

**PRACTICAL
HOLINESS
A SECOND LOOK**

V O L U M E 4

PRACTICAL HOLINESS A SECOND LOOK

*A study of the victorious Christian life:
pursuing holiness inwardly and outwardly,
avoiding legalism, protecting Christian
liberty, and applying scriptural principles
to everyday situations.*

DAVID K. BERNARD

PRACTICAL HOLINESS: A SECOND LOOK

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*To Pastor and Mrs. Thomas L. Craft,
the First Pentecostal Church of Jackson,
Mississippi, and the faculty, staff, and student body of
Jackson College of Ministries for creating the spiritual
environment that made this book possible.*

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Author's Preface

I am convinced that there is both a great need and a great hunger today for teaching on practical holiness. As of this writing, over 17,600 copies of *In Search of Holiness* have been printed. It has been well received by new converts, charismatics, independent congregations, and people outside the traditional Holiness-Pentecostal movement. This indicates that in many places there is a genuine desire for scriptural holiness. I believe that we can see in our day a revival of holiness to accompany the revival of the Holy Spirit.

Why another book on holiness? Certainly, no one book can exhaust this rich subject; in many ways the first book was simply an introduction. Specifically, the present book has been designed with several additional purposes in mind: (1) To investigate the theology of holiness further, considering such topics as the sinful nature, legalism, and Christian liberty. (2) To provide historical perspectives on practical holiness issues. (3) To delve deeper into a number of topics, such as adornment and dress, hair, marriage and divorce, abortion, and astrology. (4) To present additional research in some areas, such as television, alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. (5) To answer numerous objections raised to practical holiness teaching.

Although in many ways this book is a sequel to *In Search of Holiness*, it can be read by itself. To facilitate this, Chapter 2 includes a brief summary of basic principles discussed in the first book. Whenever a chapter depends significantly on material covered in the previous book, that material is summarized and presented at the beginning of the chapter.

All biblical quotations are taken from the *King James Version*, unless otherwise indicated. The following abbreviations are used: *KJV* for *King James Version*, *NKJV* for *New King James Version*, and *NIV* for *New International Version*.

I am especially thankful to my wife Connie for her patience and faithful support throughout the writing process.

I trust that the reader will study this book with an open mind, an open heart, and an open Bible. It is not my intention to be legalistic, critical, condemnatory, or divisive in any way. Rather, my desire is simply to contribute to the enunciation of a consistent, biblical theology of holiness. I am striving to implement these principles in my life, and trust that I can assist others also in “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

David K. Bernard

Jackson, Mississippi

1

THE CHRISTIAN AND SIN

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ the righteous” (I John 2:1).

The Bible calls followers of Christ to a life of holiness. In order to obey this biblical command, however, we must first understand the relationship between the human nature and sin. This chapter investigates sin’s power with respect to the human race and particularly with respect to the born-again Christian. This will form a basis for our subsequent discussion of the principles of holiness.

The Sinful Nature

The Bible emphatically declares that every human being has sinned. In chapters 1, 2, and 3 of Romans, Paul

demonstrated that all mankind is guilty before God. He concluded, "We have . . . proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. . . . For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:9-12, 23). The Apostle John stated, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (I John 1:10). Even the Old Testament affirms, "There is no man that sinneth not" (I Kings 8:46; II Chronicles 6:36).

Sinful acts arise from the nature of sin that all human beings inherit as a result of the sin of Adam, the first representative of the human race. This sinful nature is also known as the flesh or the carnal man. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).

The penalty for sin is death, but just as we were led into sin and death by one man, Adam, so we can receive forgiveness and life through one man, Christ. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Corinthians 15:22).

Even after the new birth, we still possess the sin principle or the sin nature. "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit,

and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other” (Galatians 5:16-17). “Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” (James 4:5). “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (I John 1:8).

The sinful nature consists of a compulsion to commit sinful acts. It is more than a capacity to sin, such as Adam had in his state of innocence, for if we let the sinful nature lead us it will always cause us to sin (Galatians 5:17).

In Romans 7, Paul taught that neither the law of God nor the law of the mind brings power over the law of sin. That is, neither God’s moral law nor the good intentions of the human mind impart power to overcome the principle of sin that impels humans to sin. “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my

members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

“So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin” (Romans 7:21-25, *NIV*).

Many debate as to whether this chapter applies to the unregenerate or to the regenerate. Possibly, it refers to Paul before his conversion. Alternatively, it is Paul’s description of his carnal nature only—what his flesh is like if left to itself. In any case, the passage describes the failure of a good, sincere person who tries to live for God without relying on the power of the Spirit. As such, it applies to anyone, either regenerate or unregenerate, who tries to live a holy life by his own human power and by mere obedience to law. Thus, it describes a constant threat to the Christian: if he relies on the flesh, he will always fail and revert to sin.

Romans 7 does not represent the norm for Christian living; we find that in Romans 6 and 8. In 7:24 Paul asked who could deliver from the bondage of the sinful nature. In 7:25 he interjected a thanksgiving to God as he reflected on the answer, then concluded the chapter by summarizing the power of the sinful nature. In Romans 8 he gave the answer to the dilemma posed in chapter 7: through the law of the Spirit we can overcome the law of sin.

F. F. Bruce explained it well in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*: “The inability persists only so long as ‘I myself’—that is, I in my own strength—fight the battle, . . . ‘I myself’ (*autos ego*) is emphatic: it is ‘I by myself who experience this defeat and frustration, but ‘I’ as a Christian, am not left to ‘myself’: ‘the law of the Spirit of

life in Christ Jesus' has come to dwell within me, and His presence and power make an almighty difference."¹ Similarly, when Paul stated "ye cannot do the things that ye would" in Galatians 5:17, he meant this is true only as long as we follow the flesh. According to verses 16, 18, and 22, if we follow the Spirit we can indeed override the lusts and works of the flesh.

Power Over the Sinful Nature

Although the principle of sin remains in the born-again believer, he can overcome it through the power of the Spirit. Romans 6 states in emphatic terms that the Christian should not sin. Romans 7 warns that the Christian cannot obey this command by depending on the law, his mind, or his flesh (sinful nature). Chapter 8 explains that the Christian can fulfil this command only by walking after the Spirit instead of the flesh.

