousness is absent. With the absence of righteousness, there is no deterrent from the evil inclinations of the carnal nature. The flesh seeks attention and it results in self-love.

When a person crowns himself as king in his own life, pride, ego, and selfishness quickly assume power.

When God is dethroned in a person’s life, the throne does not stay vacant long. Pride sees that the throne is filled with self-interests. When a person crowns himself as king in his own life, pride, ego, and selfishness quickly assume power.

Love for self caused the original sin. “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat” (Genesis 3:6). Human pride is the motivation behind all sin. Every individual must choose between living to gratify his ego or to glorify the eternal Sovereign.

To please God, selflessness must replace selfishness. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself” (Matthew 16:24). Self-denial, not self-love, is the key to unlocking spiritual victory.

Paul wrote of the self-love that will be prevalent in the end times. “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves” (II Timothy 3:1-2). In the fourth verse of this same chapter Paul stated that mankind shall be “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (II Timothy 3:4). Since pleasure is for the gratification of the flesh, loving pleasure more than loving God is the manifestation of self-love.

B. Hate for God's Order

Order is the proper arrangement of people and things. From the beginning, God instituted perfect order within creation. It is an order that provides for the best outcomes for the people and things so ordered. This divine order manifests itself in many ways from authority to relationships.

In the beginning God stated plainly His order for humankind. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). As recorded in the same chapter, He added, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

Unfortunately, the serpent drew mankind's attention away from God's order by questioning it. "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). When Eve answered, "God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Genesis 3:3), the serpent replied, "Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). This disrespect for God's order eventually manifested as outright hatred for God's order.

When self replaces God on the throne of one's life, hatred for God and His order soon follows. We cannot love God and self at the same time. There is room for only one God—one master—on the throne of the human heart. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

Although God has made it clear sin is wrong, carnal individuals hate His commandments, which limit them and prevent their fulfillment of evil desires. Consequently, the carnal individual attempts to eliminate anything that encourages righteousness and discourages carnality.

Hate for God's order is the reason some people have become enemies of the church and the Bible. They seem to believe they can escape condemnation by discrediting those who uphold God's order. However, it is like a person breaking a mirror because he does not like the reflection. Or it is like breaking the fuel gauge on the dashboard of one's automobile because he does not like to think he is almost out of fuel. In either case, however, the actual circumstances are unchanged.

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE GOD

There are strong poisons and deadly venoms in the world, but there also are effective antidotes. *Antidote* derives from a Greek term that means "given against." These antidotes work to counter the poison or venom. In a sense, a poison is only as effective as the ineffectiveness of its antidote.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 says, "When we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, there is no room left for the worship of anything else."

The antidote for idolatry is the love of God. When a person really loves God, he experiences the most effective panacea for all spiritual maladies. When we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, there is no room left for the worship of anything else.

Love creates an attitude that allows no tolerance of idolatry. When we love God, we will worship only Him. And this love will create an attitude of loyalty. True love for God has no love for any other god.

The antidote for idolatry is the love of God.

Love for God also cures a person's propensity for other idols, such as material goods, personalities, or self. This quality of love makes all things subservient to the Lord. When God is primary in our lives, everything else is secondary. Many things will seek prominence, but our genuine love for God motivates us to keep Him foremost in our heart. No one has to fear the spirit of idolatry if he allows God's love to work in him. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4).

If you have been poisoned by false doctrine or have suffered an injection of the venom of hate, remember there is an antidote that can counter anything Satan would use to destroy you. There are some venoms for which there is no antidote, but Satan has never been able to

produce anything the love of God cannot neutralize. The love of God works against all evil.

A. The Greatest Commandment

“Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:35-40).

Worship of a god is nothing without love. *Worship* is “the practice of sharing deep respect and admiration for.” It is impossible to really worship without love. If we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we will worship Him. The secret is to love the Lord as we love ourselves. “Love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:39).

Total love dictates our responses. When we love anything with all of our heart, it is not difficult to respond to it. Love and worship are the Siamese twins of devotion. If we love anything, we will find ourselves responding in worship to the object of our love.

Total love not only dictates our responses but also demands our responses. Our love for the Lord necessitates our worship of God because the Scriptures command it. Among many other verses that command our worship, Mark recorded Jesus as saying, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30). Further, Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Although none of the Ten Commandments given on Mount Sinai mentions loving God with all the heart, the first two said, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” and “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (Exodus 20:3, 5). Those are exclusive and certain commandments that leave no room for loving anything more than God. When Jesus said the greatest commandment was to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, He obviously recognized that commandments beginning with “Thou shalt not” could not create as much positive

response as love. For this reason He said, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40). Love is the force that empowers mankind’s ability to keep the commandments.

B. The Greatest Power

Because God is love, and God is the greatest power in the universe, the greatest power is love. “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” (Song of Solomon 8:7). Satan has experienced the futility of pitting hate against the love of God.

*Because God is love,
and God is the greatest
power in the universe,
the greatest power
is love.*

God could have identified Himself as “force” because all power rests in Him; He is sovereign. However, He chose instead to identify Himself as “love” (1 John 4:8). He knew the power of love over that of brute force.

It is a mystery why anyone would choose to worship a false god over the worship of the one true God. Jeremiah underscored the folly of idolatry: “Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them” (Jeremiah 10:14).

Isaiah illustrated the futility of idolatry in Isaiah 44 when he explained how a man will cut down a tree, burn part of it for firewood to warm himself, use part of it to roast his dinner, and with the rest make a god. He concluded with, “He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isaiah 44:20).

David offered a vivid explanation of idolatry and idolaters in Psalm 135:15-18.

*“The idols of the heathen are silver
and gold, the work of men’s hands.
They have mouths, but they speak
not; eyes have they, but they see not;*

they have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths. They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them” (Psalm 135:15-18).

Perhaps the reason some choose idolatry over the worship of the true God is that they want a god they can see and touch. Belief, or faith is necessary to worship an invisible God one can neither see nor touch physically. However, God’s invisibility does not diminish His viability. It is mankind’s carnality that causes him to seek physical, tangible idols.

C. The Greatest Motivation

“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (II Corinthians 5:11-14).

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 lists three agents of motivation for serving God.

II Corinthians 5:11-14 reveals three agents of motivation for serving God: fear, self-acceptance, and love. Obviously, love is the greatest motivation. According to I John 4:18, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”

To serve God because of fear is to live a miserable life. This kind of fear represents a compulsion that produces guilt. Fear and guilt never produce happy Christians. In such cases, a foreboding sense of guilt is ever present to haunt and harass the individuals.

Self-acceptance is another motivation that produces negative results if it is not properly disciplined, for it is based on human pride. Pride-based motivation never produces posi-

tive results. This kind of motivation produces an upward striver who always is conscious of status and position.

With love as our motivation to worship God, our devotion to Him will come easily and naturally.

Some individuals serve the Lord out of a sense of obligation, which is a poor motivation for serving the Lord. Obligation makes discipline a drudgery. When we feel obligated to do anything, it robs us of the joy we would otherwise experience. However, with love as our motivation to worship God, our devotion to Him will come easily and naturally; it will never seem difficult or forced.

The Book of Malachi provides an example of this type of service done out of obligation. Rebuking Israel, the Lord said, “Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD” (Malachi 1:13).

Whatever we do, whether it is physical or spiritual, the effort expended will be enjoyable if we love to do it. If children make a game of work, they enjoy it. Further, if we really love the Lord, our service to Him is not difficult. It flows as a response to our love. With love there are no bad side effects, no negative results, and no fear or guilt. Love is the greatest motivation.

D. The Greatest Privilege

The greatest privilege man has is the opportunity to love God and serve Him. We must never take this privilege for granted. He did not have to allow us this opportunity, but did so by His grace. Gentiles especially should recognize the privilege of worshiping God. They once were a wild olive branch, but God grafted them in and made them a part of what

Paul called “a good olive tree.” (See Romans 11:17-24.)

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Privilege is defined as “a special right or advantage for a particular person or group.” This agrees with the definition of grace as “divine favor.” *Favor* is defined as “friendly or kind regard, good will, approval, liking, unfair partiality.” By an expression of His grace, God is showing favoritism to us to allow us the opportunity of salvation. What an advantage this gives to the recipients! God’s special favor directed to us enables us to win when otherwise we would lose.

*The greatest privilege
man has is the opportunity
to love God and
serve Him.*

Internalizing the Message

We have studied how these end times have produced an attitude of idolatry. It is obvious the spirit of antichrist has motivated this attitude. And this attitude fathered in humankind a love for self and hatred for God’s order. It is clear societal problems today are the direct result of these attitudes.

Thankfully, God has provided an antidote to this spiritual poison. If a person should find himself guilty of this kind of modern-day idolatry, there is something he can do about it. He

can run to God. To love Him with all one’s body, soul, spirit, and strength neutralizes the poison of ungodly attitudes. Further, “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5). We need the Holy Spirit of God within!

Believers are blessed with the greatest commandment, the greatest power, the greatest motivation, and the greatest privilege. There is no reason why anyone should not live for God. We have everything we need to be victorious. This lesson should challenge us to draw closer to the Lord and live for Him in the midst of idolatrous times.

Consider the warning in the last two verses of I John 5. “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (I John 5:20-21).

Scripture commands us to keep ourselves from idols. This means idolatry is not an overwhelming influence against which we have no power. Rather, we determine whether we are going to worship idols or the one true God. We should make up our mind once and for all that we will worship the true God—and Him alone—with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Further, we must leave no room for giving any attention to idolatrous images, ways, or attitudes. There is within every person an ability to love God amid idolatrous times.

REFLECTIONS

- Why is idolatry wrong? Discuss.
- Discuss at least two by-products of idolatry.
- Discuss the manifestation of idolatry in the popular culture today and how it influences the church.
- What is the antidote for idolatry?
- Discuss the greatest source of motivation—the love of God.

2

week of
03.09.14

Have Hope
amid Despair

Lesson Text

II Timothy 3:1

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

Titus 2:11-13

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

II Timothy 4:8

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Luke 21:9-11

9 But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by.

10 Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom:

11 And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.

Focus Thought

In the end times, a flood of catastrophes and carnage will sweep the earth; however, the child of God lives in hope and peace in Jesus Christ.

Focus Verse

Titus 2:13

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Finding Peace in Troubled Times

by Gary D. Erickson

I didn't think my nine-year-old son was listening to the radio as we rode down the highway. He appeared to be preoccupied with a toy airplane. The news commentator shared a number of negative stories as we drove along. When I turned down the volume for the ads, my son said to me, "Dad, this world is in a mess, isn't it?" Our children grow up being exposed to many terrible things.

Over fifty years ago I remember a prevailing fear that gripped the general public concerning the advent of nuclear weaponry. It was talked about regularly and many people built bomb shelters on their property. Even though nuclear war continues to be a threat, that fear has subsided over the years. Nevertheless, it has been replaced with many others. It seems we move from one crisis to another. All my life there has been some form of crisis looming: war, famine, climate change, crime, monetary troubles, civil unrest, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and other crises. In the last few years there has been an increase in the frequency of earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, droughts, and other natural phenomena.

There is only one way to find peace in troubled times: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:3-4).

I. END-TIME ATTITUDES—STRESS, DESPAIR, AND DEPRESSION

A. A Scriptural Prophecy

B. A Cultural Problem and Challenge

II. ANTIDOTE—HAVE HOPE

A. Hope Defined

B. Hope's Effects

C. Hope's Results

D. Hope Endures

He said, "All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8). As we see the fulfillment of these predicted occurrences, we can know the end is approaching even though we do not know the exact timing.

In this lesson we will study how despair is gripping the hearts of people as they see these things happening that Jesus foretold. Further, as a result of these perilous times, we will observe the development of end-time attitudes in many people—not only of despair, but also of stress and depression.

This lesson will underscore scriptural prophecies outlining all these things that are coming to pass. We also will see the challenges these end-time fulfillments of prophecy present. Thankfully, however, we have hope through Jesus Christ. We will not only study the definition of hope, but we will consider the need to trust in the sovereignty of God and His purpose in all things. Finally, we will study hope's effects, results, and endurance.

Contemplating the Topic

Although no one can agree on the exact timetable of the events of the last days, most agree many of the events of the last days will be catastrophic. Paul said, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (II Timothy 3:1). *Perilous*, according to *Strong's Concordance*, means, "difficult, that is; dangerous, or by implication, furious, fierce." *Oxford's Dictionary* defines *perilous* as "full of danger or risk." *Today's New International Version* renders II Timothy 3:1, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days."

Jesus warned we would hear of wars and rumors of wars. He said, "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Matthew 24:7). We have seen the fulfillment of all of these things; however, we must remember that

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 urges, "Regardless of the negative attitudes all around us, let us have hope amid despair."

May this lesson create in all of us a stronger resolve to hold to the hope in our hearts that we received by the Holy Ghost. Regardless of

the negative attitudes all around us, let us have hope amid despair.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDES—STRESS, DESPAIR, AND DEPRESSION

A. A Scriptural Prophecy

Perhaps no other passage in Scripture gives a more poignant picture of the emotional effect of the last days than Luke 21:25-26.

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21:25-26).

The word *stress* is a shortened form of the word *distress*, which means “extreme anxiety, sorrow, or difficulty.” Although describing another time in history, Thomas Paine’s statement aptly describes our present age: “These are times that try men’s souls.” Paine referred to the time of the American Revolutionary War, but today’s stress is related to another war—a spiritual one that exists between good and evil.

Not only is stress a mental and emotional state, but it also is biological in that it affects the physical functions of an individual. It may affect a person’s judgment, general outlook on life, and mood. All these functions and others can be affected by the conditions of the end times, which Jesus Christ predicted during His ministry on earth.

“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall

rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another; and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:3-12).

When we read about the signs of the end times as prophesied by Jesus, it is not difficult to understand the end-time attitudes of stress, despair, and depression that many people are suffering. First, Jesus said the last days would be a time of deception with false prophets arising with the intent to deceive. He said false messiahs would come in His name claiming to be the Christ.

We do not have to fear deception if we are allowing God’s Spirit and Word to guide us.

This tension of the possibility of deception contributes to the stress of this age. No one wants to be deceived, especially concerning salvation. Believers must be careful to reject false prophets and to avoid “wolves” and hirelings that would deceive them. They should commit their energies to following the true under-shepherds who will lead them to follow Jesus Christ alone. We do not have to fear deception if we are allowing God’s Spirit and Word to guide us. Jesus said, “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:4-5).

Jesus also warned about the end times being a time of wars and rumors of wars.

Clearly, we live in a day of global conflict that manifests in many parts of the world. World War I was believed to be “the war to end all wars.” To the contrary, it seemed to be the war that precipitated more wars. Jesus prophesied, “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matthew 24:7).

Jesus warned of coming famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in different places. It is difficult to find accurate statistics that demonstrate an increase of this trio of calamities in our day. Some experts agree there has been an increase, yet these same individuals claim the increase could be a result of better or more reporting mechanisms and stations. Still, the anecdotal observance of practically anyone who follows the day’s news would seem to indicate a definite uptick in reported instances of famines, pestilences, and earthquakes throughout the world.

The stress, despair, and depression resulting from the catastrophic conditions listed above have resulted in a loss of hope among many people. Hopelessness exists in many individuals because of physical world conditions such as those Jesus mentioned and also because of present political and economic conditions. It would seem the political and economic realities of the day are working in tandem with the prophesied physical signs occurring around the world to bring about the fulfillment of Jesus’ words. Clearly, certain conditions must exist before the Lord returns to the earth to set up His earthly kingdom.

B. A Cultural Problem and Challenge

Although Christians have no problem believing we are living in the end times, the post-modern world lives in denial.

“But first you must realize that in the last days some people won’t think about anything except their own selfish desires. They will make fun of you and say, ‘Didn’t your Lord promise to come back? Yet the first leaders have already died, and the world hasn’t changed a bit!’” (II Peter 3:3-4, Contemporary English Version).

Where belief in the Rapture once was highly respected—if not as a fact, at least as a possibility—it is now often dismissed as an aberration of the “end-of-the-world crowd.” Christians who believe in the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ seem to be in the minority.

Although believers in the Rapture may be a minority, we must not be discouraged. Instead, it should serve as a challenge to make us stronger in our faith. We must not allow the doubt of unbelievers to be stronger than the faith of Christians. As Romans 12:12 admonishes us, we should rejoice “in hope.”

Some Christians grow weak in faith when they face the opposition of unbelief from others. Some, however, respond as described by Jesus in the parable of the sower.

“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Matthew 13:20-21).

The Rapture is the great hope of every Christian.

II. ANTIDOTE—HAVE HOPE

A world with questions and no answers and a world with problems and no solutions would be like a world with venoms and no antidotes. It would be the same kind of world as one with sin and no salvation, for the ultimate hope of salvation is the rapture of the church.

The Rapture is the great hope of every Christian. If it were not for this hope, we would suffer the despair unbelievers suffer in this world. Jesus said, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12). We can only enjoy that reward if there is a resurrection of the dead or rapture of the church.

Not every antidote works as designed. Unfortunately there is not an antidote for every poison and venom in the world. But hope in Christ is an antidote that works every time. It is also an antidote for every known and unknown problem and situation. Regardless of the negative responses of others, we have hope. Regardless of the attitude of hopelessness in this present age, we have hope through Jesus Christ.

A. Hope Defined

Hope is translated from a Greek word that means “to anticipate, usually with pleasure.” The *Oxford Dictionary* defines *hope* as “a feeling of expectation and desire for something to happen.” Hope is anticipation and expectation. Hebrews 6:19 says we have hope “as an anchor of the soul.”

As a metaphor the concept of anchorage involves connecting to something stable beyond the area of instability. For example, for a boat to anchor it must connect to something beyond or outside the river. Whether a boat ties to a tree or rock on the bank of the river, or whether it drops an anchor that finds stability on the bottom of the river, the boat is stabilized by its connection to something that the river is not moving or causing to be unsteady.

For a person to be anchored spiritually, he must connect to something beyond the influence of this world. Anchoring to this world is like tying your boat to a floating log in the river. “Heaven [our atmosphere] and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). As a believer, we are anchored to the eternal. For this reason the time and tides of this world system cannot effect the shipwreck that Satan desires.

Our hope in Christ is not just in this world. It reaches beyond this world to Heaven. The anchorage of this world is shifting, uncertain, and unstable. The anchorage of Heaven, however, is steadfast, sure, and stable.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (I Peter 1:3-4).

I Peter 1:3 states that we have “a lively hope.” Our hope as believers is alive. It is not a dead desire or wishful thinking. Contrary to the thinking of many non-believers, our hope of the rapture of the church and eternal life are not outmoded religious hallucinations or subjects of pre-historic theology.

A Christian’s hope is based on the trust he has in the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God fosters hope because it recognizes God as the supreme ruler of the universe. He has all power to take care of us here and in eternity. However bleak the situation may look, if

we are truly trusting God’s sovereignty, we need not despair.

Our hope in Christ is not just in this world. It reaches beyond this world to Heaven.

One large national corporation has used the slogan “The good hands people.” Their business logo displays a person surrounded by a large pair of hands. They may have good hands compared to other similar corporations, but no hands compare to the good hands of the Lord. Anything the world has to offer for our care is inferior to what God has to offer.

Peter wrote, “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Peter 1:5). The word *kept* in this verse derives from a compound of two Greek words meaning “to be a watcher in advance, that is, to mount guard as a sentinel (post spies at gates); figuratively to hem in, protect; keep (with a garrison)” (*Strong’s Concordance*). How encouraging to know that by the Lord’s power we are guarded day and night.

The hope of salvation offers to us a protection against being lost. This helmet of hope shields our head against the brainwashing that Satan attempts through attacks of doubt and false doctrine. “Putting on . . . for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (I Thessalonians 5:8).

Our trust is based not only on the sovereignty of God, but also in the purpose of God. In all things God has a purpose. “All things work together for good . . . to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). This trust in His purpose and plan gives us hope, for He rules by a perfect plan, which He designed from the beginning.

As confusing as the picture may be to us, God knows exactly what He is doing. We see only a small part of the total picture, but God sees the whole. Because we are only able to view a small part of what God is accomplishing, we often do not understand His actions.

But if we will trust His plan, it will solidify hope in our hearts.

B. Hope's Effects

Hope has many positive effects. Hope gives the believer an eternal perspective that sees life positively. Without hope the unbeliever finds himself echoing the title of a song Peggy Lee made popular in 1969, "Is that All There Is?" This is a fatalistic view that occurs when people do not have hope. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Corinthians 15:19).

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 says, "Hope allows us to see through the fog of our present dilemma to focus on our eternal future."

Hope allows us to see through the fog of our present dilemma to focus on our eternal future.

"Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5).

Hope creates an attitude of confidence. When a person anticipates something good happening, it establishes a certain boldness and gives that individual the ability to face the future. Without hope for the future, however, the person is affected negatively.

C. Hope's Results

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

The ultimate hope of all believers is one day to reach Heaven as their eternal destination. Having the Holy Spirit within now gives us hope of being with Christ during eternity. This living hope enables us to make it through each day as we anticipate eternity. It is somewhat like the working person who is able to make it through the work week because of the promise of the weekend. We are able to make it through the trials of this life because of the promise of life eternal.

"And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3).

Hope also purifies believers. There is something about eternal hope that refuses to associate with sin. Anyone who surrenders to God and lives in His will is inoculated with purifying hope.

The world may criticize our hope and call it useless. Karl Marx called "religion the opium of the people." The unbeliever does not believe in the validity of the Christian's hope. However, the believer has staked everything on salvation and his hope for eternity. The seventeenth-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal proposed that everyone who was skeptical about the existence of God would be wise to go ahead and respond as though there were a God. He proposed that if there is a God, you have acted wisely. If there is no God, you have wagered but lost nothing. Thankfully, the true believer is not wagering. We have real hope in Jesus Christ that naysayers can never negate.

When the world is confused and bewildered by the plethora of problems, the Christian is calmly awaiting the Rapture and eternity.

During this time of stress in our world, hope gives believers assurance and peace. When the world is confused and bewildered by the plethora of problems, the Christian is calmly awaiting the Rapture and eternity. When unbelievers have placed their hope in Wall Street and Washington, believers are counting on the church and Jesus Christ. Our hope is in Jesus Christ.

D. Hope Endures

"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

To be saved we must be steadfast in our faith to the end. Salvation is wonderful! What

a joy to have one's sins forgiven, washed away by the blood of the lamb, and replaced by the Spirit of God. However, as wonderful as salvation is, it is a continuing process that a believer must pursue faithfully to the end in order for him to realize eternal salvation. In the meanwhile, hope is the means by which he is strengthened and motivated to continue until the end.

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain" (I Corinthians 9:24).

One is able to receive the prize only if he stays in the race. Staying in the Christian race is what faithfulness is all about. Living for God is a marathon and not a sprint. It is about endurance. Only hope can enable a believer to endure the rigors of the race.

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 depicts runners in a race and makes a statement about hope.

Hope is not the beginning exhilaration of a new adventure. It is the enduring attitude of one who understands the necessity of holding out unto the end. It is the solid determination that keeps the runner in the Christian race knowing the prize is not awarded to a participant but to a finisher.

Internalizing the Message

These difficult times have produced attitudes of stress, despair, and depression, which were prophesied in Scripture to come to pass in the last days. The international news reminds us daily of these existing conditions.

Such attitudes and conditions present a cultural problem and a challenge. The cultural problem is easily discerned as we witness how times have changed, creating a different set of responses now compared to those same responses of earlier times. These changing times and different responses present a challenge to believers. Will we allow the trends and nuances of change to affect us?

The answer should be a resounding no for we are stabilized by our hope in Jesus Christ and our trust in His sovereignty and purpose. This hope acts as an antidote to the world's ills and as an anchor of the soul. It also empowers us to be recipients of eternal rewards. The hope rewarded is the hope that endures. "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss the end-time attitudes of stress, despair, and depression.
- How do these attitudes present a cultural problem and challenge to the believer?
- Define hope and discuss its importance to believers today.
- Discuss some of hope's effects and results in the lives of believers.
- How does hope affect us? Discuss.

Love Truth amid False Doctrine

3
week of
03.16.14

Lesson Text

II Thessalonians 2:10-12

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Focus Thought

In the end times, false doctrine will turn many from the truth; however, the child of God will develop a love for the truth that will protect from every erroneous teaching.

