**GUARDING ONE’S LIFE FROM SIN**

Evan A. Diaz

What do you guard? Ladies, have you ever asked anyone to watch your purse? Have you ever locked your door when you got out of your car or left your house? Folks with smartphones, do you have a lock on your phone? Probably we all would answer yes to all of those things.

What about this? When you take your garbage out to the curb, how long do you normally stick around and make sure the coast is clear? Do you make sure nobody is waiting nearby to steal your trash while you’re not looking? Do you lock your trash cans? No, of course not; nobody will take our garbage unless we pay them money to take it, and even then it’s sometimes reluctantly. Only valuable things need to be guarded because they are usually the only things under attack.

If heaven is the goal, one vital step that cannot be forgotten is learning how to guard our lives from sin. What do we have that is more valuable than our soul? Jesus makes the point in Mark 8:36: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”

We know there is nothing more valuable to us than our souls, and we also know that there is nothing more constantly under attack than our souls. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Again, Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:6: “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.” The idea from the word *watch* is to be on guard, be cautious, and active. This is something we must do if we are to not lose our souls and make it to heaven—guard our hearts, and our souls from sin.

The question then is: “*How?”*  We need not look any further than the only One Who was able to guard His life from sin perfectly—our Lord Jesus; He’s the perfect example. Jesus did three things that helped Him; if we do the same it will help us greatly in our efforts to guard our lives from sin just as He did.

HE SPENT TIME STUDYING

Jesus, we know, from a very young age made the decision to be a student of the Scriptures. In Luke, we find a young, 12-year-old Jesus and learn how highly He priori-tized His study of Scripture:

His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they re-turned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day’s journey, and sought Him among their relatives and ac-quaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and ask-ing them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His under-standing and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.” And He said to them, **“Why is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Fath-er’s business?”** But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them (Luke 2:41-50, emphasis added).

This is an amazing story, and I want to break it down. First of all, He’s twelve, in a city all by Himself—no friends, no family, nothing. When was the last time you have ever heard anyone, much less a 12-year-old, say at the end of a long sermon: “Man, if only that sermon was ***3 days longer****?*” It doesn’t happen. But such was Jesus’ appe-tite for the Word of God.

The distance from Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth to Jerusalem would have been nearly one hundred miles by foot. Making that trip alone goes a long way to show His family’s devotion to God. Even more impressive is that He would have made the trip three times each year (for the Feast of Tabernacles, Pentecost, and Passover). On this particular trip, His family would have been there for a week before they left, but He remained there for three days. Where did He sleep, and what did He eat? He may have just slept on the floor of the temple; as for food, it was customary that at age 12 children begin to learn to fast. He very well may have been fasting those three days, making it an even more amazing feat.

Notice also that He was *sitting* with the teachers—not standing with those who were not counted as being worthy to be part of the group. His wisdom and knowledge of the Scriptures allowed Him to be treated as a peer of those who were teaching. In the first century, the masters (those doing the teaching) were the ones who sat; those being taught often times stood (Matt. 5:1). He must have begun His studies well before the age of 12 to be able to keep up with the aged doctors and scholars of His day.

He desired to be instructed. He sat and listened and was unafraid to ask ques-tions. Both of these things are important to the learning process. If someone is explain-ing something unimportant to you, you may be less interested in asking questions. “Uh, huh…you don’t say.…” But if someone is telling you life or death information (“Clip the blue wire, then the red wire, then the black wire; make sure you don’t touch the green wire or the bomb will explode”), you might be a bit more inclined to listen and ask ques-tions if anything was even slightly unclear. “Okay, just to make sure, it was the red wire, then the blue, then the black….”

When something matters to us, we’ll make sure we get it. That’s just what Jesus did. He was not too proud to ask questions, nor was He too timid to answer questions, He took both as an opportunity to grow more in wisdom (Luke 2:52). Jesus didn’t insist on remaining in Jerusalem, even though it may have been a great opportunity to learn more and increase His standing; He was content to obey His parents and humbly go back to obscurity in Nazareth. Even though He was the Son of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, He humbly submitted Himself to His parents (both of whom He already surpassed in knowledge and wisdom of the Scriptures. He obeyed and submitted because He knew this was His duty.

He made His Father’s business His business. Whatever was important to His Father was also important to Him, and He made it a priority from early on. Even those who were much older than He was (including His parents) did not understand His great emphasis on the work of God, but He left them a great example to ponder and to later follow.

If we so prioritize our Father’s business in our lives, we will not only learn what to do and what not to do, but we will also not even have time to get ourselves into the kinds of trouble so many people sadly find themselves in.

PRAYER WAS IMPORTANT TO HIM;

HE ALWAYS MADE TIME TO PRAY, NO MATTER WHAT

In Luke 4-5, we find that Jesus has just began His ministry. He had embarked on the most important work in the history of mankind—preaching the gospel, casting out demons, and healing the sick, the diseased, the leprous. People are clamoring to be healed by Him and to be taught by Him. With all of this happening, what do we find Him doing? “So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed” (Luke 5:16).

This is terribly interesting to me; here’s why: Entire country sides, whole towns, and cities would come out and follow Him. He was *busy*. My work is important to me, but if I don’t answer a phone call, no one is going to die. There are plenty of people who can take care of things for me if I can’t respond immediately.

Jesus, on the other hand, literally had no one else who could do this work for Him. He is irreplaceable; if He doesn’t do this work, no one can step in and take over. These people wanted Him and needed Him. Yet, despite all of this, He made it a priority to carve out time to be by Himself—away from work, away from family, away from life, away from everything but Him and His God—with Whom He communed in prayer. Not only that, but He did this *frequently*. No matter what was going on in His life or how de-manding His schedule, He made sure to make it happen. That’s what is so interesting. He was *needed*, but He knew He needed to pray.

So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:16).

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12).

After feeding the 5,000, He again snuck away by Himself to pray; this time His disciples found Him and joined Him (Luke 9:18). Just a few days later, in Luke 9:28, Jesus again hikes it up a mountain just so He can get in some prayer time.

In Luke 11:1 the Lord’s disciples were apparently sitting around, watching Him pray, and just waiting for Him to finish. It doesn’t matter to Him who is waiting or how important their questions or needs are. In front of Him were disciples who so hungered after spiritual matters that the top question on their minds was, “Lord, teach us to pray…. Lord, teach us to be more like You. We see You praying, help us to be more like You.” Prayer was a priority, and He made it happen, and it had a profound positive effect on those who were close to Him.

Not only did prayer affect those around Him, it calmed His own soul, connected Him to His Father, focused Him, and reminded Him of His mission. He taught His apostles that prayer will help guard us from temptation (Matt. 26:41).

A praying person is a person who is mindful of his or her complete and utter reli-ance on God. Prayer takes the focus off of self (off of this life and its problems) and places the focus on God. This is a soul that will not quickly run to sin.

“I don’t have time to pray, I’m too busy.” Jesus not only prayed *when* He was busy—but also ***because*** He was busy. When we are the busiest is the time we need to stop and spend time with God in prayer. Don’t say, “I’m too tired”—pray. Don’t say, “I’m too stressed out”—pray. Don’t say, “I’m too sad, I’m discouraged”—pray. And on days when you can say, “I feel great!”—pray.

HE UNDERSTOOD The DECEITFUL NATURE OF SIN.

Jesus had an uncanny knack for being able to unmask sin and see it for what it really was. He didn’t fall for the advertising. This insight no doubt protected Him from the temptation and allurement of sin. It is never exactly what it promises to be. There are al-ways strings attached, and there is fine print that cannot be overlooked.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (Matt. 4:1-3).

Unfortunately, sin sometimes just doesn’t seem that wrong. If you’re hungry and in need of food, it seems innocent enough to make bread out of stones. The temptation is subtle; there isn’t anything wrong with eating—it’s a God-given need. Jesus needed to eat to complete His mission; He’s on the verge of starving to death (after 40 days). There is no Scripture forbidding such a thing, either. In other words, we could easily say, “I don’t see anything wrong with it.” As one commentator wrote:

“At first view, the thing appears justifiable enough, and the truth is, the more plausible a temptation is, and the greater appearance there is of good in it, the more dangerous it is” (Henry 27).

However, Jesus knew His purpose on this earth was not to serve Himself (Matt. 20:28), nor was He here to prove anything to the devil; He knew who He was (Phil 2:6). The devil was questioning His priorities and His reliance upon and trust in God (***if*** You were really the son of God, He wouldn’t let You just die out here in the wilderness; *save Yourself*). The Lord’s very nature was being tested, but He stood firm.

“The Temptation unmasked Satan…*If you are God*, said Satan, *then daz-zle me. Act like God should act*. Jesus replied, *Only God makes those de-cisions, therefore I do nothing at your command”* (Yancey 71).

But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” (Matt. 4:4) In other words, Jesus was saying, “God will take care of Me, I don’t have a thing to prove to you.” Satan’s reaction is, “Ok, fine; since You like using Scripture, If God will take care of You, then don’t worry about proving anything to me; prove it to the people.”

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over You,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear You up, Lest You dash Your foot against a stone’” (Matt. 4:5-6).

Surely many people would see, believe in, and follow Jesus if He were to actually so what the devil suggested. It would be a quick path to assured fame. But Jesus did not want to take shortcuts or for people to follow Him only because of the miracles. He wanted people to follow Him because of His teachings and out of love for Him. Matthew Henry comments:

If Christ should cast himself down, it would be the tempting of God, [1] As it would be *requiring a further confirmation* of that which was so well con-firmed. Christ was abundantly satisfied that God was already His Father, and took care of Him (1215-16).

Jesus answered Satan, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (Matt. 4:7). The devil remained undaunted. “Enough with the subtleties! You want people to follow You? You want to set up a kingdom? Here’s how You do it:”

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:8-9).

That would, in one sense, achieve the goal Jesus came to achieve, but doing so in such a manner would rob it of any efficacy. As with all sin, the end does not justify the means, It would be a hollow victory—if it could be considered one at all. It would pervert the entire reason that God sent His Son to this earth. Jesus was not so short-sighted. One source makes the following comments.

Remember that Satan is a liar; so don't assume that he actually could or would give Jesus that kind of power.

Christ was actually going to receive authority over all the kingdoms of the world from the Father. What the devil offers is a shortcut. Why go through the pain and trouble of being nailed to a cross by people who hate you? You can have it now!

Satan offers us shortcuts today. Why wait for God to accomplish His pur-pose? You can have what you want now!

The devil promises the things that appeal to us. Even if he does deliver short term enjoyment, he does not provide the fulfilling joy that the Lord does. All he offers are shortcuts and substitutes. If we take those things instead of the good blessings the Lord gives, our enjoyment will be very short lived (The Temptation of Jesus).

Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall wor-ship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matt. 4:10). The suggestion was so repulsive to Jesus that He cast the devil away from Himself that very instant and would hear no more.

He tempted Jesus toward the good parts of being human without the bad: to savor the taste of bread without being subject to the fixed rules of hun-ger and of agriculture, to confront the risk with no real danger, to enjoy fame and power without the prospect of painful rejection—in short, to wear a crown but not a cross. (The temptation that Jesus resisted, many of us, his followers, still long for) (Yancey 72).

May we never be enticed by the devil to satisfy our God-given natural desires outside of God’s will. Nor may we be enticed to take a shortcut to get where we de-sire—either by cheating or stealing or lying. Nor may we lose sight of the reason God has put us here in this earth, which is not to simply work or have fun.

CONCLUSION

Much more could be said about how we could guard our lives from sin—by sur-rounding ourselves with the right kind of people (Ecc. 4:9-12; 1 Cor. 15:33), by remem-bering to remain humble and open to correction (Pr. 16:18, Phil. 4:5-8, 1 Peter 5:5-10), and by seeking godly counsel and support (Ps. 1; Pr. 4:7; 12:15; Gal. 6:1-5). However, it is often times the basics that escape us. Studying and praying will help us to see sin for what it is, and so we will find our lives well-guarded from sin.

WORKS CITED

All quotations are from the New King James unless otherwise specified.

Henry, Matthew. *Commentary on the Whole Bible.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

Publishing House, 1961.

The Temptation of Jesus, found at the following link:

<http://www.franklinchurchofchrist.com/sermons/date/2011/htm/201106051100.htm>

Yancey, Philip. *The Jesus I never Knew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing

House, 1995.

**KEEPING “THE CONSCIENCE CLEAN”**

Gary W. Summers

Have you ever noticed that some people do not seem to have a conscience? They can look straight into a television camera and tell a lie without blinking. They can convince the public of something that is not true by repeating it frequently even though they know they are not telling the truth. Later, people marvel that they could do such a thing, but the Bible has an explanation.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

The context is one that involves false teachers who can look their brethren right in the eye and lie to them about what the Bible teaches or the meaning of a particular passage. The apostles and elders met in Jerusalem, for example, in Acts 15, and they determined that Gentile Christians did not need to be circumcised in order to be saved; neither did they need to keep the Law of Moses (except for the four things that were mentioned in the letter). Did that put an end to the unauthorized teaching of these men? Not all of them. Knowing of the decision that had been made, they would still go out and preach that same false gospel.

Had Jesus not thoroughly defeated the theology of the Sadducees, who did not believe in angels or the resurrection? How is it that more than 25 years later some were teaching in Corinth that there will be no resurrection from the dead? Paul responds by, first of all, pointing out that the resurrection of Jesus is a fundamental part of the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1-4). He next lists several who saw the resurrected Christ—in-cluding himself (5-11). Then Paul begins his application: “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (12). After making several arguments proving the reality of the resurrection, Paul talks about the day when Christians shall be raised from the dead, having been made victorious over it (13-57).

How could some have brought themselves to speak contrary to the truth? They had seared their consciences. Distorting the truth is not the only moral evil men can accustom themselves to committing. How can murderers, such as Queen Jezebel, not be bothered by their actions? Those who live in fornication or persist in an unauthorized marriage actually convince themselves they are doing nothing wrong. People have learned to justify every sin imaginable by searing their consciences.

But those individuals are not the su+bject of this study. Faithful Christians will fervently desire to never reach such a condition. With careful preparation, we can all avoid ever arriving at such a point in our lives, and if we begin when we are young, the better able we will be to establish the proper attitudes and strategies. The first question to ask is, “What is the conscience?”

CONSCIENCE

*Old Testament*

Before considering definitions, it is usually helpful to see how a word is used in context. The King James, the New King James, and the American Standard have no renderings of *conscience* in the Old Testament. The New American Standard has one—1 Samuel 24:5. The English Standard Version also has only one—1 Samuel 25:31 (as does the Revised Standard Version). The New International Version has the previous two and four others (Genesis 20:5-6, 2 Samuel 24:10, and Job 27:6).

The two in Genesis relate to Abimelech who protested to Abraham that he had taken Sarah in the “integrity of” his heart (“with a clear conscience,” NIV). All of the other translations likewise use “integrity.” The NIV obviously used one of their “dynamic equivalences” here instead of the actual word. All of the translations use the word *re-proach* in Job 27:6: “My heart shall not reproach me.” The NIV says, “My conscience is clear”—once again being a little looser.

In 2 Samuel 24:10, after David numbered the troops, various translations say, David’s heart “smote,” “struck,” or “troubled” him. (The NIV said he was “conscience-stricken.”) Those same words are used by the various translations mentioned above for 1 Samuel 24:5, except for the New American Standard, which says that his “conscience bothered” him. The NIV again says David was “conscience-stricken.” The final verse under consideration is fairly evenly split. The KJV, the NKJ, and the ASV use “offense of heart.” The RSV and the ESV have “pangs of conscience.” The NAS has “troubled heart,” and the NIV begins the verse with, “My lord will not have on his conscience….”

So, some translators have thought that a “troubled heart” might be equivalent to a “bothered conscience”—even though the literal word used in all six passages was heart. The concept seems to be present. When Adam and Eve violated what God taught them concerning not eating the fruit, they hid. They experienced guilt; showing that the consciences He created them with were functioning.

*New Testament*

In the New Testament it is another matter entirely. The Greek word, *suneideesis* [4893 in *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*], appears in the Greek text 32 times, and in the King James is translated “conscience” every time. In addition, no other Greek word is translated “conscience.” Below are a few of the verses in which the word under dis-cussion appears. They help bring out the meaning of the word.

Then those who heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest to the even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst (John 8:9).

Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1).

This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men (Acts 24:16).

Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them (Rom. 2:15)

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me wit-ness in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 9:1).

Therefore you must subject, not only because of wrath but also for con-science’ sake (Rom. 13:5).

However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with con-sciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled (1 Cor. 8:7).

But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak con-science, you sin against Christ (1 Cor. 8:12).

If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for conscience’ sake (1 Cor. 10:29).

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith (1 Tim. 1:5).

Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience (1 Tim. 3:9).

To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbeliev-ing nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled (Titus 1:15).

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:14).

For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purged, would have no more consciousness of sins (Heb. 10:2).

For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one en-dures grief, suffering wrongfully (1 Peter 2:19).

There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21).

To summarize briefly, then, the conscience accuses, tries, and convicts a person when he violates what he has been taught. It is possible to live with a good conscience, but It can be defiled. Encouraging someone else to violate his conscience is a sin against Christ. Obeying what Jesus taught provides an individual a good conscience, which is peace of mind.

*Definitions*

Strong defines the Greek word *suneideesis* as, first, “the consciousness of any-thing,” and, second, as “the soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter, commending one, condemning the other,” which is what we have seen in the above usages. Robertson comments that the word

Is literally “joint-knowledge” in Greek, Latin (*conscientia*) and English “conscience” from the Latin. It is a late word from *sunoida*, to know to-gether, common in the O.T., Apocrypha, Philo, Plutarch, New Testament, Stoics, ecclesiastical writers. In itself the word simply means conscious-ness of one’s own thoughts (Heb. 10:2), or of one’s own self, then con-sciousness of the distinction between right and wrong (Rom. 2:15) with approval or disapproval (3:397).

W. E. Vine agrees that *suneideesis* means literally “a knowing with (*sun*, with, *oida*, to know), i.e., a co-knowledge (with oneself)” (1:228). He adds:

…the witness borne to one’s conduct by conscience, that faculty by which we apprehend the will of God, as that which is designed to govern our lives ; hence (*a*) the sense of guiltiness before God; Heb. 10 : 2 ; (*b*) that process of thought which distinguishes what it considers morally good or bad, commending the good, condemning the bad, and so prompting to do the former, and avoid the latter ; Rom. 2:15 (bearing witness with God’s Law) ; 9 : 1 ; 2 Cor. 1 : 12 ; acting in a certain way because the con-science requires it, Rom. 13 : 5…. (1:228).

Considering all the definitions and the contexts of the way the word is used, we may arrive at the following two conclusions.

First, we all have a faculty that we term *conscience*. It is a function our mind has—unless we sear it so that it fails to operate properly. Our minds carefully consider what we have been taught concerning right and wrong and compare our actions with those ideals. If we know that stealing is wrong, yet for whatever reason we take that to which we are not entitled, our mind processes what we have been taught with our ac-tions, and it accuses us: “Thief!” We may try to justify ourselves, but our conscience has already condemned us, and we know internally that it is right. If we succeed in defending our actions, even though we know we are wrong, we risk searing this valu-able service that the conscience provides.

Second, as our minds compare our actions with our beliefs, the conscience will also accuse us of failing to do what we ought to have done. The brother of the Lord wrote: “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). So if we had an opportunity to do a kindness for someone and failed to act, we are likely going to hear about it. If we passed up an opportunity to ask someone for a Bible study and failed to do so, we will find ourselves at the end of the day asking forgiveness and an opportunity to be more watchful the next day.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE CONSCIENCE

The conscience is one of the most valuable assets we have, but it is not fool-proof. As powerful as it is in helping us to do what is right, it is not infallible. Two things can render this God-given tool useless and ineffective. The first has already men-tioned—searing it. A refusal to accept the accusation made against us can cause great damage. If we find ourselves defending actions that we know were wrong, we are headed in the wrong direction. Many reason, “My employer doesn’t pay me what I deserve; therefore, taking home tools, products, or supplies that have not been paid for (or approved by management) is acceptable. They actually owe it to me.” Another form of stealing is called, in the common vernacular, “goofing off.” If someone is being paid for work, he ought to be working; otherwise, he is stealing the time and money of his employer. If we, therefore, little by little, justify bad behavior, the conscience can be defeated and overcome.