The law of the Spirit does not destroy the law of sin but overcomes it. Let us draw an analogy from the influence of gravity upon a flying bird. As long as the bird flaps its wings, the law of aerodynamics enables it to supercede the law of gravity and it stays aloft. Gravity has not been destroyed, however. If the bird folds its wings, gravity reasserts itself and the bird plunges back to the ground. Likewise, the born-again Christian can live above sin because the law of the Spirit in him supercedes the law of sin in him. However, if he does not walk after the Spirit, the law of sin, which has not yet been destroyed, will reassert itself and drag him back into sin.

Certainly, Christians receive power over the sinful

nature, for Jesus came to save from sin (Matthew 1:21). If we are not delivered from bondage to sin at conversion, how are we saved in the past and present tenses as the Bible states?

As born-again believers we now have freedom from sin—the power to choose not to sin. “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:34-36). “Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. . . . Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God . . . For sin shall not have dominion over you . . . But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. . . . But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life’ (Romans 6:6-7, 11-14, 17-18, 22).

Romans 6 reveals a threefold approach to overcoming sin: (1) *Know* who we are and what has happened to us. Know that when we were born again we died to sin. Know, therefore that sin has no power over us. (2) *Reckon* this to be so. Act as if we died to sin and sin has no power over us. (3) *Yield* to God. Replace sinful habits with an active

performance of God's will as revealed by His Word and His Spirit. Let us analyze these concepts further.

At the new birth, the old man actually died, that is, we died to sin. In this passage, the old man does not mean the sinful human nature itself but the unregenerate lifestyle or the dominion of sin. God did not eradicate the sinful nature at conversion, but He destroyed the dominion or reign of sin over us. If we as Christians now sin, it is because we choose to sin, not because we are forced to do so. If we sin we voluntarily submit to a principle with no legal or actual power over us. We must recognize the truth of our liberation and act upon it. We must count ourselves as indeed dead to sin but alive to God. As Jerry Bridges of the Navigators explained, "Now that we are in fact dead to sin—to its rule and reign—we are to count on that as being true. We are to keep before us this fact that we are no longer slaves. We can now stand up to sin and say no to it. Before we had no choice; now we have one. When we sin as Christians, we do not sin as slaves, but as individuals with the freedom of choice. We sin because we choose to sin."²

The Holy Spirit gives us power to live righteously and to be living witnesses that God has indeed saved us from sin. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:2-4).

“Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit” (I Thessalonians 4:7-8, *NIV*). By allowing the Spirit of God to work in us we can put away evil works, do God’s will, and bear righteous fruit (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:21-24; Philippians 2:13).

Bruce has commented: “Christian holiness is not a matter of painstaking conformity to the individual precepts of an external law-code; it is rather a question of the Holy Spirit’s producing His fruit in the life, reproducing those graces which were seen in perfection in the life of Christ. The law prescribed a life of holiness, but it was powerless to produce such a life, because of the inadequacy of the human material that it had to work upon. But what the law was powerless to do has been done by God. . . . All that the law required by way of conformity to the will of God is now realized in the lives of those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit and are released from their servitude to the old order. *God’s commands have now become God’s enablings.*”³

The born-again Christian will not continue to live in sin, and in fact his newly given nature cannot sin. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (I John 3:9). The Christian still has the capacity to sin, as John noted in chapters I and 2 of his epistle, but the born-again nature restrains him from habitually committing sin. As long as he lets the Spirit lead him he will not sin.

We Must Not Sin

Since the Christian has power over sin he should not sin. “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? . . . What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Romans 6:1-2, 15). “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not” (I John 2:1). The Spirit gives us the ability to live an obedient life, but it is our responsibility to make use of this power. Bridges noted, “To confuse the *potential* for resisting (which God provided) with the *responsibility* for resisting (which is ours) is to court disaster in our pursuit of holiness.”⁴

In fact, if the Christian continues to live in sin or allows unrepented sin to remain in his life, he will not inherit salvation in the life to come. By his sinful, faithless lifestyle he will lose the salvation he received by his previous repentance and faith. The following points amply demonstrate this truth.

- The true test of whether or not we know God, have the love of God, and abide in God is whether or not we keep God’s commandments and live a Christ-like life (I John 2:3-6).

- Those who are led by the Spirit are (remain) the sons of God (Romans 8:14). The child of God who rebels against God’s authority is not “unborn” but God will disown and disinherit him.

- True religion means to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27), and God will have a spotless church (Ephesians 5:27).

- We must overcome temptation, sin, and the things of

this world in order to receive an eternal reward (Revelation 2:1-29; 3:1-22; 21:7).

- We must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (II Corinthians 7:1).

- We must follow holiness in order to see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14; I Peter 1:15-16).

- Jesus Christ lived an innocent, sinless life as an example for us to emulate (I Peter 2:21-24). We have Christ in us to reproduce His life in us (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27).

- We have confidence towards God only if our hearts do not condemn us (I John 3:21). We have confidence if we keep His commandments and do His will (I John 3:22). If we have unrepented sin in our lives our hearts are full of condemnation and guilt.

- A Christian with specific unrepented sin in his life cannot inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life (I Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; I John 3:15; Revelation 21:8).

- A born-again person must continue to walk by faith, which includes obeying the Word of God, in order to receive salvation in the end. “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17). “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:13). “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Romans 11:22). “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this

thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (I Timothy 4:16). “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (Hebrews 3:14). “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Hebrews 4:11). (See also Matthew 10:22; I Corinthians 9:27; 15:2; Philippians 2:12; I Thessalonians 5:8; II Peter 1:10).

•A child of God will lose his salvation if he allows unrepented sin and unbelief to remain in his life when the Lord comes for him. “Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith” (I Timothy 5:12). “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Hebrews 10:38-39). “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20). “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (II Peter 2:20-21). (See also Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 6:4-6; 12:15; II Peter 2:1; Revelation 3:5; 22:19.) Prominent examples of unrepentant backsliders in Scripture are Saul (I Samuel 16:14; 18:12; 28:16), Judas (Acts 1:15-20, 25; Psalm 69:25, 28), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and Demas

(Philemon 24; II Timothy 4:10).

- Although nothing can separate us from God (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:35-39), we ourselves can choose to leave Him just as we chose to come to Him. We determine whether or not we will abide (remain) in Him (John 15:1-10).