Focus Verse

Proverbs 23:23

Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.

Fusion Confusion

by Gary D. Erickson

We are living in a highly integrated world. Some call it “fusion.” Have you ever stood at a large salad bar and considered the multiple origins of the many selections? There are fruits, vegetables, and nuts from various parts of the world. We would be amazed if we knew where each of these items came from. Many fruits and vegetables that used to be seasonal now can be enjoyed year-round due to the ease of transporting them across oceans and hemispheres.

As my wife and I sat in a restaurant in Mont-Tremblant, Quebec, another dimension to modern fusion came to mind. We were English-speaking customers, eating in a Mexican restaurant, and trying to read a French menu. It is interesting that two popular foods in America today are Korean tacos and taco pizza. It’s called “fusion cuisine.” These are foods based on one culture but prepared using ingredients and flavors inherent to another culture. I’m wondering when a restaurant will start offering kosher BLTs!

This fusion of foods, language, and culture is indicative of other fusions in North America—philosophies and religions. People take pride in their own ideas about what life means and how to live it. They pick ideas about life from the great idea cafeteria—a spoon of this and a sprinkle of that—whatever suits their philosophical taste buds. In this age of fusion, we need the tenacity of the psalmist: “The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from Your law” (Psalm 119:51, NKJV).

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—FALSE DOCTRINE

- A. Relativism
- B. Pluralism
- C. Antifoundationalism

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE THE TRUTH

- A. Presupposes Knowledge of Truth
- B. Prevents Devil’s Deceptions
- C. Prevents God’s Delusion

III. EFFECTS OF TRUTH

- A. Freedom and Liberty
- B. Eternal Salvation

Contemplating the Topic

In the early stages of their development, children learn to distinguish between what is real and what is not, what is true and what is false. This period of their development is fraught with confusion because it is not always easy to distinguish between these extremes. However, were this discernment never learned, the individual would wander aimlessly through life without understanding the difference between reality and fantasy. Until people are able to differentiate between these opposites, they are vulnerable to deception. This illustrates the necessity of truth. Truth reveals reality, and without it we are incapable of comprehending

the difference between the real and false elements of this world.

There are many reasons why truth is important. These reasons are vital even if one does not accept the reality of God. Natural laws govern human life, the earth, and the universe. That which is true comprises an environment of reality necessary for normal existence. We must have Jesus Christ to be saved, but we must recognize and coexist with true natural laws and principles to live in reality.

Just as truth has a vital role in nature and the physical aspects of human life, it also has a vital role in spiritual life. Truth is essential to our salvation. Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Further, the Word of God says, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

In this lesson we will study three false doctrines: relativism, pluralism, and antifoundationalism. We will see that these are products of end-time attitudes. The truth counters these false doctrines, but it requires our love and loyalty, not just knowledge. We will discuss the antidotal qualities of truth as well as its effects such as freedom, liberty, and eternal salvation. We also will consider the mental and emotional benefits of loving the truth.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE— FALSE DOCTRINE

The spirit of antichrist is the spirit of error. This deduction is not difficult, for if we accept the premise that Jesus is truth, anything opposed to Him also opposes truth. Therefore it is error. If the end times produce more opposition to Jesus, clearly there will be more error and false doctrine as well. Indeed, the Scriptures confirm that the end times will produce more opposition, for Jesus said, “Iniquity shall abound” (Matthew 24:12).

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1).

There are many things we could list with definite contrasts and opposite characteristics. For instance, consider these contrasts: up and down, black and white, small and large, sweet and sour, good and evil. Also, the opposite of true doctrine is false doctrine. We would love to enjoy a world without anything false, but in our fallen world that is unfortunately impossible. Therefore false doctrine continues to endeavor to influence and taint the belief systems of believers today.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says the mind is the battlefield of the soul.

False doctrine is Satan’s way of trying to confuse believers and prospective believers. Since the mind is the battlefield of the soul, Satan attacks our thinking and plants seeds of doubt.

In the Garden it was Satan who first used the tool of false doctrine. He gave false information to Eve to confuse her and try to convince her she would not die if she ate the forbidden fruit. The deception of false doctrine is that it often appears convincing. Eve probably would not have partaken of the forbidden fruit if Satan’s deception had not sounded convincing. But Satan persuaded her that eating the fruit would have no negative consequences. (See Genesis 3:6). However, after disobeying God and eating the

fruit she suffered immediate spiritual death and eventually, physical death.

In foretelling what would occur in the end times, Jesus warned of several conditions. The one condition Jesus emphasized more than others was deception. Note the three warnings: “And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5); “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:11). We see His warning concerning false doctrine manifested in the following three humanistic philosophies.

A. Relativism

“Relativism is not a single doctrine but a family of views whose common theme is that some central aspect of experience, thought, evaluation, or even reality is somehow relative to something else” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Although the broad family of views called relativism has many members, too numerous and confusing to name, a simple definition of *relativism* is “the idea that points of view have no absolute truth or validity.”

Relativism is damaging because it attempts to destroy the foundation of truth. Without the security of foundational truth, the believer is left with nothing substantial to believe. If nothing is right or wrong per se, there can be no right or wrong choice. Therefore everything is fluid in a no-man’s land of uncertainty. Obviously this view excludes the possibility of faith, for one cannot believe if there is no concrete premise. Yet one cannot please God without faith. (See Hebrews 11:6.)

Truth is absolute. According to its definition, it is “something that is true or held to be true” (*Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary*). Truth and relativism are incompatible. Where truth is stated positively, relativism says, “It depends.” Truth does not depend on qualification or understanding. It is true, for it is truth. This is the reason the Bible says Jesus Christ is truth (John 14:6). He requires no qualification or verification. As He is God alone, He is truth alone.

B. Pluralism

Wikipedia says, “Pluralism is used, often in different ways, across a wide range of topics to denote a diversity of views, and stands in opposition to one single approach or method of interpretation.” In this context, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines *pluralism* as

“a theory that there are more than one or more than two kinds of ultimate reality. . . . a theory that reality is composed of a plurality of entities.”

A mild form of pluralism would be a cozy-sounding ecumenism that suggests we should attempt to tolerate others of different religions and denominations. Toleration is good and admirable as long as it does not cross the line of compromising biblical truth to embrace false doctrines for the sake of toleration. Pluralism in a more developed form of relativism, however, is the belief that all religions are equal in value and that no religion has absolute truth. Because pluralism and relativism have this view as their extreme and ultimate goal, Christians must reject their insidious attack on biblical truth.

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-8).

Paul did not sound very ecumenical or pluralistic in his epistle to the Galatians. (See Galatians 1:6-8.) He also wrote, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5). With only one gospel, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, there is no room for a pluralistic approach. To the Corinthian believers Paul wrote, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (I Corinthians 2:2).

When a person holds that two religions are of equal value and truth, in reality that person has no religion. When a person believes in more than one god, he has no god. Multiple religions and multiple gods may satisfy the demands of pluralism, but it only creates confusion. In the atmosphere of confusion, doubt flourishes and unbelief thrives.

Not only is Jesus the truth and the life, but He also is the way (John 14:6.) Jesus only mentioned two ways in Matthew 7:13-14: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

Since the broad way is the wrong way and one that leads to destruction, the “narrow” way is the obvious way genuine believers choose—the way that leads to life everlasting. Further, Jesus Christ is that way and that life.

C. Antifoundationalism

Antifoundationalism is commonly divided into three main categories: Sophism, Pragmatism, and Skepticism. “Antifoundationalism is the rejection of the idea of a single unified whole in which everything is ultimately interrelated. The existence of what we call knowledge only exists because we have created it. . . . An antifoundationalist believes that life is defined by personal experiences. . . . In this respect knowledge is transient, existing only until something better comes along to replace it. . . . learning is only something which man uses to comprehend what society thinks. An antifoundationalist believes that everything exists only because we believe it is there. Therefore reality only exists for the individual” (<http://www.public.asu.edu/~jvanasu/Anti-Foundationalism.htm>).

In other words, antifoundationalism is that which is against or opposes the foundation, which believers recognize as the truths established by God’s Word. Although the ideas behind antifoundationalism, as well as relativism and pluralism, have their roots in early liberal and atheistic philosophy, all of these terms are aspects of the postmodern culture. They are elements of error hidden in a smoke screen of deception, and they all oppose the idea of foundational or absolute truth.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3:11).

Jesus Christ is the foundation; He is the only foundation. Any attempt to lay another will only result in futility. Antifoundationalism is nothing less than another example of the spirit of antichrist at work in the world.

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE THE TRUTH

Since Jesus Christ is the truth (John 14:6), we cannot love Jesus without loving the truth. Further, loving the truth is the antidote for the harmful effects of false doctrine. False doctrine has its roots in carnality and thrives on hate and unrighteousness. Truth, however, derives from the Word of God by the Holy Spirit of God, and it thrives on love and righteousness.

False doctrine may appeal to the head and humanistic philosophies, but truth appeals to the heart. The false doctrines and philosophies of this world are contained in many books. Truth, however, is contained in the Bible—the Book of all books.

Jesus Christ is the antidote not only for false doctrine, but for all things that oppose truth and the righteousness of God. He is the cure-all for all the world's maladies. As one song says, "Only Jesus can satisfy the soul."

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 states, "Loving Jesus acts as a guard at the gate of our minds and hearts to keep out the enemy of the soul."

Not only does loving Jesus act as an antidote to neutralize the effects of false doctrine, but loving Jesus acts as a guard at the gate of our minds and hearts to keep out the enemy of the soul. It is the sentinel against sin.

A. Presupposes Knowledge of Truth

Although knowledge of the truth is necessary to salvation, knowledge without love is only cognition. Knowledge without love reduces religion to philosophy. When the mind alone is the repository of the knowledge of God, the experience is strictly cerebral, but salvation involves the entire person. Romans 10:10 says, "With the heart man believeth," but Paul was not referring to a person's physical heart as an organ; rather, he referred to the very center of a person, or the entire individual.

Although knowledge of the truth is necessary to salvation, knowledge without love is only cognition.

According to *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, the Greek word for heart, *kardia*, means "properly, that organ in the animal body which is the center of the circulation of the blood, and

hence, was regarded as the seat of physical life. . . . universally, *kardia* denotes the seat and center of all physical and spiritual life."

Salvation is only possible through faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Further, faith also requires love to function, for "God is love" (I John 4:8). We cannot accept God or believe in Him without accepting and believing in love. Consequently, our head and our heart must operate together through both knowledge and love in order to be saved.

Some individuals struggle with the concept of God because they attempt to understand Him only conceptually. When the head alone accepts Jesus, there are many questions in a person's mind that remain unsatisfied. Reason has never been satisfied by the metaphysical, or the spiritual. The carnal mind resists that which it cannot understand.

"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Corinthians 2:6-8).

B. Prevents Devil's Deceptions

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (II Corinthians 2:11).

Satan endeavors to ensnare Christians through deceit. He always is ready to attempt to destroy believers. We must be wary of the threat he poses and exercise extreme caution. Peter warned believers, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8).

Anyone obeying and loving the truth is not easily deceived by Satan's deception. Sincere disciples readily discern his tricks and devices. However, when individuals fail to embrace the righteousness of Jesus Christ, they fall easy

prey to the devil's deceptions. Unrighteousness creates chinks in a believer's armor creating opportunities for Satan to deceive. The only means of protection is to "put on the whole armour of God" (Ephesians 6:11).

Love of the truth acts as a device that detects deception and alerts the believer. No deception of Satan is strong enough to break this "fire wall" of truth.

Love of the truth acts as a device that detects deception and alerts the believer.

C. Prevents God's Delusion

"I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not" (Isaiah 66:4).

"And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2:8-12).

Love of the truth and righteousness represent a tandem of resistance against the delusion God can bring upon a person who fails to properly love and respect the truth. Delusion will not occur when this tandem is in place. This delusion is not something for the truth-

loving believer to fear. It does not come from Satan, and God only sends it when individuals willfully resist and reject truth. Loving the truth prevents this kind of delusion.

III. EFFECTS OF TRUTH

Many people approach the concept of truth as they would a philosophical concept. Truth is not an item on the menu of philosophical concepts to be accepted or rejected without consequences. Rather, there are effects of truth that are everlasting. Further, our response to truth dictates our eternal destiny.

A. Freedom and Liberty

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 pictures a key with this statement: "Knowing and loving the truth gives us spiritual freedom and liberty."

Knowing and loving the truth gives us spiritual freedom and liberty that error and false doctrine can never afford. This freedom and liberty breaks the bondage of false doctrine and error.

"His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself; and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins" (Proverbs 5:22).

"God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land" (Psalm 68:6).

Sin binds. It acts as a chain that adds another link of bondage with each sinful action. The participant may not realize his bondage until he tries to escape. It is then that sin exerts its binding power and reminds the prisoner that he is its servant. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Romans 6:16).

Thanks to the Lord we do not have to remain a servant to sin. We can call on God and enjoy a release from Satan's prison. Through truth we are set free.

“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).

Not only do we enjoy spiritual freedom and liberty because of truth, we enjoy freedom and liberty mentally and emotionally. A believer who is walking in this liberty is more stable mentally and emotionally than his counterpart in the world.

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7)

“I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (Psalm 34:4).

B. Eternal Salvation

The freedom truth effects reaches far beyond this life and into the next, which guarantees believers eternal salvation. Salvation is possible only through acceptance of truth.

Jesus Christ is the Savior (Luke 2:11) and there is no salvation apart from Him. Jesus is truth (John 14:6). Jesus is the only name of salvation (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the author of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9). Jesus said, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (John 10:9). There is no salvation outside of Jesus. He alone is the means of redemption.

Internalizing the Message

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (I Timothy 4:16).

If there were no other verses underscoring the importance of doctrine relative to salvation, I Timothy 4:16 should be enough to

convince any honest-hearted person of that necessity. With this warning to take heed to the doctrine, we become aware that what we believe is essential to our salvation. Clearly, there are other doctrines that are not true. They are false doctrines.

False doctrine—whether relativism, pluralism, antifoundationalism, or any other false teaching—are attempts to nullify truth, but they all fail completely. Satan uses these and every false doctrine to attack truth, but we recognize them all as his works against Jesus Christ, which are motivated by the spirit of antichrist.

Truth is vitally important. Not only do we have to know the truth, but we must love the truth. Love for the truth is our antidote against all these attempts to destroy our foundation. This love for the truth prevents Satan’s deceptions and prevents God’s delusion. While deception is a tactic of the enemy of our soul, delusion is the judgment of God against those who resist truth and refuse to love it. They choose instead to live in unrighteousness.

By embracing truth we enjoy its wonderful and eternal effects: freedom, liberty, and eternal salvation. Obeying and loving the truth brings spiritual freedom and liberty. The Holy Spirit releases us from the bondage of sin. Once there is deliverance from bondage, the believer can enjoy liberty and live in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The ultimate fulfillment of full New Testament salvation will be realized when the believer enjoys eternal salvation. This final victory will be the result of having loved the truth and enduring unto the end. We must love truth amid false doctrine.

REFLECTIONS

- Proverbs 23:23 uses the terms “buy” and “sell.” How can we buy and sell the truth? Discuss.
- Discuss relativism.
- Discuss pluralism.
- Discuss antifoundationalism.
- What is the antidote to false doctrine? Discuss.
- Discuss delusion that comes from God and why it comes.

4

week of
03.23.14

Love the Word amid Deception

Focus Thought

Deception stands as the order for the end times; however, a love for God's Word will protect the child of God and prevent a diversion from truth.

Lesson Text

II Timothy 3:13-17

13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Focus Verse

II Timothy 3:15

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Lost and Found

by C. A. Brewer

Years ago while hunting toward the close of the day, I was following a path through the woods. Along the way I thought I heard a partridge just off the trail. I left the path to look for the partridge but never found it. To make matters worse, I could not even find the path I had been on. It soon got dark. My dad had taught me that if you get lost you can get your bearings from the sun, but this was a clear and crisp night. It was a little scary. Eventually I followed the moon to a wood-cutting road and found my way out from there to a highway.

It is one thing to get lost in the woods at night; it is another to lose your way spiritually. This can be a dangerous hour in which we live. The shadows seem to be deepening just before the return of the Lord. We need to be doubly careful, for there are many distractions and many detractors.

Jesus told the story of the prodigal son who got badly off track—journeying into a far country. It is really a picture of how God feels about someone who has left the path of righteousness but has decided to humble himself and repent. The overjoyed father in the parable proclaimed, “This my son . . . was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:24).

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—DECEPTION

- A. The Order of the End Times
- B. The Means by Which Antichrist Emerges

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE GOD’S WORD

- A. Read, Study, Memorize, Meditate
- B. Apply to Daily Life
- C. Let God’s Word Affect You
- D. Obey God’s Word and Live by It

Contemplating the Topic

No one likes to be deceived. To be deceived is to be misled by a false appearance or statement. The verb form of *deception* has as its origin a Latin word meaning “to ensnare; to take.” To be deceived is to be taken in a trap. To be misled and trapped is always embarrassing and humiliating. It is an affront no one enjoys.

Deception is offensive coming from a peer, for it hurts the feelings; but when it comes from Satan, it jeopardizes the soul. Deception is no game played by the devil. It is a serious attempt to devour and doom a believer. (See I Peter 5:8.)

In this lesson we will focus on one of Satan’s most effective tools—deception. Both Jesus and Paul warned of deception in the last days; however, the Word of God and love for the Word are effective deterrents against this juggernaut of destruction.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 lists four keys to victory over deception.

Reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on the Word of God, as well as applying it to our daily lives, are the keys to victory over deception.

We must obey God’s Word and live by its principles. If we do not let God’s Word affect us, it becomes an impractical presentation of antiquated stories and rules. Our obedience makes it a practical guide to everyday living and eternal life.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—DECEPTION

A. The Order of the End Times

As Jesus prophesied of the end times, He listed an order of a dozen calamities and conditions that would occur. They are enumerated in Matthew 24:

1. Deception (verses 4, 5, 11, 24),
2. Military Conflicts (verses 6-7),
3. Famines (verse 7),
4. Pestilence (verse 7),
5. Earthquakes (verse 7),
6. Persecution (verse 9),
7. Apostasy (verse 10),
8. Disloyalty (verse 10),
9. Sinfulness (verse 12),
10. Falling Away (verse 12),
11. Endurance (verse 13),
12. Revival (verse 14).

Jesus was not mentioning these in a particular order of occurrence; rather, He was establishing the reality of their occurrence. We

have observed many, if not all, of these in present times, which many people perceive to be the end times. May we not ignore these warnings but take heed to the urgency of the troublesome times in which we live. We may not be able to predict the exact order of the events of the last days or know with certainty the chronology of when things will occur, but we are able to know signs to watch for and what is going to happen in the end times.

Four times in Matthew 24 Jesus warned of deception. The disciples asked Jesus, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3). Jesus responded, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5). He then warned, "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11). Last of all He said, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24).

It should be a sobering reality to all believers that Jesus warned of deception more than any other end-time condition. The other conditions are perhaps more dramatic, but deception is more threatening to the believer's faith.

As Jesus prophesied that the gospel of the Kingdom would be preached in all nations and then the end would come (Matthew 24:14), Paul prophesied that in the last days there would be a falling away before the man of sin is revealed (II Thessalonians 2:3). There is no contradiction between these two verses of Scripture. It seems that revival and falling away will occur simultaneously. Some will turn away from the Lord while others are coming to Him.

The term "falling away" is a translation from the Greek word used for *apostasy*: "By this term we understand a dereliction of the essential principles of religious truth—either a total abandonment of Christianity itself, or such a corruption of its doctrines as renders the whole system completely inefficient to salvation" (*Clarke's Commentary*). Falling away, or apostasy, is a different condition from backsliding. Any degree of turning back from living the Christian life is backsliding. This includes failing to attend church faithfully, failing to pray, failing to read the Bible, failing to give tithes and offerings, or any other biblical obligation.

In Hebrews 6:4-6 where the writer refers to the impossibility of being renewed once a person falls away, he referred to apostasy and not to backsliding. The prodigal son left home, left his father, and failed morally, but he never ceased to be his father's son. He lost his fellowship but not his relationship with his father. When he recognized his error, he returned home, repented, and was restored. (See Luke 15:11-24.) This is a beautiful picture of the backslider coming back to the heavenly Father and being restored.

Apostasy, however, is not only a loss of fellowship but also a loss of relationship for which there is no remedy. Esau could find no place of repentance "though he sought it carefully with tears" (Hebrews 12:17).

*Loving God's Word
makes our salvation
possible and also serves
as a deterrent against
deception.*

B. The Means by Which Antichrist Emerges

The recounting of history or study of geological changes enable individuals to observe the periods of change that have occurred over many years. In a similar fashion, there are developing stages of truth and deception. Nothing happens spiritually or carnally outside the sphere of developmental changes that have preceded it and changes that will succeed it. The emergence of the antichrist will be an involved development. He will not just one day appear with someone recognizing him and announcing, "Here is the antichrist."

"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (II Thessalonians 2:9).

Since the antichrist will deceive with signs and lying wonders, it is not beyond reason that Satan will use signs and lying wonders to prepare the world for the son of perdition. This

setup could be manifested and observed through the technology of worldwide satellite or computer systems, in addition to television broadcasts.

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE GOD’S WORD

It is not possible to overemphasize the importance of loving God’s Word. Loving God’s Word makes our salvation possible and also serves as a deterrent against deception. Consequently, love for God’s Word is the ultimate antidote.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 says, “As oil and water do not mix, truth and error are incompatible.”

As oil and water do not mix, truth and error are incompatible. Love for God’s Word and obedience to God’s Word are incompatible with error and deception. As believers, if we will love God’s Word we will never have to fear being deceived.

A. Read, Study, Memorize, Meditate

Some believers admit they do not have a good relationship with the Word of God. Although there is a method to studying the Bible, no one has to have a method to be able to enjoy the Word. The important thing is to have a relationship with God and His Word, for that relationship is the only pathway to abundant life. (See John 6:63; 10:10.)

Of the four verbs that describe a person’s possible relationship with the Bible—read, study, memorize, meditate—reading is the ideal beginning pathway to a believer’s full relationship with the Word. Anyone who reads the Word of God will be blessed. “Blessed is he that readeth” (Revelation 1:3). Reading and studying the Word of God is vital to the welfare of believers. (See I Timothy 4:13.)

Study, the second verb, is a discipline that is as rewarding as any other involving the Word. We are commanded to study the Bible. There is no way we can give a reason of the hope that lies within us without study. (See I Peter 3:15.)

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, right dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and

they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

The third verb is memorize. Although nowhere in the Word of God are we commanded to memorize Scripture, David said, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). Committing Scripture to memory—hiding the Word in our heart—is an excellent deterrent to sin.

There are at least two reasons why memorizing Scripture is beneficial. First, in order to memorize something, we have to repeat the material over and over until we remember it. By saying Scriptures over and over, we inculcate the Word of God into our heart and memory. *Inculcate* comes from a Latin word meaning “to press in.” How wonderful it is to press the Word of God into our heart! Second, Scripture memorization is beneficial because it allows us to carry the Word with us without having a hard copy available. Simply, memorization allows the Word to be carried in the heart instead of in the hand.

The fourth verb is meditate. Scripture commands us to meditate on the Word of God.

“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. . . . Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all” (I Timothy 4:13, 15).

The term *meditate* in I Timothy 4:15 is translated from a Greek term meaning “to revolve in the mind.” When we meditate on the Word, it goes around and around in our mind. We need to consider that with each revolution we are gleaning beneficial principles.

“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97).

Meditating on the Word of God occupies our mind and enables us to avoid thinking on carnal things. It has been said, “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” Meditating on the Bible serves to place sentinels at the door of our mind, guarding it against trespassing thoughts. There is no place for deception to enter.

B. Apply to Daily Life

God’s Word is meant to be our daily bread. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by

every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2).

Not only are we supposed to delight ourselves in God’s law as we meditate on it, we are to do so day and night (Psalm 1:2). Psalm 1:2 emphasizes the practical application of God’s Word daily. If God’s Word does not have a practical application in our daily lives, it becomes theoretical. A Bible that is theoretical and not practical will not help us live for Christ every day.