The second problem that the conscience has is that it can only respond to what it knows. If it has been taught wrong, it will bring no charges against the individual. Why is it that many women opt for abortions? They have never been taught that it is the taking of a human life. They have constantly heard that it is just tissue—just a “fetus.” Some women who have later come to a knowledge that they, in fact, destroyed a human being have had to learn to live with tremendous guilt. Similarly, if young people have been reared in a culture where *fornication* has become an obsolete word, their consciences will not bother them when they begin cohabitating without necessarily any expectation of getting married.

In other words, although all are born with a conscience, we do not come with an innate sense of what is right or wrong. The mind only compares what we have been taught with the way we behave. God did not program us with perfect knowledge of right and wrong; we must be taught that from the Word of God. To demonstrate this point, all anyone needs is to examine the Apostle Paul. Remember that he said he had “lived in all good conscience before God until” the very time he addressed the Jews (Acts 23:1). This time period included his persecution of Christians. He said of himself:

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them and I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to for-eign cities” (Acts 26:9-11).

No inner voice told Saul of Tarsus that he was wrong in persecuting Christians. It did not violate anything he had been taught. In fact, since he and his cohorts be-lieved that Jesus was a blasphemer and a pretender, it was the right thing to do to muster as much resistance to Him as possible. Under the Law of Moses, the Israelites were told: “And whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall surely stone him…” (Deut. 24:16). Therefore, Paul and others had no qualms about having put Jesus or any of his followers to death. They had, however, failed to consider properly the evidence.

KEEPING THE CONSCIENCE CLEAN

*The Right Information*

Robertson also noted that Saul followed what he believed; he commented: “But the conscience is not an infallible guide and acts according to the light that it has (1 Cor. 8:7, 10; 1 Peter 2:19)” (3:397-98). Since the conscience can only respond, therefore, to what it has been taught, it must be taught the truth. Paul was not troubled at all in his mind as he persecuted Christians. He could sleep at night just fine. He stood confi-dently in the Law of Moses; he had not, however, learned the truth concerning Jesus. He had probably heard the gospel preached, but he did not believe it. The claims of Christianity seemed like lies to him, and he could not ignore it because he was zealous for the Law. Once he was assured of the truth of Jesus, it changed everything.

Jesus appeared to Saul the persecutor on the road to Damascus. While he had rejected the eyewitness testimony even of Stephen as he was in the process of dying (“Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” [Acts 7:56]) up to this point, when Jesus appeared to him, he had now become a witness himself (Acts 9:1-8). Although the persecution of Christians was a serious mat-ter, one wonders if Jesus was amused at the irony of Saul’s conversion. “He doesn’t like my witness; I’ll just make him one.” Saul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). He became one of the strongest, most outspoken preachers of the gospel of Christ.

Paul needed to know the truth, however, to continue to maintain a clear con-science. Therefore, in his preaching Paul often emphasized the concept. He used the word 8 times in Romans, 3 times in 1 Corinthians, 8 in 2 Corinthians, 5 in Galatians, 6 in Ephesians, once in Philippians, twice in Colossians, once in 1 Thessalonians, three times in 2 Thessalonians, 5 times in 1 Timothy, 6 in 2 Timothy, and twice in Titus. A few of those passages are listed below.

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me wit-ness in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 9:1).

[Love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6).

For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth (2 Cor. 13:8).

Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? (Gal. 4:16).

(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) (Eph. 5:9).

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth… (Eph. 6:14).

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also ef-fectively works in you who believe (1 Thess. 2:13).

And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved (2 Thess. 2: 10).

Who desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

These verses make it clear that truth is vital to salvation. If people could be saved through believing and practicing error, truth would not matter. Not only is it cru-cial for salvation, however; it is also a requirement for the conscience to function prop-erly. If truth is not firmly implanted in one’ mind, how can the conscience do its job—either to accuse or to excuse? Nothing in Saul’s mind could accuse him because the facts had not been stored there. For this reason several verses warn against error.

Paul himself talks about those who “hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1: 18, KJV). The ASV uses in place of *hold*, *hinder*, and most newer translations render the word *suppress*, which fits the thought of what follows. Paul also describes the Gen-tile world, whom he confirms “changed the truth of God into a lie” Rom. 1:25). He de-scribes “men of corrupt mind,” who “are destitute of the truth” (1 Tim. 6:5). Other men who claimed that the resurrection was already past (Max King followers should pay at-tention here) Paul affirms “concerning the truth have erred” (2 Tim. 2:18). All Christians should be cautious not to “turn from the truth” (Titus 1:14).

One reason for these warnings is that if Christians do not have a grasp of the truth, then their consciences cannot function in the way God designed them. Jesus Himself had taught that people must continue in His Word in order to truly be His dis-ciples and in order to come to a knowledge of the truth, which sets us free (John 8:31-32). Although no reference was made to the conscience, Solomon of old stressed the value of certain concepts; he wrote: “Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Pr. 23:23).

To know the Word of God is imperative, and that knowledge has so many appli-cations; several of these are mentioned in Psalm 119. One of the most pertinent of these is: “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word” (v. 9). This verse could have prompted Isaac Watts, lyricist for “How Shall the Young Secure Their Hearts?” to write the words he used in the first verse. The Word of God provides the choicest rules which, if we know them and heed them, will keep both us and our consciences clean. The Word of God does not compare to any work com-posed by a human author. Internalizing the Scriptures helps us refrain from sin: “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (v. 11).

Furthermore, the writer of Psalm 119 said: “Your word is very pure; therefore your servant loves it” (v. 140). The pure Word leads to a pure life. It is the means by which we guard our lives from sin, as well as the way in which our conscience knows to congratulate us for doing what is right or warn us when we are headed the wrong direc-tion—or bother of us if we committed sin. For all of the valid reasons that are provided in Psalm 119, may every Christian fervently say (and mean): “I have chosen the way of truth…” (Ps. 119:30).

*The Right Heart*

Of course, all the knowledge of truth in the world will not do any good without the heart and the will to follow God’s teachings. Searing one’s conscience is not the only problem the Christian faces. Vacillating between good and evil choices will hinder one’s faithfulness. Perhaps that is the reason that we read so often words to this effect: “Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!” (Ps. 119:2). The concept is mentioned five more times in Psalm 119; the most effective one being in verse 34: “Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart.” First, we need to understand the truth, and then we must keep it wholeheartedly. Half measures will not work.

Solomon emphasized this precept when he wrote: “Keep your heart with all dili-gence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Pr. 4:23). One’s behavior is an expression of what one believes. God’s principles of morality and holiness must become firmly en-trenched in our minds; we will be able to express ourselves in a godly manner if we first have thought of the rightness of wrongness of various actions and have made up our mind how we will react in various situations. The following information was taken from volume 6, page 102 of the *5.5 Chronological Bible Odyssey*, a curriculum that covers the entire Bible.

The following five points are from Cliff Goodwin’s chapter, “Proverbs for Youth: ‘Watch Your Companions,’” in *The Sayings of Solomon: Pearls from the Proverbs* (Southaven, MS: Southaven Church of Christ, 2003), page 245. The sixth point was added:

**The Solution (4:20-27)**

***Saturate*** yourself with the Word of God (20-22; cf. 3:22; John 6:63, 68, Ecc. 12:13).

***Safeguard*** your heart (23).

***Sanctify*** your speech (24, Eph. 4:29).

***Straighten*** your gaze (25; Phil. 3:13-14).

***Study*** your paths (26; cf. 5:21).

Be ***steadfast*** in your resolve (27).

The Christian must constantly remind himself of God’s teachings (saturation). Observing them brings life and health to those who do so. Guarding one’s heart will result in speaking and listening to the truth, which presumes that we have the analytical ability to discern which is which. Our eyes should be focused on the Word and not be distracted by the visual and verbal assaults Satan makes available to us. We know the paths of righteousness and the broad way that leads to destruction. We cannot allow our feet to travel where evil lies: “He who walks with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Pr. 13:24). Even under other covenants, Joseph guarded his heart and fled from the prospect of adultery. Daniel and his three friends would not violate their consciences by eating food that was forbidden to them. Truly, we must be steadfast in our resolve.

It is lamentable that with so much Bible to teach our youth that so many congregations waste time in their Bible classes. Topical and thematic studies have their place, but students of the Word need to see how all the Bible fits together and know what God’s morality entails. If young people (not to mention, adults) are to secure their hearts, the knowledge must be present, as well as the will to keep it. Understanding can only come from that Holy Book, which teaches us to seek and obey God with a whole heart.

WORKS CITED

All quotations are from the New King James unless otherwise specified.

Blue Letter Bible (a software program that enables the researcher to check several

Bible translations and also provides Scriptures and defintions from *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance.*

Robertson, Archibald Thomas. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. 6 vols. Grand

Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1930.

Vine, W.E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966.

Wigram, George V., and Ralph D. Winter. *The Word Study Concordance*. Wheaton, IL:

Tyndale House Publishers, 1978.

**“THE CHOICEST RULES”**

Bill Weaver

Life is filled with rules. This is a principle taught at a very early age. There are basic rules that are automatically understood such as, “Don’t put your hand on a hot stove.” There are also more specific rules. There are governmental laws, workplace rules, and societal expectations.

Many people go through life trying to find their way around life’s rules. “Rules are meant to be broken,” is a common adage. Another is, “it’s easier to ask for forgive-ness than to get permission.” However, in an effort to circumvent the rules, we fail to recognize that it’s ultimately about obedience. Either we choose to obey, or we choose to disobey, there is no middle ground.

With life’s daily rules, the consequences of disobedience may not seem to be too significant. However, our response to the will of God brings eternal consequences. God has given us rules by which we are to live. These guidelines have purpose for both life and eternity.

1 Samuel 15 contains one of the greatest examples of what it means to follow the choicest rules of God. King Saul began his reign with a true desire to serve God. But at this point Saul had lost his way. He had given himself over to complete disobedience.

God had given Saul some pretty simple instructions: Attack the Amalekites and destroy everything (1 Sam. 15:3). Saul heard God’s commands and partially obeyed. He chose to spare the best of the cattle and sheep. He also spared King Agag.

In Saul’s mind this made sense. Why waste good sheep? And King Agag was a powerful man. Besides, he obeyed most of God’s command. How many Christians struggle with this same issue? They obey God as far as it makes sense to them or as far as it is convenient. Imagine that you are a doctor and a potential patient is meeting with you. The patient informs you that he will listen to your medical advice and then do whatever he feels is best. He will keep his appointments as long as nothing better comes up. He will follow the treatment plan provided it makes sense to him. He will only take the medications if he likes them. What would your response, as a physician, be? You would likely refuse to be his doctor because he is not willing to acknowledge your authority.

**God expects our complete obedience and will be pleased by nothing less.** To God, choosing not to obey is the same as rebellion (Deut. 11:26-28). No matter what the rationale, disobedience is sin. While God’s grace abounds, He desires complete obedience.

**God’s choicest rules are what is best for us.** God has given us rules to live by because through them He provides protection (Exodus 16:26; cf. Deut. 10:12-13). As children, we often believed our parents made rules in order to make our lives miserable. As adults, we understand those rules were for our protection, wellbeing, and happi-ness. God’s choicest rules enable us to live well in this life and to live eternally.

**Keeping God’s choicest rules is proof of our love for Him.** If we truly love God, we will follow His statutes and walk in His ways (John 14:15). Obedience is at the very heart of our relationship with God. His choicest rules are not given to burden us but to draw us into a right relationship with Him (1 John 5:3).

But what if we are disobedient to God after giving our life to Him? The tempta-tion to sin is ever present in our lives. Even when we try our best, there are times when we will fall short. Our need for God’s grace is ongoing. We are told in 1 John 1:9 that God will forgive those who acknowledge their sin and seek His forgiveness. Acknowl-edging that we have disobeyed God allows Him to restore the relationship.

As for Saul, he never really confessed his sin. When Samuel confronted Saul, he first blamed the soldiers (1 Sam. 15:15). And the more Samuel confronted Saul about his sin, the more Saul tried to defend himself (1 Sam. 15:20-21). Even when he finally confessed, he doesn’t really accept responsibility. Saul ultimately acknowledged his sin but claimed he did it because he feared the people (1 Sam. 15:24).

Why did Saul struggle with acknowledging his sin? He had already begun to make himself his god. Saul loved himself so much that he built a monument for himself (1 Sam. 15:12). It seems that Saul had forgotten that he was king because God made him king. Saul had power because God had given it to him. But Saul began to think that he deserved his power and sought to exalt himself instead of God. He had fallen prey to the desire for power and the sin of pride.

Why do so many walk away from God’s choicest rules? Because we tend to lift ourselves up as a god. When we do, there is no room for the one true God; He leaves our thoughts (Ps. 10:4). Ultimately, whoever is in charge of our lives is our god (Matt. 6:24).

“How can the young secure their hearts and guard their lives from sin?” This goal can be reached by: 1) making God’s choicest rules a center focus of our lives; 2) accepting responsibility when we stray away from those choicest rules; and 3) humbling ourselves before God in obedience.

**AVOIDING “THE DANGERS OF THE NIGHT”**

H. Daniel Denham

Isaac Watts’ beautiful and stirring hymn, “How Shall the Young Secure Their Hearts?” has in its 2nd stanza these words:

‘Tis, like the sun, a heav’nly light, That guides us all the day;

And, thro’ the dangers of the night, A lamp to lead our way…

Of course, the reference is to the Sacred Scriptures, the Bible, the Word of the Living God, which provides the instruction and guidance needed for all to find their way to heaven. The Psalmist asked, “How can a young man cleanse his way?” And then answered, “By taking heed according to Your (God’s) word” (Ps. 119:9, NKJV).

It is our light (Psa. 119:105). It serves as a hedge against sin (Psa. 119:11). It is “the sword of the Spirit” through which the Spirit operates to effect moral change and to affect our conduct for good, but which also is given to us by God for the defense and preservation of our souls (Eph. 6:17).

But another lecture focuses on that aspect of things in this hymn and its relation-ship to God’s Book. Here we will discuss “The Dangers of the Night”—and particularly the need and the means to avoid them. Let us then consider:

THE **FACT** OF THE DANGERS OF THE NIGHT.

That such dangers to our souls exist should not be doubted by anyone, especial-ly spiritually-minded people. Of all people who ought to recognize the dangers that can arise in the nighttime are God’s children. The rest of the world mocks and jeers at the very concept of sin. But the need to realize the fact of sin and understand the real sig-nificance of the concept in practical terms is demonstrated in Dr. Karl Menninger’s book, *Whatever Became of Sin?* which discusses in part the significance of the concept in af-fecting the moral behavior of human beings, especially in regard to the need for genuine objectivity in making moral choices and in helping to encourage the taking of responsi-bility for our actions.

The last two or three generations have moved away from taking responsibility for their moral choices. Everything is viewed as environmentally affected with a virtual denial of the existence of free will. This view accords with the philosophical naturalism that has been drummed into youth in schools and colleges across the nation and throughout Western civilization by the teaching of organic evolution concerning our origins. Man is viewed as “a hairless ape,” or as zoologist Desmond Morris in his book, *The Naked Ape*, describes him: “a naked ape” and “human animal.” It is not surprising that people come to behave in keeping with such a persona when they are bombarded daily with the message that they are nothing but matter in motion or accidentally ani-mated atoms.

Our postmodern culture has become permeated with such tripe and, as a result, reflects it even in its supposed art forms. For example, as the popular song, “Bad Touch” by the Bloodhound Gang of a few years back expressed it: “You and me baby we ain’t nothing but mammals; so let’s do it like they do on the Discovery Channel.” Several other popular songs by even more recognizable groups (e.g., Maroon 5) have asserted the same false view of human nature as the basis for an amoral approach to life choices. Other songs stress a materialistic philosophy (e.g., Madonna’s “Material Girl” and Depeche Mode’s “I Just Can’t Get Enough”; etc.).

The postmodern mindset then is to blame outside factors, including the actions of other people, for our own failures. In such an approach, the perpetrator of even the most heinous crimes is classified as a “victim” of society rather than an evil or wicked person. Instead of addressing moral failure, the process simply passes the buck on responsibility to a more nebulous entity called “society,” thus absolving the evildoer of his own actions.

A community composed of such people digresses into barbarism and butchery as its normal state. When people follow the philosophies of hedonism, utilitarianism with its so-called “pleasure/pain principle,” and/or relativism, which holds that everything depends on the personal feelings of the agent of the action for its moral justification, then exists a formula for much real, moral evil to be done. It is no accident that Hitler, Stalin, and Mao were all gleeful proponents of evolution and its application to social matters. It provided philosophical justification for concentration and death camps, slave labor, forced sterilizations, and mass exterminations.

The Bible, meanwhile, has all along warned against sin. It gives us the definition of it (1 John 3:4; Rom. 4:15). It identifies the nature of it as being preeminently rebel-lious against God and His authority. It also gives the remedy for it, as we have noted.

The night vs. day and/or darkness vs. light motif are found occasionally in the Scriptures (cf. Job 12:25; Pr. 2:13; 20:20; Ecc. 5:20; Ezek. 8:12; Isa. 5:20; 29:15; John 1:5; 3:19; 12:35, 46; Eph. 4:14; 5:8-11; Col. 1:12-13; 1 John 1:6-7; 1 Peter 2:9). In these usages, the idea is that of evil vs. good, ungodliness vs. righteousness, etc. Thus, Paul says to the Thessalonians:

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this day [the Day of the Lord, HDD] should overtake you as a thief. You are sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as an helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing (1 Thess. 5:4-11).

The imagery is quite apropos. While sin can occur at any time in one’s existence as an accountable person before God, the nighttime is especially singled out in the Scriptures as fraught with dangers. We need to recognize those dangers and avoid them.

SOME EXAMPLES OF THE DANGERS OF THE NIGHT

**There is the danger of indifference or apathy**. While the language of 1 Thes-salonians 5:4-11 is figurative relative to the use of the night versus day motif, and the allusion by Paul is to the failure of one to be alert and watchful against sin, the idea does have special significance concerning the night, as we tend to let down our guard in nighttime hours more than those of the daytime. We become tired from the battles of the day, especially if we have been challenged with temptation due to contact with people who are unrighteous and who do not seek our best interest—whether it is a co-worker who wants to get us involved in their dirty joke-telling and sexual misconduct, a boss who encourages us to lie to customers for the good of the business, or a person who wants us to engage in some other unsavory activity such as stealing or unjust vio-lence.

At night we become more vulnerable to actual compromise because we are just trying to chill, to get over the rigors of these daytime challenges, and relax. At the same time loosen our morals and our commitment. We become in danger of falling asleep spiritually, as it were. We may watch things that in the daytime we would do our best to avoid. We may contemplate things that we might otherwise never entertain. A general apathy can settle in and undermine our morals and character. We need to realize that being lukewarm is always a sin—whether it is in the daytime or at night (Rev. 3:15-16). It ultimately will be easier to succumb to the pressures of the day, if we give in to apathy in the night.

**There is thus also the danger of slothfulness**. This can be fed by a wrongful desire for repose and rest. There is a place for rest and relaxation, and is often needed for our wellbeing (cf. Mark 6:31). Medical reasons also often require extensive rest for those dealing with such problems. However, many who are otherwise quite healthy are given to sloth and indolence due simply to perpetual laziness. To them life is a ham-mock to lie in and they do so at every opportunity. They act as though the world owes them a living. It is not that they are opposed to hard work because they can go to sleep next to it any time! But the Scriptures condemn slothfulness (Pr. 15:19; 18:9; 19:15, 24; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-15; Ecc. 10:18; Rom. 12:11; Heb. 6:12). One of the terms used of the one-talent man was *slothfu*l (Matt. 25:26). His failure entailed slothfulness on his part.

“How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep— so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man” (Pr. 6:9-11).

“Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you shall be satisfied with bread” (Pr. 20:13).

**There is the danger of drunkenness**. As Paul notes, the general practice is for those who become drunk to do so “in the night.” It is a time to relax, and the recreation-al use of alcohol and drugs becomes more prevalent in the night. Even the abuse of medicines is naturally more prone to occur in the nighttime, especially in the use of pain meds and sleep aides—the two most commonly abused kinds of legal medications.

We need to remember Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 5:18: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” The inceptive verb forbids even the beginning of entering in to the process of becoming drunk. Logically, without the first drink it would be impossible to begin the process. Further, there is sim-ply no Biblical authority for the recreational use of alcohol.

**There is the danger of illicit sexual contact**. God designed the human body with the capacity for sex, established the sex drive, and specified that such be confined to relations between Divinely-joined spouses in the state of matrimony (Matt. 19:4-6; Heb. 13:4). Sexual contact outside of God-approved marriage is sin. The kind of mar-riage that God has sanctioned is that of one man for one woman for life with but one exception (cf. Mal. 2:12-16; Matt. 5:32; 19:9).

