

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 1: Why Do We Do the Things We Do?

1. The Free Moral Agency of Man

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

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

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

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

2. What Affects Our Choices?

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

Genetic predisposition is not to be ignored. While our technical knowledge of genetics has greatly increased, it has largely served to confirm what was formerly known by observation: Some children are born with the temperaments and tendencies of their parents already in place. Some are headstrong; others are compliant; some have a “short fuse”; others are passive; some are optimistic; others are anxious and fretful.

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

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

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

All of these influences seethe and swirl within our minds and are gradually forged into a mindset, a value system or a set of **attitudes** that define who we are as a person. We may camouflage our true selves by speaking or acting in a way different from our real attitudes, thus deceiving others (and perhaps ourselves). But our real identity is revealed more often than we know, and it is always seen by God.

3. Discovering Our Own Attitudes

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

One of the first problems we encounter is identifying what our *real* attitudes are. This requires two basic qualities: self-awareness and honesty. First, we must learn to study and evaluate ourselves.

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

“What do I think and why do I think it?”
“What are my basic desires?” “Why do I favor option A as opposed to option B?”
“What is my real motive?” These are un-

comfortable questions to ask ourselves because the answers may be less than flattering. We sometimes assign to our-selves higher motives than we deserve, and to preserve the illusion we hesitate to peer very deeply into our own soul.

Secondly, unless we are honest with ourselves, we will plow ahead through life with thoughts and attitudes

that God finds abominable even as we attend worship, read our Bibles, pray and speak religious lingo.

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

Heb 4:12-13 – The word of God (only the written remains) “*is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” Of “discerner” (Gk. *kritikos*) Vine says: “fit for, or skilled in, judging (Eng., critical), found in Heb. 4:12, of the Word of God ... i.e., discriminating and passing judgment on the thoughts and feelings” (Vol. 1, p. 315). A.T. Robertson comments, “Psychology is constantly changing its terminology” (Vol. 5, p. 363). How true; even the whole Freudian way of analyz-

ing the human mind is giving way to modern postulates and theories. But the Scriptures stand unchanged, a rock-solid testimony to the Maker's analysis of the human mind and motivations. The written word is the key to understanding ourselves.

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

4. Cultivating Godly Attitudes

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

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

Moses: Moses did not succumb to the trappings of Egyptian religion, power

and privilege. He *chose* to identify himself with the people of God and suffer whatever came with it (Heb 11:25).

Rahab: This woman was thoroughly steeped in Gentile religion and culture. Yet she realized something about the threatening nation amassing across the Jordan. Its God was different from the idols. Thus, in faith (Heb 11:31) Rahab abandoned idolatry and put her trust in Jehovah.

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

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

Paul: We only need to reflect briefly upon the great apostle to understand the power of free will. What he sacrificed and suffered for the sake of Christ

should silence once and for all those who claim that “society” is wholly responsible for the choices made by individuals.

5. What Really Matters?

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

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are

being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

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

Questions for Discussion

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

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 2: The Christian's Attitude Toward God

1. A Comprehensive View of God

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

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

2. God: Our Creator

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

Humility: *"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon*

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

Reverence: *"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth ... Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.*

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

For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps 33:6, 8-9). The term "fear" carries a powerful, negative

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

"Do you not fear Me?" says the Lord. "Will you not tremble at My presence, who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by

a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it ... but this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; they have revolted and departed. They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the Lord our God, Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season ..." (Jer 5:22-24).

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

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

3. God: The Source of Our Blessings

In a very real sense, everything good and beneficial to us in this life finds its root in God. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights"* (Jas 1:17). *"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good ... there is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing"* (Ps 34:8-10). Everything God created was "good"; i.e., it was properly made to satisfy the purposes of God. From the food we eat to the clothes we wear, from fire that warms us to the stars that inspire us, from medicine to sunlight, from rain to microbes,

from mates to gainful labor – all good and honorable blessings are made possible by the planning and provision of God. What, then, should be our attitude toward the One who exercises such great power to our good?

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

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

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

4. God: Our Redeemer

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

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

It is this deep, abiding love for God that overcomes fear and trepidation (1 Jn 4:17-18). Even human relationships that are based upon dread, uncertainty and terror aren’t really relationships; they are bondage and misery. God wants us to grow in our love for Him, and the gradual growth of that love displaces fear.

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

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

Questions for Discussion

1. Explain this Bible statement: “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”
2. How did the Israelites come to view their blessings (Dt 8:11-17)? How might we repeat this mistake?
3. Cite an example when Jesus offered thanks to God. What does this teach us?

4. Discuss how a Christian might lose his sense of reverence for God.
5. How would you harmonize Mt 10:28 and 2 Tim 1:7?

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 3: The Christian's Attitude Toward the Scriptures

1. Treasured Correspondence

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

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

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

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

2. Hunger and Thirst

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

Just as our bodies are fueled and fortified by food, so our spirits are nourished by the insight and instruction of God's word: *"If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of*

faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed” (1 Tim 4:6).

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

3. Love for Truth

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

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

Ac 20:30 – *“Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”* “Perverse” is from the Gk. word *diastrepho*, “to distort, twist” (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 180). Even some among the elders in Ephesus, taught faithfully by Paul, would twist the truth out of shape.

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

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

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

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

4. Balancing Love for Truth

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

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

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

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

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

Tit 3:9 – *“But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about*

the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.”

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

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

“My heart stands in awe of your word. I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure. I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law. Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments. Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps 119:161-165).

Questions for Discussion

1. What can we learn from the Jews regarding Bible study (Jn 5:39-47; Ac 13:27)?
2. How can our emotions interfere with our acceptance of the truth?
3. What factors lead to a genuine appetite for God’s word?
4. Discuss the balance between patience with a young Christian with imperfect know-

ledge and rebuke of a contentious brother. How can we distinguish between them?

5. What must accompany the hearing of the word (cf. Jas 1:22-25; 1 Jn 3:18)?

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 4: The Christian's Attitude Toward Others

1. We Are Not Alone

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

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

2. Made in God's Image

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

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

womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?”

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

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

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

3. God So Loved the World ...

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

Jesus, Paul and James all summarize the law as the obligation to love our neigh-

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

4. The Spiritually Lost

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

Think of what Jesus gave up to “*come to save that which was lost*” (Mt 18:11). As people volunteer their medical skills in impoverished countries, so Jesus likens His association with sinners to a physician tending to the sick (Mt 9:12). As a man who lost his sheep, a woman her money and a man his son, so God has made efforts to find and restore men who have wandered from Him (Lk 15).

We are perhaps frustrated by sinners' lack of interest in their own alienation from God. Blinded by Satan and filled with selfishness and greed, those who are lost often don't feel lost. Perhaps there are fleeting moments when an event reminds them of their mortality or pricks their conscience, but our society is

increasingly insensitive to its own sinfulness. We must not let this make us indifferent to their spiritual condition. We must always be filled with loving concern for those who are willing to let us help them. Leading someone to Christ is the most significant achievement one can enjoy in this life.

5. Others in the Family

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

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

Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all, Rom. 15:2, and works no ill to any, 13:8-10; love seeks opportunity to do good to “all men, and especially toward them that are of the household

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

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

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

Rom 15:5 – *“Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus ...”.*

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

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

6. The Failure to Love

It is tragic when God’s people do not love each other as they should. First,

lack of due regard mars the image of Christ. Local churches can divide into cliques or be split asunder entirely. Much spiritual energy and vitality is drained from the community, and instead of working diligently for the Lord brethren work against each other. The Corinthian brethren were plagued by petty jealousies and carnal bickering. James asks his readers: *“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask ... Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”* (Jas 4:1-4).

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

May we seek to love each other more, for it is the will of our heavenly Father.

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss the “instinct” to save another human being’s life at all cost.
2. How did Paul see his personal liberties in light of saving souls (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23)?

3. What is the highest display of love for a brother (1 Jn 3:16; Jn 15:13)? If we are not called upon to die for our brethren, how else can we show our love for them?
4. Discuss how we can restore our love for someone who has hurt us deeply.
5. How should we react to our enemies' needs (cf. Rom 12:20; Mt 5:44)?

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 5: The Christian's Attitude Toward Self

1. Instinctive Selfishness

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

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

2. Legitimate Personal Needs

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

But one of man's greatest personal needs that often goes unrecognized is to be valued by others. The person who isolates himself from his fellow man and concen-

trates only upon himself will be a very lonely and unfulfilled man indeed.

3. Self-Love and Self-Esteem

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

Further, a proper love for oneself becomes the basis of our treatment of others. Jesus said, quoting the Law of Moses, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself ...”* (Mk 12:31). His own universal ethic also implies healthy self-regard: *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Mt 7:12). Such standards assume that we properly esteem ourselves and seek good things in life. It is true that much physical and emotional harm is done to others by people who hate and despise themselves.

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

4. Vanity and Pride

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

Paul exhorts: *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit ...”* (Ph 2:3). “Conceit” (vainglory, KJV) is a compound word *kenodoxia*, “from *kenos*, vain, empty, *doxa*, glory” (Vine, Vol. 4, p. 182). The adjectival form of the word is found in Gal 5:26: *“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”*

Haughtiness or pride is condemned as a fleshly and rebellious attitude. Of “haughty” (*huperephanos*) Vine says: “showing oneself above others (*huper*, over, *phainomai*, to appear), though often denoting pre-eminent, is always used in the N.T. in the evil sense of arrogant, disdainful, haughty ... Rom 1:30, 2 Tim 3:2, Jas 4:6, 1 Pet 5:5; in the last two it

is set in opposition to *tapeinos*, humble, lowly” (Vol. 2, p. 198).

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

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

5. Keeping Self in Perspective

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

Paul told the Corinthians, *“I will very gladly spend and be spent for your*

souls,” though he poignantly adds, *“the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved”* (2 Cor 12:15). Jesus certainly wasn’t appreciated by the multitudes for which He was dying.