A man in one church testified that his spiritual rehabilitation from moral failure was made possible by the daily application of God’s Word. Working in a warehouse, he quoted a word of Scripture on each step as he ascended or descended the stairs. Because there were several stairs of different lengths, he was able to memorize verses of different lengths using this method. He also wrote the first letter of each word of a verse on the rough boards of the walls and committed them to memory.

C. Let God’s Word Affect You

The effects of God’s Word are myriad. These positive effects far surpass the influence of world literature on its readers. Great authors have challenged and inspired people to achieve, conquer, and overcome, but no other book has the influence on people the Bible has.

One beneficial effect of God’s Word is to heal and medicate.

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases” (Psalm 103:2-3).

“He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions” (Psalm 107:20).

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chas-

tisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5).

The instances of people being healed in the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments are too numerous to enumerate. God’s Word has healed and inspired healing in and out of the Bible for centuries. Those who have not been healed instantly have stood on the promises of healing contained in the Word.

“And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26).

The last eight words of Exodus 15:26 provide a powerful effect for those who believe God’s Word and exercise their faith to receive healing that may not come instantly. The word *healeth* comes from a Hebrew word that means, “to mend by stitching.” As a seamstress sews a garment one stitch at a time, often we are healed “one stitch at a time.” Everyday we need to thank the Lord for His healing virtue in our lives.

The Word of God is a great deterrent to sin.

Another positive effect of God’s Word is the prevention of sin.

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11).

The Word of God is a great deterrent to sin. Not only does the Word act as a warning against sin, but it emphasizes the rewards of resisting temptations to sin. Focusing on the rewards—both here and hereafter—rather

than on the warnings, presents a more positive approach to victory.

When we are able to read in God's Word what happened to people when they sinned, it reminds us of the results of sin. This acts as a strong deterrent, for there are no pretty effects of sin in or out of the Bible.

Another positive effect of God's Word is to illuminate our paths in life.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).

It is not difficult to understand how the Word illuminates. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5). He is synonymous with His Word, therefore the lamp and light of Psalm 119:105 is the Lord Himself.

God's illumination through His Word guides us through the treacherous paths of this world. As He lights our path He makes our way clearer, brighter, and safer.

The light of the lamp of God's Word reveals the hazards of the path. There are many harmful things we would not see were it not for the light of God's Word. Satan places traps along our way to try to ensnare and destroy us, but God's lamp reveals them and enables us to avoid them.

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 indicates that the light of the lamp of God's Word reveals hazards and shows the direction of the path.

Not only does the light of the lamp of God's Word reveal hazards, but it shows the direction of the path. We would not know which way to go were it not for the Bible. Through the Word, however, we have confidence in the direction God is leading us. Further, we do not worry about the path ahead beyond that which is illuminated. We just follow the lighted path with confidence God will give us more light as we need it. Let us trust in the light of the Lord's leading.

An interesting effect of God's Word is its ability to judge.

"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Judgment by the Word of God has a two-pronged effect. If we will allow the Word to judge us in this world, we will escape the judgment of the Word in the world to come.

"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (I Corinthians 11:31-32).

If we do not allow the Word to judge and correct us in this life, there will be a time at the Great White Throne Judgment when the books will be opened, and we will be judged. (See Revelation 20:11-12.)

"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:15).

Other effects of the Word of God are that it gives strength and opens doors of opportunity.

"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name" (Revelation 3:8).

Elohim, a Hebrew term for God, means "the Strong One." God not only opens doors, but He *is* the door (John 10:9). Further, He gives us strength to walk through the doors He opens to us.

D. Obey God's Word and Live by It

The most effective way to defeat deception is to obey God's Word and live by it. Anyone who follows this formula for victory will have no problems with deception. Deception is ineffective against the individual who faithfully follows the Word of God.

No one has to be an expert on deception to live victoriously for Christ. We do not have to know the nuances of deception to please the Lord. Rather, we just need to know, love, obey, and live by God's Word.

"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given

unto us his holy Spirit" (I Thessalonians 4:7-8).

Worldliness is one of deception's greatest partners in defeating believers. However, worldliness cannot defeat the committed Christian who faithfully pursues the holiness of God.

"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (II Corinthians 3:2-3).

Worldliness is one of deception's greatest partners in defeating believers.

Whether we desire it or not and whether we are aware of it or not, the world is watching the lives of believers. They are on constant display at work, school, home, on the street, and in the neighborhood. It is difficult for a Christian to maintain a low or obscure profile in a world that is critical of believers.

When we, whether by confession or simply by the observation of others reveal we are living a separated life from sin, the world watches to see if our life is consistent with our testimony. The moment they see an inconsistency they are quick to cry out against us. Believers need always to live in complete

harmony with their profession of faith and redemption in Jesus Christ.

Internalizing the Message

The magician never reveals his secrets. By sleight of hand he performs his arcane craft as he attempts to entertain his audience. In much the same way Satan never discloses his methods. Unlike the magician, however, his purpose is not to entertain, but to deceive and destroy. (See I Peter 5:8.)

Both Jesus and Paul warned us concerning the deception of the last days. Although Jesus Christ warned in Matthew 24 of several calamitous conditions that would exist in the end times, He warned of deception four times. Further, Paul also warned of deception in the last days. In II Thessalonians 2 Paul wrote, "Let no man deceive you by any means" (verse 3). He also warned there would be a falling away in the last days. Clearly, deception is an ever-present danger to believers that they must resist at all costs.

Obedience to and love for God's Word act as an antidote against deception. By reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on the Word of God, believers are able to inoculate themselves against the deceptions of Satan.

We are not to only read the Bible, however; we also must apply the principles of the Word to our daily lives. Only a practical obedience of the Word of God is able to affect our lives positively now and effect our salvation for eternity. We must love the Word of God amid the deception of this age.

REFLECTIONS

- What end-time attitude did Jesus warn against in Matthew 24? Discuss.
- Discuss the difference between falling away and backsliding.
- What is the antidote against deception? Discuss.
- Discuss four disciplines that empower the believer to enjoy and benefit from God's Word.

Love Jesus' Name amid Mockery

5
week of
03.30.14

Lesson Text

II Peter 3:3-12

3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,
4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.
5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:
6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:
7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.
8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.
9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.
10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.
11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,
12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Focus Thought

In the end times, mockers and scoffers will attempt to negatively influence others; however, a love for Jesus' name will protect God's child amid all assailing attacks.

Focus Verse

Revelation 3:8

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

A Wonderful Truth

by C. A. Brewer

It is a wonderful truth, a liberating truth, a God-inspired truth. Yes, baptism in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins is an experience for every believer. The apostles of the first century baptized their converts in the name of Jesus because they recognized that in doing so they were fulfilling the Lord's command of Matthew 28:19.

And yet there are those who openly discredit, and even fiercely oppose, what the Scriptures clearly teach about baptism. I know from personal experience that religious tradition can blind an individual to the truth. When I first heard of people being baptized in the name of Jesus, I thought, *Some people will do anything to be different!*

Later, like many others, I saw that the New Testament formula for baptism was given in Acts 2:38. What a wonderful truth! Once we have repented and have been properly baptized, we are set free from sin. Moreover, following our obedience, God will continue to lead us and will fill us with His Spirit. Luke spoke of "the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32).

There are those who consider baptism as simply an outward expression of an inward change. Unfortunately for them, it has become simply a symbol. But in the Scriptures and for the early church, it was far more than that; baptism was and is part of the birthing experience of every believer.

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—MOCKERY

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE JESUS' NAME

- A. Significance of God's Name
- B. Call His Name Jesus
- C. Baptism in the Name of Jesus
- D. For His Name's Sake
- E. Jesus, the Name of Authority
- F. Jesus, the Supreme Name

III. PEOPLE OF HIS NAME

- A. Identifying with the Name of Jesus
- B. Biblical Identity
- C. Becoming People of the Name

Contemplating the Topic

The last days will produce not only wars, rumors of wars, famines, pestilence, earthquakes, and deception, but it also will produce many people who mock truth and the people who hold to truth. Further, in this present culture in which many people refuse to believe in "absolute truth," such mocking has begun already.

To *mock* is "to attack or treat with ridicule, contempt, or derision." These deluded deriders of things they do not understand are unwitting accomplices of the Antichrist.

Because they are carnal, they choose to mock that which is holy. Because they are ungodly, they deride biblical truth. In the midst of such mockery, however, the Scriptures

admonish us to love the name of Jesus and remain faithful to Jesus Christ and His Word.

Mockery is one of the attitudes of the end times. In spite of such evil attitudes, however, if we will love the name of Jesus it will serve as an antidote against mockery. Jesus' name alone is authoritative enough to withstand any attack of ridicule, for it is the supreme name of the Almighty.

Identification with the name of Jesus is of eternal significance. The apostles of Jesus suffered shame for His name. After one notable miracle, the Jewish authorities arrested and jailed them. Still, they were witnessing the next day in the Temple in spite of the threats, for the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, released them, and commanded them to continue to witness. After another arrest, the authorities threatened and beat them, commanding them to refrain from speaking to anyone about the name of Jesus. They returned to the others and rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer shame for His name.

From the time of the prophets, to the angel's announcement of the name to Joseph before Jesus was born, to the New Testament salvation available through that name, the name of Jesus was demonstrated to be significant. Further, the name of Jesus is the supreme name of the authority of the Sovereign Almighty.

God has not kept His wonderful name to Himself alone; He has given all humankind the opportunity to become the people of His name through repentance and water baptism in Jesus' name for the remission of sins. Believers' love for and identification with Jesus' name allies them with the supreme authority of God, which is their source of redemption and victory amid mockery.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—MOCKERY

"How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts" (Jude 18).

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (II Peter 3:3).

Because unrighteousness has always been an enemy of righteousness, it is not surprising that in the last days Satan is stepping up the opposition against righteousness. Knowing he has a short time in which to work, he is using every means possible to thwart the progress of God's body. Although Satan uses other methods of opposition, mockery is one of his favorite methods. He inspires mockers to use ridicule, contempt, and derision in their fruitless attempt to defeat the church.

Mockery is often the last weapon employed when every other weapon has proven useless. When unrighteousness and evil cannot overcome righteousness and good, evil individuals often resort to mockery. This is similar to a person verbally attacking another because he knows he is no match physically.

Satan uses mockery as a weapon, for he knows its effectiveness. We may bristle when someone mocks us, and we may bravely resist the attack. However, mockery not only hurts our feelings, it often creates self-doubt, which can fray the fabric of one's faith in God.

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE JESUS' NAME

A. Significance of God's Name

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 pictures a tower and quotes Proverbs 18:10.

Mockery is no match for the name of Jesus. "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10). While mockery is outside ridiculing righteousness, God's people are inside the tower of His name rejoicing. The rigid tower of the name of Jesus repels all epithets hurled against it.

Not only is Jesus' name much stronger than any mockery, its significance surpasses all other names, persons, or sources of power. For example, Jesus' name is the only name with saving virtue. (See Acts 4:12.) One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess His name. (See Philippians 2:10-11.)

"For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23).

A religion that does not know the name of its god is not much of a religion. It is an empty exercise in futility. The authority of a religion rests in the power of its god, which is embodied in the name of that deity. An unknown god without a name is as impotent as the material on which the memorial is carved. Thankfully, we know the name of our God!

God's name is significant in healing. James wrote in his epistle, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5:14-15). It is scriptural to anoint the sick with oil, and it is to be done in the name of the Lord. Many people have been healed by the wonderful name of Jesus being called over them in prayer.

B. Call His Name Jesus

When Mary was espoused to Joseph, she conceived a child. Because of the appearance of impropriety, Joseph was inclined to put her away legally under the provisions of the Law, but an angel of God spoke to him in a dream. The angel told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, for the child was conceived by the Holy Ghost. The angel further instructed, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

The name of *Jesus* means "Jehovah is salvation." "And the LORD shall be king over all

the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one" (Zechariah 14:9). "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8). Jesus of the New Testament is Jehovah of the Old Testament, manifested in flesh. He is the one and only true and living God.

"Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6).

"Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any" (Isaiah 44:8).

We can trace the worship of Jehovah as the one true God back to the Book of Exodus. (See Exodus 6:1-3.) Since the name Jesus means "Jehovah is salvation," and because the Word says He is the Savior (Isaiah 43:11; Luke 2:11; Matthew 1:21), the worship of Jehovah of the Old Testament and the worship of Jesus in the New Testament are one and the same.

Understanding God's identity underscores the importance of Jesus' name. If God were three separate and distinct persons, He also would have three separate and distinct names. Because God is one, however, His name is one. Further, the Scripture reveals that name to be Jesus.

C. Baptism in the Name of Jesus

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 quotes Acts 4:12.

Since we have established there is no other name besides Jesus by which we may receive salvation (Acts 4:12), it stands to reason water baptism for the remission of sins is to be administered in the name of Jesus. The Scriptures clearly prove this, and we also are told by Paul, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

Jesus commanded His disciples, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). Luke, recording the same commandment of Jesus in his gospel said, "Repentance and

remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Remission of sins indeed was preached at Jerusalem when Simon Peter commanded everyone to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Subsequent instances of water baptism in the name of Jesus occurred throughout the Book of Acts. For example, Philip's ministry in Samaria witnessed revival as he reported, "For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16). When the Holy Ghost was poured out upon Cornelius's household, Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48). When the disciples of John were approached by Paul at Ephesus and acquainted with the requirements of the gospel, "They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5).

When Jesus commanded water baptism to be administered in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, the apostles understood the name to be Jesus Christ. Since Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are titles, not names, the apostles knew to baptize only in the name of Jesus Christ. They knew Jesus had come in His Father's name. (See John 5:43; Hebrews 1:4.) They knew the name of the Son was Jesus. (See Matthew 1:21.) They also knew the Holy Ghost was sent in name of Jesus. (See John 14:26.)

Not only does Scripture support Jesus Name baptism, history supports it. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition (1910), II, 365 states, "The trinitarian formula and the triune immersion were not uniformly used from the beginning. . . . Baptism into the name of the Lord was the normal formula of the New Testament. In the third century baptism in the name of Christ was still so widespread that pope Stephen, in opposition to Cyprian of Carthage, declared it to be valid." Carney's *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1970), page 53, states, "Persons were baptized at first 'in the name of Jesus Christ . . . or in the name of the Lord Jesus. . . . Afterwards, with the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, they were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.'"

D. For His Name's Sake

"Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but

provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea. Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known" (Psalm 106:7-8).

God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage as a part of His divine purpose for His people, but there was another important reason why He delivered Israel. He also delivered them to preserve the reputation of His name. He knew if He allowed Egypt to destroy Israel, the Egyptians would say God was not able to deliver His people.

God protects and preserves the reputation of His name. A classic example of this occurred on Mt. Carmel centuries ago when King Ahab and Prophet Elijah each blamed the other for Israel's problem. They agreed to settle the dispute by seeing who could get their god to answer by fire. "And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God" (I Kings 18:24). After many desperate attempts by the false prophets of Baal, they gave up. When Elijah called on the name of the Lord, the fire fell and consumed the sacrifice, proving Jehovah was the true God. (See I Kings 18:36-38.)

A god is no greater than his name. All the so-called gods of religions' pantheon are powerless figments of the imaginations of eccentrics. Although they do not exist, their believers worship them as though they do. Their names are as impotent as their lifeless forms that allegedly represent their likenesses.

God protects and preserves the reputation of His name.

Our God, on the other hand, is the most viable entity in the universe. His name is just as viable. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). His viability produces life in His believers. Believers today are enjoying the early benefits of everlasting life made possible by His all-powerful name.

E. Jesus, the Name of Authority

Since Jesus is the almighty God of the universe, His name represents the highest authority. *Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words* says "name" implies authority. Some theologians argue that the phrase "in the name" means "in the authority of." They go on to minimize the importance of water baptism in the name of Jesus claiming there is no New Testament record of the name of Jesus being called over anyone baptized. They state that references to water baptism in the name of Jesus relate to either a command or a report of what had happened.

In response to this, consider James 2:7: "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?" The *Amplified Bible* states, "Is it not they who slander and blaspheme that precious name by which you are distinguished and called [the name of Christ invoked in baptism]?" *Pulpit Commentary* renders it, "By the which ye are called" literally, "which was called upon you."

F. Jesus, the Supreme Name

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

Supreme is defined by *The New Oxford American Dictionary* as "superior to all others; strongest, most important, or most powerful," and its root is a Latin term that means "above." Philippians 2:9 reveals the name of Jesus to be "above every name." Of all the names under Heaven, the name of Jesus is the highest. It is so high every knee in Heaven and everywhere else will one day bow to it.

It is interesting that the name Jesus is a common name among different nationalities. Our Savior is not the only one with this name, but He is the only one with this name and also with the supreme authority that accompanies it. If everyone in the world were named Jesus, Jesus Christ still would be the supreme name and Sovereign of the universe.

The supreme God of the universe would not have a name that was not commensurate with His supremacy. Since Jesus is the name of the only true God, His name also is supreme.

III. PEOPLE OF HIS NAME

It is logical that God's people should be called "the people of His name." Since salvation is only by the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12), those saved should appropriately be called by the only name given for salvation. His name gives purpose and power to repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and remission of sins. Further, when we receive the Holy Spirit, we are born into the family of God.

There is significance in a family name. It is normal and usual that all the family members receive the family name. Because our heavenly Father's name is Jesus, we take on His name and we become the people of the name.

Mockery is an end-time attitude, but we have an antidote—loving the name of Jesus.

A. Identifying with the Name of Jesus

"And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. . . . And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:40, 42).

After many signs and wonders were wrought among the people by the ministry of the early church believers, a revival occurred with many people bringing their sick into the streets that the shadow of Peter passing by might have a positive effect upon them. Further, Acts 5:16 reveals that all who came were healed. (See Acts 5:12-16.)

Although there was a great positive response from the people, the Jewish authorities did not appreciate the revival. They arrested the apostles and jailed them. The jail could not hold them, however, for the angel of the Lord released them with the order to go to the Temple and preach the words of life. (See Acts 5:17-20.)

When the authorities realized the apostles had returned to minister in the Temple, they

arrested them again and rebuked them, reminding them they had commanded them not to teach in the name of Jesus. After much deliberation they beat them and commanded them again not to speak in the name of Jesus. (See Acts 5:21-40.)

The apostles left the authorities, returned to the fellowship of the disciples, and ministered in the Temple. The threats and beating did nothing to thwart their identification with the name of Jesus. They rejoiced "they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

Let us never be ashamed of the name of Jesus. If we are ashamed of His name, we are ashamed of Him. And Jesus warned, "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words . . . of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

B. Biblical Identity

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

Salvation is associated with the name of the Lord. Acts 2:21 states clearly that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. This is the ultimate in biblical identity; however, what does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? We must interpret this verse in conjunction with the rest of the scriptural record. This verse does not mean that anyone calling out the name of Jesus, whether sincerely or insincerely, will be saved. Nor does it mean that a person could be saved without repenting of his sins and being baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. Acts 2:38 commands these actions in order for a person to experience the new birth.

Consider Romans 10:14: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" In order for a person to call on the name of the Lord, he first must hear the gospel preached and he must believe the message preached, which requires acting upon it. Further, Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). The Bible is its best commentary. To understand the Word of God, we must consider more than one isolated verse.

C. Becoming People of the Name

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 quotes Acts 2:38.

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

Because salvation is only in the name of Jesus, every part of the plan of salvation is vital and one must do it all in the holy name of Jesus. Some may hastily rush toward water baptism in the name of Jesus, which is vital. However, first it is equally vital that a person truly repent of his sins. According to Acts 2:38, both repentance and water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ are essential to salvation. In harmony with what Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19, and according to the only name used in water baptism in the New Testament church, we are to be baptized in water by immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. By obeying the New Testament plan of salvation, we become people of the name. This is essential, for there is no “other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

If we are to be the “People of the Name,” we must identify with that name in every possible

way. “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17).

Internalizing the Message

Mockery is an end-time attitude, but we have an antidote—loving the name of Jesus. We should love His name because of its significance and vital connection to redemption. Jesus was given His name by the angel of the Lord, and we are to honor His name as the supreme name of all authority. Further, for salvation we must be baptized in Jesus’ name for the remission of sins.

When we repent of our sins, are baptized in the lovely name of Jesus, and receive the Holy Ghost, we become the people of His name. This identification with His name gives us salvation and a biblical identity, and we become Jesus Name people in spite of those who may mock and ridicule us.

REFLECTIONS

- Give examples of God’s people being mocked in Scripture. Discuss.
- What is the antidote for mockery? Discuss.
- Discuss the meaning of the name of Jesus.
- Discuss the examples of water baptism in Scripture and the demonstrated practice of water baptism in Jesus’ name.
- How do we identify with the name of Jesus? Discuss.

6

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04.06.14

Be Fervent amid Apostasy

Focus Thought

Apostasy will sweep the world and affect the church in the end times; however, a devoted people fervent for the things of God will resist all compromise and apostasy.

Lesson Text

Luke 21:34-36

34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Focus Verse

II Thessalonians 2:3

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

On Fire for God

by Richard M. Davis

Did you ever wonder how the metaphor began to be used regarding one's fervency in serving the Lord: "Being on fire for God"? I do not know its precise beginning or origin of derivation, but it does make perfect sense to me.

There are several Greek New Testament words (various grammatical forms, *Strong's* 2204, 2205, 2206, 2207) that derive from the Greek word *Zeo* or *zelos*, which mean essentially "to boil with heat; be hot" (*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*). Most often in the New Testament the words are used metaphorically to describe strong emotions. In the *King James Version*, the words are translated with various English words such as "fervent in spirit; be fervent; emulation; envy; fervent mind; indignation; jealousy; zeal; affect; covet; desire; be jealous over; zealous" (*Strong's Concordance*).

It is interesting both "jealous" and "zealous" in the New Testament are translated from the same Greek word—one representing a negative emotion and the other a positive emotion, but both presenting the idea of boiling hot emotions! This is fervency! This is why we need to be "on fire for God," boiling hot with passion for God, His Word, and His work.

Forms of this same Greek word are translated as fervency in the spirit both in Acts 18:25 and Romans 12:11: "This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25). "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). The *New International Version* presents an interesting translation of this verse: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11).

Let us be boiling hot, on fire for our God, always demonstrating great spiritual fervor for Him!

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—THE FALLING AWAY SHALL COME

- A. The Actions of Apostasy
- B. The Path of Apostasy
- C. Ultimate End of the Apostasy

II. ANTIDOTE—BE FERVENT

- A. Be Prepared
- B. Be Expectant

will do nothing to atone for apostasy once that journey is complete, for apostasy is a permanent defection from truth.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 shows stages of plant growth and states, "Where lack of respect and love for truth is present, the seeds of apostasy begin to grow."

Contemplating the Topic

Apostasy and falling away describe the same condition. Both terms are translated from the same Greek word meaning "defection from truth, rebellion, turning away." Two other terms, "reprobate" and "castaway," are synonyms of apostasy, for they mean "unapproved, rejected, worthless." Paul used the term "castaway" in I Corinthians 9:27 to refer to such a condition.

We will study the actions of apostasy, the path of apostasy, and the ultimate end of apostasy. Apostasy, an attitude of the last days, is a condition a believer should understand and avoid at all cost. Repentance can reverse the condition we often call "backsliding," but it

Since apostasy involves departing from truth, the road to apostasy is one in which love for the truth is absent. Where lack of respect and love for truth is present, the seeds of apostasy begin to grow.

Thank the Lord there is an antidote to apostasy—a fervent hunger for God and that which is holy. If we maintain a fervent relationship with God, we will not fall victim to apostasy. In the cold atmosphere of carnality, however, apostasy thrives. No "on-fire" believer ever becomes a reprobate.

If we will keep ourselves prepared for the coming of the Lord, apostasy will never overtake us. We must maintain an expectant hope of the Rapture that creates a spiritual

atmosphere and discourages departure from the truth. May every believer always be fervent amid apostasy.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE— THE FALLING AWAY SHALL COME

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (II Thessalonians 2:3).

As much as we do not want to see it happen, the falling away predicted in II Thessalonians will happen. In a changing world things do not stay the same. Jesus Christ is the only One who does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). Not only do we witness shifts in the secular world, we see these changes in the spiritual realm. This is evident in a study of the seven churches of Asia Minor. The Lord complimented one church and found no fault with it, but the other six churches had identifiable problems, and Laodicea was near a state of apostasy. (See Revelation 1:20-3:18.)