All other sexual contact is against the law of God and is therefore a sin (1 John 3:4). This is true of all non-marital heterosexual contact and all homosexual contact (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21). The Greek word ***porneia*** (“fornication”) often refers to all forms of illicit sexual behavior, including pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, homosexu-ality, pedophilia, and bestiality, while the term ***moicheia*** (“adultery”) is used of extra-marital intercourse.

Christians are charged with the obligation to keep themselves “pure” (1 Tim. 5: 22). The Greek word ***hagnos*** here denotes the idea of being “chaste” in one’s behav-ior. This also precludes the unchaste handling of others, as in the practice known as “petting.” This is more prone to occur under the cover of darkness at night, when peo-ple think they are not being seen. But God always sees (Ps. 139:11-12; Heb. 4:13).

Also, this practice often leads to even more aggressive behavior on the part of the participants, which can culminate in illicit intercourse, including violent rape. One of the most common approaches today in seduction used by young men is that of the so-called “Netflix and chill” approach. The young man invites the woman over to his house or apartment to watch a Netflix movie and “just chill.” It has become a standard avenue to lead to the practice of petting often followed by more intense sexual contact. The woman often never really intended to be drawn into the activity or even suspected that to be his motive, but she becomes both victim and participant at the same time.

Often she is the one who bears the stigma of society from the contact from what may follow (e.g., disease, pregnancy), while the old phrase, “Boys will be boys,” is trot-ted out to cover for his rakish behavior. Young women need to guard themselves against such and learn what it is to be a true lady! Young men need to learn what it is to be a genuine gentleman! One of the first places to begin to do that is to avoid such situations altogether. If he truly cares about himself and the young woman, he will con-duct himself with all propriety.

One physician has noted that, genetically speaking, when one has intercourse with another person, he or she is having intercourse with every other person that his or her sex partner has had intercourse with in his or her sexual history. This means that whatever sexual baggage is involved in one’s prior experiences is carried over into any new relationships.

There are also new findings suggesting that in each case of sexual intercourse there is, through the exchange of bodily fluids, a transfer of genetic information that entails the transmission of hormones and other genetic information, including ones that promote emotional bonding or imprinting of the sexual partners. Some studies are even suggesting that kissing, especially passionate French kissing, has the same or similar effect on a smaller scale. With the woman it is the reception of testosterone from the man which encourages sexual attraction, while with the man it is the reception of oxy-tocin from the woman, which encourages bonding. The male apparently receives oxy-tocin from her in return as well. Also, it appears that dopamine is released in both par-ties in the portion of the brain which tends to be more susceptible to addiction by alcohol and other drugs. One of the side effects, in new relationships especially, is that of loss of appetite with a slight euphoria that gives the feeling that many people describe as having “fallen in love” with the other party (see *Biology*, Kirshenbaum, Lloyd, and Mokh-tar).

If this is true, then it may be a genetic means, intended by God, to encourage the wife’s desire for her husband, as Eve was told she would come to do in Genesis 3:16, and for him to cleave to her as per Genesis 2:24-26. Again, it would then indicate the intent that God-appointed marriage is the proper venue for sexual contact and that other combinations create chaotic feelings and relationships between the parties that ulti-mately can be quite destructive in nature.

Marriage from the Divine perspective is a socio-somatic relationship. The two become “one flesh” (Matt. 19:4-6). The husband’s body belongs to the wife. The wife’s body belongs to him. They have a mutual responsibility to one another involving “due benevolence” relative to sexual relations (1 Cor. 7:1-5). The Law of Moses recognized this same principle (Exodus 21:10, where the term ***onah*** is translated “marriage rights” in the NKJV). Husbands and wives need to recognize the sanctity, permanence, and purpose of marriage. They should first and foremost be best friends. They are to com-plement one another—complete one another physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and, above all, spiritually. God made one woman (Eve) for the one man (Adam), be-cause He “sought a godly seed” (Mal. 2:15, KJV). He sought a “godly offspring” (NKJV). There is a wealth of good insight built into that one statement, given the rest of the Bible’s teaching on the place of the home in God’s scheme of things. That which endangers or undermines that plan in any way is destructive to humanity in the long run.

The danger of illicit sexual behavior is more prominent at night, for obvious rea-sons. It always has been. Solomon warned of this in his advice to his son Rehoboam, when he wrote regarding the harlot whom a young man might meet “in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night” (Pr. 7:6-27). “Her house,” he says, “is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death” (Pr. 7:27). Prostitution flourishes at night for obvious reasons.

**There is also the danger of using our down time at night to plot evil for the coming day**. Many an evil deed done in the daylight began as a thought or a plot while its perpetrator lay upon his bed. David spoke of the wicked who “devises wickedness on his bed…” (Psa. 36:4). Micah, similarly, prophesied: “Woe to those who devise in-iquity, and work evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand” (Micah 2:1). He even notes some of the things they do as the result of such plots. “They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance” (v. 2). This sounds amazingly similar to the behavior of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel regarding the vineyard of Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-16). How many evil deeds have been plotted in the solitude of one’s bedroom? To give an accounting would require numerous life-times! Thus, all sorts of mischief and mayhem owe themselves to a misuse of the night.

THE MEANS OF AVOIDING THESE DANGERS.

**The Word of God is the starting point in dealing with the dangers of the night**. The Word is designed to provide us with the information, instruction, guidance, encouragement, and edification to help us deal with everything we face. Through it God has provided “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Paul taught Timothy that the Word of God is all-sufficient to supply one with what he needs for his spiritual welfare (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Jesus used the Word repeatedly in virtually every confrontation beginning with His temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4: 1-11). Each advance made by Satan was repelled with a, “It is written….” The Greek perfect tense here means, “It stands written….” The Word of the Lord cannot pass away (Matt. 24:35).

**Prayer is also a valuable weapon in dealing with the dangers of the night, as with any other type of temptation**. “Watch and pray” is good advice any time (Mark 13:33)! Leroy Brownlow used to tell about an elder’s daughter who had the habit, when a young man tried to get a little fresh with her on a date, to say, “Let’s pray!” She would then bow her head in silent prayer. Prayer can help us to overcome temptations and trials (Matt. 6:13; 1 Cor. 10:13; Jam. 5:16). God’s providence is involved in His answering of our prayers (Rom. 8:28, 31).

**Common sense would also help**. Staying away from situations where one knows he will be tempted is just good common sense. What good does it do to pray that God does not lead us into temptation when we make it a practice to walk right into regularly with our eyes wide open? We are to “make no provision to the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:14). If you are a Christian, then you are not only in Christ. You have also “put on” Christ (Gal. 3:26-29). The imagery is that of putting on an outer garment or overcoat. You are then wearing Christ in your daily walk. You need to know that there are some places that Christ is not going to go with you! Remember, He is our example (1 Peter 2:21-25).

CONCLUSION

The dangers of the night are real. They pose a serious threat to one and all, especially to our youth. The passions and zest for life coupled with the inexperience and vulnerability of youth makes for an explosively dangerous mix.

We have looked at:

1. The Fact of the Dangers of the Night.

2. Some Examples of the Dangers of the Night

3. The Means for Avoiding the Dangers of the Night.

Learn to love God’s Word, to cherish it, and do it! That’s the only way to be safe in this world of wickedness (1 John 5:3, 11).

WORKS CITED

*Biology,* [http://biology.stackexchange.com/questions/20028/do-women-experience- more-bonding-hormones-than-men-after-sex](http://biology.stackexchange.com/questions/20028/do-women-experience-%09more-bonding-hormones-than-men-after-sex), 7/14/2015.

Kirshenbaum, Sheril, “Kissing,” [http://discovermagazine.com/2011/jan-feb/20-things- you-didnt-know-about-kissing](http://discovermagazine.com/2011/jan-feb/20-things-%09you-didnt-know-about-kissing), Jan/Feb 2011.

Lloyd, Robin*, Live Science*, [http://www.livescience.com/3328-saliva-secret-ingredient- kisses.html](http://www.livescience.com/3328-saliva-secret-ingredient-%09kisses.html), 2/13/2009.

Menninger, Karl. *Whatever Became of Sin?* New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1988.

Mokhtar, Nor Ashikin, “Hormones Help in Sex,”

[http://www.thestar.com.my/Lifestyle/Viewpoints/Womens- World/Profile/Articles/2012/06/10/Hormones-help-in-sex/](http://www.thestar.com.my/Lifestyle/Viewpoints/Womens-%09World/Profile/Articles/2012/06/10/Hormones-help-in-sex/), 6/10/2012.

Morris, Desmond. *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist’s Study of the Human Animal*. Crystal

Lake, IL: Delta Publishing, 1999.

Sykes, Charles J. *A Nation of Victims: the Decay of the American Character*. New

York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1993.

**HOW PURE IS EVERY PAGE! (PART 1)**

Milen Daryl Womack

Written over a period of 1,500 years and penned by about 40 different individu-als, the words of the books of the Bible have influenced countless lives for centuries. No other book can compare to the wisdom and scope that the Bible covers. The knowl-edge contained therein helps to accurately answer two questions that no other book can appropriately answer: 1) Where did we come from? and 2) What is the meaning of life? The Bible tells us that man was formed by God in His image, and the meaning of life is to seek a relationship with Him—or as the Ecclesiastical writer puts it: “Fear God and keep His commandments.” Our God is a loving a just God; therefore He has left us instructions which, when studied properly, will produce a healthy relationship with Him. And so words of Isaac Watts are an appropriate response to God’s Word:

“Thy Word is everlasting truth, how pure is every page!”

God’s Word is indeed everlasting truth, and every page is pure. Purity in the physical sense is the absence of impurity or contaminants in a substance. Morally, purity is defined as the absence of vice in the human character. Christian purity is the absence of sin. While we can never be fully free of stumbling into sin in this life, we can continue to strive to that end. God honors those who strive for pure hearts because it demonstrates a sincere commitment to be like Jesus. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 6:8). When we emerge from the cleansing wa-ters of baptism, God sees us as a pure creature. If we commit ourselves to lives of purity, we will be pleasing to God because He is pure.

As stated in the song, Isaac Watts poses a good question: “How shall the young secure their hearts?” The purity of the Word of God is the perfect place to look for that answer. Throughout this lesson we will look at eight different ideas from the Bible that will help us secure our hearts by understanding what Godly purity is, how we can obtain it, and how we can maintain it.

RESTORE THE PURITY OF YOUR YOUTH

When we think of purity, many of us think of the preciousness of newborn babies. As long as they aren’t crying or in need of a diaper change, we admire their precious-ness because they are innately pure. Babies’ laughter can charm and touch the tough-est of men because their laugh is just so free and innocent. Even as our children grow and mature, they maintain large portions of that initial purity they are born with. For in-stance, let me recall the first time I used the word “stupid.” I was in second grade and for some reason I felt the need to say “stupid” on the playground (perhaps someone took my favorite swing). The second after it slipped out of my mouth a group of three classmates turned around in horror and proceeded to run to Mrs. Dorsey to inform her that I had said a bad word. Those second graders were so absent of worldly contami-nants that the word *stupid* burned their sensitive ears. With this in mind, let’s look at Mark 10:13-16.

Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

We cannot enter heaven without recapturing the purity of our youth. Heaven will only be filled with those who possess the spirit of a child—a spirit filled with compassion, unconditional love, innocence, and purity.

Those of us who aren’t so young might ask ourselves the question: “When did we lose our innocence?”—or better yet: “When did we become okay with our loss of innocence?” Why does society believe that children should not watch a movie that is rated PG-13 or R? We are not willing to subject our children to content and ideas that may harm their precious little minds, but as we get older we fail to protect our own minds. Somehow as we get older, we think that we are invincible to the effects of gar-bage. We have this odd mentality that as adults we get to participate in activities that aren’t suitable for children or say words that our children shouldn’t say or watch images that we would punish our children for watching. This idea of, “It’s okay for adults but not okay for kids,” is a dangerous one that must have been concocted by Satan himself. We have been deceived to believe that we can handle the filthiness of the world and therefore won’t be affected by it as much as children. This is false!

The truth is that the older we become, the more our consciences are seared by contaminants, and before long the things that used to be bad, like hearing the word *stupid* cease to bother us. Clearly, purity is something that can be lost; nevertheless, purity can be restored by removing the worldly contaminates from our lives and replac-ing them with the pure pages of God. That is our goal as Christians, to live pure, holy, and righteous lives before God to influence the world. Paul told Timothy that, although he was young, he was supposed to set a pure example for others (1 Tim. 4:12). How shall the young secure their hearts? By retaining their purity that is instilled in each and every one of us at birth. Becoming like little children again is one giant step towards regaining maintaining our purity and securing our hearts—young and old alike.

GUARD YOUR WAY

We are able to recapture the purity of our youth by studying and adhering to the pure and everlasting words of God. However, we need to understand that purity is a quality that needs maintaining. When someone buys a Brita water filter for their kitchen faucet, he doesn’t put it on for one month and then take it off the next, expecting the water coming from the faucet to remain pure. We understand that in order for the water to be purified we have to keep the device on that purifies the water all the time. Spiritual purity works the same way. Without guarding ourselves against the influences of the world, we are doomed to become poisoned by it. Jesus spoke these words to the multi-tude in Luke 11:34-36:

“The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light.”

Jesus is encouraging the multitude to control their eyes because what the eye sees can affect the whole body. If the eye sees good, then the body (and even the soul) will be good. If the eye sees bad, then the soul will be bad. Or in today’s terms we would say “garbage in, garbage out.” In order to be pure we must guard our bodies against digesting the corruption of the world. Just like the Brita filter strains out un-wanted particles from the faucet, our eyes should strain out impurities from the world.

Let’s take a lesson from the writer of Psalm 119:37, where the writer says, “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way.” David, a man after God’s own heart, understood better than most how looking at the wrong things could damage your relationship with God. Just looking down on Bathsheba would cause a series of events that included deception, murder, and shame. It is the same for us today. When we become careless in keeping our eyes fixed on the pure things, our inner light will extinguished by the vice of this world. Without that light, we will began to aimlessly wander farther and farther away from God. If we do not make a vow to turn away our eyes from looking at worthless things, then impurity is bound to come pouring into our lives. Our eyes should consider every pure page of God’s holy Book daily to condition our conscience in a world so full of pollution.

ENGAGE IN PURE WORK

Not only is our purity something that has to be protected, it is a godly character-istic that needs to be practiced in order to be perfected. We’ve all heard the phrase: “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” And that phrase is absolutely true. Why would a group of kids get into a car and drive around town smashing mailboxes? Why would a group of teenagers sit around and smoke weed every day after school? Why would kids ring a doorbell and run off? The answer is simple—they are bored and have nothing better to do with their time. Again, idle hands are indeed the devil’s workshop. Idleness is an enemy of purity. In order to maintain our purity, we need to be engaging ourselves in pure work. Let’s look at the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 2:21-22:

Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Paul was instructing Timothy that, in order to be useful to the Lord, he would need to purify himself of dishonor. By cleansing himself he would be prepared to do “every good work.” Notice especially the conclusion of verse 22. As Christians, we are to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with other pure people. Our minds should be busy all the time looking for good work to do in the name of the Lord. Being busy with good works leaves no time to be busy with vain activities. Cleansed people flee from sin and pursue godliness and purity.

Let’s take a quick look at the wonderful example we have in Isaac Watts. He wrote more than just the song from which our lectureship theme originates. Between the ages of 20 and 22, Isaac Watts penned the lyrics to hundreds of hymns which were compiled in the book, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. Many of us would be ashamed to share some of the activities we got ourselves into during our early twenties, but Isaac Watts was engaged in pure work. Perhaps he completely understood Proverbs 3:6, which says: “In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” But we should not be sad that we haven’t written a Hymnbook by the age of 22. That was Isaac Watt’s talent that he used for the Lord. We must ask ourselves each time we awake: “What am I doing for the Lord?” This attitude of engaging in pure works will help us motivate ourselves and others draw nearer to God. There is much work to be done for the Lord. The young and old alike can secure their hearts by making pure works a priority in their lives.

BE DRASTIC

Again the question posed for this lectureship was: “How shall the young secure their hearts?” This is a very good question, especially today. Some would say that during this time period in America our purity is being eroded away at an alarming rate. The Christian has to live in a world filled with toxicity and distractions. Again the ever-lasting and pure word of God provides another solution to our question. We’ve all heard the saying: “Drastic times call for drastic measures”; well, Jesus says it best in His ser-mon on the mountain in Matthew 5:29-30:

“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

Sometimes we need to do drastic things to preserve our purity. We need to be willing to be real with ourselves and ask ourselves difficult questions. What are we put-ting in our minds? Are we truly putting God first? Would Jesus approve of this Key and Peele video? Should I watch a show with excessive cursing, or any cursing at all? Do I really need to play a video game that shows someone’s heart being ripped out? Do I really need to go to the work party, knowing that there is going to be drinking involved? Should I really be okay watching this movie with a sex scene? We wouldn’t allow our kids to watch it; so why should we? We need to be willing to remove the corruption from our lives even at the risk of being ridiculed, being called a square, or even a con-servative extremist. If I am going to be called names for God’s sake, then so be it!

Drastic times call for drastic measures, and we need to make sure that we are protecting our purity in the most tactile and aggressive way possible. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. We each know our weaknesses and those things that can tempt us; so it is up to us to use God’s Word as a strainer to sift out the grime and smut of the world to help maintain our purity.

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word” (Ps. 119:9). God’s Word is everlasting truth, and every page is unquestionably pure. Let us prioritize every day to cultivate the purity within us, to recapture the purity of our youth, to guard it, to engage in pure works, to avoid impurities no matter how drastic we must be. It would be helpful for us to remember a part of a poem, written by Isaac Watts, that precisely answers the question: “How shall the young secure their hearts?”

“Come, children, learn to fear the Lord  
And that your days be long,  
Let not a false or spiteful word  
Be found upon your tongue.

Depart from mischief, practice love,  
Pursue the works of peace;  
So shall the Lord your ways approve,  
And set your souls at ease.”

**HOW PURE IS EVERY PAGE! (PART 2)**

Vincent DiGiorgio

INTRODUCTION

How shall the young secure their hearts? It’s a question that, although it might sound aimed towards just young people, it actually applies to all individuals. So this in turn means that every subject covered here today must also apply to everyone in the audience, including the one we are covering now: “How pure is every page!” What a great and powerful statement! Let’s break that statement down. In fact, let’s take that same question and put it in question format: How truly pure is every page? The answer should be obvious: Every page is the very essence of purity. But what does that mean? And what does it mean for us as Christians?

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Your word” ([Ps. 119:9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+119%3A9&version=ESV)).

So we see here that in the first Scripture that, as Christians, we are called to be pure, along with the reward for that. But this next part is incredible because we are given a solution to this question of purity. How do we stay pure? “By guarding it ac-cording to Your word”—according to God’s Word, the holy and Divine Scriptures. As Christians, therefore, we need to access and apply the Scriptures daily to our lives. We need to do things like **pray** for purity**, surround** ourselves with people who strive to be pure in their everyday lives, **purify** our thoughts, and ultimately **look towards** the re-ward for being pure.

In the endeavor to be more pure, let’s dive into the Scriptures themselves to tac-kle this subject a little further. To make things flow a little easier, let’s look at the solu-tions to this question and break down each point.

PRAY FOR PURITY

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me (Ps. 51:10).

Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name (Ps. 86:11).

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (Rom. 13:14).

**Praying for purity** is implied by what the apostle Paul told Timothy: “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).  Paul wants Timothy to know that his example needs to set the standard for ALL who come in contact with him—not just the teens or young adults who fall under that “youth” category—but everyone who falls into the cate-gory of a believer. Does that sound like a tall order? There is a lot of pressure be-stowed on Timothy by these words, but as Christians are we not called to do the same? In another passage Paul writes:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Phil. 4:8).

When I was in middle school, specifically sixth grade English with Miss Priscilla, we learned how to identify what and where a thesis or mission statement was. We understood that the sentence itself carried the overall theme of the passage or novel we were reading about. This passage is exactly that for us as Christians. Of course, many passages could be identified as carrying the overall theme of the Old or the New Tes-tament. But this verse is surely one of them; it carries a great message for us as Chris-tians.

Most of us would agree that Paul is addressing all of us today. We are all to meditate on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. The great king David put it another way*:* “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). David is referred to as a man after God’s “own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). So let us all remember to think about these things, to pray for these things continually, and to never compromise.