What is the motivation for subordinating one’s needs for the sake of others? It is not because such is always appreciated,

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

[1 Corinthians 10:23-24]

but rather it is the very nature of the God we serve. God's selfless love and concern for us surpass any response of our gratefulness or any sense of our intrinsic value.

Jesus often spoke in terms of selflessness:

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

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

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

6. What Are We?

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

Questions for Discussion

1. Cite a clear example where Satan tried to persuade Jesus to focus upon Himself to the detriment of others.
2. What makes some people so sensitive to the real and/or imagined slights or disapproval of others? How can we overcome such debilitating sensitivity?
3. Evaluate your own daily routine and identify how much time you have in the course of a day to serve others. Discuss in class how to best use these opportunities.
4. Discuss the phrase *“men will be lovers of themselves”* (2 Tim 3:2). To what degree of self-love is Paul speaking?
5. In whom should we glory (1 Cor 1:29-31; 10:31; 2 Cor 10:17)? Does this mean we cannot tell others of our achievements?

6. Discuss an unhealthy appetite for the approval of men. Consider passages like 2 Cor 10:12; Jn 5:44; 12:42-43. Whose approval is most important (cf. 2 Cor 10:18; 1 Cor 4:5)?
7. How would you reason with a man or woman who hesitated to obey the gospel because they didn't feel worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus?

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 6: The Christian's Attitude Toward Satan

1. Why This Study?

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

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

2. The Adversary of Man

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. A Being of Great Power

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

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

But just how powerful is Satan? It is obvious that he is intelligent, but is he omniscient? While he seems to know us and our weaknesses, he apparently did

not realize that his destruction of Jesus would provide redemption for sin. Thus he brought ultimate defeat to himself in his all-out effort to destroy the Son of God (cf. Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8).

How pervasive is Satan? Is he omnipresent like God – everywhere all at once? When Jesus resisted him, “the devil left Him” (Mt 4:11). Evidently, he was not where Jesus was; thus he is not omnipresent. Further, we are told that if we resist him he will flee from us (Jas 4:7). While it appears that there are certain things that Satan cannot know and do, he remains very potent and dangerous. Paul even accuses him of hindering his travels (1 Th 2:18).

4. The Devil Is Not a Joke

Satan is not to be trifled with; he deserves more credit than to be made the butt of a joke. He is a formidable, homicidal enemy deserving of the greatest respect. We should study him and our own weaknesses and anticipate

where he will attack. So many parallels can be drawn between Satan and the terrorist attacks that occurred in our nation last year. We took terrorism for granted; we underestimated how far hatred was

willing to go in harming us; we let our guard down. And we paid for it. So it is with Satan. He deserves our utmost caution and attention (1 Pet 5:8). We will discuss his “wiles” in the next lesson.

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

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

Questions for Discussion

1. What did Satan suggest about Job's faithfulness to God (Job 1:11; 2:5)?

Whereas the guilt of sin clearly falls upon that one who commits the sin, the direct and sometimes devastating effects or consequences of sin may ravage sons, daughters, and later generations of the sinner ... Contemporarily, children of a heavy drinker of alcoholic beverages may be born with severe handicaps, mental and/or physical. And few sights are as pathetic as newborn infants whose father or mother was addicted to drugs, or infected with AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhea, or any of many other social diseases. But the consequences are not to be confused with guilt. And any parent worthy of the name should be more than willing to avoid any indulgence whatever which might bring dire results to the offspring.
(Brant Lee Doty, *What the Bible Says About Sin*, p. 69.)

2. How did Satan represent the commandments of God to Eve (Gen 3:4-5)? How does Paul characterize his action in 2 Cor 11:3?
3. In what sense do you think Satan "entered" Judas (Lk 22:3)?
4. What is the significance of everlasting fire in Mt 25:41?
5. Cite a passage which indicates that Satan uses human agents to do his bidding.

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 7: The Christian's Attitude Toward Sin

1. Sin: What Is It?

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

The source of such devastation to a man's soul is the knowledge that one has

violated the laws and precepts of God Almighty. "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn 3:4). Rebellious behavior is bad enough, but it is magnified by the goodness of God. When we sin we insult our Creator who has loved us and blessed our existence with "every good gift and every perfect gift" (Jas 1:17).

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

more! Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His

sight?” (2 Sam 12:8-9). David had repaid the goodness of God with gross selfishness and disobedience.

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

2. Sin and Coming to Christ

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

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

1) We should no longer be slaves of sin (Rom 6:6). Paul is not here denying that Christians will sin, he is dealing

with the *attitude* of the sinner. We are not to present ourselves as *“slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness” (6:19).* We are not to indifferently remain in sin but continually pursue righteousness and holiness.

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

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

3. Continually Battling Sin

If sin is a terrible scourge on our soul and places us in eternal peril, why are we continually drawn back to it? Though we may hate and be repulsed by sin on an intellectual level, why are we attracted to it on an emotional level? This is one of the greatest frustrations

that a Christian will ever face, and the failure to resolve it can drive one away from God in disgust and self-loathing.

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

Further, we often gravitate toward behaviors and attitudes that inflate our sense of self-importance. This was noted in Lesson Five. We can even become more concerned with our own exaltation that we place ourselves above God.

Some live by the maxim in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "To reign is worth ambition though in hell: Better to reign in hell than serve in heav'n." Dealing with sin is ultimately a battle of submission between God and Self.

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

tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (Jas 1:13-15).

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

4. The Bottom Line

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

Questions for Discussion

1. Look up the word "device" in Vine's dictionary, definition #2, NOEMA. What is the main thought of the word? What does this suggest about "Satan's devices"?
2. List three Bible synonyms of "sin" (a synonym is a word that means the same thing).

3. How might Christians neutralize or offset the pleasurable aspects of sinful behavior? How should we counteract a desire to transgress?
4. Though the consequences of David's sin with Bathsheba were broad, what was his main thought as he reflected upon his transgression (Ps 51:4)?
5. How did Jesus respond to Satan's temptations in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11)?
6. How does naivete affect younger Christians in regard to temptations they face? How can older Christians help them?
7. How might temptations change as we age?

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 8: The Christian's Attitude Toward Trials

1. Christians Are Not Immune

Because of competing moral, philosophical and physical forces operative in this world, humans occasionally find themselves amid unpleasant and trying circumstances. We can become victims of anything from illness to injury, from discrimination to personal failure, from religious persecution to poverty.

Not only does salvation not insulate the Christian from such unpleasantness, it is virtually *guaranteed to produce it*. Why? Because the Christian takes a firm and reasoned stand upon values and principles rejected by the majority of his neighbors. Jesus said it would be this way: *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed"* (Jn 3:19-20).

Those who come to Christ with the false expectation that all the rough edges of life will be smoothed out will be disappointed when trials come.

2. God Will Allow Us To Be Tested

For reasons that we may not be able to entirely fathom, we are creatures that learn by experience. Perhaps because of the stubbornness of human will, advice and instruction are of limited value. As important as they are, we often remain obstinate until softened by trial. And God allows those trials for our good.

The Hebrew Christians: These brethren had *"endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated"* (Heb 10:32-33). These troubles caused them to seriously consider abandoning Christ for an easier life.

1) The writer admonishes them to “*consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls*” (Heb 12:3). Momentary persecution can be strengthening, but if it continues we run the risk of despair. The Hebrew writer encourages them to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus.

2) He also urges them to keep things in perspective. Suffering tends to magnify our situation. But he tells these brethren: “*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin*” (Heb 12:4). Peter urges us to take courage from others: “*Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world*” (1 Pet 5:9). Our suffering is compounded when we think we are alone, isolated in our pain. When in trouble, look around: see who is worse off than you and be thankful that things are as well as they are.

3) The Hebrew writer also makes the point that “*whom the Lord loves He chastens ... If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons*” (Heb 12:6-7). When things are not going as well as we wish they would, Satan can plant the idea that God doesn’t care about us. If He did, He wouldn’t let these terrible things happen. But the Scriptures teach that God may allow trial and hardship as a means of correction, for it is in the trials of life that we think more soberly about significant things. We have seen such a change in our nation in the months since the terrorist attacks. Whatever the outcome may be, there has been more serious self-examination among us than in times of peace and prosperity.

4) We must learn to see times of difficulty as a harbinger of better things to

God stands behind every trial and test. He wants us to know this by experience, so that we not only see his hand but also feel it. We place our hand in the hand of God. Then, in every adversity that we face, we keep our trust in our heavenly Father, for we know that he sends us these trials to test our faith. We believe that he is complete control of every situation. And God gives us exactly what we need: joys and sorrows, trials and triumphs. An Arabic proverb succinctly states, “Sunshine alone creates deserts.” Consider it pure joy when dark clouds gather above your head; they will give you showers of blessings.

Simon Kistemaker,
Commentary on James p 33

come.

The author of Hebrews says that God chastens “*for our pro-fit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; never-theless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*” (12:10-11). Admittedly, it is hard to see beyond present suffering to maturity and experience that will come to us in the future. But we are all able to look backward and see this very truth operative in our lives. Have we not all been benefited by times of trial? Are not the most lasting lessons the painful ones? Success and triumph are certainly moments to enjoy, but they frequently reinforce things that are hostile to the development of faith.

3. Attitudes Accompanying Trials

Jesus: “*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Re-*

joyce and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt 5:12).

James: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (Jas 1:2-4).*

Peter: *“In this you greatly re-joyce, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more pre-cious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:6-7).*

Paul: *“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom 5:3-4).*

“Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Such attitudes toward trial and suffering do not arise from an unrealistic, naive lack of awareness of one’s circumstances. This joy is not some faked giddiness that acts like nothing is wrong. Quite the opposite, in fact. The one who trusts in God has a very clear picture of his situation and understands the implications.