No one knows to what extent the falling away in the last days will be. The Bible does not indicate the degree to which the falling away will affect the church. But the church should not be shocked at its occurrence, for it will happen prior to the predicted day of the Lord. It is a necessary fluctuation that will precede the second coming of the Lord. It is important that we remain faithful in spite of the unfaithfulness of others. We can look to Paul as an example of someone who remained faithful in spite of those around him who failed. “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (II Timothy 4:10).

Seeds planted by worldliness have already produced visible sprouts of the falling away. For years nominal churches have allowed a deterioration of biblical doctrines to erode their foundation. Many of them have never embraced the apostolic message and experience, and others who embraced some measures of apostolic truth have turned away from such doctrines. Paul referred to such people as “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (II Timothy 3:5).

Although we refer to the great falling away as something that will happen in the future,

the effects of the falling away are presently visible. God did not give us an exact timetable of the falling away. It is similar to the difficulty of distinguishing the end of day and the beginning of night; there is a period of overlapping we call dusk, which is neither day nor night. Perhaps this describes the spiritual condition of the world at the present, a period we could label “the dusk of degeneration.”

Seeds planted by worldliness have already produced visible sprouts of the falling away.

There is good news, however! The church of the Lord Jesus Christ will experience revival simultaneously with the great falling away. The Bible promises the former and latter rain (Hosea 6:3). Many believers interpret the Scriptures to predict that a great outpouring of God’s blessing will occur in the end times while others who are spiritually cold are falling away from God. While some individuals are backsliding and drifting toward reprobation, others are experiencing the new birth and are embracing the Apostolic message.

A. The Actions of Apostasy

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (II Timothy 4:3).

In apostasy there is always a trading down in value. II Timothy 4:3 describes individuals who will trade sound doctrine for lust. Sound doctrine and lust are incompatible. Why would anyone give up beautiful, biblical doctrines for such worthless goods? But unfortunately, such is the mentality of those who trade in matters of carnality.

Satan is a robber. “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10). This thief is interested in taking from

believers everything with spiritual value. Trading down spiritually always leaves a person bankrupt. We should have nothing to do with the devil and his apostate traders.

Lusts are desires of the mind that lead a person into carnality—a state of living according to one’s fleshly desires. To choose to live life according to the desires of the flesh instead of according to biblical doctrines leads an individual toward apostasy. Spirituality—living life as directed and guided by the Holy Spirit—is the only safeguard against such carnality.

II Timothy 4:3 also mentions individuals who have “itching ears.” This refers to people who gather others around them who will tell them what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. It is similar to a sick person going to a doctor who tells him he is not sick instead of treating his illness. Spiritual degenerates do not want to hear an accurate diagnosis. This is just another indication of their spiritual condition.

“And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (II Timothy 4:4).

The term *fables* is translated from a Greek word meaning, “a tale, fiction, myth.” The apostate individual holds more to myths and fables than the truth. Unaware of the value of the truth of God’s Word, they believe fairy tales of false prophets.

Anyone who does not love and respect truth is a potential customer for the peddlers of fables. Paul made reference to those who believe a lie and consequently are condemned (II Thessalonians 2:11-12). Fairy tales and fables do not appeal to lovers of the truth.

“. . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (II Timothy 3:4).

When pleasure becomes more important to us than God and church, we are in serious spiritual jeopardy. Our backsliding will lead to apostasy if we do not stop its progression. When entertainment replaces worship, carnality has gained a fatal foothold. All these responses are warnings that a reprobate condition is imminent.

Unfortunately, many contemporary churches have substituted entertainment for worship to try to keep members or even regain ones they have lost. They have sold out to our culture’s addiction to entertainment.

B. The Path of Apostasy

No one becomes apostate overnight. Apostasy arrives in stages. Romans 1:21-32 details four steps of apostasy. An examination of these steps should serve as tangible warnings against the cancerous condition of apostasy.

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Romans 1:21).

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 lists four steps of apostasy.

1. *The first step of apostasy is a darkening of the heart.* Romans 1:21 states that the cause of this first step is a result of people knowing God but not glorifying Him as God. Further, they lack gratitude and entertain vain imaginations, which results in the darkening of their foolish hearts.

The heart plays a key role in the spiritual status of an individual. “For with the heart man believeth” (Romans 10:10). If the heart is not right, the individual is not right. We cannot please the Lord if our heart is not right. Sometimes people are deceived by their heart. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Clearly these verses of Scripture do not refer to the organ that pumps blood throughout the human body, but instead they refer to the core of an individual—the seat of emotions and intellect.

A sinful heart presents a welcome mat to apostasy. A heart becomes dark when sin enters. This darkening of the heart is a spiritual deterioration that leads to reprobation as it welcomes more and more iniquity.

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:21-23).

Paul asked, “What communion hath light with darkness?” (II Corinthians 6:14). We

must understand that our hearts cannot possess both the light of God and the darkness of sin, for the two are incompatible. An attempt to serve two masters ultimately results in apostasy. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24).

"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" (Romans 1:24).

2. *The second step of apostasy is uncleanness brought about as judgment from God upon those who profess "themselves to be wise," but "they became fools" (Romans 1:22).* They also are guilty of changing the glory of the incorruptible God into a corrupted human image (Romans 1:23). In other words, they mentally reduce God to an element of their carnal, human imagination, which results in their participation in lustful uncleanness.

This uncleanness has nothing to do with dirt. Rather, it is moral impurity. The *Amplified Bible* renders "uncleanness" as "sexual impurity." Paul warned the Colossians, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). He included "uncleanness" in this infamous list of sins. "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

"For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature" (Romans 1:26).

3. *The third step of apostasy is vile affections.* These include acts of homosexuality and lesbianism. Participants in these sins often argue they were made that way and therefore it is natural. However, Romans 1:26-27 states these individuals leave the natural use of the opposite sex to do that which opposes nature and is unnatural.

The participants in this kind of vile affection violate not only nature but the Word of God. Scriptures are decisive in their condemnation of homosexuality.

"Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Leviticus 18:22).

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, NKJV).

"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Romans 1:28).

4. *The fourth and final step of apostasy is a reprobate mind.* This stage, which is a result of God's judgment, is one filled with a full catalog of evil. (See Romans 1:29-31.) This list contains at least twenty-two terrible sins, for the carnal mind is capable of the whole gamut of iniquity. There are seventeen works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21.

C. Ultimate End of the Apostasy

"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Philippians 3:18-19).

The unhappy end of apostasy is eternal damnation. There is no way a person can have a dark heart, be unclean, be guilty of vile affections, and have a reprobate mind without suffering the ultimate end of apostasy unless they repent. However, once a person reaches the fourth stage of apostasy, it is very difficult for him to repent. God soon sears the conscience of such a person, which causes him not to recognize the need for repentance.

Many victims of sin do not seem to understand the progression of sin. No one can sin and stay at the same level of iniquity. It is a slippery slope that sends its victims ever downward. Referring to a harlot in Proverbs 7:27, the Scripture says, "Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." This verse refers to the "way to hell," which implies a highway or thoroughfare. It leads

downward, for the verse refers to “going down to the chambers of death.” Isaiah 14:9 says, “Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming.”

II. ANTIDOTE—BE FERVENT

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11).

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 says that to be fervent for God is to be on fire for the Lord.

The term *fervent* in Romans 12:11 is translated from a Greek word that means “to be hot; to boil.” In other words, to be fervent for God is to be on fire for the Lord. The temperature of our spirit is an indicator of our spirituality—hot being good and lukewarm being bad. We know this from John’s account of the church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:15-16).

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16).

There are many advantages to being fervent for God. Since *fervent* means “to boil,” it is easier to understand these advantages. For example, when water reaches 212 degrees Fahrenheit (at sea level), it boils. At this temperature not only can water cook food, but it changes forms and becomes steam. Steam is so powerful it is used to drive large engines. Fervency of spirit allows believers to be more effective in accomplishing the difficult tasks of the work of the Lord. Perhaps this change of “form” is what Paul meant when he wrote, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed “unto the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Corinthians 3:18).

A. Be Prepared

Not only do Christians need to have a New Testament salvation experience, but also they need to be prepared always for the coming of the Lord, whether by death or by the Rapture. This is the only way to withstand apostasy and to be ready to meet the Lord in peace.

Through the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins, the Scriptures give us a lesson in the importance of being prepared to meet the Lord (Matthew 25:1-13). All ten virgins took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. While they slept, however, they received the call to meet the bridegroom. As they arose and attempted to trim their lamps, five of the virgins realized their lamps had gone out. The Word reveals these five had failed to bring a supply of oil with them. As a result, while they went away seeking to buy more oil, the bridegroom came; and they were refused admittance upon their return.

“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21:34-36).

Believers should always take care to be ready for the coming of the Lord.

The three conditions mentioned in Luke 21:34-36—surfeiting, drunkenness, and cares of this life—are catalysts that speed the blight of apostasy. Of the three, perhaps the least understood is “surfeiting,” which has to do with excess in anything such as overindulgence in eating or drinking. These three conditions should serve as warnings against the onset of apostasy. It does not just happen; something always precedes reprobation that contributes to the condition.

Believers should always take care to be ready for the coming of the Lord, for it is their first obligation. Service and faithfulness to Him are required in order to please Him. If we fail to be ready to meet Him, all our service and faithfulness is in vain. “Therefore be ye

also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44).

Because of a critical political situation, a missionary family had to immediately leave the country where they were living and ministering. They told the house servant and the compound guard they would try to return but had no way of knowing how long they would have to stay away. After months they were able to return. When they walked into their house without previous warning to their attendants, fresh flowers were on the tables awaiting their return. The house servant told them she did not know what day they might return, so she kept fresh flowers on the table every day. In this same way, we must ever be prepared for the Lord’s coming.

B. Be Expectant

The verb *expect* means “to look forward to; regard as likely to happen; anticipate the occurrence or the coming of.” When we expect something to happen, we are not surprised when it does. Being expectant of anything creates readiness.

Readiness for the Rapture is what living righteously is all about. The Lord is coming back to this earth in a miraculous catching away of the saved. (See I Thessalonians 4:15-17.) We must not only be ready for the Rapture but also expect this glorious event.

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13).

Titus 2:11-13 utilizes two verbs, “denying” and “looking,” as tandem actions believers must do in order to be ready for the coming of the Lord. They must prepare for and expect the Lord’s return. We must deny the bad and

look for the good, which is the return of the Lord. Let us not become involved in anything that would hinder our being ready for that glorious day.

Internalizing the Message

The end times will produce a falling away, which was prophesied as an action to precede the appearance of the man of sin, the man of perdition. Believers should make certain they are serving the Lord fervently that they may avoid getting caught up in the falling away. Believers are not exempt from this end-time attitude, and neither are they excluded from the revival that will occur simultaneously with the falling away. The many promises of Scripture of the Lord’s return provide ample warning for believers, but they also offer great encouragement.

Apostasy does not occur overnight. Rather, there are actions and paths believers should avoid so they do not find themselves at apostasy’s ultimate end. Some individuals ignorantly trade that which has great spiritual value for that which is completely worthless. Some individuals trade sound biblical doctrines for lust, truth for fables, or worship for entertainment, but it is a path that leads ever downward toward the ultimate end of apostasy—eternal damnation.

Thank the Lord we have an antidote to all of this—fervency of spirit. With spiritual fervency we will be prepared to avoid and resist such degenerating influences. Further, we will be prepared for the coming of the Lord as we live with expectancy of this great event. Such preparation and expectancy will keep us fervent amid apostasy.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss the end-time attitude of apostasy.
- What is another term synonymous with apostasy?
- Discuss the characteristics of apostasy.
- Where does the path of apostasy ultimately end? Discuss.
- What is the antidote for apostasy? Discuss.

Have Faith amid Skepticism

7
week of
04.13.14

Lesson Text

Luke 18:8

8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

II Peter 3:3-6

3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,
4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.
5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:
6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.

I Timothy 6:12

12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

I Peter 1:7

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Focus Thought

In the end times, skepticism will attempt to erode every biblical belief system; however, a great people of faith will remain faithful until the end.

Focus Verse

Luke 18:8

I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

People Who Are Never Sure of Anything

by Rex Deckard

"Modern skepticism is embodied in the scientific method, which involves gathering data to formulate and test naturalistic explanations for natural phenomena. A claim becomes factual when it is confirmed to such an extent it would be reasonable to offer temporary agreement. But all facts in science are provisional and subject to challenge, and therefore skepticism is a method leading to provisional conclusions. . . ." (Michael Shermer, "A Skeptical Manifesto," *Skeptic Magazine*, 1997).

Skepticism is not new. In the Garden of Eden, Eve was tempted when the serpent produced doubt—"Yea, hath God said . . . ?" (Genesis 3:1). Noah was surrounded by a generation of skeptics who were destroyed in the Flood, but the attitude of skepticism endured and is increasing as time goes on.

Sadly, skeptics are even skeptical of their own results since they deem all conclusions as temporary and subject to challenge. In short, they are never quite sure of anything.

Some things need to be questioned. ESP, UFOs, Bigfoot, cultic teachings, and many alternative healing methods have been tested and found wanting. Questioning can be healthy at times, but unbelief is never acceptable. Unbelief kept a generation out of the Promised Land and prevented Jesus from doing miracles in Nazareth. Faith in God's Word is an essential first step in our relationship with God.

People of faith believe in absolutes that are not subject to any revision or review, but have been tested by the centuries and found to be unquestionable. When put to the test, the Bible has always been proven true in the end. Further, tested and proven or not, if the Bible says it, faith compels us to believe it.

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—SKEPTICISM

- A. A Faithless and Perverted Generation
- B. A Slandering Generation

II. ANTIDOTE—FAITH

- A. Comes by Preaching
- B. Produces Appropriate Actions
- C. Produces Results
- D. The Means of Divine Blessings
- E. The Supreme Battle
- F. The Supreme Victory

Contemplating the Topic

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 contrasts faith and skepticism.

Faith and skepticism provide a stark contrast of two opposing belief structures. Faith is the response of a believer in God, but skepticism is the response of a doubter who does not trust in God. These responses toward God are as opposite as night and day or up and down. Faith and skepticism are both far reaching because they affect a person's relationship with God and that person's eternal destiny.

It is possible for believers to have faith in a world where there is much skepticism toward

God and the church. Believers and skeptics can occupy the same house, work in the same office, exist in the same world, and maybe even attend the same church. We are in the world, but we are not of the world.

Faith is effective as an antidote for skepticism. We will study the origin, actions, results, and divine blessings of faith. There may be a supreme battle waging in our world between faith and skepticism, but ultimately faith will effect a supreme victory over doubt. We should not be discouraged. Listen to Paul's uplifting message to the Roman believers: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). Therefore as Christians we believe we can have faith amid skepticism.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—SKEPTICISM

Skepticism means an "attitude or disposition, doubt, or unbelief with regard to a religion especially Christianity." Peter provided a scriptural picture of skepticism in II Peter 3:3-4:

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” These last-day scoffers are the prophesied skeptics. The end times will produce skeptics who will oppose Jesus Christ and His church.

Pervasive skepticism is the spirit of this age and reaches into every area of our lives. It is not always bad. There may even be a “healthy skepticism.” After all, nobody should be a gullible dupe. We should be cautious and wise toward many things in life.

However, when people have been duped by contrived sources and are aware of the possibility of artificially produced material, they have a tendency to doubt almost everything they see and hear. Satan uses this tendency to his advantage and arms the masses with skepticism of anything religious. Believers must not allow the prevalent skepticism in the world to contaminate their child-like faith in God. We must anchor our trust securely in Jesus Christ.

Skepticism is not only an attitude but also a tactic employed by the spirit of the Antichrist in the world to try to erode faith in God. This spirit is already present in our world and works against Jesus Christ (1 John 4:3).

A. A Faithless and Perverted Generation

Jesus posed an interesting question in Luke 18:8: “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” Perhaps it was a rhetorical question not meant to be answered directly, but to be received as a warning and challenge to the disciples. It was a warning that skeptics would work to undermine the faith of individuals; it also served to challenge believers to ambitiously guard their faith at all cost.

Believers today live in the midst of a perverted generation. True to the meaning of the term “perverted,” this generation has turned from what is right to immorality. Many people are subversive and wicked in their attempt to redefine good and evil. (See Isaiah 5:20.) However, as the writer of the Book of Hebrews stated, we must learn to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20).

It is interesting that the apostles’ persecutors indicted Paul and Silas saying, “These that have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Conversely, sin had turned the world upside down, or perverted it; the apostles were involved in trying to turn it right side up.

B. A Slandering Generation

Slander is defined as “a false and defamatory oral statement about a person.” Paul’s accusers reported to Governor Felix, “We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: who also hath gone about to profane the temple” (Acts 24:5-6). Paul responded, “Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me” (Acts 24:13). This is one example of slander used against the apostles.

The spirit of antichrist opposed everything righteous concerning the early church, and it continues to work today slandering God’s people and His Word. It is logical that this opposition would be false, for it is engineered by the devil, whom Jesus called “a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). The slanderous attacks on the church today are a manifestation of the age-old conflict between truth and error.

Because Jesus is truth (John 14:6) and Satan is everything that opposes truth, it is inevitable that there is an ongoing conflict between them and between their disciples. Although Christians are the disciples of Christ by choice, many of the followers of Satan are disciples unwittingly. We are either for or against Christ (Luke 9:50). There is no neutrality in this war.

The story is told of a man in America’s Civil War who wanted to befriend both sides, the north and the south. He sewed the Stars and the Stripes, the flag of the north, to the back of the Confederate flag, the flag of the south. Living on a hill with the double-faced flag flying high, both sides could see their flag. He was fine until the wind changed directions. Then both sides shot at him.

II. ANTIDOTE—FAITH

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 states, “Faith is the antidote for skepticism.”

An antidote must be stronger than the toxin it neutralizes. Clearly, faith is much stronger than the skepticism it overpowers. Doubt is no match for faith. When we believe in God with all our heart, doubt is powerless to intervene. “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). Only when we open the door to doubt do we compromise the power of the antidote.

Although there are poisons for which there is no antidote, there is an antidote for all the doubt and skepticism in the world—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A heart that wholly believes in Jesus Christ has no capacity for doubt and skepticism regarding spiritual matters.

For antidotes of poison to be effective, they generally have to be administered within a limited time frame. For example, poisonous snake or spider bites require an antidote as soon as possible. Waiting can be fatal.

Although the antidote of faith should be administered as soon as possible, it is still effective long after the poison of error has been snuffed out. Many people come to God after living a life of sin for years, but faith is still effective to overcome all their past actions of skepticism and doubt.

A. Comes by Preaching

“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14).

We hear the Word of the Lord preached, and faith is born. How does this happen? As an anecdote from a friend inspires us to action, a story from the Word stirs us to respond. Simply, if God did something for someone in the Bible who prayed and believed the Lord, surely He will do something for us when we also pray and believe. Since He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and if He responded to prayer and faith in the Scriptures, why would He not do the same for us today? “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Since faith is necessary for anyone to be saved (Hebrews 11:6), and since faith comes by hearing the Word of God preached, a preacher is an integral part of the salvation formula. We should respect those who bring the Word of the Lord to us. This is also why the Word admonishes us to “obey them that

have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

We should never underestimate the power of God’s Word. Whether it is preached by a preacher, taught by a teacher, shared by a co-worker, sung by a singer, or read on a sign, it has life-giving power. Many have seen John 3:16 signs displayed at major venues or the “Jesus Saves” signs along highways. These signs may be obnoxious to unbelievers, but they are still powerful in the message of life they present.

We should never underestimate the power of God’s Word.

Many early Pentecostal pioneers painted messages on their automobiles to tell people about Jesus. John W. Rucks, an early pioneer of Pentecost in Arkansas and Oklahoma, painted “Jesus Is Coming Soon, Acts 2:4” on his car. His family told how some men in a field working as he passed by saw the sign, ran to where he stopped nearby, and exclaimed, “Wow, we thought that said, “Jesus Is Coming Soon, Oct. 24.”

B. Produces Appropriate Actions

“Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20).

James stated three times within ten verses in James 2, “Faith without works is dead.” Genuine faith produces works. Believing anything generally precipitates a response. Faith is no exception to this principle. When we believe, we act upon that belief.

Although Martin Luther questioned whether the Book of James should be part of the holy canon, C. I. Scofield states, “To suppose that James 2:14-26 is a polemic against Paul’s doctrine of justification is absurd. Neither Galatians nor Romans was yet written” (*Scofield Bible Notes*).

By grace we are saved through faith, and it is not of works according to Ephesians 2:8-9. However, verse 10 states, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." God expects works to emanate from the lives of those who experience redemption. God told the church at Sardis, "I have not found thy works perfect before God" (Revelation 3:2). Concerning those who die in the Lord, He said, "Their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23). Obeying the commandments of Jesus Christ are not actions of human works. When the Word of God says, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), it is commanding an obedient response, not human works. The only work involved in water baptism in Jesus' name is done by the minister who baptizes, not the candidate for baptism.

What kind of a relationship would married couples have if love was all talk and no action. When we tell someone we love them, our actions validate that love. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). When we really love anything or anyone, love precipitates action.

C. Produces Results

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17-18).

The first sign or result of faith mentioned in Mark 16:17-18 is that they shall "cast out devils." Faith produces results in overcoming Satan. Not only is Satan powerless against the name of Jesus and faith in that name, but all of Satan's works, including skepticism and doubt, are rendered ineffective.

Skepticism and doubt have to flee when faith in Jesus Christ is enacted, and Satan and his demons also have to flee when we believe and command them to leave. There are many incidents in the Scriptures of demons being cast out of people. Many individuals have witnessed demons being cast out at the invocation of the name of Jesus.

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues first was witnessed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The passage goes on to mention, "They shall speak with new tongues." Critics would like for people to believe this is referring to the new tongue that born-again Christians receive along with a new way of thinking. But the term "tongues" is translated from a Greek term meaning "languages." This is one of the wonderful signs that follows believers.

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues first was witnessed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). In subsequent chapters of Acts (10, 11, 19) the same phenomenon was experienced as believers believed on Him. This same experience has been enjoyed by untold numbers of people over the centuries when they believed, repented, and received the Holy Spirit.

The next two signs, taking up deadly serpents and drinking anything deadly, refer to the accidental occurrence of these two situations. The sign is the promise, "It shall not hurt them." We must not tempt the Lord by deliberately picking up poisonous snakes or drinking poisons. In Acts 28:3-5, when Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake, he did not deliberately pick it up. As he was gathering wood, the viper bit him. According to the Word, "He shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm."

The family of John W. Rucks tells of a man running to the altar and repenting loudly in an early brush arbor revival. He said, "Brother Rucks, I now know you are a man of God and God is real. I put strychnine, a deadly poison, in your milk in the well house several days ago. Your family should be dead by now." They drank a deadly thing, and it did not hurt them.

The last sign mentioned in this passage is, "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." James 5:14-15 speaks of

anointing the sick with oil, “and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.”

Anointing with oil and praying for the sick is as scriptural as any of the other commands and promises in the Bible. Many people have been healed as they were anointed and prayed for in the name of Jesus. These healings are either instantaneous or developmental; they either occur at the point of prayer or they take awhile to come about. Anointing with oil and praying for the sick is biblical and rewarding.

D. The Means of Divine Blessings

Faith is the means of a myriad of divine blessings from healing the sick in James 5:15 to II Timothy 3:15 where we are made “wise unto salvation through faith.” Not only is faith “counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5), but we enjoy “propitiation through faith” (Romans 3:25). We are sanctified (Acts 26:18) and justified (Romans 3:28) by faith. Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Ephesians 3:17), and “by faith we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). We “receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:14), which represents access by faith into God’s grace (Romans 5:2), making us “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). We are “established in the faith” (Acts 16:5) and we “live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 quotes Psalm 68:19.

These divine blessings are just the beginning of innumerable benefits effected by faith. “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits” (Psalm 68:19).

E. The Supreme Battle

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life” (I Timothy 6:12).