Paul wrote: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14). Once we put on Christ in baptism we become a part of His body, and in turn we leave our old life of sin and fleshly desires. But we know, as stated in Romans 3:23, that we have sinned and continue to fall short (note the present tense) of the glory of God, which means we should all the more strive for godly purity—and have no compromises on our quest to be pure.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible takes place in 1 Samuel 15 with King Saul, where Saul was given the task by the Lord, through Samuel, to destroy the Amalekites entirely (men, women. and children, as well as all the livestock and all of the spoils that came with conquering the land). So Saul went on his way to do what he was command-ed to do. He was successful; Israel thoroughly defeated this enemy. But instead of fol-lowing through with his mission, he compromised midway—not only taking the spoils but sparing the Amalekite king! So the Lord came to Samuel at night in a vision inform-ing him of the king’s compromise. Then when Saul returned from the battle, he came to Samuel, saying, “See I have done what the Lord has asked!” But Samuel rebuked him immediately, telling him he had sinned because he compromised and did not follow the Lord’s task **entirely**. But what Saul says next is incredible—because it is so typical of human beings. He told Samuel that he brought back all the spoils to sacrifice them to the Lord so that He might be glorified—which at first sounds like a good excuse until Samuel delivered a rebuttal.

“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.”

Samuel told Saul that obedience is better than offering sacrifices—a principle which many still do not grasp. Many think their ungodly living will be offset by sacrificing something to God. Saul then realizes his sin and begs for his forgiveness, which God gives to him. The lesson for us is that we should never waiver and always remember to continue to obey all that God has commanded of us.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH PURE PEOPLE

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with dark-ness? (2 Cor. 6:14).

Second, we as Christians need to hang with pure people. We are all familiar with the verse in 1 Corinthians 15:33, which states: “Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals." The underlying premise is that we are on a quest to be pure. If our goal is to truly remain pure, then why would we be hanging out with those who have the opposite goal in mind—or at least do not care about purity? This is the point of 2 Corinthians 6:14 (quoted above). These are all obvious contradictions so as to convey the message that, as Christians who are striving for purity, we need to stay away from those who don’t have the same objective in mind. For this reason youth groups and college groups are set up, so that young people can surround themselves with good company. This arrangement works for adults as well. Various activities, such as secret sisters, men and women’s Bible studies, and potlucks all give us a chance to encourage one another. So let us strive to surround ourselves with pure people.

PURIFY YOUR THOUGHTS

Purifying one’s thoughts sounds simple enough, but how does one go about pur-ifying oneself? Philippians 4:8 provides a great and pertinent answer. Along with sur-rounding one’s self with pure company, thinking and acting pure is essential as well. Psalm 86:11 provides more information: “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.”

Ultimately, in order to have pure thoughts, we need to follow and obey the truth. And as Christians we know that the truth comes from God Himself. Jesus states that He is “the way, the truth, and the life.” No one goes to the Father except through Him. So, in order to have pure thoughts, we need to read and obey the truth. How do we do that? It may sound simple, but we read the Scriptures, which is often referred to as “the good news” or “the truth,” by which we may learn pure thoughts and actions.

THE REWARD FOR PURITY

So the Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight (Ps. 18:24).

The last and final point is that God rewards us for doing all of the things we have talked about. Although the question under discussion is, “How shall the **young** secure their hearts?” the solutions discussed apply to every single one of us. The reward for us remaining pure and ultimately securing our hearts from sin is beyond comprehension. Heaven is going to be truly amazing. Heaven is a place of purity for people who value purity here on earth. The reward goes something like this:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Rev. 21:1-4).

How shall the young and old secure their hearts from sin? We have seen four solutions to that question: praying for purity, surrounding one’s self with pure people, purifying our thoughts, and looking forward to the reward for purity. Let us do every-thing we can to stay pure, just as the Scriptures are pure. How pure is every page, indeed! That Holy Book should guide us all.

**WELL SUPPORTING “OUR AGE”**

H. David Carter

“Thy word is everlasting truth;

How pure is every page!

***That holy book shall guide our youth***

***And well support our age,***

***And well support our age***.”

What defines a *youth*, and how can this Holy Book guide someone so defined? Who is considered young or a youth may be relative to the time period in which one was raised. This could be the time before one leaves home to pursue higher education, to work, to serve one’s nation, or to marry and start a family. Like many, my childhood was fraught with opportunities to do myself or others serious bodily harm—not maliciously, mind you—but just because I had not yet learned or been taught (or sufficiently threat-ened) regarding what I should or should not do in some instances. Fortunately, I’ve been able to learn a few things through my life, because of (and sometimes in spite of) my circumstances.

There are some who have been blessed to have been brought up in a household where the parents were practicing Christians and regularly attended worship services, were able to associate with other Christ-minded people, had been taught lessons from the Holy Book, were provided guidance on how to serve God, and lived a fulfilling life obedient to God’s Word. The author of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes said: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Ecc. 12:1). When children are taught from the Bible early in life, they learn about the Creator, as well as facts and concepts, which are repeated and demonstrated over and over. How well young ones are able to learn from their exposure to the Word of God (and His peo-ple) can go a long way in determining how well *our* age will be supported.

What is meant by the statement, *and well support our age*? The reference could be to a particular period in history or to our genealogical age, from birth on up. Since the song title asks, “How Shall the Young Secure their Hearts?” one might presume the reference is to those of a certain age group; but what age ***is*** young? Perhaps the song-writer was referring to those who would have been characterized as young in the latter part of his 74-year lifetime (July 1674 – November 1748) or, more specifically, in 1719 (which is the time which history records the hymn lyrics were written). Brother Guy Dickinson or Jim Correll, both of whom have passed the 80 year milestone, may look upon quite a few of us as **young**. Then again, those in college may characterize young as anyone who has yet to graduate from high school. I lean more toward thinking the writer was referring to both those who had not reached an age of accountability for their actions, as well as the time period in which he lived. In a memoir of Isaac Watts com-piled by George Burder, the author records that Watts also composed, “Divine and Moral Songs for Children” (11), and later, a volume called, “A Guide to Prayer” (12), also directed toward “young persons.” The songs were first compiled and published in 1715. The collection of 28 Divine songs and 7 Moral songs can still be viewed on-line and purchased in hard/softcover or downloaded to a kindle electronic book-reader.

While it is certain Watts was concerned about the youth of his age, it is just as probable his concern extended to all young people—how they could develop and focus their minds and hearts on spiritual matters. It is interesting to note that Christ was young (29-30) when He began His ministry. He foreshadowed His later work when, at age 12, He stayed behind in Jerusalem (after His whole family had left to go back home) in order to listen to the teachers and ask them questions (Luke 2:41-47). He truly was young! Leaders among the Israelites were usually the Patriarchs in their families—or at least those who were married with children, had property, and had some stature in their family. From that perspective, Christ too was young, but He was by no means or definition incapable of being accountable for His actions (as he was God in the flesh).

Our subject hymn, as already mentioned, was written in the year 1719. The Bible in book form had been available since 1455, when German printer Johannes Gutenberg used his printing process to print a copy of the Holy Book, the collection of inspired writings known as the Bible. Portions of the Bible are referred to as the Book of the Covenant (Exo. 24:7), the Book(s) of the Law refer to the first five (5) books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) and the term is used in Deuteronomy 31:26 and Joshua 24:26. There is one instance of the expression *holy words* found in the New King James version of the Bible in Jeremiah 23:9. No Scripture where the words *Holy Book* appears in exactly that form.

I pray the words written here and spoken on this topic will help inspire people, young and old, especially members of the church, to achieve a greater level of knowl-edge and faith, and thereby be of greater service to our Lord. Although they may be referenced in these pages, the original inspired Word of God can well stand on its own. It will be referenced throughout, but the focus remains on understanding His words and not any penned in this document. Here we will review some topics to help us all be well supported in “our age” to include being obedient, thinking critically, growing, and matur-ing in our knowledge of the Word, having a plan, making good choices, and having Christ in us.

Just seven verses from the end of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we find this beatitude: “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (22:14). The essence is obedience, those who understand to do what God commands. It is not a difficult principle to comprehend, since learning right and wrong is something children begin to develop soon after birth. Learning what behaviors elicit a smile, results in receiving more physical attention, or a desired food item is something children pick up on quickly. They also learn to determine that certain behaviors bring about undesired results. In the Bible, we find there are no exceptions regarding the outcome of disobedi-ence—man has or will suffer the consequences.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Gal. 6:7).

For it is written: “As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom. 14:11; cf. Isa. 45:23).

But when man is obedient, he is blessed of God. What is it God wants of us? In John 14:15, the Lord said, “if you love Me, keep My commandments.” John wrote, in 1st John 5:3: “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” It is simple to understand, but not as easy to comply. Even in the beginning, knowing the commands of God, Eve was deceived, and Adam soon disobediently followed suit. They went from being pleasing to God and having everything the physical man could need, to being ejected from the Garden of Eden and having to work to obtain food and experience pain in childbirth. It was the consequence of disobedience, but that did not mean that God stopped loving them. Obedience to God is demonstrated by how committed we are to understanding and obeying His words. Yes, we all have free will, but one day we must all answer for our actions…individually. As it reads in Hebrews 9:27: “And it is appoint-ed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

HONESTY

We can find within the Bible instructions to help us in our chronological age as well as in this age of the world. So, what guidance is found in the Scriptures? This may seem like a rhetorical question, since most people know the Bible contains information beneficial to everyone…or do they? Unfortunately, it would be a mistake to presume that most people know the truth about what the Bible teaches. According to a survey taken in 2013, “…only one in five Americans reads the Bible on a regular basis.” “…88 percent of respondents said they own a Bible, 80 percent think the Bible is sacred, 61 percent wish they read the Bible more, and the average household has 4.4 Bibles.” (RNS) It is beneficial to not only read the Bible, but to take time for some critical think-ing before we act. This takes into consideration that different situations may allow for more or less time to think before having to act (or react).

In Philippians 4:8, Paul writes: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, what-ever things are noble, whatever things are just [“honest,” according to the KJV, HDC] whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good re-port, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate [or think] on these things.” What is being referred to are things which are true or truth—though it is also true that people are not to lie (it is mentioned twice among the six things that the Lord hates, in Proverbs 6:17 and 19). No matter what we are told or might think, there is nothing that can be gained during our short (relatively speaking) time on earth that is worth an eternity of suffering. We must not go against what we know to be true or the right thing to do.

While in the military, I had on several occasions reviewed my personnel rec-ords—each military person was individually responsible for ensuring that the docu-mentation in our record was complete and accurate. During one such review, I noted that I had improperly been granted credit for an activity (and been awarded a medal) in which I had played no part at all! When I pointed out the error, the clerk first asked me if I didn’t want the credit (which amounted to one (1) point to be added into my score for consideration of a future promotion). I quickly assessed that: 1) as a Christian, it would be improper to fraudulently accept credit, and 2) there could be an earthly long-term effect, had I said nothing. I told the clerk that I’d be glad to accept it IF the words were true and I had earned the recognition, but I would not accept a medal for something I did not do. So, I requested and received a correction of my records. Several years later, I was being considered for promotion and learned that I missed the cut-off score by less than one (1) point—that one point I would have had if I had dishonestly accept-ed credit for a medal earlier. See, the military double-checks records of those who are being considered for promotion to the rank for which I was being considered, to ensure there is nothing out of sorts. Had I NOT pointed out the truth as soon as the error was identified (dishonestly accepted credit), it would have been identified during the pre-promotion check of records, and I would have been informed that my promotion selec-tion was invalid because of the errant award. How embarrassing would that have been, and what would it say about my character, integrity, or my Christianity? We must never violate our principles of honesty to gain worldly possessions or success. Proverbs 13: 11 reads: “Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but the one who gathers by labor will increase.”

Who has ever heard any of the following statements: “Finders keepers; losers weepers” or “What someone doesn’t know won’t hurt them”? These are favorites of some for whom being dishonest may come naturally; they are words which could be tempting to those who would be honest otherwise. What is the price point for honesty? If we find a dollar next to a car in the store parking lot, do we pick it up and look around to see if anyone has dropped it? Would we do anything different if it was a $20 bill—or an envelope with $1000 in it, or perhaps a wallet or pocket book with little money but several credit cards and personal identification in it? How concerned would we be if WE were the one who misplaced or dropped the money, wallet, or pocket book? Jesus is recorded in Luke 6:31 as having said: “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.” Two Scriptures which complement each other and can help us in the area of honesty are again Galatians 6:7: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (cf. Matt. 12:36) and the last verse of the book of Ecclesiastes: “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:14).

PURITY

Keeping our hearts pure helps combat dishonesty, too. Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). Paul advised the young preacher Timothy to keep himself pure (1 Tim. 5:22). Keeping one’s thoughts pure can be diffi-cult, given the visual and verbal assault our senses are exposed to. We are careful what we eat and would not knowingly inhale, ingest, inject, or seek to absorb something that would be poisonous or cause harm to our bodies; in fact, we probably take steps to ensure those things don’t happen. The Bible teaches us that it is even more important that we not let impurities corrupt our minds. Corruption is indicated by what we say or do. The Pharisees were admonished by Christ in Matthew 12:34-37 that they would be called to give an account of their hypocritical behavior; their actions and words belied what was in their hearts. We, like the Pharisees, will be either justified or condemned by our words.

Young people must determine to take steps each day to keep their thoughts pure. They must be careful what they watch, the activities they seek to entertain themselves with and with whom they spend most of their time. Paul said: “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’” (1 Cor. 15:33). We are commanded to strive to be a positive influence on those with whom we come in contact. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). However, we shouldn’t depend on our righteousness or good deeds to keep us from harmful influences. Joseph was, by all accounts, striving to do the right thing, while he was serving his (temporary) Egyptian masters. But that didn’t keep Potiphar’s wife from going after him and bringing false accusations. He didn’t have a choice (before being sexually harassed) of working or not working in the household, which exposed him to situations he would not have willingly placed himself. Why would we choose to willingly put ourselves in the company of individuals or in places where immoral activities might occur? Such does not have to be the case with any Christian. The words of this Holy Book ***can*** well support our age, if we heed its instructions and don’t give in to being dishonest, harboring impure thoughts or actions.

PROBLEM SOLVING

The Bible teaches us that, as we grow in our faith, none of the challenges we face are unique. Believe it or not, this was stated several thousand years ago by a very wise man. Solomon said: “That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecc. 1:9). In Lesson 4 of Exum’s material, he wrote:

One major problem with young people and problems is that they feel that their own problems are unique. They feel that no one else has ever had quite the same problem, but this is untrue. While problems might be new to you [us], they are not new in the world. Your parents had problems in their teenage years and everyone goes through much the same type of problems as they encounter every phase of life (21-22).

Whenever we have problems, it’s always nice to have someone we trust to share our concerns in confidence and share ideas in an effort to solve our personal problems. But let’s face it, if we encounter a ***serious*** problem, should we be seeking advice or guidance from someone who has the same or perhaps even less life experience? They may be struggling with the same or other problems. If we are saying to ourselves that, when we have a problem, we would pray about it first, then we’ve taken an excellent first step! David prayed often, and in one of those recorded in Psalm 55:1 he said, “Give ear to my prayer, O God, And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.”

PRAYER

Christians are told to pray and provided instructions on how to petition the Fath-er. Prayer was important to the Son of God during His ministry, as He taught the dis-ciples. He told them to pray for their enemies. Think how it can and does benefit ourselves and others when, as a result of prayer and positive influence (example on our part), someone who was an enemy amends their ways? Christ provided an example of the components of a purposeful prayer (Matt. 6:5), as well as the type of attitude we should have when entering into prayer (Matt. 6:6). Christ Himself prayed often in pri-vate (Matt. 14:23; 26:36) and for extended periods of time. Luke 6:12 records that He went up to a mountain and, “continued all night in prayer to God.” Christ prayed for His disciples in John 17—a chapter which more so than either Matthew 6:9-13 or Luke 11:2-4 could be called “the Lord’s Prayer.”

There are numerous examples of the power of prayer found in the Bible. Con-sider the events which occurred right after the words, “and when they had prayed,” that are recorded in Scripture. In Acts 4:31, we read: “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” In Acts 6:6-7, we read of those “whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

As we grow in our Christian walk, we seek guidance through prayer to the Father and we seek input from more experienced Christians. Both of these avenues will always be excellent choices. As we learn and gain knowledge from studying God’s word, it is important to put that knowledge to use to make good choices—those most beneficial to the work of the Lord.

WISDOM

“Knowledge is not wisdom, but knowledge precedes wisdom” (Exum 23). When-ever we have heard the expression*, criminal mastermind* (one who comes up with amazing schemes to execute some criminal activity), that person is rarely, if ever, re-ferred to as being wise. Having knowledge is an excellent thing, but the one who puts knowledge to use to better one’s self, one’s fellow man, or society as a whole is the one who may be counted as wise. Wise people know they don’t have all the answers to every problem. Solomon said, “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise council” (Pr. 1:5). Seeking and gaining wis-dom will help us to grow as Christians in this age. We must be careful to make certain that we are not distracted from our goal by the things of this life.

REPUTATION

Money and wealth may be nice, but those are things we cannot take with us to the grave; they will be taken or left to others. One thing which cannot be bought with money but can be ruined with its mishandling of it is our reputation. As with the earlier example of mistakenly being given credit for an award, our conduct in precarious situa-tions, will reflect on our character and reputation. Trusting in earthly wealth may give us the temporary appearance of being “well supported,” but wealth can disappear quicker than it accumulates. Remember the rich man in Luke 12:16-21 who tore down his barns to build larger ones? From that situation we learn that in death, one’s earthly wealth will be of no consequence from a heavenly perspective. However, our reputation as stewards of God’s blessings will do well for the kingdom of God and for us. As Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is to be chosen rather than riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold.”

It is not alarmist to say changes have taken place in society which drastically test Christians, and this includes changes in religious attitudes. We know man has passed laws allowing legal use of drugs which alter the mind and affect the body. Some may ask, “Are you referring to marijuana, alcohol, or tobacco use, chemical content allowed in some consumables (food and non-alcoholic beverages), or homosexual unions and other activities that run contrary to Biblical instruction?” Yes. However, such events are not all unique to our age but, in fact, have been occurring over the ages. Homosexuali-ty, drunkenness, and use of narcotics are recorded in the Bible and in the history of so-cieties across the globe. Just as an example, the drug opium first appeared in Greek pharmacopoeia during the 5th Century B.C. and in Chinese medical texts during the 8th century A.D. (McCoy). It is important that the church be aware of what is happening around us and be ready to bring to light the truth for those who may not be aware that there are activities and attitudes which are blatantly contrary to God’s Word.

Unfortunately, even in the church some have their own agendas and desire to draw away a following. They are willing to compromise or ignore the Lord’s commands and to tell people what they want to hear, rather than what they need to hear—God’s truth. It happened in the Old Testament, with devastating results, when kings and other leaders of God’s chosen people allowed themselves to be misled by false prophets—because it was what they wanted to hear rather than to heed the message of God’s prophets. As is recorded in Jeremiah 5:31: “The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?” Paul warned elders in the church at Ephesus: “Therefore take heed to your-selves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:28-30).

BIBLE STUDY AND LOVE OF GOD

Having knowledge of God’s Word and the evidence that He is true to His Word throughout the ages helps our hearts keep secure and gives us the information we need to make good choices. Obtaining a copy of the Scriptures today is easy, and it is the only sure way of knowing who is teaching the true Word of God. Every Christian should be a personal soul-winner for Christ. To that end, we must put first things first, and de-termine that our daily schedules include time for prayer and Bible study. Programs that include devotionals are great, but they will not replace serious Bible study. The Bible says, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV).

While every congregation should be concerned about holding their young people, programs which entertain but have little or no emphasis on studying the Bible will not increase knowledge or instill a deep and loving respect for God’s holy Word. The power to save and preserve souls is in the Bible—not the words of man, regardless of how elo-quent they may be; we need to know the WORD. Paul said in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” The blessings of the Lord come to those who first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33). To help us along the way, we must be strong to not yield to temptations or to compromise our principles. Is our eternal soul worth winning the friendship of the “cool kids”? As much as we love our earthly family and want to please them, our highest loyalty, must always, at any cost, belong to Christ and his church. The question is raised in Matthew 16:26, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” It is a matter of priorities.

A Christian family whom we came to know while stationed overseas in Italy, eventually returned to the states, retired, and settled in the state of Georgia. As the wife and mother of the family shared sometime afterward, the youngest of three children, their son, experienced some difficulty after falling in with the wrong crowd and getting into fights. He decided to obtain some tattoos and was later surprised and disappointed to learn that, because of the placement of the tattoos, he would be prevented from join-ing the military (the tattoos could not be covered by a normally worn uniform). That dis-appointment and other challenges impacted his mental state until sadly in his late teens he committed suicide. His mother was concerned he wouldn’t go to heaven, if for noth-ing else, for having taken his own life. She began questioning her faith and eventually fell away from the church. Her love for her son superseded her love for God. It is sad to note that she was later diagnosed with and eventually died of cancer, leaving behind her husband and their two daughters. She did not return to the Family of God before dying, which pains us greatly. Christ said, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:37). This Scriptures don’t teach, “***Do not*** love them”; it is a matter of priorities.