- When a Christian sins he has allowed the sinful nature and the devil to provide leadership. God does not tempt anyone to sin, and sin is not of God (James 1:13). Someone who sins is the servant of sin and the devil (John 8:34; Romans 6:16; I John 3:8). This can be either a temporary or a permanent situation.

- Simply stated, the Christian has two choices: he can walk after the flesh, which leads to sin and death, or he can walk after the Spirit, which leads to righteousness and eternal life (Romans 8:5-14; Galatians 5:16-25). When Paul admonished believers not to continue in sin, he reminded them, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

If We Sin, We Must Repent

Even though a Christian should not sin, if he does sin he can obtain forgiveness by repentance. The one thing worse than sin is a refusal to confess sin. God can save a sinner, but He will not save one who refuses to confess sin. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (I John 2:1). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

Prior righteousness will not cover that sin. "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die" (Ezekiel 18:24).

Nor does the grace of God automatically cover that sin in the absence of genuine repentance (Romans 6:1-2, 15-16, 23). The Lord specifically requires repentance of Christians who commit sin: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Revelation 2:5). (See also Revelation 2:16; 2:21-22; 3:3-5; 3:19.)

If a person sincerely lives for God, commission of sin will be at most a temporary lapse and an aberration. When a consecrated Christian temporarily falls into sin, usually he has immediately a repentant heart and will receive instant forgiveness. Of course, repentance includes godly sorrow and regret for what has been done as well as a present desire and intention not to commit that sin again (Proverbs 28:13; II Corinthians 7:10).

When a Christian does sin, the Bible indicates that, in general, God gives opportunity and time for repentance (Romans 2:4; II Peter 3:9; Revelation 2:21).

The Bible also teaches that backsliders can be restored (James 5:19-20; II Peter 3:9; Revelation 2:15). Passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-31 do not contradict this truth, but teach the following: (1) If we reject the atoning death of Christ, there is no other way of salvation. (2) A backslider can harden his heart so much, go so far

into delusion, or deny the work of the Spirit to the point that God can no longer deal with him, and he cannot be saved while in that condition.

Assurance of Salvation

We need not live in fear of condemnation for sin committed unknowingly. No sin is committed totally by accident. James 4:17 says that a knowing failure to do good is sin. This implies that in some cases we are not accountable for things left undone in ignorance; however, ignorance is no excuse when God's Word addresses an issue. We should pray for God to reveal the hidden things in our lives that are not pleasing to Him, and He will do so (Psalm 19:12-13; 139:23-24). If we will remain sensitive to the Spirit of God, He will teach us and convict us of sin (John 16:8, 13).

We can have assurance of salvation. We can know with certainty that we are saved (Romans 8:14-16). We can also know with certainty that we will inherit eternal life if we continue to have faith in Christ and love for God (Romans 5:8-11; 8:28-39). As long as we abide in Christ, nothing can separate us from Him or cause us to lose salvation (John 15:1-10; Romans 8:35-39).

What is Sin?

Sin is both a nature and an act. As already described in this chapter, the sinful nature is an inherited compulsion to sin that only the Spirit of God can overcome. The

Bible defines sinful acts in at least three ways:

(1) "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). All disobedience of God's commandments is sin, whether by commission or omission.

(2) "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Anything incompatible with faith in God is sin. If we believe something is wrong or have doubts about it, but do it anyway, then we have gone against what we believe to be the will of God. In other words, we manifest a willingness to rebel against God. This attitude is sinful. Even if the act is not wrong for someone else, it becomes wrong for us because it violates our conscience and contradicts the faith principle.

(3) "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). This apparently refers to a choice between morality and immorality, or a choice between obeying and disobeying one of God's commands. Not every failure to do a good deed or the best thing in a given situation is sin (I Corinthians 7:26-28).

Temptation is not sin, for Christ was tempted but did not sin (Matthew 4:1-11). It will produce sin only if we entertain it and yield to it, either mentally or physically (James 1:12-16).

Not every mistake, fault, or personality flaw is a moral sin, even though we sometimes label them as "sins." We should seek to improve in these areas, ask God to help and forgive us, and ask others to forgive; but these things are not always immoral or sinful. For example, Paul asked forgiveness from the Corinthians if his refusal to take support from them was not proper (II Corinthians 12:13). Other examples could be rudeness, oversleeping, habitual lateness, and insensitivity at a particular time.

Sin and Grace

Grace provides forgiveness for all repented sin. It does not provide forgiveness for unrepented sin. In other words, grace makes forgiveness available for sins committed after the new birth, but only upon repentance.

After the new birth, grace gives us both the desire and the power to do God's will and live a holy life (Philippians 2:13). It is not a means by which God overlooks sin in the life of a "helpless" Christian; it does not let us continue in sin (Romans 6:1-2, 15-16). In fact, grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11-12).

God's gracious salvation is a cure for all the evils of sin. Grace deals with both the sinful act and the sinful nature. It does not merely cover up sin, but enables the repented man first to avoid sin's penalty and then to start a whole new life free from sin's dominion. The same grace that reaches back to forgive past sin also reaches forward to prevent and overcome future sin.

In conclusion, here are two basic guidelines for Christian living: (1) We must not sin; (2) If we do sin, we must confess it to God and continue serving Him from that point. God's gracious salvation provides both forgiveness of sin and power to live a holy life.

FOOTNOTES

¹F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Vol. VI of *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, R. V. G. Masker (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 153, 156.

²Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Nav-Press, 1978), p. 60.

³Bruce, p. 160. Emphasis ours.

⁴Bridges, p. 60. Emphasis in original.

2

GENERAL HOLINESS PRINCIPLES

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

The new birth is the initial experience of salvation, but the work of salvation does not end there. God calls the Christian to a continued life of holiness. It is imperative for the born-again believer to experience the continuing work of sanctification, which comes by daily submission to the leadership and control of the Holy Spirit. Just as we must be born again to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5), so must we follow holiness or sanctification in order to see the Lord. (See Hebrews 12:14.) “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14, *NIV*). “Follow peace with all men, and the sanctification, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14, *American Standard Version*). The new birth will have no eternal value unless the born-again

person continues to walk by faith and live after the new nature of the Spirit, allowing God to complete the work of salvation that began at the new birth.