He knows that tribulations of even the worst kind will draw him closer to God. No one wishes himself harm, but if times of trouble do come, the Christian has a divine source of strength that helps him cope rather than crumble.

4. When Are Trials from God?

Without direct revelation, it is impossible to know the exact causes of life’s twists and turns. Some things are directly connected to God’s providence, others are the products of man’s free will and his penchant for evil. Some things are pure happenstance; accidents do happen.

But does this uncertainty rob us of the usefulness of the events? No, because we should train ourselves to look at every situation in life as a test: “What can I learn from this? How can I grow from these circumstances?” Any unfortunate situation beyond our control reminds us of our fundamental helplessness and our dependence upon God.

But what if our troubles are of our own making? Is there any comfort to be found when we have brought hardship upon ourselves? Even though we are not justified in our mistakes, God is still compassionate toward us in our ineptitude. When Peter denied the Lord, Jesus reassured him both *before* and *after* the event that he was still useful to God (cf. Lk 22:32; Jn 21:15-17).

May the misfortunes that will come to everyone in life make us all long evermore to be *“absent from the body and ... present with the Lord”* (2 Cor 5:8).

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss Paul's outlook on suffering for Christ in 2 Cor 4:16-5:8.
2. How can Jesus inspire us during times of persecution?
3. What does God's chastening demonstrate? How does this differ from modern concepts of discipline?
4. What did Paul mean when he said, "When I am weak, then I am strong"?
5. What can we learn from how Jesus treated Peter in regard to Peter's denial?

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 9: The Christian's Attitude Toward Death

1. Death: The Natural End of Life

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

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

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

Second, the physical process of expiring can be arduous and unpleasant. We fear

the pain and suffering we may have to endure as life draws to an end.

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

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

2. Death and Sin

But the greatest source of dread when contemplating death is the existence of sin. Paul said, "*The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law*" (1 Cor 15:56). Paul here says that the "sting" of death, the element that is most pain-

ful and hurtful, is due to sin. Sin is what puts our eternal welfare in jeopardy; it raises doubt, makes us feel unworthy, causes us to fret over and be repelled by the prospect of dying. If not for sin, we would welcome death as a reunion with our glorious Creator.

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

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

3. Free from Law; Free from Sin

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

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

1) “*But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed ... even the righteousness of God which is through*

faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe” (Rom 3:21-22).

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

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

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

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

4. The Christian’s Perspective on Death

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Death Is Not To Be Chosen

Someone might accuse Christians of being less than committed to earthly life because of their heavenly hopes. Some mentally unbalanced people have even killed their children on the pretense of “sending them to heaven.”

But Christians, though looking forward to life hereafter, are fiercely devoted to the preservation of life. This grows out of our respect for God who gives life and who alone has the prerogative to take it away. Christians should be opposed to euthanasia, assisted suicide, abortion and other forms of unlawful death.

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

6. The Hope of Resurrection

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

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

Questions for Discussion

1. How did Jesus express Himself concerning death when it was drawing near?

2. What moral principle results when the idea of resurrection is rejected (1 Cor 15:32)?
3. In the 23rd Psalm, did David say he would not fear death? Where did his strength lie?
4. Explain how the strength of sin is the law (1 Cor 15:56). How has this been resolved?
5. Describe Paul's confidence when facing death in 2 Tim 4:6-8.
6. Discuss some wrong ways in which people try to deal with the possibility of dying.
7. What hope enabled Paul to endure the rigors of apostleship (Ph 3:10-11)?

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 10: The Christian's Attitude Toward Judgment

1. The Need for Accountability

Few people enjoy the burden of accountability, but would we really want to live in a world without it? Imagine how much more dangerous driving would be without accountability to law enforcement officers. Since the payment of taxes is held in universal contempt, who would freely volunteer to pay his portion without accountability to the IRS? It is not difficult to envision the anarchy, chaos and decadence that would plague society if we lived lives of total self-will.

Accountability comes in the form of authority figures – parents, teachers, police, the boss, etc. – who exercise some form of punitive power when we fail to meet standards imposed upon us. Our choices in life are often influenced by the likelihood of being discovered and punished. Thus clear, legitimate accountability functions as a *deterrent* to forbidden behavior.

2. Ultimate Accountability

While God has put in place various instruments of earthly accountability, man may slip through these unscathed because they are implemented by fallible human beings. But God reserves for Himself the right of ultimate, eternal judgment.

One of the clearest tenets of Scripture is that all will eventually stand before God and answer to Him for our earthly lives.

Some key passages:

2 Cor 5:10 – *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*

Rom 14:10, 12 – *“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ ... So*

then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Rom 2:5-6, 11 – *“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’ ... For there is no partiality with God.”*

Note the terms “all” and “each.” Divine judgment is not a collective or group evaluation but individual. God is aware of the activities of each one who has ever or will ever live, and the time will come when every person will stand **alone** before God to explain himself.

But it is not only the acts that will be judged; our deepest thoughts and motives will be laid bare:

1 Cor 4:5 – *“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one’s praise will come from God.”*

We may fool others, or even ourselves, but none can deceive God. He will see us as we truly are.

3. Attitudes Toward Judgment

Fear: The knowledge that we will be brought before God’s judgment should cause us to fear, to approach each act, word and thought as if it is being done in the very presence of God – for it is. Thus Peter says, *“And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear ...”* (1 Pet 1:17).

Preparation: If we know we are to be evaluated, the natural response is to prepare ourselves for it. In the case of judgment, we know for certain that it is coming – we just don’t know *when*. So the only sensible thing to do is to *always* be prepared. *“Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober”* (1 Th 5:6). The parable of the virgins also urges preparation (Mt 25:1-13).

Warning Others: As Paul contemplates the horror of standing before God unprepared, he says, *“Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ...”* (2 Cor 5:11a). Paul traversed the Roman Empire warning and exhorting men to prepare for judgment. He said to the Athenians: *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man who He has ordained ...”* (Ac 17:30-31a). We must cultivate a sense of urgency that dilutes our fears and impels us to speak to our fellow man of salvation.

4. The Standard of Judgment

Inherent within any judgment is a standard by which the subjects will be evaluated. Is there one universal standard by which all men will be judged? Or will the judgment be according to individual cultures, religions and other differentiating factors?

“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn 12:48).

Jesus will come “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Th 1:8).

tion for that judgment even now, for every day we write another page in the book of our life. How does our autobiography read so far?

The final judgment is real, not symbolic or figurative. We are laying the founda-

Questions for Discussion

1. How did Paul react to the possibility of failure at the final judgment (1 Cor 9:24-27)?
2. What assurance is given of Jesus’ appointment as Judge (Ac 17:31)? Explain.
3. To what Gentile audience did Peter speak of Jesus judging “*the living and the dead*”?

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 11: The Christian’s Attitude Toward Worship

1. A “Going to Church” Mentality

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

will in large measure be determined by the value we place upon worship to God on a personal level.

2. Reverence for God

As these lessons are addressing a *Christian’s* attitude toward things, we must assume a degree of reverence for God *already* exists within the believer. But the human capacity to take things for granted, even miraculous things, is well demonstrated throughout history. For example, the Jews persisted in irreverence when God’s presence among them

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

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

was daily demonstrated by a column of fire and smoke. They continued to berate Moses even after God opened the ground and swallowed Korah. Likewise, even after coming to the Lord in genuine penitence and gratitude it is possible for the Christian to flag in his fervor toward God. We must make constant effort to not let our appreciation of God go stale and wane in our desire to demonstrate our adoration for Him.

3. Losing the Joy of Worship

God faulted Is-rael for allowing worship to become a hated drudgery. They said things like, *“When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade our wheat?”* (Am 8:5). God rebukes them: *“And you have been weary of Me, O Israel. You have not brought Me the sheep for your burnt offerings, nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices ...”* (Is 43:22-23). Through Malachi He says, *“But you profane it, in that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.’ You also say, ‘Oh, what a weariness!’ And you sneer at it ... Should I accept this from your hand?”* (1:12-13). Thus God accuses Israel of despising His name (Mal 1:6-7). Our attitude toward God will most definitely be manifested in our worship.

4. The Quality of Our Worship

When our enthusiasm for worship fades, the quality of our worship will suffer. With little true desire to commune with God, our prayers will be shallow and brief. Jesus, on the other hand, engages in frequent and lengthy prayers (cf. Lk 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 11:1). Indeed, it is hard to imagine Jesus lamenting, as

some among us do, “I just don’t have that much to say in a prayer.”

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

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

5. Attitude Toward the Assembly

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

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

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

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

Our hurried, harried, clock-watching way of life makes me wonder whether we would even desire a lengthy, leisurely opportunity of worship. Long concerts or movies, overtime sports events, hours in boats, tree stands or on golf courses, i.e., spending a lot of time *doing things we enjoy*, testify against our impatience when worship runs a little long. Eternity is an awfully long time to worship God for people who get antsy after an hour.

6. Worship vs. Service

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

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

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

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

Many other examples indicate that worship is a specific act of homage to God. It is true that everything we do must be motivated out of respect for God, but strictly speaking I am not worshiping when I discipline my children or go to work. This erroneous idea of worship has led to the corruption of the assembly into gymnastics meets, drama produc-

tions, feats of strength and other carnal entertainment. They reason, "Since God gave me this ability, and I am glorifying Him through it, it is an act of worship."

"... let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29).

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

Questions for Discussion

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

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 12: The Christian's Attitude Toward Spiritual Responsibility

1. A Parable

In the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30), Jesus challenges each Christian to accept responsibility for the God-given resources at his disposal. Several points are worthy of notice:

- 1) The master distributed his property to the servants. That is, they were *stewards* of his money. He *owned* it; they *used* it. So it is with our abilities to serve God.
- 2) The master distributed talents "*to each according to his own ability.*" He took into account the relative abilities of

his servants and endowed them accordingly. This shows a fundamental sense of fairness; he expected profit commensurate with his servants' abilities.