Madison Square Garden, the premier music and sporting venue in New York City, has been the scene of many famous fights. However, a fight that has meant much more to eternity began on earth in the Garden of Eden—the supreme battle between good and evil. That battle continues even now with Satan battling against every believer. This battle actually began in Heaven as Lucifer rebelled against

God, and God cast him and his followers out. When we become Christians, we join that battle on the side of God, which makes us enemies of His enemies. For this reason we have to fight the good fight of faith.

We see this metaphor played out in II Timothy 2:3-4: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”

As a soldier of Jesus Christ involved in this epic war, we are given the needed armor from our “loins girt about with truth” to the “breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14). Our feet are “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” as we wield the “shield of faith” and put on the “helmet of salvation” (Ephesians 6:15-17). Our most important piece of equipment is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

As a soldier of Jesus Christ, we are given the needed armor to fight the good fight of faith.

All of this armor of God is necessary because “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

F. The Supreme Victory

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (I John 5:4).

A warrior has one objective in mind while fighting—victory. This is why he fights. Perhaps a small minority of soldiers in the world fight for other reasons or for money as mercenary soldiers. But for the majority, victory is the ultimate goal.

History reveals some extended conflicts such as the “Three Hundred and Thirty Five

Years' War" between the Netherlands and the Isles of Scilly. (Interestingly, though it was waged for over 335 years, the war had no casualties.) However, the longest conflict of all time is as old as creation, reaching all the way to Heaven.

After fighting against evil to maintain righteousness, believers will get to enjoy ultimate victory when Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:10) while we are rejoicing at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9).

When Satan tempts you to be skeptical and doubtful, have faith in the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Internalizing the Message

The end-time attitude of skepticism is rampant in our world today. Many unbelievers in this generation are largely faithless, perverted, and slanderous. This condition exists because Satan has launched an all-out offensive to try to defeat righteousness and the church. Skepticism and doubt are the ingredients that fuel the machine that seeks to destroy everything good.

We can thank God we have an antidote against skepticism—faith in the Almighty. Faith, which comes by preaching, produces appropriate actions and results. It is the means

of divine blessings. Therefore we are not left vulnerable to this world's insidious attacks. Faith will save, protect, and keep us secure in Christ Jesus.

We also have armor that God has provided for us. According to Ephesians 6:12-17, we have everything we need to protect ourselves "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." We have our "loins girt about with truth" and have on "the breastplate of righteousness" (Ephesians 6:14). We also have our "feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace," "the shield of faith . . . and . . . the helmet of salvation" with the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:15-17).

All of this enables us to fight in the supreme battle between good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, which will culminate one day in the battle of all battles, Armageddon (Revelation 16:14). Fighting with the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be completely confident we will enjoy the supreme victory in the end (Revelation 19:11-16).

When Satan tempts you to be skeptical and doubtful, have faith in the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy victory. You will overcome and be supremely rewarded. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21).

REFLECTIONS

- Define skepticism. Discuss.
- Discuss ways the enemy is slandering the church and trying to defeat believers.
- What is the effective antidote against skepticism? Discuss.
- How does one obtain faith? Discuss.
- Discuss how we can have faith amid a world of skepticism.

8

week of
04.20.14

Flee amid Temptation

Lesson Text

Matthew 24:12-13

12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Genesis 39:7-12

7 And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.
8 But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;

9 There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

10 And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

11 And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within.

12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.

Luke 21:34-36

34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Focus Thought

Dealing with end-time attitudes will require spiritual instincts of both fight and flight; fleeing all temptation will sustain those who are spiritually cleansed.

Focus Verse

II Timothy 3:5

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

The Power of No

by Rex Deckard

While visiting Longfellow Elementary School in Oakland, California, in 1982, Nancy Reagan was asked by a schoolgirl what to do if she was offered drugs. The First Lady responded by saying, "Just say no." In a short time, there was a full-fledged campaign called "Just Say No." Mrs. Reagan traveled throughout the United States and several other nations, totaling over 250,000 miles, appeared on dozens of television programs, spoke to the United Nations, and even invited the wives of thirty heads of states to join her in the initiative. Eventually, the mantra "Just Say No" came to apply not only to drugs but a host of other social ills such as pre-marital sex, gambling, and peer pressure.

The definition of no includes "used to express refusal, denial, disbelief, emphasis, or disagreement" (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Many common idioms and phrases incorporate this powerful word, such as "no big deal," "no if, ands, or buts," "to no avail," "all bark and no bite," "no excuses," "no boundaries," "all talk and no action," and dozens of others.

In a sin-saturated society, the Christian must have clear positions defined before the temptation ever comes. Trying to decide in the midst of temptation is fraught with potential disaster. It is critical to weigh the costs well before the enticement comes and already have a response waiting—just say no.

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE— ALLURING TEMPTATION

- A. The Widening Sanctification Gap
- B. The Stress of the Worldly Culture on the Church

II. ANTIDOTE—FLEE

- A. Need Spiritual Discernment
- B. Need Courage and Tenacity to Stand for Right
- C. Need an Eternal Focus
- D. Need a Spiritual Lifestyle

attractive packages. He knows if he presented sin as it really is, nobody would be interested. Consequently, he has mastered deception.

Fine restaurants have specialists who are trained in food presentation, which is defined as "the art of modifying, processing, arranging, or decorating food to enhance its aesthetic appeal." In the same sense, Satan does not serve food, but sin, and he knows how to make it look as attractive as possible.

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

"For we are not ignorant of his devices" (II Corinthians 2:11).

In Ephesians 6:11, the *New Century Version* uses the word "tricks" where the *King James Version* uses "wiles"; and *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible uses "sly ways" in II Corinthians 2:11 instead of "devices" found in the *King James Version*. Sin is not a matter to trifle with. Peter warned, "The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8).

Satan's enticements challenge believers to choose between good and evil, and whether or not to partake. Believers have to make this decision on the basis of their measure of spiritual maturity in Christ Jesus. Further, they have to make the decision for themselves; nobody can make it for them. Paul wrote to the believers in

Contemplating the Topic

Constantly surrounded by the temptations of life, believers live continually amid temptation. How we respond to the temptations we face determines our level of victory or defeat. From the temptation in the Garden to the present time, the full gamut of Satan's enticements have tempted believers of every age. As isolated from the world as Christians may try to be, they still live in the midst of an ungodly world.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says, "Satan presents his evil wares wrapped in attractive packages."

Satan is a salesperson of the underworld who presents his evil wares wrapped in

Philippi, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

Believers have to choose between fighting or fleeing. To stand and fight is sometimes the right thing to do. Other times it is best to flee. Therefore we need spiritual discernment to be able to determine which response is best.

There is an end-time attitude of alluring temptation that believers must face today. Worldly culture places stress on the church, which results in temptations for individuals endeavoring to serve Jesus Christ.

In spite of temptations on every hand, it is encouraging to know there is an antidote for temptation—to flee. To some individuals it may seem an oversimplification simply to flee, but it is not. When temptation comes, a believer should depart from it with haste. Flee! If it is not a situation that calls for the believer to fight or resist, he should just run. Flee amid temptation.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—ALLURING TEMPTATION

Believers today do not just face temptation; they face alluring temptation. *Alluring* means “very tempting.” Satan knows he has only a short time, and he is doing his best to defeat believers totally by bombarding them with enormous temptations.

Satan enhances the allurement of sin with everything he can muster. He dresses up evil and masquerades sin to make it look good and appealing. If Satan offered sin in its real state, people would not be as interested.

Many people have seen ads of the “Marlboro Man,” a macho-looking western-dressed man on a horse, who advertised cigarettes for Marlboro for a number of years. Unfortunately, he died of throat cancer from smoking. Marlboro never advertises that. They want people to see the alluring side of their product.

Alcoholic beverage companies do not show the results of alcohol such as crushed automobiles, diseased bodies, broken families, and deaths. If people could always see the results of sin, they would not be as anxious to partake. “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15).

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it

was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6).

When Satan told Eve her eyes would be opened and she and Adam would be as gods, she saw the tree and its forbidden fruit differently. Being tempted in her pride, she partook and suffered the consequences. She not only suffered, but sin passed on to the whole human race. (See Romans 5:19.)

In spite of temptations on every hand, it is encouraging to know there is an antidote for temptation—to flee.

Sin always looks better in Satan’s showcase than it does when it has done its work on individuals. Salvation, however, does not always attract the masses, for God lets people know up front what they are getting into.

“And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:38-39).

Although living for God is the greatest life to live, it is not always an easy road. However, with all its obstacles, the Christian life is still an easier road than the life of sin. The Bible warns of the difficult path of the wicked. “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isaiah 57:20-21). “But the way of transgressors is hard” (Proverbs 13:15).

A. The Widening Sanctification Gap

In the 1970s, author Richard Lovelace apparently coined the term “sanctification gap,” which offers the idea of a widening distance between the culture of the world and the values

and principles of the church. Obviously, this distance is not shrinking, but it continues to become wider as we draw nearer the coming of the Lord. Many things once considered to be worldly, and far removed from the lives of individuals trying to hold to morality and integrity, are now much more evident among some individuals who profess to be Christians. The deviant lifestyles, worldly dress styles, and filthy language of the street have come dressed in alluring costumes of acceptability to many classrooms, homes, and businesses.

With the world becoming more wicked, culture is bringing pressure to bear upon believers. People do not have to draw nearer to biblical principles for the sanctification gap to widen; that occurs with the culture moving farther away from biblical truth. What sometimes appears as a shrinking of the distance between the culture and the church is really a widening gap, for the Apostolic church consistently resists this spiritual deterioration.

Acceptability is one of the key words in this metamorphosis. What used to be frowned upon as evil by many people often is accepted as the norm now. What used to be socially unacceptable among the population at large now is considered politically correct behavior. This dynamic shift is characteristic of an attitude change from morality to immorality, from good to bad. These changes partially fulfill Jesus' prophecy that in the last days "iniquity shall abound" (Matthew 24:12).

B. The Stress of the Worldly Culture on the Church

"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:34-36).

It seems everything happening in the world has an effect on the church. It appears that the move by the world away from godly, biblical beliefs and behaviors entices some individuals associated with the church and, consequently, places pressures and stress upon Christian believers.

It is not only sinful behaviors like carousing or drunkenness that affect individuals and put stress upon the church, however. The cares and concerns of modern life can create stressful situations as well. These situations can cause believers to become so busy with life that they neglect church attendance, prayer, and Bible reading. Without yielding to temptation to violate biblical principles, struggling believers can fail the Lord by neglecting the things that would keep them strong.

Satan uses social acceptability to break down resistance to sin and bring sinful behavior out into the open. Lifestyles that used to be frowned upon and not accepted by the general public are now accepted by many people. For instance, having a baby out of wedlock or living together without marriage vows once were looked upon with disfavor, but now they are commonly accepted by the culture at large. Homosexuality once was recognized as a practice condemned by the Scriptures, but now many people appear to defend it and tout it as an acceptable behavior and lifestyle. Still, the Bible explicitly condemns such immorality. (See I Corinthians 6:9; 7:2.)

Raising a family in such a permissive society subjects the believer to a lot of stress. Working on a job where immorality is considered chic and employees are involved with each other in affairs is stressful on a believer. Being a student in a classroom where deviant lifestyles are defended produces stress in a pure-hearted Christian. Living in a non-Christian home while trying to live for God is stressful. Parents and friends often cannot understand why the believer will not participate in their ungodly activities. "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (I Peter 4:4).

II. ANTIDOTE—FLEE

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 lists four biblical commands to flee.

The Word of God contains at least four commands to flee:

1. "Flee fornication" (I Corinthians 6:18).
2. "Flee from idolatry" (I Corinthians 10:14).
3. "Flee also youthful lusts" (II Timothy 2:22).
4. "Flee these things" (I Timothy 6:11).

No antidote for temptation is more simple, to the point, and effective than for the one

tempted to flee. There are other solutions to temptation, but fleeing is often the most effective.

North American culture would have us to think that if challenged to a fight one should never back down—that running away is cowardly. Many individuals have suffered bruising defeat rather than to be thought of as a coward. However one may handle facing physical confrontation, spiritual preservation often dictates walking if not running away from a fight.

Spiritual preservation definitely dictates running away from temptation. Some individuals may try to outsmart and defeat the tempter, but the Bible commands us to flee temptation. *Flee* is translated from a Greek term meaning “to run away.”

The story of Joseph in the Old Testament is a classic example of fleeing temptation (Genesis 39:7-12).

“And it came to pass after these things, that his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master’s wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; there is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her; to lie by her; or to be with her. And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out” (Genesis 39:7-12).

In the Genesis 39 narrative, Joseph refused the advances of Potiphar’s wife and tried to reason with her that he could not violate the trust his master had placed in him. When she began to force the issue, she caught his garment, and said, “Lie with me.” Joseph fled from her advance and from temptation. Although she lied to her husband and caused Joseph to lose his job and to be thrown into prison, he did not lose his relationship with God.

A. Need Spiritual Discernment

Every believer needs spiritual discernment to be able to recognize the attacks of Satan. A person first must determine whether a circumstance presents a temptation or not. As simple as this sounds, it is not meaningless. For a believer to fail to recognize the present danger of temptation places him in serious spiritual jeopardy.

Christians need to be able to see through the glitter and facade with which Satan camouflages sin.

Every believer also needs spiritual discernment to know whether to fight or flee. Some challenges require fighting or resisting, which causes the devil to flee (James 4:7). However, other times call for one to flee rather than resist. We must not try to resist if fleeing is best. Obviously, spiritual discernment is necessary to make such a determination.

Christians need to be able to see through the glitter and facade with which Satan camouflages sin. II Corinthians 11:13-15 reveals Satan’s ability to disguise himself or a temptation.

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

B. Need Courage and Tenacity to Stand for Right

The easiest way to fall to temptation is to make no effort to stand against it. Standing against temptation requires courage and tenacity. Standing for that which is right

requires one to resist the efforts of Satan to pull everyone downward. Spiritual energy is necessary, for it gives a believer strength to stand against wrong when the crowd is flowing with the popular trend. When the popular thing to do is not the right thing to do, it takes tenacity to hold on to righteousness.

Moses provided a classic example of courage and tenacity to do right. "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward" (Hebrews 11:25-26).

The Bible is replete with stories of courage exhibited by people in the face of temptation. The prophet Nathan told David, "Thou art the man," revealing the king's sin (II Samuel 12:7). How tempting would it have been for Nathan to overlook the king's failure rather than risk the king's displeasure and the possibility of being banished? How tempting would it have been for John the Baptist to look the other way and be silent about the sin of Herod? (Matthew 14:3-4). How tempting would it have been for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow down to the image and escape the fiery furnace? (Daniel 3:16-18). Perhaps they could have just stooped and not really bowed, but their integrity would not permit them to compromise their faithfulness to the one true God.

*We should not worry
about people thinking
of us as cowards if by
fleeing we can maintain
our integrity.*

It is better to flee and be thought a coward than to stay, partake, and be a loser. Our spiritual victory must be a result of our Christian principles. Otherwise, defeat will result from our carnal pride. We should not worry about people thinking of us as cowards if by fleeing we can maintain our integrity.

C. Need an Eternal Focus

*"Set your affection on things above,
not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).*

The most effective way to flee temptation is to have an eternal focus. By focusing on Heaven, earthly things will grow dim. By focusing on an object in the distance, we barely see that which is in our peripheral vision. The more we focus on Heaven, the less we are distracted by temptation.

*"And Jesus said unto him, No man,
having put his hand to the plough,
and looking back, is fit for the king-
dom of God" (Luke 9:62).*

A wise old preacher once said, "Keep your nose and your toes in the same direction." With our hands on the plow and our feet moving forward, we need to always look forward. We will always go wherever we are looking.

*"Let thine eyes look right on, and
let thine eyelids look straight before
thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and
let all thy ways be established. Turn
not to the right hand nor to the left:
remove thy foot from evil" (Proverbs
4:25-27).*

A focus on a goal beyond the immediate effort and activity always acts as an incentive. Whether a person is in school and envisioning graduation, working on a job while planning a summer vacation, or building a house and seeing it finished, the goal acts as encouragement to continue to the end. It also helps to enable a person to overlook some of the difficulties and obstacles along the way.

Even Jesus used this concept to make real His goal of eternal salvation for us. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). Let us, therefore, keep our eye on the eternal goal of personal salvation and endure whatever we have to go through. Jesus promised, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

D. Need a Spiritual Lifestyle

When space exploration first began, rockets would leave the earth's atmosphere and enter outer space for only a few seconds or

minutes and would then reenter our atmosphere. It was quite awhile before NASA was able to launch a vehicle that could maintain a sustained orbit around the earth in outer space. This is similar to many people's experience with God. They leave the carnal atmosphere momentarily only to soon return to their worldly habits, allowing the gravity of the world to bring them back down.

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 states, "A spiritual lifestyle is an orbit that is maintained well above the carnal atmosphere of this world."

A spiritual lifestyle is an orbit that is maintained well above the carnal atmosphere of this world. At this level sin no longer controls the individual. These are the heavenly places to which Paul referred in Ephesians 1:3.

With a spiritual lifestyle it is much easier to flee temptation, for there is something better to run to. If an individual does not know God, he has no refuge. When temptation comes, the sin to which it beckons is no different in quality than the sin in which he is living. But when a believer is tempted, he has the name of the Lord to run to for shelter. "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10).

Internalizing the Message

Much like Israel in Canaan being surrounded by idolatry, believers live in a world where they are surrounded by sin. They experience temptation daily. But as Israel maintained its spiritual identity, at least for awhile, believers today also are able to retain their relationship with Jesus Christ. Students in a humanistic environment can maintain their godly

beliefs. Employees working among an immoral work force can retain their purity. People living in homes where God is not honored can keep their relationship with the Lord.

Often, believers need to flee when temptation comes, but sometimes they need to stand up and fight, resisting the accuser of the brethren. However, spiritual discernment is necessary for one to be able to differentiate between the different situations. We may flee at times, but God also has enabled us to be spiritual warriors who are able to deflect the fiery darts of the wicked one and fight the good fight of faith (I Timothy 6:12).

We have a very effective antidote for temptation—fleeing. Some animals, like the gazelle, are not gifted fighters, but they are swift runners and are able, with bursts of speed up to sixty miles per hour, to outrun many other animals. Believers are not only equipped to fight and are effective fighters, but they can run. Whether the circumstance calls for us to resist or flee, in every situation we need to be renewed by the Spirit of God.

"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

REFLECTIONS

- Define *alluring*. Discuss.
- What is the "widening sanctification gap"? Discuss.
- Discuss how the degenerating worldly system affects and attempts to influence the church.
- What is the antidote for temptation?
- How does an eternal focus help a believer to overcome temptation? Discuss.
- Discuss how living a spiritual lifestyle helps a believer to overcome temptation.

Love Jesus amid Persecution

9
week of
04.27.14

Lesson Text

Matthew 24:6-14

6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

Luke 21:17-19

17 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

18 But there shall not an hair of your head perish.

19 In your patience possess ye your souls.

Focus Thought

Especially in the end times, the righteous will suffer persecution; however, a steadfast love for Jesus Christ will keep God's child through every attack.

Focus Verse

Matthew 24:4

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

Persecution: The Blessing Nobody Wants

by Rex Deckard

*“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”
(Matthew 5:10).*

Multiplied thousands lost their lives in the first three hundred years of Christianity. In fact, martyrdom had become so common in the second century that some Christians questioned their own faith because they had not been martyred. But today, many Christians still face persecution and torture that is just as great. While people in America may complain about the temperature of the thermostat, the volume of the sound system, or the hectic church calendar, some Christians in other places are still being put to death for their faith.

In the Sudan, thousands have been massacred by Muslim armies. In Indonesia, churches have been burned and untold numbers of Christians have been murdered. According to the Open Doors Organization, “100 million Christians around the globe are currently suffering persecution for their faith. Most often persecution takes the form of imprisonment, abuse, and hostilities. In some cases, however, Christians are asked to face more than scorn, prison, or the loss of health—they are asked to face death” (“Christian Martyrs in Today’s World,” www.opendoorsusa.org).

John Hanford notes, “On a worldwide basis, Christians are the most persecuted major religion in terms of direct punishment for practicing religious activities—public worship, evangelism, charity” (*Christianity Today*, “Tortured for Christ—and Ignored,” March 4, 1996).

In America Christians are not yet suffering physical persecution for our faith, but it has become both acceptable and fashionable to ridicule and taunt Christians in the media, politics, and other areas of society, which is often the precursor to physical persecution in societies. As the coming of the Lord draws nigh, persecution may come to every doorstep, but in Heaven we will rejoice for eternity.

I. END-TIME ATTITUDES—LIFE STRESSES AND PRESSURES

- A. Anger
- B. Hatred

II. NECESSITY OF PERSECUTION

- A. Hated of All Nations
- B. Hated for Jesus’ Name

III. EFFECTS OF PERSECUTION

- A. Persecution Solidifies
- B. Persecution Scatters
- C. Persecution Fosters Revival
- D. Persecution Prepares

IV. ANTIDOTE—LOVE FOR JESUS CHRIST

are quick to label the latter as people who have a “persecution complex.” Whether we consider a person’s complaint of “persecution” to be legitimate in every circumstance or not, persecution is real. *Persecution* is “cruel or unfair treatment or harassment over a long period of time.” Although people may be persecuted for various reasons, in this lesson we will deal primarily with the real persecution of believers because of their stand for the gospel.

Persecution of believers is not new. It has existed from the early days of mankind to present-day people who uphold righteousness and have been persecuted for their beliefs. We may not be personally aware of any persecutions that resemble the ones recorded in *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, but various levels of persecution do occur in many parts of the world. As long as there is right and wrong, there will be persecution against those who stand for that which is right. It is the normal response of those who choose to align themselves with error to persecute those who align themselves with righteousness.

Contemplating the Topic

*“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”
(II Timothy 3:12).*

No one likes to be persecuted, and most people do not care to be around individuals who feel they are being persecuted. Many people

Regardless of persecution they may suffer, believers can choose to love Jesus Christ amid persecution. Persecution challenges the very constitution of an individual, but nothing can turn aside a person's true devotion for Jesus, for it is a special kind of committed love—agape love. Religiosity may generate a measure of shallow affection, but it does not produce this special kind of committed love, which is deep and genuine. Committed love does not remove offenses, but it makes them more tolerable.

Committed love does not ignore sin, gloss over iniquity, or make offenses against us less painful. However, this measure of love enables us to work in a sinful environment at a factory or office without allowing offenses to damage our relationship with Jesus Christ. It empowers us to live peaceably with a mate who is not serving the Lord. We do not live as monks in monasteries, completely insulated from the world's unrighteousness. However, we can live righteously in an unrighteous world.

The stresses and pressures of life often cause passions such as anger and hatred to flare. Believers also have to deal with these pressures, but the Holy Spirit helps believers to handle them. God knows we are human, but He expects us to allow His Spirit to control our passions.

Jesus foretold of persecution. He said we would be betrayed and hated (Luke 21:16-17). He also said we would be hated for His name (Matthew 24:9).

Persecution often solidifies a true believer's faith, scatters believers to spread the gospel, prepares Christians to experience revival, and actually fosters revival. Persecution of the church has usually precipitated revival. This phenomenon clearly appears in the Scriptures.

The antidote for persecution is loving Jesus Christ. There is something about genuine love, especially love for Jesus, that changes the paradigm. With love we can tolerate the intolerable. We can love the unlovable. We can forgive the unforgivable. Thank God for His love and our love for Him.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDES—LIFE STRESSES AND PRESSURES

Anger and hatred are integral passions of the human makeup. These responses often occur when stresses and pressures of life are made to bear upon an individual. For instance,

in family relationships, situations sometimes contribute to such responses—financial difficulty, job loss, divorce, disease, and death, to mention only a few.

Unfortunately, some people direct a lot of anger and hatred these days toward believers. Angry people often look for others upon whom they can vent their passions. Since Christians are different in their dress, speech, and lifestyle, angry people may make them targets for their expressions of anger. They cannot understand them, and they often feel condemned because of believers' positive lives and examples, so believers become easy targets.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says, "We need cool heads and compassionate hearts when those around us are losing their composure and melting down."

Believers must not let these stressful times pull them into this caldron of vented feelings. We need cool heads and compassionate hearts when those around us are losing their composure and melting down, manifestations of vented anger.