God loved us so much that He sent his Son to die for us. But, thank the Lord, Christ was resurrected and is alive today. We know that both the mother and the son in the preceding narrative died physically, as must we all, but unfortunately they will also experience the second death as well—separation from God for an eternity of anguish. As much as possible, we must be careful to select circumstances and individuals who will help us get to heaven. This is especially important when considering a potential husband or wife. We each make decisions on a daily basis which can have an eternal impact; so we need to choose well. To do otherwise may cost us our eternal soul. Remember, too, anyone who causes us to be out of the proper relationship with God, is not a true friend.

In order to use that Holy Book, the Bible, for guidance in our youth, we must know what is in it and have a plan for putting it into practice. Nobody plans to fail, but many fail to plan. Remember that in 2 Timothy 2:15 we are told to study and be diligent regarding our knowledge of God’s Word. It’s difficult to have strong faith in something we don’t know much about. Paul said in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” In God’s plan, Christ was a pivotal part, and He was intimately familiar with the plan. Many in Christ’s day evidently weren’t too sure about Christ’s message and did not recognize the link to prophecy. To reassure them, Christ said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18). Our knowledge of God’s plan and making plans ourselves will help us secure our age.

CHOICES AND DECISION-MAKING

In the Old Testament, Joshua said, “And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fath-ers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. ***But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”*** (emph. HDC). Adam and Eve had choices to make, and they made a bad one. They yielded to Satan and brought sin into the world for the first time. The immediate impact was their banish-ment from the Paradise of Eden, women experiencing pain during childbirth, and man having to work hard to raise crops (Gen. 3). These consequences continue even these thousands of years later. Joseph’s brothers also made a decision driven by envy and hate when they sold him into slavery—an action that severely pained their father. It was not until years later the action was corrected as they repented of their transgression and the family was reunited. Job made the decision to remain faithful to God even though he suffered devastation, loss of wealth, his family, and his health. His wife and friends did not provide comfort (16:1), but his faith remained strong, and he was rewarded.

We can start by first remembering to pray, then keeping calm (Ps. 46:10). We must not allow ourselves to be rushed or pushed into making a quick or rash (emotion- driven) decision. Think things through; seek counsel, guidance, and advice from mature and trusted friends (Christians preferably). This is especially important when consider-ing major life changes, because we must live with whatever decisions we make. For major decisions, we should get a real piece of paper and a pencil, draw a line down the middle to make two lists. Take time to consider the positive and negative outcomes of a decision, and review the list to eliminate the least appealing options or choices. We must remember to use Biblical principles as the foundation for decision making. Solo-mon said in Proverbs 14:12: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Also, Jeremiah said, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in him-self; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (10:23). We need God’s help in making decisions. Forewarned is forearmed.

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION

Since we know the world is going to try to drag us in and down, we should be prepared for **when** it happens (*not* ***if***). Yes, different things are temptations to different people, but some things can look innocent yet be deadly. Who has met a person who was conservatively or professionally dressed and who spoke or carried themselves with dignity and confidence? Who has seen that same person in a different setting and noted that they were less than conservative in their dress, behavior, or speech? It is very disappointing and, some might say, hypocritical. Have we ever been that person? The Lord does not change (Mal. 3:6), and God’s children should strive to be consistent in our conduct as well. The Bible says in Matthew 5:37: “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ’No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” And James 5:12 also tells us, “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment.”

Say what you know and don’t feel obligated to fill up the rest with a guess or a lie. We must stand with God’s Word when we find that someone is trying to divert us from it, we must not be afraid to say, “No!” Remember the encouragement from Christ in Mat-thew 5:11-12: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” We may be called foolish or naïve for taking a stand or making a decision that is contrary to the world; we may even be “politically incorrect,” but we are in good company! The apostles were imprisoned for teaching the Gospel of Christ and healing people (Acts 5). The Sadducees had them thrown in prison and, after being freed by an angel of the Lord, they went back to teaching in the temple, only to be brought before the Jewish council, admonished, beaten, and released. They rejoiced that they were counted wor-thy to suffer shame in His (Christ’s) name (Acts 5:17-41)! We shouldn’t go *seeking* situations that would subject us to imprisonment, but we should not be afraid to stand for what is Biblically correct either, even if it may result in our being criticized or ar-rested. Think of the opportunity to bring the Gospel to the attention of others that such might bring. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that they (mthe apostles) were fools for Christ (1 Cor. 4:10), meaning, that they were not in fact foolish, but that they were called fools because they would not deter from living the Christian lifestyle or preaching the Gospel. One reason Christians in the early church were able to rejoice in the face of persecution was that Christ was in them, and they were therefore active in the work of the Church.

Many early Christians lost possessions when they became Christians, and it became necessary for them to band together to survive. At that time they had all things in common (Acts 2:44-45). They shared successes and found support in each other in times of trial. The word *gospel* means “good news,” and who doesn’t like to share good news? The letters to the saint reminded the early Christians of Gods plan for the faith-ful. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:11-13 that he knew how to be content in all conditions and acknowledged that all things are possible through Christ. Also, in 2 Corinthians 5:1, he wrote: “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

CONCLUSION

The Bible is fraught with words of encouragement to help support people of all ages in any age. Psalm 128:1-2 reads: “Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, Who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.” Proverbs 16:20 says: “He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he.” The happiness available through the Lord cannot be found in momentary pleasures (many destructive) of the world. Man is from the earth ***and*** from God. Many try to satisfy the flesh, that part of man that exists for a while and will return to the earth as dust, and give little thought or attention to preparing that part of man, the soul, which will exist forever and, after returning to God, will stand to hear judgment of how and where we will spend eternity—either in the peace and splendor of heaven with God or the perpetual torment and anguish of hell with Satan. Who we live for in this age will determine who we live with in eternity.

The Holy Book can indeed guide our youth, and it can well support a person of any physical or chronological age, as well as in any period of man’s existence on earth. In this present age, the Scriptures remain unchanged by time and is still as applicable to and for Christians of any age. Part of the summation of the Bible, Revelation 22:14, reads: “Blessed are they that do His commandments that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates of the city.” There are no exceptions to the rules; they apply to everyone equally with no one getting any preferential treatment. The Bible teaches in 1 John 5:3: “This is the love of God, that we keep his command-ments.” Being obedient to God demonstrates our love. It does not make us unthinking drones. In fact, it helps prepare us to think critically and respond in a way that will both protect us and allow us to successfully influence and help others.

An example is given of soldiers who are taught to march in formation. It doesn’t teach them to be better soldiers, but they learn discipline and how to work within a group, take care of each other, and achieve a common objective. As we grow in faith and knowledge, we will make better choices. We must have a plan to help us focus our actions and efforts to achieving our goal. With Christ in us, we need have no fear. Christians struggle and may at times be unsure, but when faced with life’s challenges or seemingly insurmountable obstacles, we can take confidence in the words found in Romans 8:31: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” As the stanza says, “That Holy Book shall guide our youth, And well sup-port our age, And well support our age.”

WORKS CITED

Except where otherwise indicated, all Scriptures are from the New King James Version.

Burder, George. *Memoirs of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.* Copied by Stephen Ross for

WholesomeWords.org (Edition 2014) from, The Works of the Reverend and

Learned Isaac Watts In Six Volumes. London: J. Barfield, 1810.

http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/bwatts14i.html

Dobson, James, Dr. *The New Dare To Discipline.* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Pub-

lishers, Inc., 1992.

Exum, Tommy. *In The Days Of Thy Youth – Lessons to Inspire the Youth of the Church*

*to Greater Heights of Faithfulness and Service.* Tommy Exum, 1987.

Leman, Kevin, Dr. *Keeping Your Family Strong in a World Gone* Wrong. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2002.

Religion New Service (RNS), <http://www.religionnews.com/2013/04/04/poll-americans->

love-the-bible-but-dont-read-it-much

Smith, Bill E. “TRAIN……Up a Child” (Proverbs 22:6). Oklahoma City, OK: HELM

Publishers. 1996.

McCoy, Alfred W. *Opium History Up To 1858 AD*,

http://www.opioids.com/opium/history/index.html.

**HOW SHALL THE YOUNG SECURE THEIR HEARTS?**

Isaac Watts

How shall the young secure their hearts  
 And guard their lives from sin?  
 Thy Word the choicest rules imparts  
 To keep the conscience clean.

When once it enters to the mind,  
 It spreads such light abroad,  
 The meanest souls instruction find,  
 And raise their thoughts to God.

’Tis, like the sun, a heav’nly light  
 That guides us all the day,  
 And through the dangers of the night  
 A lamp to lead our way.

The men that keep Thy law with care,  
 And meditate Thy Word,  
 Grow wiser than their teachers are,  
 And better know the Lord.

Thy precepts make me truly wise:  
 I hate the sinner’s road;  
 I hate my own vain thoughts that rise,  
 But love Thy law, my God.

The starry heav’ns Thy rule obey,  
 The earth maintains her place;  
 And these Thy servants, night and day,  
 Thy skill and power express.

But still Thy law and Gospel, Lord,  
 Have lessons more divine;  
 Not earth stands firmer than Thy Word,  
 Nor stars so nobly shine.

Thy Word is everlasting truth;  
 How pure is every page!  
 That Holy Book shall guide our youth  
 And well support our age.

**THE PROVERBS AND STRONG DRINK**

Geoff Litke

INTRODUCTION

A ray of light has permeated the increasing gloom characterizing younger gen-erations over the last several decades. A new study reveals that drug use among U.S. teens has sharply declined (Potrikus). A glimmer of hope is not, however, the absence of threat. Nonetheless, this study shows that youth **can** be reached by messages warn-ing against the devastating effects of alcohol. The aforementioned study focused pri-marily upon illegal drugs, but found: “Alcohol and cigarette use among teens declined, too but only modestly” (Potrikus). The report goes on to impress just how remarkable these findings are. “This kind of change has not been seen across the board in almost a decade” (Potrikus).

This decline is moderate—yet still a decrease. Furthermore,

The overall drop in drug use wasn’t merely a matter of switching from illegal drugs to alcohol, according to the survey. The number of students reporting that they’d been drunk declined by 11 percent (Potrikus).

Students credit anti-drug ads for changing their attitudes. However, the messages in public service ads leave a great deal to be desired when compared with truth.

The real tragedy is that at a time when so many are so receptive, only the words of men are reaching the world. More than ever, now is the time for vigilance against the threat posed by alcohol. God declared His Word will not return void (Isa. 55:11). Man’s message is a “mixed message.” Slogans such as “drink responsibly,” practice “safe sex,” and “don’t drink and drive” all commit the fallacy of treating spiritual problems as if they were merely physical. This pragmatic approach to the problems of the world (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 3:23) may seem productive, but in the conclusion it creates more confu-sion than it cures. False hope is one of the greatest enemies to the cause of truth, and many people (especially young) tenaciously cling to it.

The real danger lies not in the mere existence of alcohol, but ignorance concern-ing God’s will (Hos. 4:6, 11; Eph. 5:16-18). Elders, parents, preachers, and Bible class teachers have a tremendous responsibility in this area. They must be aware of what the youth are facing and be equipped to defend the Biblical truth concerning alcohol. With this burden in view, this lesson will examine the Scriptural teaching on alcohol from the Proverbs and the application of those eternal truths.

# THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

The Old Testament is not the final authority today (Col. 2:14; Mat. 28:18). The world is under the perfect law of Liberty (Jam. 1:25; Heb. 1:1-2). But the Old Testament provides a great deal of wisdom for the sincere seeker (Rom. 15:4). The world by and large rejects God’s Word and seeks understanding in their own experience. There is an ever-growing trend to “identify” with people rather than (instead of) “reprove, rebuke, ex-hort” (2 Tim. 4:1-2). The “identification” apart from revelation method of teaching is es-pecially prominent among youth workers. This approach is utter nonsense (Jer. 10:23). Solomon, of all men, would understand this (1 Kin. 3:9ff), and he did say, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Pro. 14:1). God understands man and foresaw this inclination. The books of wisdom leave objectors with no excuse for their disobedience. Henry Halley observed:

The teachings of this book Proverbs are not expressed in a “thus saith the Lord” as in the Law of Moses, where the same things are taught as a di-rect command of God but rather are given as a coming out of the experi-ence of a man who tried and tested just about everything man can engage in…. Solomon here says, the things which God has commanded are proved by experience to be the best for man, and the essence of Human Wisdom is in the Keeping of God’s Commandments (270).

The sentiment of experience over inspiration is known by its many slogans such as, “Don’t knock it till you try it.” The idea is that a person who has never engaged in a given sin is wholly unqualified to comment thereon. This is utterly wrong and entirely misses the point. Seldom is this approach seen more clearly than it is concerning sins of immorality, many of which are accepted by society such as drinking. Every child of God is qualified to speak the truth known from God’s Word (John 8:32; 17:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17). Solomon possessed both knowledge of Scriptures and firsthand experience that strong drink has no place in the life of the spiritual person (Ecc. 2:1-2).

A MOTHER’S LOVE

King Lemuel’s words in Proverbs 31:1-7 are inspired advice gained through his mother. While it may never be fully known who was the actual penmen (whether Solo-mon or another), be sure that these words are just as good from mothers to sons today as they were when freshly penned.

The heart of this advice is undoubtedly for Lemuel to stay away from that which destroys kings! The affectionate counsel named two things able to destroy kings. First, be careful about choices of women. To that end, the rest of the chapter provides insight on the kind of woman her son should seek. Secondly, wine is unfit for her son.

Her first plea was for her son not to sacrifice his strength (Hebrew: “Vigor”) to women (kings kept harems). Her second plea concerning “that which destroyeth kings” was likely referring to “strong drink,” which she goes on to discuss in the succeeding verses. She was warning him against “wine” and “women” (Hunt 424).

# *The Royal Restriction (31:4)*

The fact that the befuddling beverage was not fit for kings should be enough to keep all from its use. Monarchs were to have no part with this inhibitor of reason. Keil and Delitzsch wrote concerning the introductory phrase signifies: “It is not the part of kings, it does not become them to drink, let them not have any business therewith” (476). In similar fashion, Christians are a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). Under the old law, priests were explicitly forbidden from the use of alcohol while serving in the tabernacle:

And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses. (Lev. 10:8-11).

How many Christians imbibe alcohol and remain faithful priests, distinguishing between right and wrong (Heb. 5:14; 1 The. 5:21) and teaching others (2 Tim. 2:2; 4:2)?

# *A Responsibility Robber (Pro. 31:5)*

Kings and princes, the text says should not drink wine or strong drink: “Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.” This grievous grog is notorious for its ability to steal away men’s better judgment. Conventional wis-dom tends to consider this statement speculative, but there is plenty of precise technical evidence to testify to the truth of this Proverb.

Phineas P. Gage revolutionized thinking about localized brain function in his day. However, Gage was no brain surgeon, but a railroad worker. On a September afternoon this young foreman set a charge of blasting power and a fuse into some rock. He began to pack the charge and fuse with a three and a half foot tamping rod. Distracted, Gage turned his head to check his crew when the rod struck the rock, producing a spark and setting off the blasting powder. Instantly the rod shot through Gage’s grip, entered his head at the jaw, tore through his brain, exited from the top of his head, just behind his forehead, and flew many yards beyond Gage.

Other than being knocked back and convulsing briefly, Gage was relative-ly well. Within minutes he was up and talking. He even explained the un-believable event to the doctor himself. Seemingly, this young man was unaffected by the event. However, prior to his accident, Gage was de-scribed as a man of medium stature, athletic build, temperate habits, and considerable character. After the accident, though his body healed physi-cally, it became apparent that Phineas Gage, the well-respected foreman, was no longer the man his crew had known.

In the words of his physician, Dr. J. M. Harlow, "the equilibrium, or bal-ance, so to speak, between his intellec­tual faculties and animal propensi-ties seems to have been destroyed. He is fitful, irreverent, indulging at times in the grossest profanity (which was not previously his custom), manifesting lit­tle deference for his fellows, impatient of restraint or advice when it conflicts with his desires, at times…obstinate, yet capricious and vacillating, devising many plans of future operation, which are no sooner arranged than they are abandoned in turn for others appearing more feasi-ble. A child in his intellectual capacity and manifestations, he has the ani-mal passions of a strong man. Previ­ous to his injury, though untrained in the schools, he possessed a well-balanced mind, and was looked upon by those who knew him as a shrewd, smart busi­nessman, very energetic and persistent in executing all his plans of operation. In this regard his mind was radically changed, so decidedly that his friends and acquaintances said he was “no longer Gage” (Bosley).

The frontal lobes of the brain are vital in aiding the process of restraint and moral judgment. In essence, Gage performed a frontal lobotomy on himself, and his character never recovered. Similarly, drinking alcohol is a liquid lobotomy. Alcohol’s first strike is upon the frontal lobes, impairing moral judgment.

The frontal lobe of the cerebrum, which is one’s reason and self-control, is affected by .01% -.10% alcohol, causing removal of inhibition, loss of self-control, weakening of will power, impaired judgment, etc. (Jeffcoat 99).

This brain impairment is seen in even the smallest (what some term infinitesimal) amounts.

Indications are that .005 percent is about the smallest concentration in the blood which can be measured in terms of its effect on some areas of the brain. This constitutes only one drop of alcohol in twenty thousand drops of blood (Jeffcoat 99).

From a fraction of the first drink, a person’s ability to reason, discern, and exercise re-straint are immediately retarded. Shakespeare penned a truth in *Othello*:

“O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause transform ourselves into beasts!”

The ability to “judge” is something which must be guarded by every faithful child of God. Judgment is one of the “weightier matters” of the law (Mat. 23:23), yet who can have good judgment while warring against reason through wine? Following Peter’s pronouncement of royal priesthood, he went on to exhort them to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11).

# *A Relief of Grief (Pro. 31:6-7)*

Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

God’s prohibitions against alcohol are neither unreasonable nor inconsistent with the rest of the Scriptures. Men must look to God for the proper use of things rather than dictating their own terms to Him. There is a good and proper use of everything upon the earth. There is also improper use. This Proverb testifies to the fact that the general use of alcohol by a healthy man is contrary to the will of God. This passage provides a de-scription of a proper medicinal use. The *Pulpit Commentary* sets forth this medical use:

There are cases where strong drink may be properly administered…. As a restorative, a cordial, or a medicine, wine may be advantageously used; it has a place in the providential economy of God. “Use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake. And thine often infirmities,” was St. Paul’s advice to Tim-othy (1 Tim. 5:23) (596).

Furthermore, the practice of offering “pain-killers” to those who incurred the death sen-tence was developed from these very verses. Note the words of Keil and Delitzsch,

The preparation of a potion for the malefactors who were condemned to death was, on the ground of these words of the proverb, cared for by noble women in Jerusalem…. Sanhedrin 43a; Jesus rejected it because he wished, without becoming insensible to His sorrow, to pass away from the earthly life freely and in full consciousness, Mark 15:23 (478).

This is the most reasonable approach to the advice of Lemuel’s mother concerning the “giving of wine”:

At this point the faithful must divide from the majority of commentators who try to make a case for moderate use of alcohol to cheer those who are healthy yet less fortunate. This **cannot** be what the proverb is saying. First, it addresses those ready to perish, sorrowful, completely bereft of hope. Second, this passage addresses alcoholic wine. All passages deal-ing with recreational use of wine in a positive light have non-alcoholic wine in view. Verses such as Psalm 104:15 suggest the power of the drink to make the heart merry, but corn (among many other things) is also attri-buted this power (Zech. 9:17). Very few grocers keep alcoholic corn in stock. Still yet, a person would have to eat a great deal of corn to actually “forget” their troubles. The scriptures nowhere endorse this kind of recre-ational use. One writer humorously commented,

If one overlooks the Hebrew parallelism here, he would have ended up having God advising the sorrowful to turn to booze. But life has proven that people who do that don’t “drown their sorrows”; it is more as Archie Word observes: “They only give them swimming lessons” (Hunt 425).

These verses provide a medical distinction in clear terms. It is a Divine prescrip-tion of abstinence for kings and medicinal wine for the dying. Do not drink: You’ve got responsibilities as a healthy man; leave the drinking to those who are nigh to death.