- 3) The master had not outlined a business plan; therefore, the servants had to exercise initiative to make a profit with the money. One, of course, did not exercise that initiative and was a failure.
- 4) The master expected something more than his original investment to be returned. The slothful servant who was given "only" one talent (that was still a lot of money, perhaps 20-30 years

wages) was punished for returning the original sum without loss.

How does this apply today? The principles are clear enough. Each of us has been created with “talents” (intellect, money, personality, etc.) that have potential usefulness to God. We are only responsible for the abilities *we* possess; faithfulness to God is not a “competition” with others. We must, however, exercise initiative in order to put these talents to use. God may open doors and create opportunities, but He will not force us to act. We must recognize the opportunity, respond to it and work to achieve the result God desires.

Further, we must work to hone the latent, undeveloped skills that lie within. I am convinced that most Christians have tremendous stores of talent and skill buried beneath a pile of distraction, insecurity and fear. We find excuses that seem reasonable to us, that don’t arouse an offended conscience, and we trot them out whenever obligation comes calling.

Jesus demonstrates very clearly in this parable that, while we may get away with such shenanigans in this life, a day of reckoning is coming. The master, after being long absent, will return and demand an accounting for what we did with what we were given.

“For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping gnashing of teeth” (Mt 25:29-30).

2. Leadership Responsibility

While there is an endless variety of ways to serve God for men and women, young and old, novice and experienced, the need always exists for some to step forward and take the reins of leadership. Any group of people trying to function as a unit (such as a local church) needs guidance, direction, planning and exhortation. As individuals we each have our will, opinions, weaknesses and other foibles that may threaten the cohesiveness of the group. Good leadership helps moderate those tendencies and maximize the resources that would benefit the community.

God’s present method of communication, unlike certain times in ancient history, is indefinite. That is, He issues general commands and expressions of will and leaves the implementation on a voluntary basis. For example, the NT speaks at length upon the need and value of evangelists, but there is no issuance of direct calls to individuals. Each man must examine himself in all honesty and evaluate his traits and abilities and ask:

- 1) Is this a work for which God has adequately equipped me? Do I have latent skills that could be developed and used?
- 2) Do I have acceptable reasons for not using these abilities more so than I do?
- 3) Am I both talented and motivated enough to make preaching my vocation? Is there potential benefit to the kingdom that I am wasting because I am reluctant to employ my God-given talent?

This is a process that must be engaged in between a man, his conscience and his Maker. The questions that need to be

answered can only be answered by each person. It is not a matter of arm-twisting or manipulating with guilt, for service on such a flimsy basis is vain. The same process holds for potential elders, deacons, teachers and others. Christians must constantly ask, “What *more* can I do for the Lord?” and not “How *little* can I do and still slide by?”

3. First, A Willingness

One of the most inspiring examples of taking responsibility to serve God is that of the brethren in Macedonia (2 Cor 8-9). While the contribution for the Jewish was voluntary, the Macedonians gave till it hurt:

“... in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality ... beyond their ability, they were freely willing ... And this they did ... but first gave themselves to the Lord ...” (2 Cor 8:2-3, 5).

Paul notes the heart of serving God: *“For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have”* (8:12).

It is the willing mind that gives generously, without lamenting of the hardships brought upon the benefactor:

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:6-7).

While this specific context is in reference to financial support, the underlying principles apply to all acts of service to God. Our faith must be of sufficient stature and character that we look for ways to serve rather than reasons not to serve. This takes initiative and desire.

4. Avoiding Evil Not Enough

Some evaluate themselves morally and spiritually from the standpoint of what they have *not* done: I’m OK because I haven’t killed, raped, stolen, lied, etc. But there is no virtue in merely not being guilty of heinous crimes; Jesus’ death atoned for even the “small” transgressions. Thus we are indebted to Him for delivering us from all violations of divine law, and we owe Him a life of service in return for the promise of eternal life.

Jesus was morally perfect yet did not distance Himself from those around Him who were suffering as a consequence of their own error and that of others. We live in a world where heartache, fear, debilitation, violence and other maladies plague our friends, neighbors and family. We cannot turn a blind eye to this and just immerse ourselves in our own interests.

Our knowledge and insight as Christians obligates us to accept personal responsibility as we have opportunity. God works in this world providentially, and sometimes that providence is enacted through His people, people attuned to the evil wrought by sin, to the spiritual deficiency of the world, to the eternal emptiness and suffering that awaits those who live in rebellion to God. Spiritually mature people will look for ways to serve; they will shoulder the load for

Christ. It is the least we can do in recognition of what He has done for us.

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss possible reasons why one would desire to serve as an elder (1 Tim 3:1).
2. Discuss Jas 4:17 in reference to exercising spiritual responsibility.
3. Describe the element of spiritual responsibility in these passages: Gal 6:1-2; Jas 5:19-20; Jude 22-23; Ph 2:4.
4. What traits of Nehemiah (Neh 1:4; 2:5, 12), Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:1-10) and Josiah (2 Chr 34:19-21, 26-28) made them great leaders?
5. Discuss some practical ways in which Christians can help each other grow in reference to spiritual responsibilities.

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 13: The Christian's Attitude Toward Employment

1. Work: Activity Ordained of God

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

As punishment for sin, God had ordained that henceforth man would sustain himself *"in the sweat of your face ... till you*

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

Gainful, productive employment brings structure and focus to life; it occupies attention and energy that might otherwise be directed toward evil designs.

And there is a sense of warm fulfillment in having completed a task, in creating something useful, in providing a service for others – a job well done.

2. Getting Work Out of Focus

The Workaholic. There are some who spend an inordinate amount of time on their work. This can occur for a variety of reasons. For some, work is escapism: they can escape family responsibilities, spiritual obligations or other tasks deemed undesirable by going to the office or traveling unnecessarily. For others, the goal of work is not providing for needs but a way to define themselves. For these people, promotions, increasing salary, perks for the privileged and other temporal rewards become the end within itself. Career achievements take precedent in their lives to the detriment of relationships with family and God.

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

The Sluggard. The other extreme is to lack industry, to be lazy and slack in supporting oneself. Many are the proverbs confronting this attitude: *“Go to the ant,*

you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise ... How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? ...” (Pr 6:6-11; cf. 24:30-34; 26:13-16).

Some brethren in Thessalonica erroneously believed that the Lord was soon to return, so they quit working (2 Th 3:6-12). Paul calls such a freeloading, welfare state “disorderly” and condemns the

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

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

“busybodies” who use their idle time to snoop and pry into the affairs of others. The church is not a commune in which all share the fruits of their labor equally. Rather, each is to do his or her part to supply their needs.

3. Attitudes Toward Labor

Christians should always honor the agreements upon which they were hired. If the agreement is to work so many hours per week for so much pay, then to do less is tantamount to stealing from our employer.

Paul raises common labor to a sublime level by equating one’s boss with Christ, Himself: *“Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart”* (Eph 6:5-6). This means to give the proper effort whether the boss is looking or not,

or if one is working out of town and his progress cannot be overseen.

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

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

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

4. Attitudes Toward Our Employer

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

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

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

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

5. Working and Worship

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

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

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

Several points seem pertinent:

- 1) Even Jesus admits in principle that some other activity may supercede a formal occasion of worship. In Mt 5:23-24 Jesus indicates that reconciliation with an estranged brother is more important than offering a gift at the altar. *“First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*
- 2) Not every chosen absence from worship is an affront to God. We may on occasion stay home with a sick family member. Should we have hired a sitter? Should we have left the ill alone for the hour or so it takes for worship? Or perhaps we stayed home when sick so that we wouldn’t make others ill. Do these choices *necessarily* mean that we have put someone else before the Lord?
- 3) Like attending a sick family member, one’s labor obligations are divinely ordained activities. This is fundamentally different from deliberately choosing to miss worship for a frivolous activity that we simply find more attractive.
- 4) It may rank in the category of “tempting God” to quit every job that presents a conflict and then expect for God to provide for our needs. I dare say there are

certain parts of the country and world where men and women have no work options that would allow *every* worship service to be attended. Thus, it seems unrealistic to me to hold that a man or woman who honors their employment obligations and misses a worship service necessarily sins by dishonoring God.

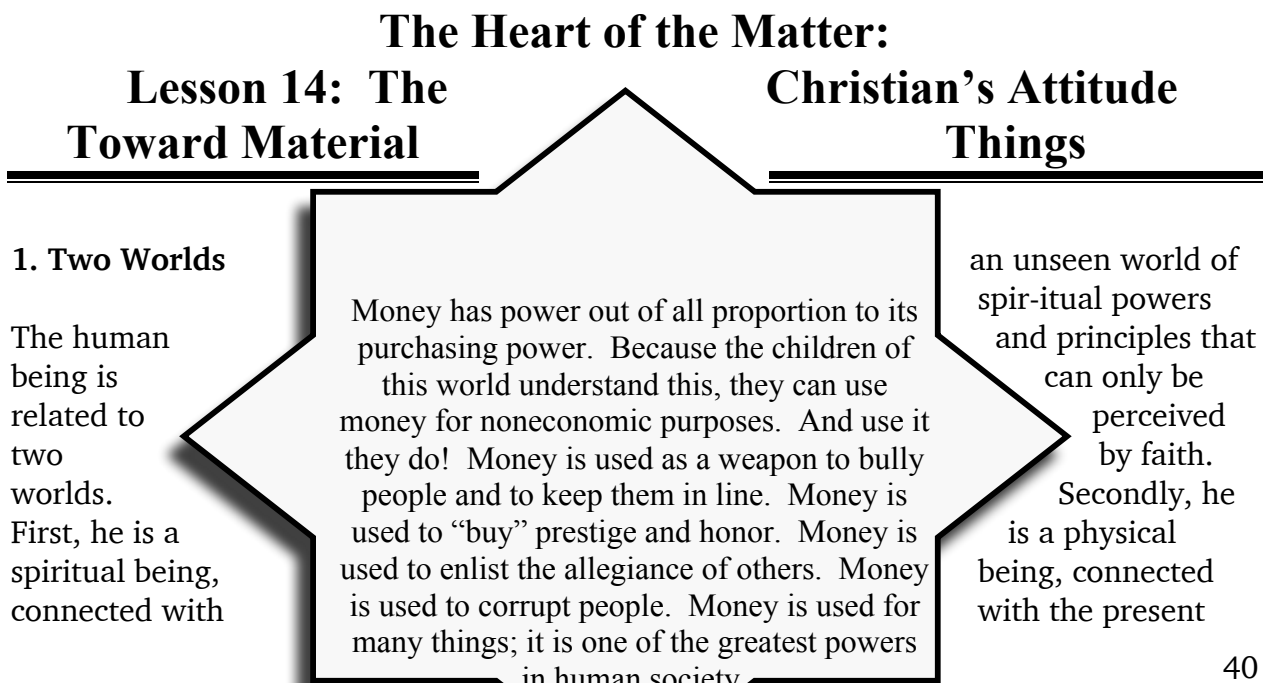
Having said that ...