A. Anger

"Be ye angry, and sin not" (Ephesians 4:26).

When we read Ephesians 4:26, we should recognize that Paul is not commanding us to be angry. However, Paul knew that anger is a component of the human response mechanism. Knowing there would be flashes of anger, God inspired Paul to caution believers to keep this dangerous emotion in check. The emphasis in this verse is on maintaining control to the extent of not committing sin when angry. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to avoid becoming angry occasionally, even believers. Anger often comes without warning. Someone says or does something that triggers a sudden emotional response.

The key is for Christians to maintain self-control so they may exhibit the proper response when flares of anger arise. Simply stated, when Christians experience anger, they should avoid allowing their passion to cause them to commit sin. They should not do or say anything that fails to reflect Christian virtue and grace.

In *The Genesee Diary* Henri J. M. Nouwen wrote, "Anger often reveals how you feel and think about yourself and how important you have made your own ideas and insight. When God becomes again the center and when you can pull yourself with all your wholeness in front of Him, you might be able to take some distance and allow your anger to ebb away and pray again."

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31).

In Ephesians 4:31, the word "wrath" is translated from the Greek word *thumos*, which means "hot anger, passion." The dictionary defines *wrath* as "extreme anger." If we do not bridle our anger, it has a tendency to manifest itself with more intensity, which is wrath. When people get mad enough to kill another human, it is because they become consumed with wrath. Of all people, Christians should govern their anger so they do not become guilty of that which wrath could cause them to do.

B. Hatred

Although the word *hatred* occurs in the *King James Version* of the Bible eighteen times, it occurs only once in the New Testament. (However, the same Greek word appears in Romans 8:7, although it is translated "enmity" in that verse.) Its occurrence in Galatians 5:20 appears in a list of seventeen works of the flesh. The term *hate* also appears numerous times in the Bible.

The hatred directed toward believers is a result of the spirit of the age. Since God is love (I John 4:8), the spirit of antichrist opposes God's people through hatred. Consequently, it is not unusual for the church to experience persecution in these last days. This persecution occurs in many forms. Sometimes it may be resentment manifested through frowns and grimaces. Other times it may take a more abusive form such as that which is manifested through rebukes, challenges, and insults. At times through the history of the church, and in some nations today, believers have suffered or are suffering physical persecution in its most extreme forms through torture or death.

Although hatred is the major motivation of the persecution against believers, we must not let this spirit affect us. Conversely, the Word of God instructs us to do good to those who

hate us. The Bible challenges believers to be like the Lord Jesus in this regard.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:43-44).

Love is the first of the nine virtues listed as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Love counteracts hatred, which Paul listed as the seventh work of the flesh recorded in Galatians 5:19-21. As believers, we must not allow the flesh to dictate our responses toward others.

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

Love counteracts hatred.

II. NECESSITY OF PERSECUTION

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12).

Believers should not think it strange when they suffer persecution. They encounter persecution for several reasons. First, Jesus said we would suffer persecution (Matthew 24:9; Luke 21:12, 16-17). Paul said the same thing (II Timothy 3:12). Believers are also persecuted because persecution manifests the age-old conflict between good and evil. However, persecution has a unique way of not only spreading the Word of God, but also developing believers spiritually.

"But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is

not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matthew 10:23-25).

A. Hated of All Nations

"Ye shall be hated of all nations" (Matthew 24:9).

The term *nations* in Matthew 24:9 is translated from a Greek term meaning "nationality, nations, ethnicities, peoples." Does this verse mean that everyone in every nation will hate Christians? No. The *New Century Version* renders this phrase, "Then people . . . will hate you because you believe in me." In other words, many people in many nations will hate believers because of their belief in Jesus.

B. Hated for Jesus' Name

"Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (Luke 21:17).

Hatred for people who associate themselves with the name of Jesus Christ is a normal response from those who are motivated by the spirit of antichrist. Satan hates Jesus Christ. Likewise, sinners are individuals who are yielding themselves to Satan who influences them to hate Christians. This hatred often manifests itself as various forms of persecution.

Another aspect to consider about Luke 21:17 is that individuals who strongly believe there are three separate and distinct persons in the godhead often have little tolerance for those who embrace the Oneness concept of the godhead and who celebrate the saving name of Jesus Christ. Because Oneness believers stress the necessity of the name of Jesus Christ in water baptism, those who do not embrace that truth often are critical of those who do. This criticism sometimes may take the form of persecution.

III. EFFECTS OF PERSECUTION

Persecution is not pleasant. However, as unpleasant as it is, persecution accomplishes some good things.

Transparency 2 lists four positive effects of persecution.

A. Persecution Solidifies

Only individuals who are sure of their faith in Jesus Christ will continue faithfully when persecution comes. As a result, persecution serves either to solidify a believer's faith or to cause him to recant his faith. In this sense persecution serves to solidify and strengthen a believer's faith. When the winds of persecution buffet a believer, like an oak tree with deep roots that strongly grip the soil, the believer holds more tightly to the principles of righteousness.

The best way to get more sugar or flour into a canister is to shake it. This removes the spaces between the granules and causes the substance to fit more tightly in the container. Perhaps we all have "air bubbles" and "spaces" in our belief systems that persecution helps to remove, making us more solid and genuine. In this way persecution solidifies us. Nothing will take the air out of pride like persecution.

God accused Ephraim of being "a cake not turned" (Hosea 7:8). In Bible times cakes were baked on an open fire. Because of the heat being only on one side, the cake would bake only halfway through. This necessitated the cake's being turned. A cake not turned would be a cake that was dough on one side and cake on the other. God wants us to be consistent—the same all the way through. This is actually the idea of the word *integrity*.

B. Persecution Scatters

"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. . . . Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:1, 4).

When wild animals brush up against seed-bearing stalks and carry the ensnared seeds to other fields where they fall off, germinate, and multiply, they are spreading the plant to new places. The only other factor that contributes as well to scattering seed is

the wind that blows seeds to new places of germination.

Persecution unwittingly becomes one of the most successful components of spreading the gospel. Much like the passing animals and the wandering wind, persecution causes the seeds of the gospel to be sown in other fields of the world.

Persecution fails as a “fire extinguisher,” but serves more like bellows to increase the intensity and dimensions of revival fire.

C. Persecution Fosters Revival

Obviously, the goal of persecution often is to curtail or limit the gospel, but it usually has the opposite effect. Trying to put out the fire of revival scatters the glowing embers. Whenever they land, they start a new fire. Thank the Lord that persecution fails as a “fire extinguisher,” but serves more like bellows to increase the intensity and dimensions of revival fire.

Following the martyrdom of Stephen, there was great persecution against the church at Jerusalem. Believers were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). When Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them, revival broke out with healing and exorcisms. People were also baptized and filled with the Holy Ghost when the apostles laid hands on them. (See Acts 8:5-17.)

Historically, persecution has fostered revival. America was settled by people fleeing religious persecution in Europe. Many of the new churches in the colonies were members of groups from Europe who had been severely persecuted. Therefore they fled to the colonies. This caused a religious fervor that spread the gospel not only to the new colonies

but to remote areas as these new immigrants began to migrate west.

D. Persecution Prepares

When people live in a sleepy age in which comfortable lifestyles rock individuals to sleep, it requires a strong jolt to awaken them. Persecution is the kind of jolt that will awaken, stir, and prepare believers for the coming of the Lord.

Prepare means “to make something ready.” Although we should all live anticipating the return of the Lord, not all believers do. It is so easy to allow the cares of life to preoccupy us with so many things that we too often neglect the necessary matters.

Persecution can act as a wake-up call—sometimes a very harsh one. Persecution awakens drowsy Christians to the realization of their weak spiritual condition. In such a condition, carnal people are not ready for the Rapture. Although this awakening often is rude and uncomfortable, it can help careless Christians see their need to prepare for eternity.

IV. ANTIDOTE—LOVE FOR JESUS CHRIST

The strongest, most effective antidote for any problem is to love Jesus Christ. This antidote of love works because when we love the Lord with all our heart, we belong to Him, and He takes care of His own.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Corinthians 10:13).

In I Corinthians 10:13, there are at least four points to consider concerning persecution. First, consider the temptation itself. *Temptation* is translated from a Greek word meaning, among other things, “trial.” A temptation is a trial; therefore individuals often consider the trials that come their way as persecution. Temptation is a common experience to all mankind, so believers should not think it strange when they suffer temptation, which could possibly come in the form of persecution.

Second, I Corinthians 10:13 provides a note of encouragement. “[He] will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.” Many individuals have observed that God “will not

put more on you than you can bear.” This is true, for He knows our limitations, and it certainly applies also to situations of persecution.

Third, Paul assured the Corinthians that with the temptation God also would provide a way to escape. Some individuals read the word “escape” in this verse and wrongly think it means they will not have to go through the temptation. However, a person should carefully read the rest of the verse. The escape is not a route of avoidance, but one of endurance.

Fourth, Paul wrote, “That ye may be able to bear it.” The escape involves the believer’s God-empowered ability to bear the temptation. God gives us abilities we would not have otherwise. The gift of perseverance He gives in the midst of a trial creates for the believer the ability to go through the trial victoriously.

Internalizing the Message

Often persecution is perceived to be a negative experience. However, Jesus said we would be hated of all nations for His name’s sake (Luke 21:17), so clearly, persecution is something every believer should prepare to face. Paul stated in II Timothy 3:12, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

Although we do not enjoy persecution, it has its positive effects. Persecution often solidifies a true believer’s faith, scatters believers to spread the gospel, prepares Christians to experience revival, and actually fosters revival. Examples from Scripture and history chronicle these results.

In the midst of hatred and persecution, we have an antidote—loving Jesus Christ. Love, which is as strong as death (Song of Solomon 8:6), provides special divine empowerment that enables us to overcome every circumstance, trial, and persecution.

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 states, “If we can love God in spite of circumstances, people, and conditions, we can be victorious through all things.”

Perhaps our greatest challenge as Christians is to love the Lord regardless of who is around

us and regardless of what they may have done or are doing to us. Simply, if we can love God in spite of circumstances, people, and conditions, we can be victorious through all things, including persecution.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned” (Song of Solomon 8:7).

Although severe persecution has not knocked on the door of every believer, it has visited countless believers over the centuries. Further, it has arrived in varying degrees of severity. While some have been tortured unmercifully or killed, others have suffered only verbal abuse. Hebrews gives a list of many of the various degrees of persecution.

“Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Hebrews 11:35-37).

Regardless of the degree of persecution or suffering, we can love Jesus and remain faithful to Him. We can suffer persecution, stay saved, and endure to the end. All of this is possible because of His divine empowerment that enables us to love Jesus amid persecution.

REFLECTIONS

- Life stresses and pressures cause what two passions to manifest in some individuals? Discuss.
- Does the Bible tell us to be angry? Discuss.
- What prophecies predict the reality of persecution? Discuss.
- Discuss four effects of persecution upon believers.
- What antidote delivers believers out of persecution? Discuss.

10
week of
05.04.14

Be Filled with the Spirit amid Carnality

Lesson Text

Romans 8:1-13

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Focus Thought

In the end times, carnality will consume hearts and minds of all kinds of people; however, the saints of God will remain filled with God's Spirit and live in victory.

Focus Verse

Ephesians 5:18

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.

To Be Full of the Spirit

by Richard M. Davis

In her teaching article titled “What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?” author Rosemary Bardsley observed, “The Bible never uses the term ‘the fullness of the Spirit’ . . . the New Testament refers several times to the life lived under the control and direction of the Spirit of God as being ‘full of the Holy Spirit,’ or ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ . . . the selection criteria for deacons in Acts 6:3 required that the men chosen must be ‘*known to be full of the Spirit*’; Stephen is described as ‘*full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*’; Stephen, Barnabas and some disciples are described as being ‘*full of the Holy Spirit*’; . . . and we are commanded to be ‘*filled with the Holy Spirit*’ (Ephesians 5:18).

“In each of these references either the adjective *pleres* (full) or the verb *pleroo* (fill) is used. Whenever a verbal form is used it has a continuous tense. Thus all of these references indicate a continuity of the condition of being full of the Spirit. . . . it indicates and requires an on-going, sustained influence of the Spirit in the human life. . . . a life lived submissive to the Spirit of God” (<http://www.godswordforyou.com>, accessed March 12, 2013).

Individuals fill their lives with many things, but apostolic believers should fill their lives with the Spirit of the Lord and His passions. If we are full of the Spirit and we fill our lives with His influence, passion, and pursuits, there will be no room for carnality, which serves only our human desires. Let us be full of the Holy Ghost!

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—CARNALITY

II. ANTIDOTE—BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

- A. Degrees of Spirituality
- B. Be Filled

III. HOW TO REMAIN FULL OF THE SPIRIT

- A. Walk in the Spirit
- B. Pray in the Spirit
- C. Live in the Spirit

Contemplating the Topic

When people make statements such as “He is full of mischief,” it is an admission that people can take on attitudes not part of their original makeup. Simply, we are not sealed containers. We can be filled with physical things such as food and water, and we also can be filled with other non-physical things. We have a capacity to appreciate and value physical things, and we also have a capacity to appreciate and value spiritual or figurative things. Peter reminded us of this ability in his second letter: “Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (II Peter 1:5-7).

Not only can we add virtues, but we can add the Spirit of God to our lives by receiving the Holy Ghost. God designed us with a capacity

to receive the Spirit; therefore, as we are able to ingest food and water or to absorb ideas and knowledge, we can be filled with the Spirit of God.

Sadly, the Holy Spirit is not the only entity wanting and waiting to fill us. Competing with the Spirit for our allegiances, interests, and desires is the human characteristic of carnality. Carnal attitudes will control part of our lives if we give them opportunity. Throughout life, Satan is ever ready to spew the sewage of worldliness into the lives of believers.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says, “It is our responsibility to make the right choices of what we will allow into our lives.”

Let us consider some of the good and bad things vying for our attention in this world and waiting to fill us. It is our responsibility to make the right choices of what we will allow into our lives. The Scriptures command us to be filled with good things, and especially to be filled with the Spirit of God.

Further, the antidote to carnality is being filled with the Holy Spirit. Carnality and being filled with the Spirit are incompatible. By receiving the Holy Ghost into our lives, we become “partakers of the divine nature” of Christ

(II Peter 1:4). Living in and by the Holy Ghost is the only way to avoid becoming carnal. However, if a person becomes carnal, it indicates his failure to continue to walk after the Spirit and spiritual things. Rather, that person is walking according to the desire of his carnal flesh. The believer must resist this prevalent attitude of the end times.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—CARNALITY

To understand the term *carnality* in this lesson, we need to know the meaning of the root word. *Carnal* is translated from a Greek word that has a wide range of meanings from the soft tissues of a creature to sinful nature. It is often translated “flesh.” However, as always, the context in which the word is used is key to its meaning. Flesh is not always bad. After all, God made humans, and the image of His handiwork resides in all humans.

The attitude of the end times is one of carnality—continually seeking to satisfy lustful desires. This is in conjunction with the perilous times spoken of by Paul. “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (II Timothy 3:13). Jesus prophesied that in the last days “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12). This attitude has morphed into a spirit that permeates the hearts and minds of all those not maintaining a spiritual walk with the Lord.

As we approach the soon coming of the Lord, people are controlled more and more by the appetites of their flesh. They are being governed by carnality.

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”
(I Corinthians 3:1-4).

I Corinthians 3:1-4 introduces an interesting insight into the spiritual status of the Corinthian believers. Paul referred to these

believers as carnal, “even as . . . babes in Christ.” Evidently, it is possible to be carnal and still be in Christ. When this condition occurs, it means an individual is born again but is yielding more to the flesh than to the Spirit. This is a dangerous condition, but there is hope for those who are carnal. Although carnality is a condition to guard against, it is not equivalent to reprobation. Reprobation is final; carnality is correctable.

The writer of Hebrews expounded on the subject of the diet of the carnal that Paul mentioned in the verses above.

“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:11-14).

When we are full of the Spirit of God, there is no room for anything else, including carnality.

II. ANTIDOTE—BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

The Scriptures command us to be filled with the Spirit. When a container is full of liquid, it has no more capacity to contain more substance. When anything is full, it is holding as much as possible. In similar fashion, when we are full of the Spirit of God, there is no room

for anything else, including carnality. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is the perfect antidote for carnality.

Unfortunately, believers sometimes allow their flesh to take liberties that are incompatible with the Spirit, which reflects carnality. This does not mean they have lost the Spirit of God. The Spirit is still there, but the flesh has raised up and refused to be subject to the Spirit within. When the disciples were sleeping while Jesus was praying in the Garden just prior to His arrest, Jesus said, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 pictures a water faucet filling a container with water and states, “To prevent carnality, we must be full of the Spirit.”

To prevent carnality we must be full of the Spirit. This antidote is the only way to avoid our fleshly desires rebelling against the Spirit’s leadership within us. We can be filled with the Spirit and thereby keep carnality in check. May we always stay full of the Holy Ghost!

If a person often experiences the rise of carnality within, it suggests something is draining the fullness of the Spirit from him. The Scriptures are clear that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (II Corinthians 4:7). Therefore, we know the fault does not rest with the Spirit of God; it is the fault of the imperfect vessel. Or consider the metaphor of evaporation: a vessel full of water eventually will evaporate. This idea would suggest that if we fail to give regular attention to our relationship with God through worship, Bible reading, and church attendance, the Holy Spirit will gradually diminish in its effective leadership within our vessel. As evaporation of water is caused by the sun, so the hot beams of this sinful world that radiate on believers daily will cause their relationship with Christ to shrivel if left unattended. This should challenge all Spirit-filled believers to keep the spiritual gauge always on full.

A. Degrees of Spirituality

It seems there are different degrees of spirituality. When the Scripture commands us to be filled with the Spirit, is it implying it may be possible to be less than full of the Spirit?

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were

assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

Although Acts 4:31 states, “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost,” they had initially received the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). After the disciples assembled together and reported to one another the persecution they all had encountered (Acts 4:23), they proceeded to have a prayer meeting in which “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 4:31). This seems to imply we can be filled and re-filled with the Spirit, or that the status of the Spirit within us depends on our continual, regular relationship with Him through renewal.

If a person often experiences the rise of carnality within, it suggests something is draining the fullness of the Spirit from him.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about being renewed in the Spirit. “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (II Corinthians 4:16). Receiving the Spirit is wonderful, but we must continually be renewed in our relationship with Him, which is contingent upon our submission and responses to Him.

The use of the term *fervent* with regard to prayer (James 5:16), love (I Peter 4:8), and spirit (Romans 12:11) suggests the idea of degrees. There appears to be degrees of spirituality that are associated with an individual believer’s fervency for God. This also suggests varying degrees of a person’s relationship with the Holy Spirit based on his fervency and responsiveness to the Spirit’s leading in his life.

B. Be Filled

What a commandment Paul gave when he commanded the Ephesians to be filled with

the Spirit! (See Ephesians 5:18.) His words were not a suggestion, but emphatic. Jesus told His disciples to receive the Holy Ghost (John 20:22). Further, on the Day of Pentecost Peter was emphatic when he said, “ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Paul revealed the reason for the emphasis of their words in his epistle to the believers in Rome: “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9). It is essential that we have the Holy Ghost within.

Not only do the Scriptures command believers to be filled with the Spirit, but there is a further implication: stay filled with the Spirit. We are to have an ongoing and fervent relationship with Jesus Christ that maintains our connection to Him through His resident Spirit in our lives.

“To be filled” conveys the idea there is no room for anything else. When we receive the Holy Ghost, He fills us completely with His Spirit and leaves no room for other dimensions or endeavors of spirituality. God expects believers to maintain the fullness of His Spirit within, not trying to supplement His presence with other spiritual interests or curiosities. Several Scriptures in the Book of Acts refer to men full of the Holy Ghost. (See Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24.)

III. HOW TO REMAIN FULL OF THE SPIRIT

If the Lord commands believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit and expects them to maintain the fullness of the Spirit in their lives, we need to learn how to do this. If it were not possible to remain full of the Spirit, the Word of God would not instruct us to do so. The Word contains helpful instructions on maintaining a close relationship with the Spirit.

A. Walk in the Spirit

Living for God often is referred to as walking with the Lord. This metaphor of walking, however, suggests more than only mobility; it has more to do with *how* we move. “In him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). In other words, as we move through life, our living should be centered around and focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. Further, it is not about how slow or fast we move; the Scriptures speak to us of walking, running, and flying. (See Isaiah 40:31.) But more important than the mode or speed of movement with God is that we are moving “with God.” He is our pilot and guide; He leads us as we live our lives for Him.

Physically, we walk by taking one step at a time, which we should apply in principle to our spiritual walk with the Lord. Many believers get discouraged when they are not able to accomplish more than they envision. Some individuals focus so much on tomorrow they stumble over the responsibilities of today.

*As we move through life,
our living should be
centered around and
focused on the Lord
Jesus Christ.*

In living our lives for the Lord, He always allows us to see just beyond our next step. The scope of our vision should always exceed the stride of our walk. However, we always need to watch our step. The Bible says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105). God is letting us know the next step we need to take is lighted so we can see where to go. Still, He does not light the complete path of our journey. We need to take one step at a time and trust His continued guidance.

God led His people Israel in the wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). Although the pillar of fire at night was sufficient to light their camp, He did not light the whole Sinai peninsula. His night light was all they needed for each night.

Walking one step at a time suggests living one day at a time. We often concern ourselves with tomorrow instead of enjoying what the Lord has for us today. Jesus said, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:34). The *New International Version* says, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

B. Pray in the Spirit

Talking to an important person creates an elevated feeling of excitement in all of us. Those who have spoken to or shaken hands

with individuals of great renown sense the excitement in advance and probably even tell their friends.

If shaking hands with a celebrity causes us to feel excitement, what should talking to God accomplish in us? What a privilege! Few individuals get the chance to speak to prominent celebrity figures; however, everyone in the world has the opportunity to speak to the God of the universe anytime, day or night.

There are so many benefits we can derive from talking to God. Not only does it play a role in a person's salvation, but following redemption it enhances his life every day.

Everyone in the world has the opportunity to speak to the God of the universe anytime, day or night.

Believers can and should talk or pray to God daily through words of communication, but there is another dimension of prayer that is even deeper than only talking to God with words or thoughts. The Scriptures call it praying in the Spirit. When we pray in the Spirit, our spirit prays and communicates with the Spirit of the Almighty.

“For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful” (I Corinthians 14:14).

Praying in the Spirit usually involves praying in an unknown tongue (I Corinthians 14:14). However, sometimes it may not involve any spoken words at all; the Spirit may intercede through us by “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26). Although we do not understand the words coming out of our mouths, we understand our thoughts feeding those words. (See Romans 8:26-27.)

When we pray in the Spirit, we do not understand the words but we are receiving spiritual benefit. “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself” (I Corinthians 14:4).

Paul went on to say, “Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also” (I Corinthians 14:13-15).

There is a difference between an unknown tongue that a person may speak in his personal devotions and a message given in tongues for the edification of a local worship assembly, which is a manifestation of divers kinds of tongues mentioned in I Corinthians 12:10. (See also Hebrews 2:4.) The latter is a reference to one of the nine spiritual gifts given with the intention of interpretation that the entire body may be edified. The other is “the gift of the Holy Ghost” or the baptism with the Holy Ghost, which every believer receives upon spiritual conversion (Acts 2:38; I Corinthians 12:13). Following the new-birth experience, a person may be used by the Spirit to operate in the gifts of the Spirit, which are available to all believers according to I Corinthians 12 and 13.

C. Live in the Spirit

Although we are creatures of the dust and prisoners of the flesh, there are realms in which we can function that are different in quality than the basic existence of human flesh. For example, in *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes, the fictional character is Don Quixote who lives in an imaginary realm where windmills become giants in his mind. As he tilts with them, he does not see them as windmills. This is where we get the term *quixotic*, which means “foolishly impractical, especially in the pursuit of ideals.” In other words, it is imaginary.

Obviously, to be quixotic is impractical, but to live in a world where we accept nothing beyond what we are able to perceive with our eyes is shortsighted. There is a realm of living in the Spirit that transcends the human senses and understanding, a special state of existence where we realize we live by faith and the final outcome of every situation can be better than otherwise imagined.