Frequently, people who like to regularly drink invoke this “medicinal privilege” to defend their beer a day or glass of wine each evening. First, it is doubtful that the rea-son they drink is actually medicinal. Present day medicines and vitamins are superior in accomplishing the preventative effects claimed for alcohol. In the first century, the phar-maceutical arsenal was comparatively limited. Second, they cannot prove that the med-ical benefits attributed to wine actually have any association to the alcohol. As a heart disease preventative, grape juice has the same qualities claimed for red wine. The Welch’s website hosts an article titled, “Researchers Report Mechanism For Anti-Clot-ting Effects Of Purple Grape Juice Unrelated to Alcohol” (Welch’s). The conclusion of this study says:

"There have always been questions about the role of alcohol in the health benefits of drinking red wine," says Freedman. "However, it carries with it its own set of problems and concerns. Isolating the effects of quercetin is im-portant because it suggests that purple grape juice may be a legitimate, non-alcoholic alternative to red wine" (Welch’s).

Recently, another study confirmed the fact that alcohol’s dangers outweigh the pre-viously speculated benefits. “For middle-aged people, drinking alcohol in moderate amounts actually causes the brain to slightly deteriorate, a new study shows” (Davis). The study was upon the middle-aged, but the effects can only be multiplied with use beginning at younger ages. The article went on to say:

What’s more, you get no protection from stroke—which runs contrary to previous studies that show moderate alcohol intake is associated with some protection against it…. Researches found that former drinkers and moderate drinkers had higher odds of stroke than those drinking occa-sionally (Davis).

The medicinal use of alcohol is definitely speculative at best. This is no new revelation. In June of 1917, the American Medical Association passed this resolution:

Whereas we believe that the use of alcohol is detrimental to the human economy, and its use in therapeutics as a stimulant has no scientific value; therefore, be it resolved that the American Medical Association is opposed to the use of alcohol as a beverage; and be it further resolved that the use of alcohol as a therapeutic agent shall be further discouraged (Jeffcoat 116).

Paul’s advice to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23) was medicinal in nature and never intend-ed to contradict other epistles (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:6). One writer summar-ized the approach of so many to this text saying: “Sometimes we are led to believe that the verse reads like this: ‘Everyone who wishes to drink socially may do so immediate-ly’” (Ramsey). Paul’s prescription was *most likely* due to polluted water; it was intended that wine be used as a purifying agent, which is not unlike the modern use of chlorine as a purifier.

As a matter of necessity, ancient people sometimes diluted fermented wine in their drinking water to purify it. In these cases the alcoholic content after diluting with water would be very low, yet sufficient for their purpose. A use such as this is akin to medical usage and has no parallel in Ameri-can social culture today (Cooper).

Even with that information it still COULD be that the “wine” was not of necessity alcoholic. Paul *could* have been appealing to the digestive help provided by mere grape juice. One of the greatest fallacies committed in the study of alcohol in the Scriptures is the belief that every occurrence of *wine* was equal to what is called *wine* today. The word *wine* in the Bible is a word with a broad range of meanings and must be deter-mined by the context. In Isaiah 65:8 the juice in the cluster is referred to as “wine.” Grapevines do not come in the alcoholic and nonalcoholic varieties. The fruit and juice while fresh was called *wine* (Exo. 22:29; Num. 18:1-2). Whether it was or was not is quite irrelevant concerning Timothy since it was a medical use and not the recreational use so many desire. The bottom line in Proverbs 31 is that wine use is no good for healthy people with any responsibility. In a strong contrast, give it to those who are dying.

A DEVILISH DESCRIPTION

The advice of Solomon in Proverbs 31 is not all he wrote concerning the alluring liquid, but he vividly described the vile situation of its users in Proverbs 23. These six rhetorical questions should serve as a fit repellent to drinking. “Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?” (Pro. 23:29).

*Who Hath Woe? Who Hath Sorrow?*

Woe and Sorrow are easily observed and “heard” in someone who has been drinking. Woe is a “state of intense hardship and distress…stressing the intensity and personal engagement in the state of sorrow” (Swanson HGK208). It is an “impassioned expression of grief and despair…often implying a denunciation” (Brown, Driver, Briggs 17:1). Albert Barnes likewise noted, “**Woe ... sorrow –** The words in the original are interjections, probably expressing distress. The sharp touch of the satirist reproduces the actual inarticulate utterances of drunkenness.” (65).

*Who Hath Contentions?*

Contentions and drinking go hand in hand like rain and wet. Terms like “bar-room brawl” are not arbitrary. The advocates and defenders of drinking and drinking establishments are hard pressed to overcome such stigmas. Imagine someone up-holding an evening at the tavern as good wholesome entertainment. Why then are not “ice-cream parlor altercations” or “burger-barn bashes” part of common parlance?

Hostility is one of the chief features of an alcoholic.

Alcoholics often show evidence of marked hostility toward those closest to them…occasionally, repressed hostility does break out during an acute in-toxication stage—one of Zwerling’s patients was stopped just as he was trying to push his father out of a hotel room window (Roche 22)

Narconon, a drug rehabilitation facility, reports: “Four in ten criminal offenders report alcohol as a factor in violence.” They also claim: “Among spouse violence vic-tims, three out of four incidents were reported to have involved alcohol use by the of-fender.” Crime in general goes along with the drinking culture. The economic cost of alcohol-related crime in the U.S. in 1992 alone was $6,312,000,000 dollars (Harwood, Fountain, and Livermore).

*Who Hath Babbling?*

A babbler is not a likely candidate for reasonable conversation. The translation of *babbler* seems to recognize that the drinker is one incapable of relevant speech and communication. However, the word is often translated “complaint.” What could be more characteristic of the drunk than an unintelligible outpouring of self-pity? Looking to the end of their situation, the drunkard is indeed a complainer. The rest of the passage shows there is plenty to complain about. The physical aches, the social shame, and emotional guilt of the first drink all scream for more drinks to help them cope. These woes they have brought upon themselves, and have only themselves to blame.

Slurred speech, self-pity and coarse talk are all characteristics of alcohol and re-flect the progression of the work of alcohol upon the brain. An old Hebrew myth shows that they were familiar with this same progression and especially its relation to speech.

Noah, after the flood, planted a vineyard. Satan came along and watered the vineyard with the blood of a sheep, a monkey, a lion, and a hog. This was understood as a sign that man, before drinking, is like a sheep—mild and inoffensive. When he begins to drink, in the first stage of drunken-ness, he chatters aimlessly like a witless monkey. In the second stage, he becomes irritated, quarrelsome, and aggressive like a lion. When he drinks still more, he enters the third stage—he loses control of body and mind, falls to the ground, and wallows in his own filth (Hearn, *Alcohol and Christian Influence* 31).

*Who Hath Wounds Without Cause?*

Spending time among a multitude of sorry, agitated, violent people who are not seeing or thinking clearly is surely formula for disaster. For this reason there are many “wounds without cause” in the sense that one may be beaten for something they did not necessarily do. Keil and Delitzsch note that these are “strokes which one receives with-out being in the situation from necessity, or duty to expect them, strokes for nothing and in return for nothing” (347).

Whereas fights are probably in view here, inasmuch as they are noted later in the context, another aspect wherein a drinker incurs physical damage is the harming of **themselves** with liquor itself. Liquor damages the brain, permanently killing brain cells and shrinking the brain. It damages the digestive system and the muscular system, as well as contributing to numerous nutritional deficiencies. Cirrhosis of the liver alone is a major opponent to good health caused by alcohol use. Approximately 10,000 to 24,000 deaths from cirrhosis may be attributable to alcohol consumption each year (NIAAA).

This self-inflicted pain and perpetual seeking would be more fitly called social suicide. It is amazing that there remains uproar over doctor-assisted suicide while convenient store-assisted suicide remains acceptable. Not only does society accept this, many religious teachers are adamant in their stand that drinking is not condemned by the Scriptures. Rock icon Ozzy Osbourne is no paragon of purity and rarely demon-strates good sense. However, as one quite experienced with liquor, he is willing to state what even some brethren deny, namely, the fact that use of alcohol is slow suicide. In his song Suicide Solution, he sang, “Wine is fine; But whiskey's quicker; Suicide is slow with liquor.”

# *Who Hath Redness of Eyes?*

Redness of eyes is a necessary side effect of any substance which enlarges the blood vessels as alcohol does. A good description of this process also upholds the de-ceitful nature of alcohol.

It seems to warm one by depressing the nerve centers of the brain that regulate the size of the blood vessels of the skin. Through their dilatation, the blood flow to the skin and heat loss by radiation are both increased. The sense organs of warmth, located in the skin, transmit the impression to the brain that the alcohol user is warmer, whereas his body may be suf-fering from heat loss (Hearn, *Alcohol The Destroyer* 37-38).

While red eyes are definitely a result of drinking, it is competently argued that the proverb suggests impaired vision instead. Keil and Delitzsch say that

this redness is really a darkening (clouding) of the eyes, from [Heb.], to be dim, closed, and transferred to the sensation of light: to be dark (*vid*., at Gen. 49:12; Psa. 10:8); the copper-nose of the drunkard is not under con-sideration; the word does not refer to the reddening, but the dimming of the eyes, and of the power of vision (347).

The *Pulpit Commentary* entertains this view, “But Delitzsch, Nowack, and many modern commentators consider that the word indicates ‘dimness of sight’; that the change in the power of vision when the stimulant reaches the brain” (445).

The corrupting effects of alcohol on the brain cause this impaired vision. Even lower levels have adverse results on the parts of the brain responsible for the process of seeing. “Tests by delicate instruments have indicated that small doses of ethyl alcohol also affect the functions of sight, hearing, and touch sensation, in each instance by the depressant or narcotic action upon the central nervous system” (Jeffcoat 91). This is fundamentally important in defense of the inspiration of the Scriptures and establishing the sinfulness of the recreational use of alcohol.

A study at Glasgow University was set up to establish whether or not there was any merit in the claim to “Beer-goggling.”

Professor Barry Jones, from Glasgow University's psychology department and his fellow academic, Ben Jones, from St. Andrews University, led the study. They found that men and women who have drunk a moderate amount of alcohol find the faces of the opposite sex 25% more attractive than their sober counterparts (BBC News).

These findings are not surprising. First, the Scriptures testify to these effects of alcohol; Proverbs 23:33 says: “﻿Thine eyes shall behold strange women” (KJV), although other translations have the more generic “things” for “women.” Second, even our popular culture recognizes this principle. As Mickey Gilley, sang, “Don’t the Girls All Get Prettier at Closing Time?”

THE DIVINE DIRECTIONS

Who are the reapers of these fruits? “They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.﻿ ﻿Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright” (Pro. 23:30-31). The instruction to look not upon the wine is the answer to avoiding all the aforementioned troubles. It is not enough just to tarry “short” at the wine, the real answer is found only in abstinence. Some individuals believe that “tarry long” is the only limitation placed upon the use of wine in all of the Scriptures. Limiting the Divine wisdom to this passage and pressing it beyond its own context is self-destructive (2 Pet. 3:16). Time is not the issue in gaining understanding about this verse. Man seeks a consistent definition of “moderation” which includes drinking, but even that breaks down to nonsense.

A vodka-drinking competition in a southern Russian town ended in tragedy with the winner dead and several runners-up in intensive care. The com-petition lasted 30, perhaps 40 minutes, and the winner downed three half-litre bottles. He was taken home by taxi but died within 20 minutes….

Five contestants ended up in intensive care. Those not in hospital turned up the next day, ostensibly for another drink. …the director of the shop organizing this month’s contest had been charged with manslaughter. He had offered 10 litres of vodka to the competitor drinking the most in the shortest time (Reuters).

This behavior is foreign to godliness on so many levels despite the fact that there was no tarrying “long.” The insanity involved in such actions is remarkable indeed. Still, after such an event many contestants returned for a drink, as the Divine record shows: “When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again” (Pro. 23:35).

Since time is not the standard, and the Scriptures provide no instruction on a safe drink (number) minimum, the only reasonable conclusion is that there is NONE (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Instead, the Scriptures only provide warnings against it. The primary points of Proverbs 23:29-31 and Proverbs 31:1-7 are prohibitive: “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright” (Pro. 23:31). While it is not uncommon to see someone hold their nose when they drink the putrid punch, perhaps they would do better to shut their eyes. In truth, neither is what the writer had in mind. These words mean something, but this is not a command to drink with eyes closed. Instead it is the “don’t even look at it” principle. Christians should altogether separate themselves from drinking.

In the New Testament, the “don’t even look at it” principle is made extremely clear (for those who desire to see it). Ephesians 5:18 is a direct statement of prohi-bition: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” It is also a direct statement commanding that something be done.

Today, many young people are defining fornication as casual sex outside of *any* “loving committed” relationship. With that erroneous definition, two people could easily feel good about their sexual relationship just so long as they have feelings for each other. This approach makes the definition **purely** subjective and thus something which can only be determined by the one committing the act. Just how far should a young person (any person) go while being tempted before he has committed fornication and needs to repent? President Clinton, all the king’s horses, and all the king’s media could not figure this out. Sadly, some people’s approach to “drunk” is NO different. However, the child of God is commanded to have understanding and wisdom: “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*.﻿ ﻿And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:17-18).

Yet there must be some way to evaluate this item (1 Cor. 5:11). How can one know who is and is not a drunk? Ephesians 5:18 helps one to understand how long is “too long.” A clear mind willing to do a little bit of thinking will honestly evaluate what is ACTUALLY being said in Ephesians 5:18, instead of seeking “what can I get away with,” and will have understanding (Eph. 3:3-4; John 7:17).

Paul wrote some things which the unlearned and unstable wrest to their own de-struction (2 Pet. 3:16). Some things take a careful consideration. However, for the hon-est heart the truth is not so complex or difficult to see. Two points are set against each other. The amount of wine and “amount of spirit” are equal and opposite—not just equal: “Don’t have any wine; don’t have any spirit.” They are not just opposite: “Don’t have one drop of wine; have only one drop of the spirit.” Instead, they are equal ***and***opposite. This means one must be completely without wine and completely filled with the Spirit. The attitude which asks, “How much wine may I have and be pleasing to God?” is the same attitude which wonders, “How much of the Spirit may I neglect and remain pleasing to God?”

The idea that BIBLICALLY one is drunk with the first drink of wine is found in Ephesians 5:18. It may be stated in plain terms: When a person drinks one drink, he is one drink drunk, or it may be defined in quite detailed terms. Either way, the truth is there in the passage.

The **fact** is that the word *drunk*, as used in this passage, **does** involve the entire process of use of wine. It does not refer to some far off point when the magical number of drinks is hit or the number of minutes exceeds the “tarrying long” mandate. Nor does it refer to that point when “shot-gunning” (as if in a vodka drinking contest) that the actu-al drinking stops but the alcohol’s effects become outwardly manifested. The condem-nation of the process beginning with the very use of wine is the ONLY conclusion which harmonizes with all of Scripture. Brother W.D. Jeffcoat showed this in plain terms when he wrote:

There are several Greek terms which are translated "drunk," "drunken," and "drunkenness" in the New Testament. Along with several others, W. E. Vine makes an interesting distinction in regard to *methusko*. He defines it as, “to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process of the state expressed in *methuo*), to become intoxicated, Lk. 12:45; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:7a.

Robert Young, along with W. A. Haynes, defines it as "to begin to be soft-ened.” S.T. Bloomfield views the term as meaning, "to moisten, or to be moistened with liquor, and in a figurative sense, to be saturated with drink." E. W. Bullinger says *methusko* means, "to grow drunk (marking the beginning of *methuo*. The renowned Joseph Henry Thayer states that the term means, "to get drunk, become intoxicated."

These definitions clearly establish beyond a doubt that drunkenness is something that can grow, progress from one state to another, be consid-ered as a state of becoming softened, and, therefore, that it is the begin-ning of even an advanced degree. The implication is that persons begin to be drunk when they begin to drink (93-94).

This close look at the Scriptures seals the matter that, in fact, Biblically speaking, **drinking is drunkenness**. Paul by inspiration of God essentially said do not even be-gin the process of drunkenness.

Moreover, drunkenness is just the opposite of sober. Ephesians 5 contrasts wis-dom and folly and light and darkness. In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul contrasted light and darkness, but also drunkenness and sobriety.

﻿Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drun-ken in the night.﻿ ﻿But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:6-8).

Drunkenness is a process that **begins** at the first drink. Sobriety is a state which **ceases** to exist precisely where drunkenness begins. Think of it as a circle of sobriety and crossing the line of sobriety places one into drunkenness, and the same circle is light and stepping out of that circle places one in darkness (1 John 1:5-7; Psa. 119:105).

Sobriety is commanded (1 Thess. 5:6, 8; 2 Tim. 4:5; "watch"; 1 Pet 1:13; 4:7; 5:8; "watch")! A brief look at the word *nepho* provides positive evidence that the New Testa-ment speaks of total abstinence from wine in passages commanding sobriety. Vine gives the primary meaning, “to be free from the influence of intoxicants” (583). A look at Liddell and Scott make it abundantly clear that one cannot drink alcoholic wine and fulfill the obligation to be “sober” or “to drink no wine” (532). The word is connected to its early form *nephalios*, which they define as “unmixed with wine, wineless.” Kittel’s *The-ological Dictionary of the New Testament* gives for the first definition of *nepho*:

The concept which underlies the verb νήφω == “to be sober” and the whole word group, is formally negative. It is the opposite of “intoxica-tion”﻿﻿ ( → μεθύω) both 1. in the lit. sense of intoxication with wine, and 2. in the fig. sense of states of spiritual intoxication attributable to other causes (5:507).

Moulton and Milligan submit that *nephalios “*referred to the altars at which only wineless offerings were made or perhaps to cakes made in the form of an altar, free from all in-fusion of wine” (426-27).

Even the pagans had the clearest understanding of what sobriety (*nepho*) meant. They understood it was impossible to achieve long as alcohol was present. This is drastically different than those claiming to be Christians and pour wine upon their altars and sacrifices which are supposed to be *nepho* (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 1:13). Drinking is unspiritual and a work of the flesh (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:21).

Christians MUST be sober, and ever watchful. One reason they are not to sleep (1 Thess. 5:6-8) is that their adversary the devil never sleeps. Peter said, ﻿“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Adam Clarke gave an insightful comment on this verse:

It is not every one that he can swallow down: those who are sober and vigilant are proof against him, these he May Not swallow down; those who are drunken with the cares of this world, etc., and are unwatchful, these he May swallow down. There is a beauty in this verse, and a striking apposi-tion between the first and last words, which I think have not been noticed: Be sober, νηψατε from νη, not, and πιειν to drink; do not drink, do not swallow down: and the word καταπιη, from κατα, down, and πιειν, to drink. If you swallow strong drink down, the devil will swallow you down. Hear this, ye drunkards, topers, tipplers, or by whatsoever name you are known in society, or among your fellow sinners. Strong drink is not only the way to the devil, but the devil’s way into you; and Ye are such as the devil particularly may swallow down (6:869).

The Token’s 1961 hit, “The Lion Sleeps Tonight,” told the story of a village lulling their children to sleep through the comfort that the lion slept.

In the jungle, the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight.

In the jungle, the quiet jungle, the lion sleeps tonight.

Near the village, the peaceful village, the lion sleeps tonight.

Near the village, the quiet village, the lion sleeps tonight.

Hush, my darling; don't fear, my darling. The lion sleeps tonight.

For Christians this night will never come on earth. There is never a time to let one’s guard down. The watch must remain. An evening of strong drink is evidence that one has been deceived into believing that Satan is resting or harmless. That lie is one of the greatest tools in Satan’s arsenal and precisely the thing Peter warns against. As Chil-dren of Light, each Christian has the responsibility to preach the gospel (Mat. 28:18-20). This task is one demanding vigilance.

Abraham Lincoln's only sister, Sarah, married Aaron Grigsby. Two years later, when she was being attended in childbirth by a midwife, a complica-tion arose which demanded a physician immediately. The nearest doctor, who lived two miles away, was summoned, but when he arrived, he was so drunk that he had to be put to bed. Another doctor was sent for, but before he arrived Sarah and the baby died (Hearn, *Influence* 29)

Christians are much like doctors on call. It is they who hold forth the Word of life (Phil. 2:16). They are commanded to be on call to defend the truth at all times. Peter said, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear﻿﻿” (1 Pet. 3:15). Nothing in the Scriptures authorizes one to purposefully impede his ability to fulfill this obligation. This author once had a friend call at 3:00 A.M. to come over and discuss his life in light of the Scriptures. Refusing on the grounds that “I’m too tipsy to make it” would result in nothing short of standing before Christ with bloody hands (Acts 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:10). Besides this, who is comfortable giving eternal guid-ance after drinking a bit?