- 1) Perhaps more thought needs to be given to avoiding career choices and work options that will inevitably interfere with our spiritual duties.
- 2) Might we reasonably distinguish between *occasions* of missed worship and a career which *rarely* allows the Christian employee to worship or attend Bible study? Is there not a point at which we must ask, “What is the outcome of such an arrangement? What will spiritually become of the man who infrequently assembles due to an oppressive work schedule?”
- 3) The man who misses worship due to voluntary overtime, the woman who does not press her employer for religious assembly rights, the Christian who stays home from worship to be fresh and rested for the work week needs to do some serious soul searching regarding their priorities.

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

Questions for Discussion

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



but shorter phase of earthly existence. The challenge is to live properly in a material world without losing sight of the spiritual dimension that is no less real but harder to comprehend.

2. The Necessities of Life

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

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

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

life our troubles begin with an overemphasis upon material things.

3. Keeping Things in Balance

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

- 1) Riches are unstable (Pr 23:4-5).
- 2) Material things decay. Moth and rust destroy; thieves steal (Mt 6:20).
- 3) Affection for money and what it buys is the springboard for a multitude of evils (1 Tim 6:10).
- 4) Material things will not be part of our eternal future. "You can't take it with you" (1 Tim 6:7; Ecc 5:15).
- 5) Possessions can be spiritually blinding as the rich young ruler painfully learned (Mt 19:21-22).

4. The Antidote for Materialism

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

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

1) *“And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content”* (1 Tim 6:8).

2) *“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Col 3:2).

3) *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things”* (Mt 6:31-32).

4) *“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Ph 4:11-12).

5) *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”* (Mt 6:33-34).

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

While greed and covetousness grow in the vacuum of what one does not possess, thankfulness springs from an awareness and appreciation for what one has. Passages encouraging thankfulness abound, but note the following:

1) *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Ph 4:6-7).

2) *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”* (1 Th 5:16-18).

3) *“As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving”* (Col 2:6-7).

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

Questions for Discussion

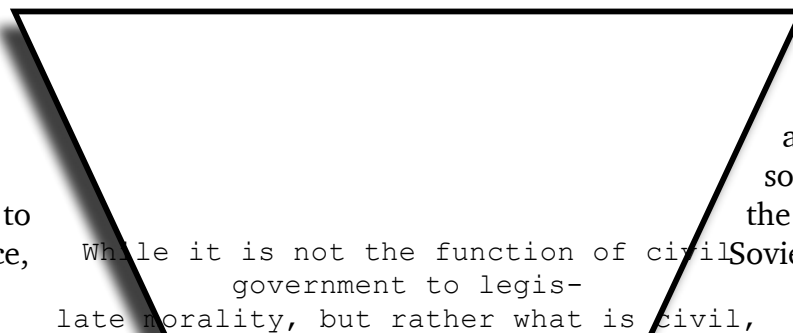
1. How does our society encourage us to overemphasize material things?

2. How might we unwittingly pass on materialistic values to our children?
3. Discuss the implications of Lk 16:10. What can we learn from this statement?
4. According to 2 Cor 4:18, what is the duration of “seen” and “unseen” things?
5. What challenge/promise did God lay before Israel in Malachi 3:8-10?
6. What did Jesus offer the rich young ruler if he would sell his possessions and follow Him? How did the young man react to this offer?
7. What does Jesus promise those who suffer deprivation for His sake (Mt 19:29-30)?

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 15: The Christian’s Attitude Toward Civil Government

1. The Importance of Civil Rule

Recent world events illustrate a Biblical principle: man needs civil rule to combat violence,



treachery and anarchy. To this end, God has not mandated any particular *form* of

government such as democratic, monarchical or socialistic. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union,

organized crime has run rampant in Russia, for a powerful central government does not exist to curtail such enterprises.

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

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

2. Submission to Civil Authority

The Jews chafed under Roman rule, and they were greatly dissatisfied at the idea of a Messiah who wouldn’t take up arms and fight. The Jewish leaders tried to use this anti-Roman bias against Jesus, pitting popular hatred for Rome against the obligation to submit to civil authority. The most volatile issue in this regard was the payment of taxes: should the Jew pay Roman tax, thus acknowledging and even supporting the oppressive regime? Jesus upholds the truth but softens the blow with a spiritual imperative: *“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”* (Mt 22:21; cf. Rom 13:6-7).

It is our obligation to submit to the ruling authority over us, whether federal, state, county or municipal: *“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him”* (1 Pet 2:13-14). Paul offers two considerations:

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

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

3. Respect for Civil Rulers

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

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

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Tim 2:1-2).

Such respect does not nullify criticism of flawed policies or rebuke for immoral

behavior. Even civil law permits the first, and God's law demands the second. But at the same time, we must show respect for the office – the authority and power – as ordained of God.

4. Uses and Abuses of Civil Power

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

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

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

5. The Power to Execute Criminals

What should the Christian's attitude be toward execution? Is it inconsistent with

kingdom principles to advocate the death penalty? While some disagree, I believe Romans 13 upholds the right of civil government to take the life of certain criminals.

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

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

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

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

enforced unevenly at times. But if the mere existence of human foibles argue against the death penalty, they also argue against all punishment.

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

Questions for Discussion

1. Does Paul object to capital punishment in Ac 25:11?
2. Discuss the right of a Christian to hold an elective office.
3. What rationales might a Christian use to justify breaking the law?
4. Is it sinful for a Christian to protest against laws they deem unfair?
5. Is it sinful for a Christian to vote for a president that is pro-abortion?
6. Should a Christian refuse to pay taxes because he feels it supports immoral practices?
7. When civil law violates God's law, what should the Christian do? Cite a verse.

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 16: The Christian's Attitude Toward Time

1. Life in the Present Moment

Great authors, poets and men of divine inspiration have pondered the nature of time. God has ordained that earthly life be lived only in the present moment. As each moment passes it recedes into history, unchangeable and fixed in the past. Any future existence is uncertain and out

of reach. The present moment is the time of decision and action, and what we do with it will have serious implications here and in eternity.

2. How Much Time?

Life doesn't come with a warranty; no one born into the world has any idea

how long his life will last. This also makes the present moment crucial, for there may be no future to amend or improve the decision of the present.

Moses observed: *“The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years ...”* (Ps 90:10a). This is only a broad parameter, for the author himself lived to be 120. And even in our advanced age the duration of life depends upon where one lives. While in America the average life span matches Moses’ standard, yet in most of the world one’s life span is drastically reduced.

In relation to eternity, however, the length of our earthly life is irrelevant. It is the *quality* that counts; i.e., has one lived appropriately before his Creator in the time he has been given? God has not seen fit to extend the life span of many of His most faithful servants, including His own Son. Rather, God is concerned with our stewardship of time.

From an earthly standpoint, an early departure from this life is a tragedy. In view of eternity it is a blessing. For the Christian, earthly life can be summarized as service to God. Our life belongs to Him and He sustains it for as long as He chooses. Death, as we studied earlier, is a portal or passageway to heaven.

3. Perception vs. Reality

Although time passes at a constant rate, we have all experienced the different *perceptions* of how time passes. And understanding this is crucial to our faith.

Moses continued to note of the life span: *“Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow;*

for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Ps 90:10b). At the end of life, however long we live, it will seem to have passed quickly. James acknowledges the same phenomenon: *“For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away”* (Jas 4:14).

David also pondered this: *“Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but a vapor”* (Ps 39:5). Asaph wrote of God turning His wrath from Israel: *“For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again”* (Ps 78:39).

At any given moment, time may seem to drag along. Because of some present unpleasantness, the present seems to last forever and the future cannot come quickly enough. But a broader perspective on time recognizes this to be an illusion; it is merely a skewed perception based upon present circumstances.

When people are happy and content with the day, the remainder of life may seem all too short. They wish for things

present unpleasantness, the present seems to last forever and the future cannot come quickly enough. But a broader perspective on time recognizes this to be an illusion; it is merely a skewed perception based upon present circumstances.

It spreads itself out, indeed vapour does; for it is manifold in its schemes and cares and but, like vapour, it is frail and transient. We know this to be true, but how little do we realize it! We form plans about business and family affairs, about our houses and fields to improve our social status; but we forget that all these are dependent upon an unknown quantity – our continuance and health, our possession of the future, and of property itself. Now, in all this, do not we calculate quite irrationally? How can our calculations be correct, when we leave out the factor of the duration of life? It is the part of a wise man often to reflect that his life will soon be in eternity.

[Pulpit Commentary, homily on James 4:14]

to remain as they are so their enjoyment may continue. But those in unhappier situations may feel that the rest of life is interminably long and cannot be lived in the way that God prescribes.