Contrary to Don Quixote, Christians are not psychotic dreamers who refuse to accept reality and live in a world of delusions. They are realists who walk in a realm of faith believing that anything is possible with God.

Living in the Spirit is not a state of mind that can be achieved by will power or exercise of mind over matter. It is a result of being

born again of water and Spirit (John 3:3, 5). Living in the Spirit is a life that is entered by the new birth. By being born into the kingdom of God, we enter another kingdom or realm where God is first in our lives and anything is possible.

degrees of spirituality, so to avoid carnality we must be full of the Spirit, continually living in as close a relationship with the Lord as possible.

Transparency 3

Internalizing the Message

Transparency 3 shows a wooden bucket being filled with water and says, "To remain full of the Spirit, we are to walk in the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, and live in the Spirit."

There are two basic choices of relationship with the Lord. One is a spiritual relationship where we live and walk in the Spirit. The other is a carnal relationship where we live and walk after the flesh. We must choose between the two because there is no neutral position in this matter. According to Revelation 3:16, we must be either hot or cold or He will spew us out of His mouth.

There are actions every believer can take to be certain he remains full of the Spirit in the end times. We are to walk in the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, and live in the Spirit. By doing this, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh as carnal individuals. Rather, we will remain filled with the Spirit amid carnality.

To be lukewarm is to be carnal. Further, let every believer be aware that to choose the path of carnality is unwise "for to be carnally minded is death" (Romans 8:6).

REFLECTIONS

Carnality is a prevalent attitude of the end times, and it is a serious and sad state. This should not surprise us, for Jesus predicted, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). Paul also gave a serious warning in II Timothy 3:13: "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."

The antidote for carnality is for a person to be filled with the Spirit. There are different

- What is the end-time attitude of which we are warned in this lesson? Discuss.
- Discuss the definition of carnality.
- Is it possible to be carnal and yet in Christ? Discuss the danger of such a condition.
- Discuss the possibility of varying degrees of spirituality.
- What must a believer do to remain full of the Spirit amid a world filled with carnality? Discuss.

Be Faithful amid Fear and Doubt

11
week of
05.11.14

Happy mothers' day

Lesson Text

Luke 21:25-27

25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Hebrews 10:23-25

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Focus Thought

Faithlessness marks the age before Christ's coming. The Lord's bride will emerge as a faithful people who will reject fear and doubt.

Focus Verse

Hebrews 10:25

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Sin on Parade

by C. A. Brewer

Without question dramatic and disturbing events are taking place in today's society. It is not just that we hear of moral corruption in all levels of government or that Hollywood continues to spew out its filth. Of equal concern is that dishonest practices and sexual perversion are increasing, many forms of hardcore pornography are legal in most North American communities, and abortions have become commonplace.

Sin no longer slinks along in the dark alleys of our cities. It no longer has to hide its face for fear of public outcry or legal consequences. Sin, in fact, is on parade. It marches brazenly down our streets in gay parades. It invades homes and destroys marriages. Many new forms of immorality have been invited into the classrooms of most public schools and critically wound the youth.

We can throw up our hands and think nothing can be done. But rather than giving into fear and frustration, we must believe in God, who still sits upon the throne. Brave men and women have always had to stand against imposing odds and the high tides of sin. God told Joshua as he began his campaign to conquer Canaan, "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua 1:9).

I. END-TIME ATTITUDES—FEAR AND DOUBT

- A. Fear of Events
- B. Fear of the Unknown
- C. Doubt of God's Word

II. ANTIDOTE—FAITHFULNESS

- A. Derived from Faith
- B. Expressed in Consistent Living
- C. Rewarded in the End

Contemplating the Topic

Because faith is so essential to salvation, Satan does all he can to create doubt, the arch-enemy of faith. He knows believers must keep believing. Therefore if Satan can do anything to disturb that continuing process of faith, he will. To avoid Satan's darts of doubt we need to strengthen our belief system against such attacks and demonstrate faithfulness amid fear and doubt.

Doubt is just as evil and destructive as fear. With these two saboteurs of spirituality, Satan attacks believers to try to defeat and destroy them. When individuals allow fear to control them, they become powerless as Christians, for the source of believers' power is their faith.

Believers should not allow the thought of these kinds of attacks to discourage them because there is an antidote to fear and doubt—faith: "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Ephesians 6:16).

With unwavering faith in God, fear and doubt become ineffective and impotent. Further, faith enables believers to be faithful because faithfulness is derived from faith, expressed in consistent living and rewarded in the end. We can live victoriously in the end times and be faithful amid an atmosphere of fear and doubt.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDES—FEAR AND DOUBT

We live in an age of fear. There is a phobia for everything from ablutophobia, fear of bathing, to xenophobia, fear of foreigners. Because fears have been given labels, it troubles many people to consider the preponderance of fears and they believe they have more fears than people used to have. There is even phobophobia, which is fear of fear. Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his inaugural address, said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Fear is undoubtedly a major attitude of the end times.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 quotes Ephesians 6:16.

Doubt is the other end-time attitude we are considering in this lesson. *Doubt* is translated from a Greek word meaning “to stand in two ways.” In other words, it is to be double-minded about a matter. Doubt is damaging to a believer because it neutralizes his faith, and faith is necessary for a person to please the Lord. (See Hebrews 11:6.)

When fear and doubt join hands, their attacks can be devastating to Christians, especially new converts. Fear and doubt cause believers to question their experience, themselves, and even God. Even an established believer must withstand attacks of fear and doubt.

A. Fear of Events

“Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21:26).

For those who are under sin’s condemnation and not ready to meet the Lord, but who have some understanding of the coming events of the last days, there is an accompanying fear. These people know two things about this matter. They know they are not ready for such times. Also, they know perilous times are imminent. With this combination of condemning knowledge, individual’s hearts are failing them.

“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Not only are there scriptural events associated with the last days, but also there are events prophesied by would-be prophets that frighten the masses. These events, from dates advertised as the end of the world to catastrophes, become a part of the tapestry of apocalyptic prophecies by self-appointed seers. Satan uses these dire predictions to compound some people’s fear of coming events.

When a person has experienced the new birth, is living according to the Bible, and has

a spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ, he may not look forward to the events of the last days, but he does not fear them like a non-believer. Believers know that the last-day events, no matter how severe they will be, are only a prelude to eternity with Jesus Christ. Unbelievers, who have nothing to look forward to in eternity, naturally fear these events greatly.

According to statistics by Weill Cornell Department of Surgery, heart disease is America’s leading health problem and the leading cause of death. Unfortunately, fear is damaging not only to a person’s health in general but to the heart specifically. The saying “scared to death” can be literally true. Upon hearing of tragedy, many people suffer heart attacks.

It is interesting that the expression “giving their heart to the Lord” is often used when people come to the Lord in repentance. Further, the Scriptures instruct us to love the Lord with all our heart (Matthew 22:37). The heart is the focal point of surrender and service. When people are out of communion with God, some would say that “their heart is not right with God.” While these uses of the word *heart* are both literal and also representative of the central core of an individual, the physical heart of a person benefits or suffers when a person lives in communion with God or does not. It is understandable that the heart is the organ that signals the presence of extreme fear.

Speaking of the last days, Zechariah prophesied, “Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth” (Zechariah 14:12). Jesus spoke of coming wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes (Matthew 24:6-7). In his second epistle Peter wrote, “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (II Peter 3:10). There are many other frightful events prophesied in the Bible concerning the last days, but these alone are enough to strike fear in the heart of an unbeliever.

Various people and groups have advertised in relatively recent years several dates of the end of the world or apocalypse. Some undoubtedly have been well-meaning and others not so well-meaning. It would appear that Satan is inspiring these self-appointed apocalyptic prognosticators that he may strike more fear in the hearts of people. Paul warned of

these false prophets in his second epistle to the Thessalonians.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (II Thessalonians 2:1-3).

B. Fear of the Unknown

The world today tends to identify and label everything. Over the centuries people have occupied themselves with identifying and classifying everything from plants to rocks, from flowers to birds, from fish to soil. Anything man cannot identify he places in the category of the unknown.

There is something about the unknown that produces mystery and fear. From the Abominable Snowman or Sasquatch, to the Loch Ness monster, stories often produce a strange kind of fear in many people. Stories of the Bermuda Triangle and UFOs are two other unknowns that sometimes strike fear in the hearts of the unsaved.

A person whose faith is anchored totally in Jesus Christ has no fear.

Fears of the unknown are enough to cause a lot of people to be apprehensive. But the subject that produces more fear in some people is the unknown aspects concerning the hereafter. Such questions as “Is there life after death?” and if so, “Where?” torment the minds of many people. Although many skeptics do not believe in Hell, they wonder if there could be something to the beliefs of those weird evangelicals who believe in a literal burning Hell where the wicked go. Many of these topics may be unknown to unbelievers, but the Scriptures give us many of the answers.

There may be some things unknown about Heaven and Hell, things not addressed by the Scriptures, but believers in Christ Jesus do know they can trust in Him for they know Him. A person whose faith is anchored totally in Jesus Christ has no fear. He knows whatever happens in the future, God has his best interests at heart and God will take care of him.

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7).

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (I John 4:18).

When we receive the Holy Ghost, we receive peace. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Not only do we receive peace when we are born of the water and the Spirit, we receive love, for God is love (I John 4:8). “Perfect love casteth out fear” (I John 4:18).

C. Doubt of God’s Word

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (II Peter 3:3-4).

If the last days is a time of unprecedented doubt concerning God, how much more is it a time of doubt concerning His Word? To the skeptics the Bible is just another book. The respect for the Word of the Lord that past generations had seems to be a thing of the past. To many, it is just another book. To the child of God, however, it is the Word of the Lord.

“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right,

rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:7-9).

Believers are constantly bombarded both by Satan and by skeptics who challenge the validity of the Scriptures. Satan, who is not the sharpest cosmic entity, tells believers God and the Bible are not true. Apparently he does not realize if the Bible were not true and God did not exist, then he too would be a myth, for it is the Bible that authenticates Satan. It is interesting that Satan will tell a believer, “God is not real,” and then tell him later, “God does not love you.” The believer should ask Satan, “What God?” If there were no God, there would be no God to love us.

In spite of the ridiculous arguments submitted by Satan and skeptics to try to refute the validity of God’s Word, they shake many believers and tempt them to doubt. These attacks are more effective against new and inexperienced converts, for Satan knows his flimsy arguments against God and His Word will not stand the test of the knowledge of a child of God who knows his Bible. For this reason the Bible says, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

II. ANTIDOTE—FAITHFULNESS

In uncertain times people need to understand they have a certain God who has left an inspired Book that is accurate in foretelling the things that will come upon this world prior to the coming of the Lord. The Holy Bible tells us God is faithful (I Corinthians 10:13).

The antidote for fear and doubt is faithfulness. Because God is faithful, we can be faithful. It does not matter what skeptics and Satan use to attack; if we are faithful to the Lord, we have sufficient strength to resist and overcome.

A. Derived from Faith

The root word of the term “faithfulness” is “faith.” We can only be faithful if we have faith. Faith is fundamental in the believer’s response to God. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe” (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is the most basic requirement of salvation. We cannot be saved without faith.

If we will be faithful in all things concerning the Lord and His work, we will be rewarded accordingly. In the parable of the talents when the faithful servants came to their lord and reported they had doubled the talents given to them, their lord said to each, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21). Likewise, the one unfaithful servant was condemned.

If we will be faithful in all things concerning the Lord and His work, we will be rewarded accordingly.

B. Expressed in Consistent Living

If we have faith and are faithful to the Lord and His Word, we can survive in the midst of fear and doubt. This kind of faithfulness expresses itself in what could be called **four keys that will prevent backsliding**.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 lists four keys to prevent backsliding.

1. *Pray.* “Pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17) is a command so basic it should not have to be mentioned. Prayer is to our spiritual health what oxygen is to our physical being—essential. Prayer, which is simply talking to God, feeds every starved cell of our spiritual body. As “perfect love casteth out fear” (I John 4:18), perfect prayer strengthens us in casting out fear and doubt.

Were faithfulness to represent the bricks of our spiritual house, prayer would be the mortar. Without mortar the stability of the bricks is compromised. The building may stand, but it will not withstand any challenge to its stability.

How much should we pray each day? Some say an hour and others suggest a half hour. The Bible does not tell us how much we are to pray every day, but it does tell us to “pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17). “Pray

without ceasing” does not mean we are commanded to pray twenty-four hours every day, which is logistically impossible. It means we are not to stop praying or having a prayerful attitude. We should stay in an attitude of prayer and let it be a vital part of our daily existence. Praying each day is necessary to be faithful to the Lord.

When we get our first automobile driver’s license, friends ask, “Are you driving now?” When a person answers yes, it does not mean that the person is at that moment driving his car. Someone may ask an elderly driver if he is still driving. Again, if he answers in the affirmative, it only means he has not stopped driving. “Pray without ceasing” means we are not to stop praying. We may not be praying every moment of the day, but we are still praying.

Praying each day is necessary to be faithful to the Lord.

Prayer is not offered to us as a choice. The Scriptures command us to pray. If we are to survive as a Christian, we must pray. If we are to be faithful amid fear and doubt, we must pray.

2. *Read the Bible in daily devotion.* The Bible is the believer’s guide to God and everything about God. A Christian without the Bible is like a chef without a recipe, a conductor without a score, a mechanic without tools, a surgeon without a scalpel.

Many years ago an elder minister advised one man to read the Bible like he reads the daily newspaper. Implied in his advice was that there are several reading levels to the Bible. At one level we read more rapidly as we glean the main points. At another level we read with less rapidity and absorb more of the meaning. At the deepest level we read word for word, savoring each syllable and studying each implied nuance.

Every believer should read the Bible through regularly. With 1,189 chapters in the Bible, a person can read the Bible through in one year by reading just over three chapters every day. Reading four chapters each day will

enable one to read the Bible through in about ten months.

3. *Be faithful to church.*

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

A person sometimes says, “I do not have to attend church to be saved.” How many times have we heard people make an attempt to disassociate themselves from what they call “organized religion.” However, the Bible makes plain the necessity of church attendance.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:13-14).

If we cannot hear without a preacher, it would seem that associating with a truth-proclaiming assembly would be vital. Further, it is not enough to hear a preacher preach through media. The Bible instructs us not to forsake assembling together (Hebrews 10:25).

Faithfulness in church attendance involves going regularly to the services as one is able. Some people may only attend on limited occasions and consider themselves to be faithful church attenders.

Some individuals may complain they are so busy and have so much to do they are unable to attend faithfully, but we have more advantages today than ever before. In the early days of the twentieth-century Pentecostals, automobiles were rare and believers attended churches that generally lacked the comforts existing in churches today. Further, many early churches had numerous services every week and in revivals the people were usually in service every night. Believers today have no excuse for unfaithfulness in their church attendance.

4. *Testify to others.*

“And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Our witness to others is a key to our faithfulness. It is essential to our victory. “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11). When the fire of Pentecost burns brilliantly in our hearts, there is a strong desire to share it.

Our testimony does not have to be a lengthy commentary on our life or an exhaustive exegesis on apostolic doctrine. It may be a brief declaration concerning the goodness of Jesus Christ. However, it is vitally important that every believer share his faith in Christ.

C. Rewarded in the End

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 quotes a portion of Revelation 2:10.

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

God requires faithfulness. For a person to be rewarded in the end, he must be faithful unto the end. “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) is a fitting illustration of how our rewards for faithfulness will be handed out. There will be some who have sacrificed much for the kingdom of God who will be rewarded much. There will be others who have sacrificed and given some to the Lord’s work who will receive some reward. But there will be others who are like the man who was given one talent and he went and hid it in an effort to preserve it. As this one man received a rebuke from the master, so they will receive a rebuke from the Lord and will lose even what they have tried to preserve.

Although we are living in the end times, it is not the end. There is still time for us to do our best and be faithful in living for Jesus Christ and doing His work. We can be faithful amid fear and doubt.

Internalizing the Message

We are surrounded by fear and doubt. Inspired by the spirit of antichrist, this end-time attitude is manifesting itself as two components that are doing their best to destroy believers. Thankfully, we have an antidote to neutralize the attempts of Satan to distract and destroy us, which is faithfulness. A believer who has faith in Jesus Christ has the potential to be faithful to Him, which the Christian expresses by consistently living his life according to the Lord’s expectations. Further, the faithful will be rewarded in the end.

This end-time attitude of fear and doubt is manifesting itself in three major ways: fear of events; fear of the unknown; and doubt of God’s Word. Let us be aware of this two-dimensional, diabolical onslaught and brace ourselves to withstand it. Knowing beforehand the strategy of Satan helps us to prepare for his attacks.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss fear and doubt as end-time attitudes.
- What last-day events do many people fear because they are not ready to meet the Savior? Discuss.
- Discuss reasons why people often fear the unknown.
- Discuss the antidote that neutralizes the fear and doubt that attack believers.
- Discuss ways in which we can be faithful to God.

12
week of
05.18.14

**Live in Praise & Worship
amid Selfishness**

Lesson Text

Focus Thought

In the end times, selfishness will prevail in society and culture; however, the saints of God will discover complete victory as they live in praise and worship.

Revelation 22:8-10

8 And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.

9 Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

10 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.

John 20:24-31

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:

31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Focus Verse

Revelation 22:9

Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

Culture Connection

A Place in God

by C. A. Brewer

Often, as a new convert to the Pentecostal experience, I struggled with feelings of personal insecurity. But my home church was a worshiping church, and that little congregation had a way of touching the Lord even while singing in the early part of a service. An anointing would fall upon the people, and my spirit would be uplifted as we sang familiar choruses. One of the choruses I remember states,

*There is a place in God
Where rest is complete.
There is a place in God
Where we sit at His feet.
Earthly cares are all vanished;
All tears wiped away.
There is a place in God.
You can find it today.*

—Author Unknown

When we genuinely and wholeheartedly praise and worship the Lord, our spirits soar like eagles above a storm. People all around us may be filled with fear and worry. Evil behavior may seem to prevail. But there is a safe dwelling place for those who are lifting their hearts up to God. Our spirits are refreshed in these times of thanksgiving; our hopes are renewed in the knowledge that the Almighty controls it all.

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—SELFISHNESS

- A. A Self-Centered Age
- B. Iniquity Abounds
- C. Relationships Erode

II. ANTIDOTE—GIVE GOD HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE

- A. Eliminate Pride and Maintain a Heart of Humility
- B. Praise and Worship God

We have an antidote for selfishness. It is giving God His rightful place in our lives—on the throne of our heart. Believers should make Him first in their lives, eliminating pride and seeking to maintain a heart of humility. When we give God His rightful place and live with an attitude of praise and worship, we discover true victory amid selfishness.

Contemplating the Topic

Our world is afflicted with an epidemic of selfishness. The Scriptures call believers to praise and worship God, and even in the midst of this epidemic, they are to faithfully worship Him alone. Satan loves to motivate people to focus on themselves. As we witness the products of this self-centered age, we see iniquity abounding as relationships erode.

In the Garden, Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). What a selfless prayer! It was not “God the Son” praying to “God the Father”; deity does not have to pray. Rather, the Son of God—Christ in His humanity—was praying to deity. Jesus refused to surrender to the human will; rather, He surrendered to the divine will. Jesus Christ in the flesh was the model of unselfishness.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—SELFISHNESS

“For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (II Timothy 3:2-4).

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says, “No one teaches a baby to be selfish. It is a natural inclination deeply embedded in humankind.”

No one teaches a baby to be selfish. It is a natural inclination deeply embedded in humankind. When Adam and Eve sinned, the enormity of their sin sank into the basic fabric of humanity. David said, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). Paul said, "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Romans 5:19). As a result of sin, people are naturally selfish, for that is the nature of sin. Sadly, it seems this natural inclination to sin becomes stronger as mankind nears the end of the age. Paul wrote to Timothy, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (II Timothy 3:13).

A. A Self-Centered Age

When a person's focus is not centered on God, he becomes self-centered. This is the origin of selfishness. The worship of self replaces the worship of God. Not only has such worship created an attitude, but it has birthed a philosophy of life called humanism, "a system of thought that regards people as capable of using their intelligence to live their lives, rather than relying on religious belief" (*Oxford Dictionary of Current English*).

When our focus is on God, however, we think more of others and less of ourselves. We see more of Him rather than the problems around us. This means our focus is more on the answer to life's problems than on the question of life's problems, more on the solution than on the dilemma. This is in harmony with Paul's admonition: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).

*When our focus is on
God, we think more
of others and less of
ourselves.*

This self-centered age has given us such terms as *egotistical*, *egocentric*, and *egomaniacal*. These terms have to do with being excessively conceited and self-centered. The last term, *egomaniacal*, has to do with an obsessive concern with oneself. *Wikipedia*

defines *egomania* as "an obsessive preoccupation with one's self and applies to someone who follows their own ungoverned impulses and is possessed by delusions of personal greatness and feels a lack of appreciation. The condition is psychologically abnormal." The more people focus on themselves and worship the ego, the more this attitude manifests itself.

The father of self-centeredness is Satan. As one reads the scriptural account of Lucifer's attempted ascension and fall, he will notice Lucifer used the personal pronoun "I" five times in just two verses.

*"How art thou fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer; son of the morning! how art
thou cut down to the ground, which
didst weaken the nations! For thou
hast said in thine heart, I will ascend
into heaven, I will exalt my throne
above the stars of God: I will sit also
upon the mount of the congregation,
in the sides of the north: I will ascend
above the heights of the clouds; I will
be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be
brought down to hell, to the sides of
the pit" (Isaiah 14:12-15).*

Satan was first known as Lucifer, an angel in Heaven who enjoyed an enviable position in the celestial realm. Sadly, he became lifted up in pride and iniquity through selfishness. The Scriptures tell us of his excellence and remind us of what self-centeredness can do.

"Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O

covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more” (Ezekiel 28:13-19).

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). No one can ascend so high he cannot fall. If Lucifer could be expelled from Heaven because of pride, how serious pride is to those of us still seeking to make Heaven our eternal home. “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment . . . The Lord knoweth how to . . . reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (II Peter 2:4, 9). Let us humble ourselves and resist this self-destructing attitude that caused the fallen angels to lose their first estate and still causes people today to be lost.

*“Pride goeth before
destruction, and an
haughty spirit before a
fall” (Proverbs 16:18).*

B. Iniquity Abounds

“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12).

Iniquity is translated from a Greek word meaning, “against law.” When iniquity *abounds*, that is, “exists in large numbers,” lawlessness prevails. When individuals ignore God, they also ignore His law. When self sits on the throne of our heart, the individual emerges as a law unto himself.

It was iniquity found in Lucifer that effected his fall. (Ezekiel 28:15). We must be careful to squelch any feeling of lawlessness that manifests itself in our heart. To guard against this we must not yield to resentment of authority, secular or religious. “Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities” (Jude 8). The *New International Version* renders the *King James Version* words “despise dominion” in this verse as “reject authority.”

As proof of this end-time epidemic of iniquity-producing selfishness, many years ago in America and Canada, people were more conscious of the needs of their neighbors. People often helped each other. Neighbors gathered and helped another neighbor build a barn. In rural areas there was less crime. Perhaps this is a clue to part of the problem. When more people are concentrated in one area, there often is less concern for one’s neighbor. Consequently, a selfish culture has evolved in which every person cares primarily for himself.

As babies are born with an inclination toward selfishness, they also are born with a tendency to rebel. This is the iniquity, or lawlessness, that accompanies a sinful nature. “Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (I Samuel 15:23). This tendency is in all of us, therefore we must fight to suppress these responses and yield to God’s Spirit.

When the herds of Abraham and Lot increased and their workers could not get along, they agreed to separate so all could live peaceably. Abraham gave his nephew the choice of where he would like to live. Lot selfishly chose the best: the well-watered plain of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 13:10). These twin cities must have created quite an appealing metropolis, but they were exceptionally sinful. “The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly” (Genesis 13:13). *Halley’s Bible Handbook* states these cities of the plain could have had a population of up to five hundred thousand people.