This chapter presents in condensed form the basic principles of holiness. It also summarizes some of the main points of *In Search of Holiness* in order to lay a foundation for the remainder of this book.

Definition of Holiness

God is holy; holiness is an essential attribute of His nature. With respect to Him, it means absolute purity and moral perfection. With respect to man, holiness means conformity to the character of God. We must be holy because God is holy (I Peter 1:15-16). It means thinking as God thinks, loving what He loves, hating what He hates, and acting as Christ would act.

Specifically, holiness consists of two components: (1) *separation* from sin and worldliness and (2) *dedication* to God and His will. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 6:17-7:1). "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your

mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2). The truth of Christ is “that ye put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24, *NKJV*).

Holiness means we cannot love this ungodly world system, identify with it, become attached to the things in it, or participate in its sinful pleasures and activities. “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (I John 2:15-16). One important aspect of pure and undefiled religion is for a person to keep himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

Holiness involves both the inner man and the outer man (I Corinthians 6:19-20; I Thessalonians 5:23). We must perfect holiness by cleansing ourselves of filthiness both of the flesh and of the spirit (II Corinthians 7:1). For example, lustful thoughts are as sinful as an act of adultery (Matthew 5:27-28), and hatred is just as sinful as murder (I John 3:15). Holiness, then, includes attitudes, thoughts, and spiritual stewardship on the one hand and actions, appearance, and physical stewardship on the other. One without the other is insufficient. Inward holiness will produce outward holiness, but the outward

appearance of holiness is worthless without inward holiness. For example, a modest spirit will produce modest dress, but modest dress is of little value if it conceals a lustful heart.

Holiness or sanctification is not a means of earning salvation but a result of salvation. As such, it comes by grace through faith. Holiness cannot be manufactured by works of the flesh but must come as we submit to the leadership and control of the Holy Spirit. We are holy in a twofold sense. On the one hand, we receive an immediate sanctification (separation from sin) through the death of Christ when we are baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:10). God counts us holy by imputing Christ's righteousness to us. On the other hand, we must follow after and seek holiness (Hebrews 12:14). We must strive after holiness and receive the progressive work of sanctification. We are already sanctified, but we are also called to be saints (sanctified, holy ones) (I Corinthians 1:2).

Following Holiness Requires Personal Effort

Holiness does not come automatically as we rest passively. Some teach that any attempt to live holy is "of the flesh," but they fail to understand that genuine faith always includes obedience and always produces good works. We must open our lives to the working of God's Spirit. We must actively implement the spiritual principles He places in us. We must resist the devil, subdue the sinful nature, discipline the flesh, and kill the deeds of the body.

Thus, the Bible teaches, “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God” (Romans 6:11-13). “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:7-8). “Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (II Peter 3:14, *NIV*). Paul said, “I run . . . I fight . . . I discipline my body and bring it into subjection” (I Corinthians, 9:26-27, *NKJV*). The Bible exhorts, “Let us cleanse ourselves . . . Let us labour . . . Let us lay aside every weight and . . . sin . . . let us run with patience” (II Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 4:11; 12:1).

Philippians 2:12-13 sums it up well. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” It is our responsibility to reverently and watchfully implement holiness in our lives, and this takes great personal effort and exertion. At the same time, God is actually the One working in us, and He provides both the desire and the power to live righteously. God’s grace works *in* us, but we must work it *out*.

Bridges gave an analogy of farming to illustrate this principle. The farmer is utterly dependent on God for rain and sunshine. Yet, unless he diligently fulfills his own obligations to plow, plant, fertilize, and cultivate, he will not reap a harvest. “The farmer cannot do what God must do, and God will not do what the farmer should do . . . The pursuit of holiness is a joint venture between God and

the Christian. No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part. God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But He has given to us the responsibility of doing the walking; He does not do that for us . . . *We pray for victory when we know we should be acting in obedience.*"¹

We wait for God to liberate us from struggles and temptations, when God expects us to use the power we already have in the Spirit and force the flesh to obey His Word. It is like the man who received a compliment on his garden: "You and God have really made this piece of land beautiful and productive!" The gardener replied, "You should have seen it when God had it by Himself."

A Daily Walk

If we live one day at a time holiness becomes a possibility rather than an impossibility. We have the power of the Spirit and the promise that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our capacity to bear it (I Corinthians 10:13). Therefore, unlike an unsaved person, we can say, "Regardless of the circumstances that will face me, I can live today without sinning." If we do sin that day, we can obtain forgiveness and begin the day anew. Jesus encouraged this type of thinking, for He told those whom He delivered, "Go, and sin no more" (John 5:14; 8:11). He also gave absolute perfection as the goal for which to strive: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

A Continual Growth Process

Even though no one is absolutely perfect or holy as God is, we can all be perfect (mature) and holy in a relative sense (II Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 3:15; Colossians 1:28; 4:12). God will consider us holy if we live a repented life, have faith in Christ, live according to the knowledge of His Word, and strive to become progressively more Christ-like (Ephesians 4:13). He expects us to grow continually in grace and knowledge (Mark 4:26-29; II Peter 3:18), and to bear more and more spiritual fruit (John 15:1-8). If we do not become progressively more holy and Christ-like in thought, attitude, conduct, and lifestyle, something is wrong.

God evaluates us individually on the basis of where we have come from, what He has given us, and what our ability is (Matthew 13:23; 25:14-30). Two Christians can both be perfect in God's sight even though they have attained different levels of perfection in an absolute sense, just as two children at two different stages of growth can both be perfectly normal and healthy. We must not judge one another or compare one with another, but must be patient and tolerant of different levels of perfection, endeavoring to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Matthew 7:1-5; II Corinthians 10:12; Ephesians 4:1-3).

None of us has yet attained the fulness of perfection. Paul wrote, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind

and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind" (Philippians 3:12-16, *NKJV*).

We must be tolerant of different levels of maturity with respect to practical holiness even while we are careful to maintain the level which we have attained. We must let God be the judge of others. In particular, we should take great care not to condemn, intimidate, or offend visitors and new converts. Due to diversity of backgrounds, some people require more time than others to develop certain holiness convictions. It is better for a new convert to develop solid scriptural convictions over a period of time than for him to conform immediately to every detail without understanding why.