Those, for example, who ruin their prospects for divinely approved marriage early in life often willfully choose to live in adultery because they cannot bear the thought of living celibate the rest of their lives. They have a problem of perception: they have reversed the duration of earthly life and eternity and are willing to forfeit eternal happiness for a moment's joy upon the earth.

4. Stewards of Time

Moses prayed: *“So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom”* (Ps 90:12). David asked likewise: *“Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am”* (Ps 39:4). As we mature we should learn from experience about the passing of time. We should learn to enjoy good times, for they will seem to pass very quickly: Time flies when you're having fun! On the other hand, when life takes a downturn, we must remember that “this, too, shall pass.” And standing above it all is God, superintending our lives with His providential care.

We must also realize that we do not have as much time as we think to accomplish the important things. We have all read various calculations like the following:

If a man lives to be 75 years old he will spend:
25 years sleeping

15-20 years working
6-7 years eating
3-4 years in school
1,000 years *mowing the grass*

At any rate, when one factors in all the time-consuming incidentals of life – from hygiene to financial accounting to leisure time, etc. – the time left to study, worship and serve the Lord in other direct ways is very minimal indeed. This is why Paul exhorts us to *“redeem the time”* that we have (Eph 5:16).

5. Problems of Time Management

Procrastination: Satan whittles away our opportunities by a phantom sense that “later” is a better time than now. We must use our time wisely, and some things are best put off for the present in favor of something more important, but it is very easy to cross the line and delay unnecessarily things which ought to be done today.

Anxiety over the future: Jesus says: *“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”* (Mt 6:34). Some worry themselves into paralysis because of undue concerns about the future. If we are consumed with fear, we will squander today fretting about tomorrow.

Impulsiveness: The opposite of such anxiety is an impulsiveness that takes no thought about the future. Time is wasted due to a lack of focus on specific goals and objectives. The demands of each day can be overwhelming, especially with a growing family. We must plan our time effectively or it will disappear.

Frivolity: Some simply squander their lives in pursuits that are unworthy of a child of God. They can't say "no" to any element of fun or amusement, and they cram so many frivolous activities into their lives that no time is left for the truly important things.

Our lives are ticking by every second, minute, hour, day, week, month and year. We all marvel in our casual conversations about the years getting faster. Let us be wise and order each day according to this realization. We will get much more out of life if we do.

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss Jas 4:17, the "sin of omission," in the context of time management.
2. How can our past mistakes ruin the moments we have today? Cite a passage that may help overcome this problem.
3. Why is it so hard to apply the lessons of the past to the decisions of today?
4. Discuss Rom 13:11 in reference to our outlook on life.
5. What perspective did Paul have upon the past in Ph 3:13-14?

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 17: The Christian's Attitude Toward Leisure

1. The Age of Leisure

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

time and the energy to pursue other amusing and entertaining aspects of life.

2. The Need for "Downtime"

Actually, the Bible says very little specifically on the subject of recreation and leisure. To be honest, what is said often points out the evil side of self-indulgence

and frivolity. Nevertheless, the need for rest and rejuvenation is acknowledged in the Scriptures:

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

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

3. Principles of All Non-specified Activities

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

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

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

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

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

5) It should go without saying, but say it we must: Leisure and recreational activ-

ities are **NOT** within the scope of congregational responsibility. It is not for the church to build gymnasiums, provide sports equipment, fund teams, etc. We must not corrupt the spiritual body of Christ with our personal amusements.

4. Enhancing Our Relationships

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

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

Questions for Discussion

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

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 18: The Christian’s Attitude Toward Marriage

1. The Gift of Marriage

Truly one of the greatest gifts of God to mankind is the provision of marriage, the intimate sharing of life by two people under an exclusive covenant of love,

trust and devotion. While the world in its moral degradation may look upon marriage as an outmoded and irrelevant social custom, Christians should realize its divine origin, spiritual foundations and eternal significance.

The power of the marriage bond has the potential for great good. Yea, it is so strong that one may willingly give his life for his beloved, or one may even expire from grief over the death of a mate. On the other hand, the corruption of marital forces does great psychological and emotional harm. Unfaithfulness and divorce have long fueled the fires of murder and a host of other evils.

2. Marriage and the Church

Paul uses the relationship of husband and wife to describe that between Christ and His church, and vice-versa (Eph 5). Though not politically correct in our day of women's liberation and gender equality, one cannot reasonably deny the practical effects of a marriage relationship based upon the following principles:

1) The husband is head of the wife, *as also Christ is head of the church* (Eph 5:23). This is not a commentary on competence but order and structure. Ultimate authority resides in the man. To deny this either in theory or in practice is rebellion against God, Himself.
2) *Just as the church is subject to Christ*, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (5:24). There is no parallel here between the perfect headship of Christ and that of any given husband. Certainly God knew that any man who would fill the role of husband would be flawed. Wives should submit out of respect for God's arrangement, not by virtue of her husband's competence.

3) Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and*

cleanse it ... (5:25-26). The essential quality of headship is not perfect judgment but *sacrificial love*. A wife must see that her husband leads and guides with her welfare in mind, not as a self-centered "do as I please" autocrat.

4) So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies ... for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, *just as the Lord does the church* (5:28-29). Jesus gives His full attention to the needs, welfare and protection of His people. The church is not an afterthought, hobby or trophy to the Lord. Rather, he pampers it and attends to it as a man does his own body. So a husband should model his affections toward his wife.

Thus marriage is a mutually beneficial relationship patterned after Christ and His church. Though it may be hard to fathom what Jesus gets out of fellowship with sinful people, it is undeniable that He died so that we could be in His body. On the other hand, the benefits to the church by relation to Christ are obvious and numerous. A good marriage, one built upon godly principles, will enrich both husband and wife far beyond their premarital expectations.

3. Marriage: Covenant and Vows

To make a

Commitment asks a more of you than just marriage! It asks that you *love* and *cherish* the other means avoiding a substitute of any kind. It requires that everything in *your* power that your role requires of you it asks that you do all of the every kind of circumstance for long as you live. This kind of commitment has simply *not* been stood in our society.

[Neil Clark Warren, *Finding and with the Love of Your Life*, p. 133

covenant and exchange vows before God is a serious under-taking. The strength of those vows will be based directly upon one's view of God, Himself. If one believes that calling the Creator to witness obligates him to fulfill his word, if one believes the Creator's promises to help him do what is right, if one believes that he will answer in the Judgment for the exercise of his character, then there will be tremendous resolve to honor one's marital vows.

When one enters into marriage, he must do so with the understanding of God's expectations for the relationship. Jesus states God's universal decree for marriage, that it is life-long and not to be sundered (Mt 19:6). Both Solomon and Malachi refer to the covenant nature of marriage (Pr 2:17; Mal 2:14). In marriage one is not only committing himself to a *person* but to a contract, a covenant or an agreement. He vows to unilaterally keep his word regardless of the difficulty, disappointment or disillusionment that may come.

Anyone can cite a heart-rending circumstance in which it seems only reasonable and fair to excuse the suffering mate from the covenant, but Jesus acknowledges only *one* mitigating factor – that of sexual unfaithfulness (Mt 5:32; 19:9). The reason for this rigidity is the power and responsibility that comes with marriage. To remain loyal and committed for life is truly difficult; it requires much work and will be challenged by many obstacles. If the relationship is broken easily or whimsically, great damage will result. The rules and regulations, while appearing harsh in any given single instance, are unyielding for the overall benefit to the marital

covenant. Remember, God knew that weak, selfish and fallible people would enter into marriage. The institution itself must be safeguarded by stringent requirements.

Further, this rigidity seeks to protect both individuals and society from the damage done when marriages fail. Even when the covenant has been grievously breached by one party and the innocent puts away the guilty on divinely approved legal grounds, the effects are devastating. Divorce is *never* painless or pleasant even when it is permitted.

4. God Hates Divorce

So states Malachi: *“For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence,” says the Lord of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously”* (Mal 2:16). There are a multitude of reasons why God hates divorce, but most of them have to do with the pain and injury caused to innocent people by such moral breakdowns.

For one to be told that they are no longer worthy of another's affection, desire, respect and commitment is immensely withering to the soul. It is demeaning and depersonalizing; it destroys one's healthy sense of self-worth and value. Rejection and divorce ruins past memories and future hopes. It is frightening, especially to a woman, and often plunges her into poverty. The prospect of being a single parent, growing old alone, caring for oneself through illness, pining for companionship and managing physical desires are all horrible side-effects of those who are repelled by their mates. ***No wonder God hates it!!!***

And so should we. We who are married should never consider or entertain it, even casually. We should never use it as leverage against our mate or as an idle threat. Even when permitted by the Lord, it should only be a reluctant last resort, forced upon us by the callous betrayal of an unfaithful spouse.

5. Marriage is ...

Confinement ... to one person for life.

Freedom ... to acknowledge one's flaws and work on repairing them without the fear that one will be rejected on their account.

Joy ... in sharing life with another.
Heartache ... in seeing your mate struggle or suffer.

Routine ... as each day brings repeated fulfillment of responsibilities.

Adventure ... as each day holds the prospect for learning, growing and sharing something new.

May we never adopt our society's growing disenchantment with marriage. If we do, it will be a measure of how far we have drifted from God. Let us honor marriage as one of the greatest gifts from God for our enrichment and joy.

Questions for Discussion

1. If one doubts his ability to keep a marriage vow, what should he do (Dt 23:21-23)?
2. How do you think our young people are encouraged by society to think of marriage?
3. Discuss practical things courting couples can do to help them make the right choice about a mate.
4. Think of some other marital "contrasts" like the ones listed at the end of the lesson.