We are seeing less and less dependence on God, His Word, and the church. *Gallup International* indicates that 41 percent of

American citizens report they regularly attend religious services, compared to 14 percent of French citizens, 10 percent of United Kingdom citizens, and 7.5 percent of Australian citizens. However, these numbers are open to dispute. *ReligiousTolerance.org* states: “Church attendance data in the United States has been checked against actual values using two different techniques. The true figures show that only about 21 percent of Americans and 10 percent of Canadians actually go to church one or more times a week.” The Word of God encourages us to be more faithful to church attendance as we see the day of the Lord approaching.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

C. Relationships Erode

Matthew 22:37-39 lays out the ideal pattern for relationships. There is a vertical relationship, which is loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. A horizontal relationship involves loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. Graphically, these relationships create a triangle—God, neighbors, ourselves. The triangle of relationships creates a dynamic that generates the energy of love. With this energy flowing between God, us, and our neighbors we enjoy a dynamic that neither Satan nor Hell can break or disrupt.

Unfortunately, when something breaks down in this triangle of love, it disturbs the dynamics and relationships erode. Without this reciprocal love, selfishness develops and leads to sin. Selfishness destroys the integrity of every relationship: God, family, business, community.

When we have the right relationship with God and our neighbors, not only do we enjoy the flow of fellowship, but it often establishes a relationship between God and our neighbors as well. Because the Old Testament matriarch Naomi had a great relationship with God and with her neighbor, Ruth, who was her Moabite daughter-in-law, a relationship developed between God and Ruth. She said, “Thy God [shall be] my God” (Ruth 1:16). Although witnessing is powerful, we often can cause people to be interested in God when we first have the right relationship with God and with them.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Selfishness always is a contributing factor in marriage relationships that falter. One of the members of the marriage decides to do something or to make a choice that does not consider the other member. Very little can be suggested as a reason for a failed marriage that does not include selfishness as its motive.

Whether a marriage relationship or any other relationship, selfishness always causes relationships to erode. A proper marriage relationship balances husband, wife, and God. Selfishness disturbs that balance.

II. ANTIDOTE—GIVE GOD HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE

Thankfully, we have a solution for eliminating the disruption and destruction of relationships: giving God His rightful place in our lives. Although many people do not want God in their lives, He is the most important part of a complete life. Without Him an individual suffers a deficiency whether he realizes it or not.

In the way a key ingredient is essential to a particular recipe, so Jesus is necessary for a fulfilled life. When Jesus is left out of a life, the same thing happens as leaving out a key ingredient from a recipe. He is not an item to be added if desired. He is the main ingredient of a wholesome life.

God’s rightful place is to be first in our lives. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). In the major decisions of life such as seeking employment, seeking a mate, getting married, buying a house, purchasing a car, retiring, or relocating, we need to pray for God’s will.

Even in the minor decisions every day we need to ask God to direct us. By putting Him first and giving Him His rightful place, we will be able to properly make both the major and minor decisions in life.

During the time of the kings, God began to deal strongly with His people Israel (II Kings 10:32). The sufferings of Israel occurred because they were not putting God in the proper place in their lives. When we fail to give God His rightful place in our lives, we suffer. A people can be a blessed people only when they put God first in their lives.

Marriage provides an excellent example of God’s blessing on a family depending on His

preeminent occupation in the couple's lives. When a couple chooses to join together in putting God first in their marriage, they will enjoy a blessed marriage and establish a godly atmosphere of righteousness in their home. Putting God first and giving Him His rightful place always produces benefits.

A. Eliminate Pride and Maintain a Heart of Humility

Giving God His rightful place in our lives creates completeness, which solves the root cause to many problems—selfishness. When a believer enthrones Jesus Christ in his heart and worships Him with all the heart, it is impossible to be selfish.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 pictures a throne and states, "There is no room on the throne of our heart for both self and the Savior; He refuses to share the throne with any other."

There is no room on the throne of our heart for both self and the Savior; He refuses to share the throne with any other.

Daily we must crucify our fleshly lusts and die to our selfish ambitions.

Because of mankind's inclination to be proud and self-centered, it is difficult for a person to be truly humble without God. Humility is an inward attitude of the heart, and the heart is the very core of a person, which is completely wicked without God (Jeremiah 17:9). Salvation is mankind's only hope of redemption, and God is the only source of salvation. Humankind cannot be saved apart from God. David said, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 61:2). Someone from a higher level must lift us to redeem us. Our fellow humans cannot lift us, for they exist on our same level and with the same need of redemption. We require a power that is above us to lift us higher, which is possible only through Jesus Christ.

Another sure antidote to pride is for a person to submit his fleshly inclinations to the Holy Spirit within. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24).

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Speaking of submitting his fleshly will to the eternal Spirit, Paul wrote, "I die daily" (I Corinthians 15:31). Daily we must crucify our fleshly lusts and die to our selfish ambitions.

B. Praise and Worship God

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 shows two swords and says, "Believers have in their spiritual arsenal two of the greatest weapons against Satan: praise and worship."

Believers have in their spiritual arsenal two of the greatest weapons to defeat anything Satan throws at them. Those weapons are praise and worship. When believers praise and worship the Lord they create an unstoppable, unbeatable dynamic, which positively affects them and the Lord and thwarts the attacks of Satan.

Consider the benefits reaped by the one who praises the Lord. When a person praises anything or anyone, he directs approval and admiration toward the recipient of his praise and may benefit in some way as a result. However, when anyone praises the Lord Jesus Christ, that person is blessed. Praising the Lord blesses Him, but it also blesses the one giving the worship.

The Lord raises the worshiper's spirits and increases his faith. When we praise the Lord, we magnify Him. There is no way we can make the Lord any bigger than He is. However, our praise does magnify our view or perception of Him.

God has called believers to praise and worship Him. When we praise and worship the Lord, we exalt Him, which lifts Him up so others can observe His glory. He is worthy

to be praised, and praising Him fulfills our purpose.

“Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion” (Psalm 65:1).

“Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 150:6).

Not only does praise and worship fulfill our calling as believers and elevate Jesus Christ before all the world, but it also negatively affects Satan. He has directly opposed God from the time of his rebellion and banishment from Heaven. Because of his pride, Satan desires the attention we give to God, and he does everything he can to hinder our praise and worship of the Lord.

Praise will raise us to heights of blessing, but pride will put us on a downward ride toward destruction.

Praise and worship of God also causes Satan great discomfort and effects his exit. He does not like to stay around people who are constantly praising the Lord. The atmosphere created by praise and worship is not conducive to satanic activity. For this reason King Saul often had David play his harp for him. “And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him” (1 Samuel 16:23). David’s worship of God quieted the evil spirits’ tormenting of Saul.

Our world does not value and respect our worship of God, but we should never allow the resistance of others to quiet our worshipful

spirits. As believers continually give praise and worship to their worthy Savior, they thwart the negative efforts of Satan and advance the purpose of the church. Despite the selfishness of our contemporary world, we can avoid the self-centeredness of the age and fulfill our calling by giving praise always to Jesus Christ.

Internalizing the Message

Selfishness is a prominent attitude of the end times. It has become the watchword of the age. Still, believers have the opportunity to live in continual praise and worship of God amid this epidemic of selfishness. This is a self-centered age in which iniquity abounds. Despite the encroaching lawlessness, however, we can be faithful to the Lord and worship Him in the midst of every circumstance.

Praise will raise us to heights of blessing, but pride will put us on a downward ride toward destruction. Pride takes individuals to places they never planned to go—all downward.

Selfishness, like the cascading water following a hard rain, erodes everything in its path. It negatively affects relationships and ultimately destroys them. A proper relationship must have balance, and the element that balances relationships is having a proper relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Only then can a person have a genuinely balanced relationship with others and overcome the destruction caused by selfishness.

The only way to fight the erosion caused by selfishness is to counter it through praising and worshiping God. By giving God His rightful place in our lives we can eliminate human pride, maintain a heart of humility, and live in praise and worship amid a world of selfishness.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss the end-time attitude of selfishness.
- Discuss the problems involved in being egocentric.
- What is iniquity? Discuss.
- What does selfishness do to relationships? Discuss.
- What is the antidote to selfishness? Discuss.

**Love People in a
Materialistic World**

13
week of
5.25.14

Lesson Text

Luke 17:26-36

26 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.

27 They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.

28 Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;

29 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

30 Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

31 In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.

32 Remember Lot's wife.

33 Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.

34 I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.

35 Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

36 Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Focus Thought

A spirit of materialism will consume many people in the end times; however, the saint of God will resist materialism's influence and love what God loves—people.

Focus Verses

Luke 17:28, 30

Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; . . . Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

Consumerism: An Investment with Low Returns

by Rex Deckard

People today have things that those a few decades ago would only have dreamed of—multiple cars in the garage, larger homes, gadgets for entertainment, exotic appliances, and a huge wardrobe. Families don't just eat out on special occasions but often several times a week, and the restaurants are more than just the corner café. Yet this increase in affluence has not been accompanied by an increase in satisfaction and happiness.

"Compared with their grandparents, today's young adults have grown up with much more affluence, slightly less happiness and much greater risk of depression and assorted social pathology," notes Hope College psychologist David G. Myers, PhD, *American Psychologist* (Vol. 55, No. 1). "Our becoming much better off over the last four decades has not been accompanied by one iota of increased subjective well-being."

Frequently the consequences of this phenomenon are disastrous as credit-card balances explode, and parents work overtime and take on extra jobs to pay for all the possessions. Family and church time fall by the wayside in order to purchase, play with, maintain, and pay for all the new goods.

Many psychologists believe the motivation behind consumerism is driven by feelings of insecurity. Marketing techniques are developed that focus on the desire to be prettier, healthier, have better relationships, and be part of the mainstream—all by spending more and acquiring more. There is debate as to whether materialism produces discontent, or discontent creates the drive for materialism. In reality, it appears to be a vicious cycle that never ends unless someone is able to completely step outside of it and evaluate the things in life that have eternal value.

The famous German poet Goethe said, "The things that matter most should never be at the mercy of the things that matter least."

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE—MATERIALISM

- A. As in the Days of Lot
- B. The Magnetic Pull of Materialism
- C. The Danger of Materialism
- D. The Cause of Materialism

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE PEOPLE

- A. Discover Christ's Passion and Share Your Resources
- B. Establish Relationships, Evangelize, and Disciple Others
- C. Build Community, Not Bigger Barns

Contemplating the Topic

Because we live in a physical world, our primary focus is naturally on the physical. Although in II Corinthians 4:18 Paul said we should look at things that are not seen and not at things that are seen, we often do the opposite. Paul went on to say that the things seen are temporal and the things not seen are eternal. A vision limited to temporal things causes individuals to be more materialistic. For this reason another predominant attitude of the age is materialism.

Believers should resist focusing on the temporal. We are to focus on the things not seen—the eternal. Only eternal things are lasting things. By focusing on the things we cannot see, we attach our heart to spiritual values. While endeavoring to resist the world's materialistic influence, we must not lose our love for materialistic people in the world. We are not to love the world or the things in the world (I John 2:15), but we are to love people. God loves the lost, and we are called to love them also. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The magnetic pull of materialism endangered Lot and his family in Sodom. Surrounded by the sinful influences of Sodom, they refused to separate themselves from the pervasive evil attitudes. By living in the midst of iniquity, iniquity affected them. As a result, Lot's family became victims of evil influences. The only thing that saved any of them was the urgent insistence of the angels that literally pulled them from the city prior to its destruction. Still, Lot's wife looked back and became

an eternal monument to the destruction of sinful influences. Materialism is a spiritual malady, and it has the same kind of influence on people.

Thankfully, there is an antidote for the evils of this world including materialism—loving what God loves, which is people. When we discover a Christian passion for the lost, we will share our resources, establish relationships, evangelize the lost, and disciple other believers. Such godly passion will lead us to build a better community, not bigger barns.

It is human nature not to like or associate with those who share views and live lifestyles diametrically opposed to ours. This inclination causes people to divide into networks of individuals who share similar views and lifestyles. But the love of God and people should neutralize this feeling toward others.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDE— MATERIALISM

Materialism is “preoccupation with or emphasis on material objects, comforts, and considerations, with a disinterest in or rejection of spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values.”

Materialism is definitely an attitude of the end times. Satan has succeeded in getting the masses to focus on the world around them—the physical—rather than on the world beyond them, the spiritual. Preoccupation with physical things has kept mankind from the reality of his eternal destiny. Materialism has created an epidemic of myopia, or shortsightedness.

“And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (II Peter 1:7-9).

Because attitude is a frame of mind, it is not difficult to conclude that materialistic people have been influenced in their way of thinking. This is the reason we need to love the Lord with all of our mind (Matthew 22:37). The mind guides our members and directs our actions. If our mind is not dedicated to the Lord, our thoughts will not be

right. When our thoughts are not right, our actions are not right.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 states, “Materialism causes individuals to focus on things instead of people.”

Materialism causes individuals to focus on things instead of people. And ultimately things do not really matter. Because the world promotes material products, advertisements trying to influence people to buy those products constantly bombard potential customers, which can produce a materialistic attitude. The very nature of the word *materialism* suggests an attitude with the wrong emphasis, or too much emphasis.

A. As in the Days of Lot

“Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:28-30).

When the herdsmen of Abram and Lot had conflict because their herds had increased, they agreed separation was the solution. Abram gave his nephew Lot first choice of where he and his herdsmen would live. (See Genesis 13:10-11.)

Lot’s choice of Sodom and Gomorrah would seem to reflect a carnal and materialistic attitude. Genesis 13:10 says, “The plain of Jordan . . . was well watered every where . . . even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt.” Apparently, it was not difficult for Lot to become comfortable in this wicked environment.

The evil influence on Lot’s thinking was evident in his strange response to the wicked men who came to the door and demanded to have immoral contact with the men (angels) who were guests in his house that night. Refusing the request, Lot offered them his daughters instead. Clearly, his thinking was warped by Sodom’s evil influence. As he should not have offered the male guests to the perverted intruders at the door, neither should he have offered his own daughters for the physical pleasure of these iniquitous men

(Genesis 19:5-8). The evils of Sodom had so polluted his mind he was unable to make a logical judgment.

Not only was Lot at home in Sodom, his family became comfortable there. They were so acclimated that when Lot went to his sons-in-law and daughters to warn them of the impending doom, “he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law” (Genesis 19:14). Materialism not only makes a person insensitive to spiritual things, it makes them oblivious to warnings of consequences. When things are going well, it seems improbable everything could change from good to bad that quickly. They were not only drunk with materialism, they were inebriated with complacency.

In Luke 17:28 Jesus mentioned six activities that had characterized the days of Noah, and all six were normal. They ate, drank, bought, sold, planted, and built. This was not a list of crimes or sins; these were normal activities, even responsibilities of normalcy. The sin lay not in the activities but in the overemphasis of these things to the exclusion of spiritual matters. Jesus went on to say, “Thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:30).

We are to function as normal human beings. God does not expect us to refrain from tending to the normal responsibilities of life. However, He expects us to be balanced in our activities so we do not overemphasize temporal concerns. Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

B. The Magnetic Pull of Materialism

With the strong warning of the angels still ringing in their ears to leave Sodom and to not look back, Lot’s wife turned and looked back. What made her do this? Was it a careless response or was it the magnetic pull of materialism? Her heart was drawn toward Sodom; therefore she deliberately looked back with regret and longing. Because she willfully violated God’s command, she suffered the awful consequences of His judgment (Genesis 19:26).

Materialism’s effective magnetism to humankind results from human nature. As creatures of the dust, we are strongly drawn toward concerns and interests of our physical makeup. However, mankind’s physical concerns are driven by carnality, and Satan plays on this aspect of human nature to entice us. We are not solely physical beings; we are a

combination of both the physical and spiritual, which makes materialism potentially deadly for our spirituality. The physical part of us desires material things, but the spiritual part of us desires spiritual things. To avoid becoming a casualty of the fleshly desires, we must feed our spiritual hunger with godly pursuits.

Some people are pulled downward by the magnetic allure of materialism. It is so subtle they may not even realize what is happening to them. We need to be ever vigilant to guard against the pull of our flesh toward materialistic attractions.

To avoid becoming a casualty of the fleshly desires, we must feed our spiritual hunger with godly pursuits.

Materialism never improves the lot of an individual or the status of a nation. Its downward pull always takes its victims to lower levels of existence. Because of their material wealth, some people may enjoy a higher standard of living compared to third-world countries. Their health, education, and finances may fare better, but a materialistic focus always drags people and countries down morally.

“Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6).

As materialism is always a bane, godliness is always a boon. Materialism costs; godliness pays. These results are not accidental. They represent two different directions and focuses in life—one toward God and the spiritual and the other toward Satan and the material.

C. The Danger of Materialism

Materialism is dangerous and intoxicating. It destroys its victims by desensitizing them to the extent they do not perceive things as they really are. A person drunk on materialism gets confused about values. Things that are supposed to be important lose their importance,

and they begin to perceive as important trivial things with little or no eternal value.

As their sense of values is inverted, so their spiritual vision becomes blurred. They do not see things as they really are. Having eyes to see, they see not (Mark 8:18). Therefore, they lose their way more easily and fail to discern the warning signs of pending destruction.

Because materialistic people have so many things surrounding them, it seems impossible that they lack anything they really need. Thus materialism creates a false sense of security.

Materialism in its early stages seems harmless. Its danger lies within its progressiveness. Materialism follows the pattern outlined in James 1:14-15: "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." First there is desire, then enticement. Following lust is the conception of lust, and then sin follows, which brings spiritual death. (See Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:14.)

Materialism causes its victims to make bad choices like Lot and his family, and it also causes its victims to make fatal decisions as in the case of Lot's wife who looked back and was judged by God (Genesis 19:26). The Word of God warns us to "remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32).

D. The Cause of Materialism

Pride and envy drive materialism; therefore selfishness and self-centeredness stand at the center of a materialistic person's heart. Materialism does not just happen; it is caused by natural, human inclinations toward carnality. Pride plays on our basic human carnality and leads us to focus on fleshly needs and desires instead of the spiritual.

Pride and envy drive materialism.

When Satan tempted Eve in the Garden, he appealed to her pride and enticed her with the promise, "Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for

food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (Genesis 3:5-6).

The urgings that eventually lead to materialism are legitimate, for God has given mankind the desire to better himself. The desires for self-improvement and achieving success are not bad in and of themselves. It is the distortion of these desires that creates materialism. In materialism a person loses a balanced focus on the true values of life, and he falls into a dangerous condition that has a history of destroying people, physically and spiritually.

II. ANTIDOTE—LOVE PEOPLE

Love is the world's panacea; it is the cure-all. God is love (I John 4:8), and God is everything we need. With God being love we have the antidote for materialism. It is love: love for God and love for that which God loves, people.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 says, "Loving God with all our heart and loving others as we love ourselves will produce happiness and fulfillment in our lives."

Loving God with all our heart and loving others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39) will produce happiness and fulfillment in our lives.

Loving people changes our focus from the meaningless to the meaningful, from things to people. With materialism the emphasis is on the temporal. When we love people, however, it is a focus on the eternal. Having our focus on eternal things lifts our vision to something greater and beyond ourselves and the objects we care about.

Since *materialism* is "preoccupation with material objects," the emphasis on objects causes materialistic people to ignore other people and their needs. The antidote for this condition is to focus on and love people. The closer to God we draw, the more love we experience for people because He loves them. With His love for people in our hearts, we develop more tolerance for their materialistic and humanistic lifestyles. This does not mean Christians appreciate or adopt their materialistic lifestyles; it means believers can love people in spite of their lifestyles.

When we love people, we tend to overlook their inconsistencies. "For charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8). As a loving

God realizes our imperfections but still loves us, and as a loving mother knows the faults of her children but continues loving them, so a loving Christian loves others despite their weaknesses.

When we love people, we tend to overlook their inconsistencies.

A. Discover Christ's Passion and Share Your Resources

"For God so loved the world, that he gave" (John 3:16).

God loved people so much He gave His life for their redemption. He loved souls so much he was willing to share His heavenly resources that the people might be saved.

When we begin to possess God's passion for the lost we also will be willing to share our resources and talents to reach out to the unsaved. Paul said, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Corinthians 9:22). Loving souls and reaching out to them is an unselfish gesture that involves whatever is necessary on our part. The Lord held back nothing in order to save us. If we are to share His passion for the lost, we will be willing to give what we can that they might live.

Because it is the nature of love to give, when we love God and people, we naturally want to give. Giving involves not only financial gifts but also other resources in the form of time and talents. It is not enough for us to give of our finances only. Some people give financially and try to hide behind their contributions, believing they are exempt from getting more deeply involved in helping others. John wrote, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:18). True love requires giving ourselves completely to the cause of God.

B. Establish Relationships, Evangelize, and Disciple Others

When we love people, it is not difficult to establish relationships with them. Love is not

only what causes us to reach out to others and establish relationships; it is the necessary adhesive that holds such relationships together. Loving Jesus with all of our heart and loving people opens many doors to others that otherwise remain closed. The less love we have for Jesus, the less love we have for others. Without His love we will not be able to effectively establish relationships, evangelize, or disciple others in biblical truths.

The love of God in our hearts and our love for others will cause us to evangelize those around us. Since the nature of love is to share, it should be easy for believers to share the gospel with others. The greatest gift believers can give is the gospel. The most effective method of sharing the gospel is to establish relationships with people. Our love for those souls should cause us to desire to disciple them for the Lord.

We need to disciple those whom we win to the Lord. To disciple someone involves a continuation of the process of establishing a relationship and evangelizing a soul, which is only made possible by love. When we really love people, however, we want to see them develop spiritually. It is not enough just to share the truth with them. They need mentoring after their conversion. This usually involves giving them more attention than at the time of their conversion. Not only did the Good Samaritan take care of the injured man's immediate needs, but he also said to the innkeeper, "Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee" (Luke 10:35).

C. Build Community, Not Bigger Barns

We can enjoy great musical compositions because gifted composers know how to put notes together in a melodic and harmonic pattern that results in a pleasant creation of music. Music is not a single note played over and over. The only way you can enjoy harmony in music is to have two or more notes being played or sung at the same time.

In much the same way, a community of people develops and enjoys one another. One person living alone does not comprise a community. There can be no harmony when the population of an area is one single individual. A hermit does not constitute a community. Harmony is possible only when two or more people live together or live as neighbors.

When we love the Lord with all of our heart and our neighbors as we love ourselves, we want to be with people. Isolation is never the

desire of a Christian. People who have trouble getting along with others and want to be isolated from everyone else are not letting the love of the Lord do what it is supposed to do in them. Human beings are naturally gregarious. They like to be with other human beings. How much more should we want to be with others when we have been born again to be like the Lord.

The love of God in our hearts and our love for others will cause us to evangelize those around us.

In a materialistic world people are more interested in themselves and their success. They are not interested in helping others. Their selfishness makes them want to be alone or with people of their own kind. Their mind is preoccupied with building bigger barns, not community; but it is a sad and lonely life. Further, it is not the life the Lord planned for His people.

Internalizing the Message

To internalize the message of this lesson, we need to focus on love. From loving God to loving people to loving ourselves is the path we should follow. When we are able to follow this path effectively, it is not difficult to love people in a materialistic world. Love makes all of the duties, responsibilities, and obligations of the Christian much easier.

Materialism is the complicating factor that has been added to the mix of the end times. Materialism, which is an end-time attitude, makes proper relationships more difficult, if not impossible. Although many believers find it difficult to love people in a materialistic world, it is our responsibility.

There is a magnetic pull to materialism in the world, which poses a great danger for believers. Consider the carnal response of Lot when he selfishly chose the well-watered plains of Sodom. The environment of Sodom had devastating effects on his family. He lost his sons-in-law in the judgment of God that destroyed those wicked cities of the plain. He lost his wife as she disobeyed the commandment of the Lord and turned back to look once more at Sodom. As if all this were not enough, he suffered the shame of fathering two sons by his two daughters as he lay in a drunken state.

As believers surrounded by materialism, we may often find it difficult to love its victims for selfishness goes hand in hand with an attitude of materialism. But that is our challenge. We are to discover Christ's passion and share our resources as we establish relationships, evangelize, and disciple others to Jesus Christ. If we do this, we will be successful in building a community instead of materialistically building bigger barns.

REFLECTIONS

- Define materialism. Discuss.
- Discuss examples of how the present day mirrors the time of Lot and Sodom.
- What is the cause of materialism? Discuss.
- What is the antidote for materialism? Discuss.
- After we establish a relationship with another and evangelize that person to Jesus Christ, what is the next necessary step? Discuss.