Two Kinds of Holiness Standards

We can divide holiness convictions into two categories.

(1) Clear teachings of Scripture that are immediately apparent to all. There should be no differences of opinion relative to these basic commands. The new convert should begin to obey them immediately. In fact, the pastor should refuse to baptize someone who does not manifest a willingness to conform immediately. Examples of these teachings are the prohibitions of fornication, lying,

and drunkenness.

(2) Practical application of scriptural principles to modern situations, which are usually understood and implemented gradually as the new convert grows in grace and knowledge. There can be some legitimate differences of opinion among Christians as to the details of specific applications. Examples include various aspects of godly adornment and dress.

We should not expect new converts to understand the application of scriptural principles completely and to conform immediately, especially if they do not have a strong biblical background. Rather, we should lead them patiently into further truth, depending on the working of the Holy Spirit, scriptural teaching, and Christian example. God has already justified them on the basis of their faith, but now they must submit to the progressive work of sanctification. It is not recommended that new converts be used in leadership positions until they understand and conform to the teachings of the local assembly.

Spiritual Fruit

The essence of true holiness is to produce spiritual fruit (John 15:1-17; II Peter 1:3-9). In particular, we can describe holiness in a positive manner as developing and bearing the ninefold fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), gentleness (kindness), goodness, faith (faithfulness), meekness (gentleness), and temperance (self-control) (Galatians 5:22-23). When we allow the Spirit to produce this fruit in us, we will display holiness in our lifestyle.

Self-Discipline

In particular, temperance is an important principle to implement in every aspect of daily living (I Corinthians 9:24-27). This means self-discipline, self-control, and moderation in all things. Richard Taylor's book, *The Disciplined Life*, contains much good material on this topic. In his introduction Taylor wrote, "Christians in a land of bulging supermarkets must discipline their appetites lest they fatten their bodies and stupefy their souls by habitual gourmandizing. They must beware the subtle, insidious tendency to judge the importance of themselves and others by the flashiness of their cars and the cut of their clothes. They must cease from careless spending and showy extravagance, not on the grounds of being unable to afford it, but on the grounds of principle. The alarming tide of moral casualties of recent years in both pulpit and pew is without question the result of that inner softness born of undisciplined, self-indulgent living."²

Overcoming Sin: A Practical Approach

In the final analysis, holiness means to obey God's Word and to resist temptation to sin. As a practical matter, how is it possible to overcome sin on a daily basis?

First, we must pray. Prayer will draw us closer to God. Through prayer we commune with Christ and progressively absorb more of His mind and attitude. Paul prayed on many occasions that believers would develop spiritual strength and holiness of life (Ephesians 3:16;

I Thessalonians 5:23). If prayers of another can avail to develop holiness in us, how much more can our own prayers do so!

In particular, it is important to pray in the Spirit. This means to reach a dimension of prayer in which the mind concentrates totally upon God and the human spirit unites with the Holy Spirit. This includes, but is not limited to, speaking in tongues (I Corinthians 14:14-15). When we pray in the Spirit, the Spirit Himself helps our weaknesses and intercedes through us to pray for what we truly need even though we do not know exactly how to pray (Romans 8:26).

Spiritual prayer is a powerful weapon of warfare against temptation (Ephesians 6:18). Jude admonished, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 20-21). Of course, it is not always possible to pray extensively at the moment of temptation. For this reason, it is important to have a consistent, strong prayer life at all times.

Second, we must engraft or implant the Word of God in our hearts so that we will obey His Word as a matter of course. "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21, *NKJV*). We must absorb the Word until it becomes a very part of us. "God's Word must be so strongly fixed in our minds that it becomes the dominant influence in our thoughts, our attitudes, and our actions."³ We can do this by hearing, reading, memorizing, and meditating upon the Word of God. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of

sinner, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. . . . I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. . . . Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:11, 16, 105). When temptation comes, we can recall the Word and speak it in our hearts. At the moment sin presents itself we must immediately begin to meditate on the Word before there is time for anything else. Jesus overcame temptation by quoting the Word (Matthew 4:1-11).

Third, we must personalize the truth of God’s Word. We must realize both our personal ability and our personal responsibility to obey God and resist sin. We must recognize that we died to sin. In the time of temptation, we must recall the principles of Romans 6: *know, reckon, yield*. We should remind ourselves, “I do not have to do this. I am a free person. I have the power of the Spirit available to me. I can resist this temptation to sin.”

Fourth, we must not give the sinful nature any opportunities. Instead, we must consciously avoid tempting or dangerous situations. We must not feed our fleshly desires by thinking, reading, watching, or indulging in things that would inflame those lusts. We must discipline the flesh and daily kill its desires. Basically, this means to cut off sinful thoughts and desires as they begin to develop. We must learn to think on good things (Philippians 4:8) and to make every thought obedient to Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). We must also learn to control all bodily appetites, for if we overindulge in physical appetites it will be more difficult to deny ourselves in other areas. Fasting is one

good way to impose discipline on the physical body, not to punish it but to control it.

“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin” (Romans 6:13, *NIV*). “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:12-13, *NKJV*). “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts” (Romans 13:14, *NKJV*). “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts . . . But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 5:24; 6:14).

Finally, we must train ourselves to develop proper habits of Christian living instead of sinful habits. Developing good habits requires several things: repetition, commitment to consistency, diligence, refusal to make any exceptions, and refusal to get discouraged because of failure. We must learn to yield to God just as we formerly yielded to sin (Romans 6:13, 19). When we recognize and experience a scriptural prompting to do God’s will, we must visualize and meditate upon the action desired decide to do it, and then yield our bodily members to perform it.

Excerpts from “Holiness” by J. C. Ryle

In summarizing the principles of holiness, we quote from a book entitled *Holiness*, written by an Anglican Bishop of Liverpool in the late 19th century, J. C. Ryle.

This valuable and timely book has been reprinted in the 20th century with the endorsement of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

“I have had a deep conviction for many years that practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians . . . The subject of personal godliness has fallen sadly into the background. The standard of living has become painfully low in many quarters. . . . It is my firm impression that we want a thorough revival about *Scriptural holiness* . . .

“Surely the Scriptures teach us that in following holiness the true Christian needs personal exertion and work as well as faith. . . .