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 19: The Christian's Attitude Toward Husbands

1. Understanding Men

This will be a short paragraph, for we men probably don't understand ourselves any more than we understand women. I believe it is psychologically,

emotionally and spiritually accurate to say that there are profound differences between the sexes that cannot be legislated or educated away. I believe it is plain old horse sense, i.e., judgment shorn of cultural baggage and psycho-

babble, to recognize that taking a boy's toy trucks and replacing them with a Barbie doll won't really change his maleness.

Allowing for individual differences, I believe that God equipped the male to function in the unique role for which He made him. As head and leader, men generally are physically stronger, less emotional and more rational in their thinking, more competitive and goal oriented. We can haggle over various traits and cite women who have excelled in a "man's world," or we could tout the virtue of "house husbands," but in the end men will still be men with their peculiar traits, and women will still be women. And if we insist on denying the obvious, we will continue to live with stressful misunderstandings between the sexes and not have a clue why they exist.

One goal of any wife should be to understand the traits of men in general and familiarize herself with those personality traits embodied in her husband. In so doing she will help herself immensely, for her happiness depends upon securing the happiness of her husband.

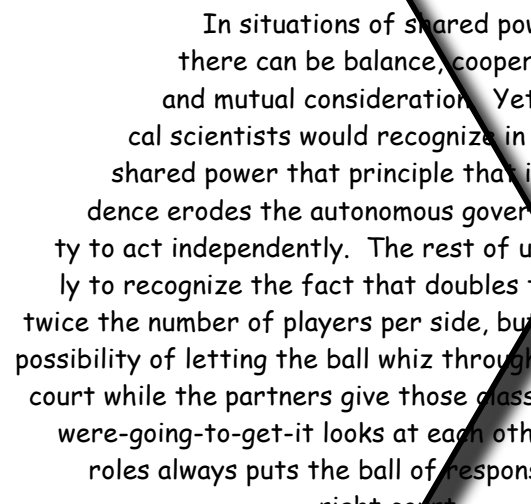
2. Understanding the Man's Role

I can personally understand a woman's potential discomfort with being made subordinate to and dependent upon a man, especially in America. In more primitive, agrarian societies which still have to physically eke out a living, dependence upon the male is enhanced. Societies which are violent and chaotic place a premium upon the man's power to protect.

But in the U.S., ease of living, high wages, broadly available education and rela-

tive peace enable a woman to "do her own thing." The need for a man to function in the role outlined by God may not be so obvious. It is thought demeaning and depersonalizing for a woman to have a high level of dependency upon man – at least that's the line pushed by feminists and others with liberal agendas. Such a message has trickled down to the woman on the street. It is now quite socially acceptable to portray men as bumbling idiots and incompetent boobs while the woman is intelligent, well-tailored, climbing the corporate ladder, deftly balancing motherhood with the executive boardroom.

In the midst of all of this role revisionism, the place of the male has taken a serious hit. Not only has a woman's perception of a man's role been affected, in many cases *the man's perception of his own role has been confused*. At best some men have reacted by shrinking from their duty; at worst a hostility has erupted that, in the long run, the women's movement may live to deeply regret. Both husbands and wives should cultivate an appreciation for the leadership God has invested in the husband. This provision brings order, initiative and



In situations of shared power there can be balance, cooperation and mutual consideration. Yet classical scientists would recognize in a shared power that principle that independence erodes the autonomous government to act independently. The rest of us only to recognize the fact that doubles the number of players per side, but possibility of letting the ball whiz through court while the partners give those classic were-going-to-get-it looks at each other roles always puts the ball of responsibility right court

direction to the family. As in any other organization of people, leadership must be clearly focused for maximum productivity. Someone must take responsibility for setting a tone, overseeing the whole, providing cohesiveness in the community.

Nothing is indicated in the Bible about a man's intellectual or moral superiority in being the leader. Any man who sees himself as such is deluded, and any woman who believes this is misled. Some men think this is license to keep women under their feet, to unilaterally do what they want. These do not have the spirit of Christ. The proper husband/leader has the confidence to ask for his wife's advice, seek her opinions, listen to her thoughts, needs and wishes. This is wisdom, not weakness. It is no reflection upon his leadership, just as a cabinet is no reflection upon a president's authority. Corporate CEOs need a board of directors; head coaches need assistant coaches; generals need sergeants and lieutenants.

A woman tears this down at her own expense: *"Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands"* (Pr 14:1). Much is at stake as we consider the leadership of the man.

3. Taking On the Role

When a man enters marriage, he is stepping into a new world. His individual pursuits of amusement, pleasure and self-gratification give way to concern for those who will become his dependents. His employment is no longer a flight of fancy but a way to feed, house and clothe a family. He cannot with honor simply choose to walk away or leave them to fend for themselves. Their

welfare is now squarely on his shoulders. This re-responsibility will define the rest of his life.

The leadership of the husband must result in fiscal soundness for the family. Substantial debt will breed anxiety, fuel fights and suffocate marital love. Men must have the self-discipline to suppress wants, control spending and plan for the future. A certain *standard* of living is not suggested, and men must be strong enough to provide a standard that is reasonable. He must not be pressured and provoked by a covetous wife.

In addition to leadership relative to "this world" considerations, the most important element of leadership incumbent upon the husband/father is spiritual. Since this study is primarily upon attitudes, we must be brutally honest: *Men, how many of us see ourselves as the spiritual leaders of our home? Are we setting a course that will give our family the best chance of getting to heaven?*

This does not mean necessarily that you are the one doing Bible lessons with the children. But do we have spiritual vision that provides what they need? Have you developed an atmosphere of unquestioned attendance at worship? Do you work to make faith in God a happy, desirable and positive element of life? Or are you spiritual dead weight, your wife constantly pulling you along as she seeks to educate and inspire your children about God and His word? Or, worse yet, is your wife as weak as you, leaving *no one* to hold the reigns of spiritual leadership in your family?

More than likely, in any family, the wife/mother will be the hands-on teacher and nurturer of the children. She will spend

the most time with them, though many of us dads need to increase our direct interaction with our children. But it is up to the husband/father to give clear definition to the spiritual foundation of the family. *Men, is this a role and responsibility you desire? Does it fit your conception of what you wish to be? If not, you have a serious attitude problem regarding one of the most fundamental aspects of earthly life.*

Conclusion

Christian men and women must have a Biblical rather than a cultural outlook on the role of the husband. We tamper with and undermine his role to our own peril. Not only does social cohesiveness

break down, the male who is liberated from his moral and spiritual duty to his family becomes a frightening creature. Men have the physical power to overwhelm and ravage others to their own satisfaction. Such a situation of social chaos happens gradually, one man at a time, until we wake up one day and realize that there are no leaders in the land:

“When a man takes hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, ‘You have clothing; you be our ruler, and let these ruins be under your hand,’ in that day he will protest, saying, ‘I cannot cure your ills, for in my house is neither food nor clothing; do not make me a ruler of the people’” (Is 3:6-7).

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss aspects of leadership which men think women may not fully understand.
2. Discuss what women need to see in their husbands pertaining to leadership.
3. In what practical ways may husbands/fathers take a leading role in setting a spiritual tone for the family?
4. What advice would you give an engaged couple to enhance the leadership role of the man?

The Heart of the Matter: Lesson 20: The Christian’s Attitude Toward Wives

1. Woman: A Creature of Purpose

All creatures were created with purpose, for God doesn’t waste energy. But the human female is unique in that she was

created only after God acknowledged the incompleteness of the male: *“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’” (Gn 2:18).*

In her fullest state (an exalted but not a commanded role), a woman becomes a wife and supports her husband in a subordinate position. Within this context, the woman/wife becomes a mother and thus, in the aggregate, the nur-

turer of humanity itself. Though in regard to authority and leadership she occupies a subordinate position, the woman in actuality exercises tremendous influence. The wise woman will learn to cultivate that influence unto godly purposes without doing violence to the restrictions placed upon her.

The wise man, on the other hand, will recognize his special dependence upon his wife and will bestow due honor upon her as God's special creation for him. He will love and cherish her, for in so doing he honors God, himself and his wife.

2. The Weaker Vessel

Any reference to a woman as the "weaker vessel" is sure to tweak the sensibilities of the liberated female (as well as the culturally conditioned male). Yet Peter says, "*Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered*" (1 Pet 3:7). If the term "weaker vessel" was in the context of taking ad-

vantage of women, abusing them, denigrating or otherwise re-flecting ill upon women as a class, then a cry of objection would be understand-able. But it is

puzzling when women are offended by a self-evident truth and an admonition to value and treasure women.

Yes, it is true that

individual women may surpass some men in strength. But as a class, women are physically inferior to men relative to brute strength. Women simply cannot compete with men in athletic competitions where size, strength and speed are essential. Women are, in fact, "weaker." A man is to account for this and treat his wife accordingly. He must not bully her, threaten her or use his size and strength in any coercive, manipulative or oppressive way. Rather, he is to honor her and treat her as one would delicately handle a piece of crystal, a brittle book or a baby chick.

Also, in the case of a Christian couple, the husband's attitude toward his wife is shaped and governed by the fact that they both are recipients of God's grace. Physical strength notwithstanding, a sinful man is hopeless and helpless before a just God. When he remembers this, and thinks upon his wife's enjoyment of the favor of God, how could he possibly act in an unbecoming way toward her?

3. The Power of Submissiveness

Unlike Eve, whose response to God was calculating and self-serving, the virgin Mary's answer holds no hesitation about risks or losses or the interruption of her own plans. It is an utter and unconditional self-giving: "I am the Lord's servant ... May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). This is what I understand to be the essence of femininity. It means surrender. Think of a bride. She surrenders her independence, her name, her destiny, her will, herself to the bridegroom in marriage ... The gentle and quiet spirit of which Peter speaks, calling it "of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:4), is the true femininity, which found its epitome in Marv.