Dr. L. O. Dawson, in his address ‘Alcohol in the Laboratory’…cites the case of a friend whose doctor, because he’d had one drink, let his hand slip by a small fraction of an inch in cutting out a tonsil, and because of that one drink the patient lost his life (Hearn, *Influence* 30).

Having a Divine responsibility to preach (2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 5:12), Christians must watch their tongue (Jam. 3:1ff). One small slip may indeed forfeit not the life, but the soul of the hearers and those who teach (1 Tim. 4:16). Use of alcohol is nothing more than a testimony that one does not love and value souls of lost men.

THE END OF THE MATTER

What the Scriptures have to say about alcohol use is thoroughly negative. In the end it provides no good, only steps of sorrow down a slippery slope.

At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth﻿ like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.﻿ Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst﻿ of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. ﻿They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, *and* I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again (Pro. 23:32-35).

Alcohol is toxic, much like the venom of a serpent or adder. It is not good for the body. It breaks down the muscles and attacks the nervous system in a number of different ways. History records men using toxic substances for personal pleasure all over the world, but it does not make it good and proper. Heroine comes from poppies. Cocaine comes from the leaves of the cocoa tree. Peyote is a toxic cactus used to produce hallucinations. But none of these things are right for the child of God. Each of them only harm the human body and provoke foolish behavior. A drinker experiences much of the same difficulty as one stricken with sea sickness, not a welcome experi-ence, yet men return again and again.

It is said that Lincoln once went to City Point on a steamboat to visit Gen-eral Grant. The President was showing some evidence of nausea and a staff officer suggested, “Let me send for a bottle of champagne for you, Mr. President; that’s the best remedy I know for seasickness.”

“No, no, my young friend,” replied Lincoln. “I’ve seen many a man in my time seasick ashore from drinking that very article” (Hearn, *Destroyer* 61).

CONCLUSION

Against all the evidence, there will inevitably be some poor souls (even some brethren) who believe they have more wisdom than God. They will arbitrarily choose to believe they can drink and not be drunk. But that should not be surprising (1 Cor. 11: 19). Remember, there is a ray of light; some can be reached. Show the vanity of the world’s wisdom by holding forth the light of God’s Word. The matter is plain: Men claim they may drink and not be drunk, but that too is the power in the potion. Solomon said that wine *is* a mocker and that whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

WORKS CITED

Barnes, Albert. *Barnes’ Notes, Vol. 5.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996.

“Beauty is in the eye of the beerholder.” *BBC News.* 18 August, 2002, 10:50 GMT

11:50 UK <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/2201198.stm>

Bosley, Galen. “The Effects of Small Quantities of Alcohol.” *Ministry* May 1986: 24-27.

Brown, F., S. R. Driver, & C. A. Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and*

*English Lexicon, elec. ed*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000.

Clarke, Adam. *Commentary and Critical Notes*. New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury

Press, n.d.

Cooper, Dan and Katherine. "The Christian and Social Drinking." *The Christian View*

*Series.* Montgomery, AL: Bible and School Supply, 1979.

Davis, Jeanie Lerche. “Cancel Happy Hour: Alcohol Shrinks Brain-Drinking Alcohol in

Moderate Amounts Changes Brain.” Size Reviewed By Brunilda Nazario, MD,

December 05, 2003, WebMD Medical News.

http://content.health.msn.com/content/article/78/95669.htm

Halley, Henry. *Halley’s Bible Handbook.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1965.

Harwood, H., Fountain D., & Livermore, G. *The Economic Costs of Alcohol and Drug*

*Abuse in the United States, 1992.* Analysis by the Lewin Group. Rockville, MD:

DHHS, NIH, NIDA, OSPC, NIAAA, OPA. NIH Publication No. 98-4327, Printed

September 1998. <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/databases/cost5.txt>

Hearn, C. Aubrey. *Alcohol and Christian Influence*. Nashville, TN: Convention Press,

1957.

Hearn, C. Aubrey. *Alcohol The Destroyer*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1943.

Hunt, Donald. *Pondering the Proverbs*. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1974.

Jeffcoat, W.D. *The Bible and Social Drinking.*  Corinth, MS: Robinson, 1987.

Keil & Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 6*. Peabody MA: 1966.

Liddell, H. *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. Oak

Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

Moulton, J.H., and G. Milligan. *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*. Peabody,

MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.

Narconon of Southern California. *Alcohol Statistics*. ©Narconon of Southern California,

Inc. 2002. <http://www.drug-statistics.com/alcohol.htm>

NIAAA, *Alcohol Alert—The Prevalence of ALD,* National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and

Alcoholism, No. 42 Oct. 1998. *http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/aa42.htm*

Potrikus, Alaina Sue. “Study Finds Drug Use Among Teens Declines.” Knight Ridder

Tribune News Wire,

<http://www.aberdeennews.com/mld/aberdeennews/2003/12/20/news/7538066.htm>

Ramsey, Johnny. *The New Testament Teaching on Wine*. A handout given at Open

Forum at Granbury St. Church of Christ, Cleburne, TX, 2003.

Reuters. “Russian Dies After Winning Vodka-Drinking Contest.” Nov 20, 2003.

<http://www.smh.com.au/text/articles/2003/11/20/1069027201467.html>

Roche Institute (with a preface by Ruth Fox, M.D.). *Aspects of Alcoholism, Vol. 2*

Philadelphia, PA: L.B. Lippincott Co., 1966.

Spence, H.D.M. and Exell, Joseph S. *The Pulpit Commentary Volume 9*, Peabody, MA:

Eerdmans, 1962.

Swanson, J. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains*: Hebrew (Old

Testament). electronic ed. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.

Vine, W. E., M. F. Unger, and W. White. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old*

*and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996.

Welch’s. “Concord Grape Juice in the News, Welch's Health Related Press Release:

“Anti-Clotting Effects of Purple Grape Juice”, 29 December 2003.

http://www.welchs.com/health\_pr/alcohol.html

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Brown, David. “Answering False Doctrines – NO. II: Was the Wine Jesus Made in His

First Sign an Intoxicating Beverage (2:1-11)?” *Studies in John*. Ed. Dub

McClish. Denton, TX: Valid Publications. 1999. P. 436.

McGuiggan, Jim. *The Bible, The Saint and, The Liquor Industry*. Lubbock, TX: Monte Publishing Co., 1977.

Moffit, Jerry. “Discussion Forum- No. III: Did Jesus Allow or Encourage Social Drinking

of Intoxicants (2:1-10)?” *Studies in John.*  Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Valid

Publications, 1999. P. 620.

Patton, William. *Bible Wines, Laws of Fermentation and Wines of the Ancients*. Fort

Worth, TX: Star Bible Publications, n.d.

**A BROKEN SPIRIT**

Gary W. Summers

“Well, I lay my head on the railroad track,

Waiting on the Double E,

But the train don’t run by here no more;

Poor poor pitiful me.”

Warren Zevon, mostly known for his “Werewolves in London” (1978), wrote in 1973 the above words as the opening lines of “Poor Poor Pitiful Me,” a song that Linda Ronstadt barely scratched the Top Forty with in 1978. This first stanza is an illustration of the notion that, “if it weren’t for bad luck, I wouldn’t have any luck at all.” The way that news commentator Paul Harvey puts it is: “There ain’t no use worryin’—ain't ***nothin’*** gonna turn out all right.”

The song and the comments are overstatements, intended as humor; unfortu-nately, for those who are depressed, these all make sense. Especially for young people can life seem so gloomy that even suicide seems like a viable option. On a recent epi-sode of *Without a Trace* (which first aired on February 12, 2004), a boy around age twelve was humiliated so badly by some female classmates that he tried to kill himself. For every young person between the ages of twelve and eighteen who thinks that his life is over—and attempts to take his life—there are probably dozens more who have contemplated it.

The reasons for such intense sadness may be humiliation in front of one’s peers, the self-perception of being a “loser,” a failed romance, a feeling of extreme loneliness, boredom (no sense of purpose), or betrayal by those thought to be friends. While these causes vary and may involve legitimate hurt and emotional pain, the one thing they all have in common is the end result: “poor poor pitiful me.” Essentially, the source of our despondency is ourselves—the reaction we have to our situation rather than the events themselves. We can be so shaken as to not think straight. We indulge ourselves with buffet-style portions of self-pity, and if we are not careful, we may end up devouring and debilitating ourselves! The Bible describes this “pitiful” condition and also prescribes solutions for the dispirited soul.

“THE BROKEN SPIRIT” IN PROVERBS

The contrast between happy and despondent is provided in two proverbs:

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones (17:22).

A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken (15:13).

The first of these contrasts the **effects** of one’s disposition. A cheerful outlook promotes good health. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, the Hebrew word trans-lated “medicine” *“*probably means ‘healing,’ ‘relief.’” The commentators suggest that the better rendering would be “a good healing.” They cite the Septuagint as saying, “makes one to be in good case” (9:1:335). They add this appropriate comment:

A cheerful, contended disposition enables a man to resist the attacks of disease, the mind, as everyone knows, having most powerful influence over the body.

The broken spirit, on the other hand “destroys all life and vigour.” Concerning the second proverb cited above, they point out:

Happiness is shown in the outward look, but sorrow has a deeper and more abiding influence; it touches the inner life, destroys the natural elas-ticity, creates despondency and despair…” (9:1:293).

*The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary* presents a metaphor to explain the broken spirit:

When a vessel’s timbers are shivered by the fury of the storm she may not go to pieces altogether. But she is no longer able to hold her own against the elements, which she could once use as forces to convey her from land to land. If she were now to put to sea, instead of riding over the waves and making them her servants, she would be a passive thing in their hands, a mere helpless bundle of timbers to be tossed whithersoever they pleased, instead of “walking the waters like a thing of life.” So it is with the human spirit when the cross seas and angry winds of adverse circumstances have quenched the hope and paralyzed the energy that once governed and inspired man. He is no longer able to face the storms of life, and out-ride them, or even make them advance his interests. He is passive amid the changes and chances of mortal life, and they drift him on whitherso-ever they will (13:414).

The thing to remember about all of this is that people have a free will, which means that unlike the ship they do not become hapless—**unless** they choose to be-come that way. Teenagers can be made to feel like that dilapidated vessel, but they have more resiliency than they realize. Thinking that one is a failure on occasion will probably not damage a person permanently, but the outlook that one is a lifelong loser must be avoided before it becomes entrenched in one’s mind.

Young people are quite impressionable, which can be good if they are inspired—but evil if they are made to feel inferior. Some can be made to develop, at a young age, the victim mentality: “My only purpose in life is to be picked on and yelled at.” Solomon wrote: “All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a contin-ual feast” (15:15). Some of this affliction may be genuine and external (from parents), but the most destructive kind is the mental affliction we place upon ourselves.

Eventually, the gloomy soul winds up fairly friendless because others do not want to be around one who has a new affliction every day. How much does anyone appreci-ate having to hear the complaint *du jour*? “The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report makes the bones fat” (15:30). It is easy to want to be around the person with a pleasant disposition, who is happy from the inside out, who might say something encouraging rather than being critical, petty, or gossipy. Ann Murray recorded a song more than two decades ago which made the plea for “A Little Good News.”

We all notice two types of individuals—those who brighten a room when they enter it and those who brighten it just by leaving. A stanza from the REO Speedwagon song, “Roll with the Changes,” comments in a poetic way about the person with the cheerful disposition.

I knew it had to happen,

Felt the tables turnin’—

Got me through my darkest hour.

I heard the thunder clappin’,

Felt the desert burnin’—

Until you poured on me

Like a sweet sun shower.

Our disposition affects people either in a positive way or a negative one. We ought to avoid drying their bones and instead radiate warmth in their direction.

One more proverb makes the point that our internal philosophy makes all the dif-ference: “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?” (18:14). The word translated “wounded” here is the same Hebrew word trans-lated “broken” in 15:13 and 17:22. Whatever adverse condition comes along, the man with a healthy self-image can endure. It is not pleasant; in fact, the challenge may be intense. But he is like the investor who, when he takes a financial hit, is not ruined be-cause his overall wealth is secured and sound. The one who has faith in God can sur-vive various afflictions and soon be back to normal—just as the investor will soon have replenished the amount he lost. The reserve is strong; the trust in God is strong.

But if a man has a broken, wounded, depressed spirit, how is he going to be able to bounce back from even minor problems? Also, we might wonder, “Who can bear him?”

Oh, I figured this would happen; these kinds of things always happen to me. I can’t ever get a break; I have the worst luck in the universe. It’s like somebody painted a target on me for the Fates to take aim at. Poor poor pitiful me.

CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

How do people, especially youths, get into such a mindset? Probably, this condi-tion is induced by consistent hits (or a few severe ones) to a person’s self-esteem. De-spite the refusal of some to apply logic when it is needed, the truth is that we draw con-clusions all the time. When the evidence says that we are a klutz, we begin to believe it. If it indicates that we are not very bright intellectually, we eventually accept that idea. If long gazes in the mirror tell us that we are ugly, we will probably not develop a beau-tiful disposition. When false and inaccurate notions are reinforced by classmates, teachers, family members, or ourselves, the upshot is a wounded spirit.

Although other solutions will be presented later, it is important for youngsters to realize that nothing is permanently locked in; everything changes. The portly, mostly snubbed girl in the seventh grade matured in such an attractive way that she had her pick of boyfriends in her junior and senior years of high school. The seemingly agility-deprived lad develops athletic skills later that surprise himself (Michael Jordan could not make his high school basketball team.) The student with mediocre grades eventually achieves a clarity of thought and understanding heretofore lacking and find himself on the “A” Honor Roll.

Perhaps even greater than realizing that these improvements are in store is to know that social changes will occur. Many who have been assessed as geeks and losers by the “cool” crowd enter into happy marriages and successful careers; some excel in various endeavors (perhaps motivated by past failures?). On the other hand, some of the most prominent and popular youths sadly end up enduring lives of “quiet desperation.” Bruce Springstein highlighted these situations in his song, *Glory Days*. All that the star pitcher for the high school baseball team has to look forward to as an adult is drinking beer and recalling those old times. The girl who could “turn all the boys’ heads” has children and is divorced.

Of course, not all roles are reversed, but the differences between high school or college and adulthood are amazing to behold. Transformations that surprise everybody occur. The important thing for young people to know is that, despite however miserable their current existence may feel, **there is life after high school**! Two or three years can make the difference between the individual who is terribly self-conscious and com-fortably self-confident, between awkward and assured, between fearful and mature.

*Definition*

There are different levels of depression, from a:

[M]omentary feeling of emotional dejection all the way to severe disorder that can stop a person from functioning (Lobel and Hirschfeld 1).

Clinical Depression, which must be treated with appropriate medication, is not the subject of this chapter—but the less severe form most people refer to as “feeling blue.” Guy Mitchell used this color in his song:

I never felt more like singing the blues, ‘cause I never thought that I’d ever lose your love, dear; why did you leave me this way? (1956).

The Fleetwoods recorded *Mr. Blue*, which describes the same problem (1959). Don Gibson sang about a *Blue Blue Day* (1958); Bobby Vinton could only see *Blue on Blue* (1963); and poor Michael Johnson became *Bluer than Blue* (1978). To paraphrase Senator Fritz Hollings, “There’s too much depression goin’ on out there.” Even the usually jovial Beatles sang, “Oh, dear, what can I do? Baby’s in black, and I’m feelin’ blue. Tell me, oh, what can I do?”

Others color associated with depression are gray (possibly because of the color of clouds which block out sunshine) and black. Winston Churchill referred to his peri-odic bouts of depression as “the black dog” (Lobel and Hirschfeld 2). Depression also comes with a direction—down. People say, “I’m feeling down,” or, “I guess I’m just down in the dumps” (Lobel and Hirschfeld 1). Naturally, the way out of depression is up. “C’mon cheer up.” In *Fooling Yourself* by Styx (1978), the solution is, “Get up! Get back on your feet.”

Intense depression may result in frequent crying and changes in body functions, such as a lack of sleep (awakening early and not being able to go back to sleep) or changes in eating habits (loss of appetite or the opposite). Hyperactivity—or a loss of interest in things, events, and activities previously considered “pleasurable”—also is a sign of depression (Lobel and Hirschfeld 8). This inactivity results from being all-con-sumed by whatever the source of the depression is; for a moment nothing else matters. This lack of energy may be accompanied by feelings of pessimism and hopelessness (Lobel and Hirschfeld 51). As Buddy Holly sang, “I guess it doesn’t matter anymore” (1959).

*Causes*

Tim LaHaye, in his book, *How to Win Over Depression*, lists ten causes of de-presssion, five of which are listed below with appropriate comments (49-59):

**Disappointment**. A young person may have worked especially hard for good grades, but the extra effort was not reflected in a better report card; the frustration leads to disappointment, which leads to the “Why try?” attitude. Perhaps a close friend be-trays a confidence, or an important person of the opposite gender suddenly bails out of a perceived relationship. It will always be the case that:

[A] tender heart which reaches for love and understanding is often the easiest to break. Hearts that are open to trusting are usually the ones that are wounded the most (Wilkerson 17).

The alternative is expressed by Simon and Garfunkel in an early song of theirs: “If I’d never loved, I never would have cried. I am a rock; I am an island.” The song, “I Am a Rock” (1966), concludes with the words, “And a rock feels no pain. And an island never cries.” Few people, however, regardless of the intense pain at the time are willing to forego their vulnerability.

**Lack of Self-Esteem**. If other people are not hard enough on us, we can do a bang-up job of criticizing ourselves. Whereas others only suspect our deficiencies, we know what they are. As some must have been heard to say, “You can’t say anything to me that will hurt more than what I’ve already said to myself.” The goals we set may have been too high to reach. While we ought to be tough on ourselves, we must also grant ourselves some mercy. If we continually beat ourselves down, we will eventually become depressed.

**Unfair Comparisons**. The lad who stands five feet four inches tall is probably not going to be the best basketball player in high school or dunk the ball. The girl whose father is a security guard will not be able to compete in style with the outfits of her fellow students whose fathers are doctors and lawyers. The C or B student will not be invited to Harvard or Yale on a scholarship, but each individual is unique—made in the image of God. Rather than lament who we are not, we ought to appreciate who we are.

**Ambivalence**. By this term is meant “the sense of being trapped, that is, being unable to remedy an intolerable situation” (LaHaye 52). For that reason, we dealt earli-er with the fact that being in school in one particular locale will change within a short period of time. Going to college in another area or beginning work which involves a new circle of acquaintances makes a vast difference; it is an entirely different society which provides the opportunity for a fresh start. LaHaye quotes psychiatrist Mortimer Ostow as stating that ambivalence is “the most common precipitative cause of depression” (52).

**Rejection** (LaHaye’s number nine). Hardly any feeling could be worse that for a person to have done something so unacceptable that everyone avoids him. It is just this feeling that God tries to evoke in someone when the church withdraws from him. NO one enjoys being rejected. Being alone can be a terrible burden for anyone (“I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry”), but it is particularly intense for young people. Brenda Lee summed up the anguish many people feel in “All Alone Am I” (1962) and “As Usual” (1964). The songs of the “broken-hearted” are too numerous to mention, but this is the probably the most common form of rejection that teenagers experience. Each one is convinced that it is “The End of the World” (Skeeter Davis 1963) and that they have lost their only chance of happiness—ever. Observing that “there are plenty of fish in the sea” is no comfort at such times.

*Other Contributing Factors*

In another section of his book, LaHaye lists some other factors, which may result in the drying of bones. Below they will be listed in addition to the five already presented.

**Self-Pity**. “…depression results from self and self-concern” (Lloyd-Jones 103). “In spite of the causes listed previously, nothing produces depression faster or more deeply than self-pity” (LaHaye 97). He cites the case of a woman who came to see him who responded quite negatively to this diagnosis; she did not hide her disappointment: “I came to you for help, but I can see that you don’t understand my problem! (97). It is doubtful that she would have fared any better with Dr. Laura. Sometimes people see the relationship of self-pity to depression, and sometimes they do not. One woman who had stalked out of a seminar, after hearing that the root of her depression was self-pity, later realized she had indeed been feeling sorry for herself. “Honest confrontation of that fact has changed my life” (99).

Many of life’s events cause sorrow—someone’s death, the loss of a job, a health problem, unexpected confrontations with friends, schoolmates, and co-workers, or an unexpected financial crunch. As this writer’s mother-in-law says, “You should allow about twenty minutes to feel sorry for yourself—and then move on.” It would be un-natural not to feel sorrow, but it should not be indulged and fed. While a distraught soul might find a certain amount of satisfaction in singing the “poor poor pitiful me” refrain, others will soon grow weary of hearing that worn-our, overworked tune.