“Surely the New Testament teaches us that we want something more than *generalities* about holy living, which often prick no conscience and give no offence. The *details* and particular ingredients of which holiness is composed in daily life, ought to be fully set forth and pressed on believers by all who profess to handle the subject. True holiness does not consist merely of believing and feeling, but of doing and bearing, and a practical exhibition of active and passive grace. Our tongues, our tempers, our natural passions and inclinations—our conduct as parents and children, masters and servants, husbands and wives, rulers and subjects—our dress, our employment of time, our behavior in business, our demeanour in sickness and health, in riches and in poverty—all, all these are matters which are fully treated by inspired writers. They are not content with a general statement of what we should believe and feel, and how we are to have the roots of holiness planted in our hearts. They dig down lower. They go into particulars. They specify minutely what a holy man

ought to do and be in his own family, and by his own fire-side, if he abides in Christ. . . .

"I am convinced that the first step towards attaining a higher standard of holiness is to realize more fully the amazing sinfulness of sin. . . .

"Let us never be ashamed of *making much of sanctification*, and contending for a high standard of holiness. While some are satisfied with a miserably low degree of attainment, and others are not ashamed to live on without any holiness at all . . . let us stand fast in the old paths, follow after eminent holiness ourselves, and recommend it boldly to others. This is the only way to be really happy."⁴

Ryle defined "true practical holiness" as follows:

"(a) Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. . . .

"(b) A holy man will endeavour to shun every known sin, and to keep every known commandment. . . .

"(c) A holy man will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

"(d) A holy man will follow after meekness, longsuffering, gentleness, patience, kind tempers, government of his tongue. He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much, and be slow to talk of standing on his rights. . . .

"(e) A holy man will follow after temperance and self-denial. He will labour to mortify the desires of his body—to crucify his flesh with his affections and lusts—to curb his passions—to restrain his carnal inclinations, lest at any time they break loose. . . .

"(f) A holy man will follow after charity and brotherly kindness. . . .

“(g) A holy man will follow after a spirit of mercy and benevolence towards others. . . .

“(h) A holy man will follow after purity of heart. . . .

“(i) A holy man will follow after the fear of God . . . the fear of a child, who wishes to live and move as if he was always before his father’s face, because he loves him. . . .

“(j) A holy man will follow after humility. . . .

“(k) A holy man will follow after faithfulness in all the duties and relations in life. . . .

“(l) Last, but not least, a holy man will follow after spiritual mindedness. . . .

“I do not say for a moment that holiness shuts out the presence of indwelling sin [the sin nature]. . . . But it is the excellence of a holy man that he is not at peace with indwelling sin, as others are. . . . The work of sanctification within him is like the wall of Jerusalem—the building goes forward ‘even in troublous times’ . . . Neither do I say that holiness comes to ripeness and perfection all at once, or that these graces I have touched on must be found in full bloom and vigour before you can call a man holy. . . . Sanctification is always a progressive work.”⁵

He gave the following reasons for practical holiness:

“(a) For one thing, we must be holy, because the voice of God in Scripture plainly commands it. . . .

“(b) We must be holy, because this is one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world. . . .

“(c) We must be holy, because this is the only sound evidence that we have a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

“(d) We must be holy, because this is the only proof that we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. . . .

“(e) We must be holy, because this is the only sound

evidence that we are true children of God. . . .

“(f) We must be holy, because this is the most likely way to do good to others. . . .

“(g) We must be holy, because our present comfort depends much upon it. . . .

“(h) Lastly, we must be holy, because without holiness on earth we shall never be prepared to enjoy heaven. . . .

“I do not ask whether you attend your church regularly—whether you have been baptized, and received the Lord’s Supper—whether you have the name of Christian—I ask something more than all this: Are you holy, or are you not? . . . Are you yourself holy this very day, or are you not? . . . And why do I ask so straitly, and press the question so strongly? I do it because the Scripture says, ‘Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.’ . . . Do you think you feel the importance of holiness as much as you should? . . .

“Tell me not of your justification, unless you have also some marks of sanctification. Boast not of Christ’s work for you, unless you can show us the Spirit’s work in you . . . I sometimes fear if Christ were on earth now, there are not a few who would think His preaching legal; and if Paul were writing his Epistles, there are those who would think he had better not write the latter part of most of them as he did . . . Would you be holy? Would you become a new creature? Then you must begin with Christ. . . . Do you want to attain holiness? . . . Then go to Christ. . . . Would you continue holy? Then abide in Christ.”⁶

“If you would ever be saved, you must make the choice that Moses made—you must choose God before the world. . . . There is a common, worldly kind of Christianity in this day, which many have, and think they

have enough—a cheap Christianity which offends nobody, and is worth nothing. I am not speaking of religion of this kind. . . . Now are you making any sacrifices? Does your religion cost you anything? . . . Do you know anything of the afflictions of the Gospel? Is your faith and practice ever a subject of scorn and reproach? Are you thought a fool by anyone because of your soul? . . . Are you venturing all on Christ? Search and see. . . . Nothing will ever enable you to choose God before the world, except faith The true secret of doing great things for God is to have great faith.”⁷

Practical Applications Today

Here are some important areas of life today in which we have tried to apply the principles of holiness:

(1) *Attitudes* (Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:31-32). We must put away all evil attitudes including hatred, wrath, envy, jealousy, covetousness, bitterness, malice, pride, prejudice, vengeance, and all discord (contention, strife, selfish ambition, dissension, clamor, brawling, murmuring, complaining, rebellion, a critical spirit). The fruit of the Spirit—such as love, kindness, patience, and self-control—must manifest itself in our attitudes. We must learn to forgive, to be obedient to authority, to be thankful, not to let anything offend us, and not to be a busybody in the lives of others.

(2) *Thoughts* (Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 15:18-20; II Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8). We are what we think and we become what we allow our minds to dwell upon. Evil thoughts defile us. We are enjoined to think on

true, honest (noble), just (right), pure, lovely, reputable, virtuous (excellent), and praiseworthy things, while casting out thoughts that stem from evil lusts and attitudes. We are to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

(3) *The use of the tongue* (James 1:26; 3:1-12, 4:11; 5:12). We should avoid talebearing, backbiting, slander, sowing discord (causing dissension), swearing by an oath, taking the Lord's name in vain, cursing, reviling, lying, bearing false witness, idle words, and filthy communications (suggestive, indecent, or obscene speech).