One of the main objections of the submissive role of the woman is that it tends to excite the dominance of the male over her. But the opposite is true; a man with any conscience whatsoever is softened by submission. When a man realizes that his wife loved him enough to give up her independence, her name, her selfish ambitions, that she entrusted her care to him, that she agreed to let her life follow the direction of her husband's lead, a mature man will seek to be worthy of such confidence in him. There is a tremendous desire to reward one's wife for giving up so much for his sake.

On the other hand, a domineering, "wrest-control-of-the-reins" attitude on the part of a wife is guaranteed to build resentment in her husband. Some men weakly stand by and let their wives take charge, but this is contrary to God's hierarchy. Regardless of how well she may handle leadership, she has perverted her role before God and the home will be unhappy. Further, their children will grow up with a skewed understanding of marital roles.

4. Behind Every Good Man ...

A strong, wise and resourceful husband will still need a counselor, a sounding board, a companion, a morale booster. He will need an equally competent, intelligent and insightful partner to help him retain his objectivity, stand up to criticism, press on toward his goals. Rare, indeed, has been the man of great success who did not have an equally resourceful wife working behind the scenes.

The Bible offers various examples of women who assisted men without violating their assigned station in life. No one would question the authority or leadership of David, yet the counsel of Abigail helped him avoid a great error of judgment (1 Sam 25:23ff). When Manoh was fearful at the departure of the Angel of the Lord, his wife encouraged him with words of reason and confidence (Jud 13:22-23).

When Sarah saw the envy of Hagar and the potential for God's promises to be compromised, she insisted that Abraham send her away with Ishmael. This angered Abraham, but God said, *"Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called"* (Gn 21:12).

"Listen to her voice" does not mean an infringement upon his decision-making power, an abdication of his authority or a woman who is out of line. In fact, Peter upheld Sarah as a model for all Christian women to emulate: *"For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror"* (1 Pet 3:5-6).

5. Selecting a Mate

If a man has a true appreciation for the role that God assigned a wife to play in his life, and if he understands the great power and influence she will wield in his home and among his children, and if he accurately assesses how his wife will re-

flect upon him among the community, then he will order his criteria of selecting a mate accordingly (and so will a potential wife of her husband).

He will not put undue emphasis upon outward, physical characteristics, though consideration of these has its place. He will do better by judging her truthfulness, strength of character, loyalty, initiative, self-discipline, kindness, etc. If attitudes are founded upon shallow traits, changing features, financial productivity or some other factors foreign to fulfilling God's role as a wife, trouble will brew over the horizon.

Paul said, "*He who loves his wife loves himself*" (Eph 5:28). To love, honor and cherish the one who has sacrificed so much for him, who gives of herself in service to him, who is so vital and crucial to his own happiness, is to ensure domestic harmony and spiritual health. On the other hand, to treat one's wife with callous contempt is to create a lifetime of misery for all in the family. Our attitudes toward our wives will reveal what kind of men we are.

Questions for Discussion

1. Women, what mistakes do you think some wives make that undermine a husband's respect for them?
2. Men, what do you think are the biggest obstacles that a man has to deal with in maintaining a good attitude toward his wife?
3. If I first see my wife as a Christian, how will this influence my everyday behavior?
4. Discuss the relative importance of physical beauty. How do cultural standards affect a man's outlook?
5. What attitudes from the Women's Liberation Movement have undermined respect for the domestic role of wives and mothers?

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 21: The Christian's Attitude Toward Children

1. Our View of Children

One indicator of a society's moral soundness is its attitude toward the weak and helpless, especially children. It is thus disturbing to witness the trends toward children in modern American society. On the one hand, children who are deemed to be an inconvenience or an intrusion are frequently aborted. On the other hand, single women and homosexual couples adopt them in an effort to legitimize themselves. Children are often pawns in divorce battles. Some are horribly abused; others left alone while their parents pursue their personal ambitions.

Raising children is not a part-time job; it is not equivalent to having a family pet. Nurturing children is not just a tremendous investment of time but of affection, devotion and commitment. When we become parents we are signing on for a lifetime of concern; in a certain context we do not stop becoming parents once our children are grown.

Truly, Judah spoke for all parents forever when he described Jacob's love for Benjamin: "*Since his life is bound up in the lad's life, it will happen, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die*" (Gn 44:30-31). Ideally, our children broaden our concerns beyond just ourselves. We find ourselves by giving our time, love and support to those who depend upon us. In this, we become more familiar with God, who portrays Himself to us in the role of a parent – our Heavenly Father. Our lives are bound up in the lives of our children.

2. Different Stages of Childhood

The term "children" covers a wide range of ages, phases and relationship factors.

God has seemingly built in to infants features that evoke our most attentive care. The cry of an infant is at once shrill and unsettling, but it drives us to provide what is needed as swiftly as possible. But even the most loving and patient parent can be driven to the brink of uncontrolled frustration by a combination of exhaustion and emotional stress. Parents must constantly support each other and remind themselves of the temporary nature of infancy. The total dependence phase is brief; it will pass all too quickly as older parents can attest.

Other stages present both blessings and burdens. When a toddler discovers a will, he will challenge the parameters of parental authority. Years must be spent shaping and molding that will into respect, compliance and submissiveness to authority. But it is rewarding to see a child begin to make the right decisions after patient, purposeful training.

Teenage years are often very challenging to parental affections. As a child faces the difficulties of growing independence, there will likely be occasions of irresponsibility, rebellion, impulsiveness and other attitudes and behaviors that may make a child an unpleasant companion. But parental love continues as we patiently try to understand what they are going through. In all phases of our children's lives, we strive to appreciate them as gifts of God.

3. Love and Discipline

One of the most disturbing trends in our society has been the abandonment of strong discipline in favor of a more permissive, indulgent, "hands off" approach to child rearing. According to such philosophies, love and discipline are incon-

sistent. But the Scriptures tie the two together, both in reference to God's relation with humanity and in the commands of parents relative to their children.

Several timeless proverbs either explicitly or implicitly connect love and discipline:

"He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (13:24).

"Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction" (19:18).

"Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner depths of the heart" (20:30).

"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (22:15).

"Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell" (23:13-14).

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (29:15).

"Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul" (29:17).

Of course, the conventional wisdom crowd will deride such as "barbaric" and "cruel," labeling any parent who would exercise corporal punishment as abusive. But quite the opposite is true; *it is abuse to let a child go his own way and not teach him the tough lessons of life.* Such a

child will have a more difficult time with peers and authority figures because he/she has never learned respect, obedience and self-control.

Such principles of parenthood are patterned after God's own interaction with mankind:

"My Son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb 12:5-6).

We must love our children enough to do what is good and right for them though it may be uncomfortable. It is the height of weakness to refrain from disciplining children for their own good because a parent finds it inconvenient or unpleasant. Such is not the kind of loving attitude God expects from parents.

4. Children As Spiritual Beings

Paul admonishes parents, especially fathers: *"do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4).* God has chosen to introduce human life to the world by a process of nurture among human parents. Though mentally and emotionally undeveloped at first, these little lives are spiritual beings. It is the challenge of Christian parents to raise their children in such a way that the spirit is nurtured along with the body and the mind. The children must be educated about God both by precept and example. A knowledge of God must be instilled comprehensively, not merely by a Bible class here or a worship service there. Again, the Old Testament inspires us to a high standard in this regard:

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Dt 6:6-9).

If we would learn to see our children as “on loan” from God to be cared for, taught and presented back to Him, how much more time, effort and sobriety would be invested in their development?

5. Children Who Become Adults

If parents do their job right, the time will come to release children to live lives of their own. This is natural; this is the way God intended it to be. Sometimes in our reluctance to turn loose, we cling too tightly. As in the case of failing to discipline, this often has the opposite effect. Our children will often resent our interference in their affairs. They may withdraw or shut the parents out because the parents didn't respect their privacy and independence.

It is also helpful to appreciate the limitations of parenthood. When children become adults, they have their own value systems, make their own decisions and are responsible for their own behavior. Many parents continue to bear extreme guilt for the lives their children are now leading as adults. Every parents will make mistakes, and some of those mis-

Questions for Discussion

takes can have a significant impact. But even God, the perfect parent, stood by while first Eve, then Adam, fell into disobedience. Let us not expect more of ourselves than God was able to achieve.

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate” (Ps 127:3-5).

Mothers and fathers sacrifice much throughout life for the sake of their children; it is only right for children to return the blessing when parents reach a state of dependence. In a job well done, children are nurtured by attentive, caring and loving parents who discipline, teach and encourage their children to love God, respect authority and find a productive niche in society. Parents hopefully can enjoy their grandchildren and receive strength from their extended family as they age.

Granted, not every family situation reaches this ideal. But it is a goal for everyone to work toward. Even in a less than perfect world, the joys and rewards are much greater for those who strive to order their lives as God has directed. Circumstances beyond our control may bring disappointment, but God will bless us in unimaginable ways if we set our minds to building the kind of marriages and families that bring our mates and children closer to God.

1. How did Eli honor his sons more than God (1 Sam 2:29)? How might parents do so today? Give a practical example.
2. The general trend in our society is to have children later in life. Give some pros and cons to this practice.
3. Some Christians have come to believe that they should have as many children as providence allows, thus more families are having numerous children. Discuss this growing outlook. **Must** parents have children until natural circumstances make it impossible?
4. Discuss some important aspects of the spiritual training of children. In what ways has this been inadequate in recent times?
5. Discuss ways in which you feel parents and children can bridge communication gaps.

Conclusion to study on “Attitudes”:

This study has not been exhaustive; so much more could have been included. The bottom line is that true faithfulness is not superficial but rooted in the depths of the heart. It is our attitude toward our own being and our surroundings that will define what kind of people we are. Let us not sell ourselves short. We cannot justify ourselves or take comfort in one or two godly traits. Life is a constant effort to align ourselves with the character of God and thus react properly to the people and things around us. Our prayer is that this study has helped us unto this end.