**Anger/Resentment** (100-103). Maybe someone (unprovoked) threw some punches at a fellow student or knocked him down in the seventh grade. He has never had a chance to “get even” in three years, and the scoundrel is running for class presi-dent. Such a bully obviously does not deserve the popularity he enjoys; the anger and resentment can cause the victim to feel depressed—at least on occasion. Maybe someone stole his math homework or lunch money or pulled off a practical joke at his expense. A number of injustices occur at this age, which will probably never be sorted out or avenged. Similar things happen in adult life. Court proceedings are delayed and postponed; laws are not enforced, and people suffer because of unjust decisions or even no decision from a judge. How often do we all lament that criminals go free while the innocent are victimized! Such inequities need to be fixed, but they cannot govern our feelings.

**Setbacks**. All of us are the subject to these. A student who believes he has the talent he needs to play football or baseball is passed over for someone else. The part of Medea in the school play was given to a freshman with considerably less ability. Or maybe the setback is an automobile accident, as in the case of the oldest son in the fic-tional family in *Joan of Arcadia*. The tragedy of never being able to walk again, thus curbing a highly athletic career, was a hindrance that brought out self-pity, anger/resent-ment, and depression for this character.

**Distorted Thinking**. Although Lobel and Hirschfeld correctly write that “distort-ed thinking is central to clinical depression” (40), that observation needs to be expanded to include ***all*** depression. When we jump to the conclusion that all is lost or that it is the end of the world, we are not thinking clearly. What if Jesus had thought that way upon the cross? “Well, here I am, an innocent man—in fact, the only truly innocent man who ever lived—and I suffer in agony because some were jealous and envious of me. I’ve been betrayed by one disciple, disowned by another, and rejected by my own nation. What good is there left to hope for?” Of course, our Lord knew what was to follow, but Job did not. His wife encouraged him to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9).

Joshua, as leader of the Israelites, incurred one setback, and he was deeply absorbed by the “poor poor pitiful me” philosophy. In essence, Joshua asks, “Why aren’t You fighting for us anymore?” He cried, “O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies?” (Joshua 7:8). The reader can sense self-pity in Joshua’s lament, but his thinking is distorted, also. He has entertained the notion that God may have changed His mind about helping them conquer the land. Of course, such a notion is absurd. God had made the promise, and He will keep it. Joshua may be thinking that, if they lose one battle, how many more might they be bested in? How long will it be, if defeats continue, until the people begin to rise up against him, saying, “Did not our parents predict the difficulty of conquering the land? We should have lis-tened to them and returned to Egypt.” We must beware of pursuing a pessimistic line of thought.

Elijah had just finished an overwhelming victory against the false prophets of Ba-al; even Ahab looked as though he might change and begin to follow the true and living God. Then came the chilling promise from Jezebel that Elijah would be just as dead as her prophets within 24 hours (1 Kings 19:2). Elijah became so depressed that “he prayed that he might die” (19:4). God asked him why, and he said that all his zeal had been for nothing; he was the only faithful man left in the country (19:10). His thinking was distorted (although the truth was depressing enough). There is a vast difference between seven thousand and one (19:18).

A young person may think he is the only one in the entire school that cares about morality. As Christians, we may convince ourselves that we are the only ones who care about right and wrong, truth, and justice. It is tempting to think we are the only ones in the community willing to speak out on a moral issue. We may foolishly imagine that we are the only congregation left standing for the Truth. All of these result from distorted thinking. So is it when we convince ourselves that no one else could ever love us, that we will never be in any better shape than we are now, or that we will ever be a happy person. If anyone has the right to be depressed, it was Noah. We do not know if he ever said, “I don’t think anyone will be saved from the Flood except my own family,” but he would have been right. He worked, however, at the goal God set before him and did not waver.

**Lack of Faith**. Martyn Lloyd-Jones insists that

[T]he ultimate cause of spiritual depression is unbelief…. It is because we listen to the devil instead of listening to God that we go down before him and fail before his attacks (20).

Why did Noah not experience depression? His faith in God was strong. “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did” (Gen. 6:22). When young people think they have failed and have no redeeming value, have they not failed to recall that God created us and Jesus redeemed us? One soul is worth more than the entire world (Mat. 16:26). When they lament the injustices they experience, have they not forgotten that God provides all their needs (Phil. 4:6-7)? When they are unhappy about the way things are going, have they not lost sight of the fact that God operates providentially on our behalf? Teenagers are not the only ones who suffer lapses in their faith! Even Joshua and Elijah slipped a notch temporarily. Even in despair, however, there is hope.

THE REALITY OF TRIALS

An un-get-around-able fact is that, as long as we are alive, we will be facing trials. James writes that Christians should realize that “the trying of your faith worketh patience” and that the correct outlook is to “let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:3-4). “We are not patient by na-ture” (Lloyd-Jones 228). We will never develop this much-needed quality if everything runs smoothly and we never have obstacles to overcome. Peter goes so far as to point out to brethren that before receiving an eternal inheritance that:

[F]or a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold tempta-tions: that the trial of your faith…though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).

At times everyone feels overwhelmed. Moses’ father-in-law suggested dividing the burden of judging Israel because he would otherwise “wear away”—“for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone” (Exo. 18:18). Young people have family obligations, grades to keep up, extracurricular activities which in some measure depend upon them for success, perhaps a part-time job which requires time, and spiritual responsibilities—all the while looking for a possible future mate. No wonder adults seldom say, “If only I could be a teenager again!”

Leadership is a burden. Moses acutely felt the pressure; he complained to God: “I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me” (Num. 11: 14). Tragedies of life can be grievous, such as the death of a loved one; Ahijah the prophet was given the task of telling Jeroboam’s wife that her son would not recover from his illness. He described the information he had for her as “heavy tidings” (1 Kings 14:6). The realization of the effects of sin can lead one to experience great sorrow. For example, when Ezra learned that the people, the priests, and the Levites had married those who had specifically been forbidden them, he plucked hair from his head and his beard and “sat down astonished.” He then writes: “And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness…” (Ezra 9:3-4).

How many young people have had to go through the same process because of their own sins? A young man was persuaded against his better judgment to engage in drinking or doing drugs; he smashed up his dad’s car in the process. So much for keep-ing the sin a secret! Now the realization sets in that the problem was not the reckless driving; it was in disobeying his parents (and God) and being so foolish as to listen to his “friends” who wanted him to do wrong. The same heaviness might be borne by a young woman who gave in to the relentless pressure of her boyfriend. Now she is pregnant; her whole life is changed, and she has disgraced her Lord, as well as her parents. It is not the “getting caught” that disturbs her, but her decision to sin in the first place.

Some may feel as forlorn as the psalmist:

Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none (Ps. 69:20).

Solomon wrote: “Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad” (Pro. 12:25). We all need to feel this extreme sorrow for our sins. Fail-ing to realize that our sins put Jesus on the cross will prevent repentance. We need to hurt.

But we should not despair. We fail, and it is difficult to bear, but God’s marvelous attribute of patience (and grace) allows us to repent. The Lord does not give up on us even when we have greatly offended Him. “It is always after a failure that a man does his greatest work” (Wilkerson 99). It would be hard to imagine a greater transgression than Peter’s denial of Christ. Afterward, when the enormity of his actions struck him, he went out and wept bitterly. Fifty days later he is standing before thousands of Jews, the very ones who crucified Christ, and boldly proclaiming the Gospel. Did he deserve that honor? Undoubtedly, his actions that night would always haunt him, but he knew he was forgiven and went on to do great things for the kingdom of God.

God is greatly impressed by those who genuinely mourn for their sins, as Judah did in the captivity. God determined to comfort:

[A]ll that mourn…to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified (Isa. 61:3).

No one receives this blessing, however, without experiencing great sorrow of the heart. Those who do repent receive forgiveness and great blessings from God.

One final weight that must always be borne is the recognition that others are lost. It would be wonderful to adopt the unrealistic, “I’m OK; you’re OK,” attitude that some have, but reality prevents it. Perhaps no one besides Jesus has ever been so acutely aware of this circumstance than the apostle Paul, who wrote:

I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen ac-cording to the flesh (Rom. 9:2-3)

If we know the difference between *lost* and *saved*, we cannot fail to understand that we have a great task before us. We are debtors to all men (Rom. 1:14). If we understand the need for our own salvation, then it ought not be difficult to see the need for others’, also. We cannot say whether anyone has ever been depressed over the fact that the majority of people are lost (Mat. 7:13-14), but it ought to weigh on us to the point of positive action.

CURES FOR DEPRESSION

No one has a magic formula which, if applied, will pop someone out of depres-sion in a few moments; one essential ingredient is time, but we are capable of changing in just a matter of a few days with the right stimulus and the willingness to reason about the state we are in. The following suggestions are proven to have worked and will greatly help anyone leave the dark mood behind (remember that clinical depression needs medical treatment).

Realize that, whatever the source of depression, God knows. Wilkerson recalls that Jesus said: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Mat. 10:29). He points out that the verse im-plies more than that God just possesses the knowledge about us—He is with us (50). He understands our feelings and aches with us. We may be tempted to think that God is the source of our problems or that He does not care; such could not be farther from the truth. We must survive this assault on our faith, planted (no doubt) by the devil, and strengthen ourselves. Not only does God know the problem; He also knows the solu-tion (Lloyd 39).

Read the Bible. On those rare occasions when this writer has experienced de-pression, the reading of the Scriptures has contributed immeasurably to lifting his spirits. “My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according to thy word” (Ps. 119:28). Suppose that someone has been betrayed by a close friend. Jesus understands com-pletely, having been betrayed by Judas. How much anguish must He have experienced before, during, and after it occurred! Some of the sorrow may have been for Himself and the unfairness of His treatment, but some would be for Judas—because of the pun-ishment that would come upon him.

Paul also knew what it felt like to be deserted, since Demas departed, having loved this present world (2 Tim. 4:10). Anyone who has ever experienced betrayal has been touched

“in the most sensitive and delicate part” of his being—in his heart (in his mind)—which things are likely to cast him down (Lloyd-Jones 223).

But neither Jesus nor Paul allowed these things to stop them. Jesus went to the cross and died for our sins. Paul stood trial and went to his death as a faithful proclaim-er of the Word of God. Poor treatment on the part of others could not diminish the glory of the crown of life awaiting him (2 Tim. 4:8). We cannot be deterred! God’s Word strengthens our resolve.

Prayer is not only something we are to engage in unceasingly; it helps us when our hearts are heavy. We are not necessarily going to receive the current object of our desire. Some seem to view God “as our personal genie who fulfills every wish” (Wilker-son 129). The value of trying times is that they bring us closer to God whether or not our fervent request is granted. We must adopt the right attitude toward those things that have caused us emotional turmoil. Wilkerson states this point correctly; speaking of God, he writes:

He is all I need. If I need more, He will not withhold it. He will do it in His time, in His way; and, if He does not fulfill my request, He must have a perfect reason for not doing so. No matter what happens, I will always have faith in His faithfulness (141).

We must change our thoughts. Even those who approach depression from a secular standpoint understand this truth.

Cognitive therapy assumes that negative thought patterns lead to de-pressed feelings and behaviors, and that the way to change the feeling is to change the thoughts (Lobel and Hirschfeld 54).

Stephen Lloyd (the only member of the Lord’s church cited in this chapter) also observes: “A change in our behavior is brought about by a change in the way we think” (66). He mentions Romans 12:1-2, which teaches that transformation takes place by “the renewing” of the mind. Of course, this is true in a general sense, but it is also the case that, if we want to be transformed from harmful despair to a healthy demeanor, we must focus on spiritual truths. Paul provides a list of things to think about (Phil. 4:8), because what we dwell upon will affect our attitude.

Controlling our attitude toward what has happened (that has made us depressed) is crucial.

Unless an individual is willing to face the fact that his mental attitude to-ward the circumstances, not the circumstances, cause his unhappiness and depression, he is in my opinion incurable (LaHaye 20).

“Your mental attitude is more important in such matters than your hormones and glands because it controls them” (132). The problem with depression, which involves distorted thinking, is that we can become very negative about everything. Another per-son could take the same set of data and not feel down at all. Consider Paul, for ex-ample. As he was awaiting execution, having been deserted by Demas, he might have reasoned:

My whole life is a failure. I establish churches and the Judaizing teachers come in behind me, creating conflicts. The care of all the churches has really weighed me down. Even my best protégé, Timothy, I have had to exhort because of persecution. I’ve been stoned, scourged, starved, imprisoned, and so on. And what do I have to show for it? Here I am, all alone, facing death. In ten years, who knows if there will even be more than a handful of churches? And what is the reward for all my labors? Death. Is this right? Is this just?

If Paul ever harbored such a bleak outlook, he never gave any indication of it. He is awaiting the crown of life. Regardless of what the world or the church does after his departure, he fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith. Consider the positive attitude he expressed: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8-9). There is something appealing about the person who can say, “I get knocked down, but I get up again.” Paul, however, did not do this on his own; the power and sufficiency was provided by God (2 Cor. 3:5).

One generation of Israelites said, “We can’t conquer the land”; their children went in and accomplished the task. The writer of Hebrews said that the generation that came out from Egypt failed because of lack of faith (Heb. 4:2). Removing oneself from de-pression depends on what we think about ourselves and what we think about God (pri-marily the latter). Trusting in Him, regardless of how things turn out, is critical. Shad-rach, Meshach, and Abednego did not know whether God would save them or not, but they knew where they stood. We do not always know, when we pray for a resolution to a problem, whether or not we will receive our petition, but we maintain our faith in Him—that He knows what He is doing.

When terrible things have happened, our problem is that we stay focused on it to the exclusion of nearly anything else. Even when we know that it is time to move on, our mind remains riveted on “the event.” Our intellect tells us to return to the land of the living, but our heart prompts the memory to replay the situation in a non-stop loop. Why do we do that? Will it change the past? Will one of these times everything occur differ-ently? No. We may subconsciously derive some pleasure from being the victim (poor poor pitiful me). Or maybe we are trying to keep the pain alive in order to spur us to action, but more likely we will end up in inactivity. Maybe we rerun the scenario in order to avoid future pain. “What have I learned from this mess? What will I do differently in the future?” Whatever our reasons for dwelling in the past, they will not generate “a positive anticipation of the future” (LaHaye 48). We cannot change what has happened; we do control our attitude towards it. As one recovered victim stated: “It isn’t that I don’t have all the problems I had before—but having problems isn’t such a problem (Lobel and Hirschfeld 57).

We must rejoice rather than murmur about our condition. We can choose to complain, if we wish, about that which has depressed us. LaHaye points out that “you create your own emotional state by either griping or giving thanks” (118). Quite often, these attitudes spread to others: “Negativism, pessimism, griping, criticism, and gossip are not only harmful but contagious” (203). As the old saying goes, “Misery loves com-pany.” All Israel did for forty years in the wilderness was complain. What did it get them? They lived unhappily and died spiritually broke. We dare not let such attitudes develop within us.

“But I can’t help how I feel.” Who said that? Is that sentiment a Biblical teach-ing? The way some people harp on their feelings, one would think they are sacrosanct. Once again, the kind of thinking in the mind is either going to perpetuate the problem or effect a solution. “Thought patterns produce feelings, feelings produce actions” (La-Haye 27). Actually, the proper actions produce the right feelings, also. Sometimes, young people have been reluctant to sing or participate at a nursing home. By partak-ing of the action, however, which led to the residents thanking them for coming (accom-panied by a generous smile), they ended up feeling good about the action that they were reluctant to take in the first place. Thinking correctly and the proper actions can change the feelings.

Those feeling depressed act as though everyone else has the power to deter-mine their happiness. The teacher scowls at them and gives them poor grades; is that worth sulking all day? One counselor laid the stark truth on the line to a disillusioned wife:

What a shame that all your happiness depends only on what your hus-band does. If he…treats you the way you think you should be treated… then you may find a little happiness. But when he lets you down, you have nothing left. Your whole world rises and falls on the actions of your hus-band. That is why you are so empty (Wilkerson 34).

This is a mistake that young people make when dating. They turn over their happiness to someone else. When the day comes that their “beloved” decides to date another or simply wants to break up, they are devastated. This action reflects greatly on their self-esteem (“I’m not good enough”) and their commitment to the faulty notion that “this was the only person on earth who could have made me happy.” With over six billion people in the world today, one must consider that someone else could do a rea-sonable job, if given a chance.

As difficult (and loony) as it may sound, we ought to rejoice and give thanks to God even in the face of adversity. Why? The foremost reason is that Paul prescribes this course of action: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. 4:4). He adds: “Be careful in nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (4:6).

These words do not comprise an idle prescription. Were some preaching out of evil motives in order to get the imprisoned Paul’s goat? He rejoiced that the Gospel was nevertheless being preached (1:16-18). Would he be put to death for the faith? His response was that “to die is gain” (1:21).

Lamentable things occur, but God can use those things for good (Rom. 8:28). God sometimes “sends lesser trials to prepare us for the greater ones” (Lloyd-Jones 226). It may be that “one may have to pass through this kind of experience because of some great task ahead” (226). Another encouraging observation from Lloyd-Jones is: “There may be a glorious period coming for you, He may have some unusual blessing for you, He may have some great work for you to do” (230).

“But the pain involved in this experience is so great,” someone protests. Dr. Laura responds with her usual blunt insight: “In order to grow, you’ve got to face the fact that painless change happens only in fairy tales” (Lloyd-Jones 113). Again, it boils down to, “Do you trust that God is in charge of the universe and that He knows what He is doing, or not?”

Setting goals is not only the way out of depression; it is a philosophy that should be indicative of one’s life. If one’s only goal is to wake up tomorrow and feel miserable again, no wonder one’s depression is not on the decline. One desperately needs to get away from oneself (poor poor pitiful me). Joan’s (of Arcadia) brother thought one of her remarks was a little self-serving; he said the following approximate words: “Hey! Co-pernicus called. Guess what? You’re not the center of the universe” (this program aired on February 27, 2003). At times we get wrapped up in ourselves.

One of our constant goals should be to think of others. “The most rewarding and gratifying experiences in life come in serving people” (LaHaye 206). Jesus said, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Mat. 23:11), and, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Lloyd-Jones observed that many people are un-happy because “their lives do not seem to lead to anything and they are not helpful to other people” (206). He then asks the question: “How does living a life without purpose sit with you? Is this not the most frightening thought imaginable?” (20). Since depres-sion often involves self-absorption, having goals (especially those that involve other people) will definitely lead in an upward direction. In fact, happiness itself “is a by-product of a higher goal—that of living a life that glorifies God” (17).

CONCLUSION

“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?” (Pro. 18:14). Ordinarily we have enough faith, self-confidence, and positive support from others to absorb most of life’s daily setbacks. In the face of a major tragedy, however, or a series of minor ones, the spirit may become wounded. Perhaps by re-viewing the points provided in this chapter we may be able to resuscitate ourselves. Quite often a good friend can be of inestimable aid. “Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel” (27:9).

If we find ourselves in the role of encouraging others, we want to be careful not to be overly cheerful. Most people resent it when someone comes by in their hour of de-spair and tells them how great things are. They may be tempted to impart some of the grief they fuel to such a blasé brother. “Like one who takes away a garment in cold weather, and like vinegar on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart” (25:20, NKJ).

People need the opportunity to feel hurt, to express their misery (isn’t that what Job did?), and to hear words of commiseration and comfort. If the period of mourning begins to be prolonged, then they need to be exhorted not to become self-absorbed. Although many feel poor and pitiful, few would want anyone else to look at them that way. How contradictory we are—we both invite pity and disdain it. Most people really want to feel good about themselves, God, and life; therefore, let us be wise in bringing others, especially young people, back from their “dry bones” experience. What a great opportunity to be good medicine to someone who is spiritually and mentally under the weather.

WORKS CITED

All quotations are from the King James unless otherwise noted.

Harris, W. *The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book

House, 2001.

LaHaye, Tim. *How To Win Over Depression*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing

House, 1974.

Lloyd, Steven. *Coping*. Chino, CA: SML Publications, 1995.

Lloyd-Jones, D Martyn. *Spiritual Depression*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans

Publishing CO., 1965.

Lobel, Brana, and Robert Hirschfeld. *Depression: What WE Know*. Rockville, MD,

National Institute of Mental Health, 1984.

*Pulpit Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962

Wilkerson, David. *Have You Felt Like Giving Up Lately?* Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H.

Revell, 1980.