(4) *The use of the eye* (Psalm 101:3; 119:37; Matthew 6:22-23). We must guard our eyes as the gate of the soul and the primary source of input for the mind. We should choose reading material with care so that we do not saturate our minds with vulgarity, sensuality, and sin. Because of the violence, illicit sex, sinfulness, and vanity that dominate television and movies, we should not watch either.

(5) *Adornment and dress* (Deuteronomy 22:5; I Timothy 2:9; I Peter 3:1-6). The Bible establishes the principles of sex distinction in dress, modesty of dress, moderation in the cost of dress, avoidance of ornamentation, and separation from worldliness. Applying this to modern culture, we must avoid dresses on men and pants on women, colored cosmetics and hair dye, ornamentative jewelry, clothing that immodestly exposes the body, and very expensive or extravagant attire.

(6) *Hair* (I Corinthians 11:13-15). The Bible teaches that men should have short hair but that women should have long, uncut hair.

(7) *Stewardship of the body* (I Corinthians 3:16-17;

6:12, 19-20). Since the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, we avoid anything that would harm or defile the body, including anything that would cause intoxication or addiction. In view of the biblically described evils of alcoholic beverages, we must abstain from them. In view of the overwhelming evidence that tobacco is defiling and harmful, we must not use it.

(8) *Sexual relationships* (I Corinthians 6:9-10; Colossians 3:5). The Bible condemns all sexual relationships outside of marriage between one man and one woman, and opposes lustful thoughts and actions.

(9) *Respect for human life* (Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:44; Acts 15:29). In view of the sanctity of human life, we must not participate in violence or taking of human life; this includes warfare, abortion, and suicide.

(10) *Honesty* (Mark 10:19). We reject all forms of dishonesty and corruption. This includes lying, stealing, defrauding, refusal to pay debts, extortion, bribery, and all types of cheating.

(11) *Fellowship* (Matthew 18:15-18; I Corinthians 5:9-6:8; 15:33; II Corinthians 6:14). Although we should and must associate with unbelievers, we must not identify ourselves too closely with sinful activities or lifestyles. We should have no fellowship with those who call themselves Christians but continually indulge in sinful activities. We are not to become yoked with unbelievers (such as by marriage). In the church, we must resolve all disputes according to the procedure given by Christ, not by suing one another in civil court.

(12) *Other areas of worldliness* (I Thessalonians 5:22; I John 2:15). Because of the sinfulness of the world today and because of the biblical warning against loving

the world, we must carefully and maturely regulate our music, sports, games, and amusements. We must avoid excessively worldly atmospheres and appearances. We reject as inherently worldly some activities such as gambling, dancing, witchcraft, astrology, and superstition.

In Search of Holiness has addressed most of the above subjects in detail. This present book also discusses many of them in order to present additional scriptural support, new evidence from research, answers to objections, and historical perspectives.

Several biblical passages list a number of unholy actions and attitudes. God hates “a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16-19). Things that defile a person include “evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19). Those who have a reprobate (debased, depraved) mind are “filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers [gossipers], backbiters [slanderers], haters of God, violent [or insolent], proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful” (Romans 1:29-31, *NKJV* with alternatives from *NIV*). The works of the flesh are “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness [debauchery], idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies [factions], envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries [orgies]

and the like” (Galatians 5:19-21, *NKJV* with alternatives from *NIV*). In the last days evil men will be “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (II Timothy 3:24, *NKJV*).

Chapter 2 of *In Search of Holiness* deals with holiness as it relates to attitudes, specifically discussing many of those just listed. Below are a few additional comments on this vital subject.

Retaliation

The Bible expressly teaches against all forms of retaliation and vengeance (Matthew 5:38-48; Romans 12:17-21; I Peter 3:9). “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:17, 19, *NIV*).

Greed and Materialism

Envy, jealousy, covetousness and greed are closely related evils. Covetousness and greed are basically synonymous terms, meaning an inordinate, unrestrained desire for wealth or possessions. This attitude is strongly condemned in both Testaments. “Thou shalt not covet” (Exodus 20:17). “Take heed, and beware of covetousness:

for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Envy and jealousy consist of a grudging of another's possessions or accomplishments together with a coveting of them. Jealousy often connotes an extreme desire to obtain or keep what we believe should be exclusively ours, while envy connotes an extreme desire to obtain what belongs to others.

The Bible's rejection of these attitudes stands as an indictment of the materialism of our age. Materialism—preoccupation with material possessions—causes us to become soft, lazy, and discontented with what we have. In turn, this makes us reluctant to live sacrificially for Christ's sake and highly susceptible to envy and jealousy.

The Bible's teaching on this subject is very relevant to our society, for by the standards of the rest of the world and of history we in North America are wealthy. "For we brought nothing, into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. . . . Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works,

ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (I Timothy 6:7-11; 17-19, *NKJV*).

Prejudice

The Bible teaches that every human being is of equal worth in the sight of God. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11). In Christ, there is no unequal treatment based on race, social class, or gender (Galatians 3:28). Paul admonished Timothy to perform his pastoral duties without prejudice, partiality, or favoritism (I Timothy 5:21). If we discriminate against one group and show partiality to another, then we violate God’s Word. It is wrong to be prejudiced against someone because of race, social standing, lack of education, or poverty. “If ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin” (James 2:9). God “will surely reprove you if you secretly show partiality” (Job 13:10, *NKJV*).

Conclusion

God’s moral law for us can be summed up in these words: Love God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31; Romans 13:8-10). In essence, holiness means to imitate Christ, to do what He would do. It means to be Christ-like.

The power to live a holy life is a gift from God, but it is our responsibility to implement holiness on a daily basis. We seek holiness out of love for God, not out of

fear or legalism. Holiness is an integral part of the salvation of the whole man from all the power and effects of sin. It is a joyful privilege, a part of abundant life, a blessing from the grace of God, and a glorious life of freedom and power. For someone who is filled with the Holy Spirit and truly loves God, holiness becomes the normal—indeed the only—way to live. The life of holiness fulfills God's original intention and design for humanity.

FOOTNOTES

¹Bridges, p. 14, emphasis ours.

²Richard Taylor, *The Disciplined Life* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1962), pp. 12-13.

³Bridges, p. 88.

⁴J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.), pp. vii-x, 14, 32, emphasis in original.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 34-39.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 40-50.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 143-47.

3

THE DANGERS OF LEGALISM

“A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 2:16).

Whenever someone begins to teach practical holiness, he is often accused of legalism. And, indeed, some of those who emphasize holiness do drift into legalism, doing more harm than good. In this chapter we address several key questions: What is legalism? What is wrong with legalism? What are the biblical alternatives to legalism? Is it possible to teach practical holiness and still avoid legalism? If so, how?

Legalism Defined

In general, legalism means strict or excessive conformity to a legal code or set of rules. In a Christian context, legalism has two negative connotations: (1) attempting to base salvation on the performance of good

works or on the strict observance of rules and regulations and (2) imposing rules on self and others that are not based on clear biblical teachings or principles. We are guilty of legalism if we imply that a person attains salvation by his works or if we preach rules without principles.

Legalism Condemned

Jesus opposed the Jewish legalism of His day, particularly that of the Pharisees. These Jewish legalists believed that salvation rested in strict conformity to the Law of Moses and the oral traditions they had built around it. Jesus rebuked this self-righteous attitude, the hypocrisy that accompanied it, and the man-made traditions that actually subverted the Word of God.

Paul pointed out that conformity to external law never meant anything unless the heart was right (Romans 2:17-29). Furthermore, the Law of Moses could not and was never intended to impart salvation based on works (Romans 3:19-20; 8:3; Galatians 3:21-22). Rather, it served to teach man several important truths: the definition of sin, the sinfulness of sin, man's own sinfulness, his lack of power to overcome sin, and his need of salvation (Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7-14). The law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ so that we would have faith in Him (Galatians 3:21-25). Throughout history, salvation has always been by faith, not by works. Abraham (before the law) and David (under the law) were saved by faith in God, not by good works or conformity to law (Romans 4).

The New Testament church contended for this doctrine of justification by faith against some Jewish Chris-

tians who still maintained legalistic concepts. These Judaizers taught that Gentile converts had to be circumcised and had to obey the Jewish law. The church convened its first general council to discuss this issue (Acts 15). At the conference, Peter said that Gentile Christians should not have to obey the law, for God had already given them the Holy Ghost based on their faith alone. James pronounced the decision agreed upon by the church: Gentiles did not have to obey the Law of Moses, except to abstain from food offered to idols, blood, things strangled, and fornication.

Paul strongly opposed legalism in general and the Judaizers, in particular. He taught that we are justified by faith, not by observance of the Law of Moses (Romans 3:20-28). We are saved by grace through faith, not by good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). The gospel of Christ has liberated us from the need to observe the ordinances of the Jewish law (Romans 7:6; Galatians 2:16-21). In fact, if we persist in seeking righteousness by works of the law, we frustrate the grace of God and make Christ's death vain (Galatians 2:21).

Specifically, Christ's death abolished the Jewish ceremonial law with its unclean foods and drinks, special festival days, and sabbaths. We do not have to follow ritualistic rules that forbid us even to touch certain unclean foods or other items. This kind of legalism may superficially seem to be wise and holy, but it has no power to restrain the lusts of the sinful nature. "Therefore let no one judge you in food, or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. . . . Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world,

why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians 2:16-17, 20-23, *NKJV*).

In short, legalism is an insufficient motivation to live for God. It will not bring salvation, nor will it produce true holiness. Let us investigate in detail the many inadequacies and dangers of legalism.

Self-Righteous Reliance on Works for Salvation

Legalism actually teaches salvation by man’s works instead of God’s grace. The legalist will attempt to rely on his own human efforts instead of the power of the Holy Ghost. This can lead to pride, self-righteousness, and self-deception if the legalist thinks he is actually saving himself. On the other hand, it can lead to frustration, lack of assurance of salvation, fear, despair, and backsliding if the legalist realizes his inability to manufacture his own righteousness and to live by strict adherence to rules.

The Bible does stress the importance of good works as the inevitable result of saving grace and saving faith (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:11-12; 3:8; James 2:14-26). We must understand, however, that faith produces works, not vice versa. We do not get good to get God; we get God to get good. We do not work toward salvation; we work from salvation. We do not live holy in order to earn salvation;

we live holy because we have salvation. We manifest continuing faith in God by a life of submission to Him and obedience to His Word.

A failure to manifest holiness, good works, and obedience indicates either a lack of genuine faith from the beginning or a loss of genuine faith. It indicates either failure to receive salvation initially or subsequent rejection of God's continuing work of salvation. If someone continues in this condition, he will not be saved when Christ comes for him, but in no way does this imply that he can or must earn salvation by works. The root problem is not failure to produce works, but failure to maintain total faith in God and His Word.

Holiness comes by grace through faith as we submit to the sanctifying work of the Spirit in our lives. If we fail to submit, we reject God's grace and salvation. However, legalism actually sidesteps grace, faith, and the Spirit. It tries to produce holiness by human efforts alone and to purchase salvation by that man-made "holiness."

Failure to Develop Inward Holiness

As the preceding discussion indicates, legalism cannot produce inward holiness. No amount of legislating, keeping, or enforcing law will impart true holiness, for that can only come by the Holy Spirit. Legalism places utmost importance upon an outward show of holiness, while neglecting and ignoring the development of inward holiness (which, of course, will cause holiness to be exhibited outwardly). In the sight of man, the legalist may seem holy, but in the sight of God he is lacking. Even

though the legalist may be very strict in holiness teaching, he actually fails to develop holiness in his own life and in the lives of those who follow him.

Failure to Develop a Mature Understanding of Principles

In particular, the legalist does not develop a mature conscience that can guide him to principled decisions in areas where his rules are silent. He walks the thin line between the world and the church. Sooner or later he will step into a gray area and perhaps go from there into sin. He often ignores new dangers that fall outside the scope of his rules. For example, perhaps he has grown up with a rule, "Thou shalt not attend movies," but he does not really understand the spiritual evils of the movies. When new technology introduces home movie systems, he may sense nothing wrong with showing the same movies at home. He may have a rule, "Thou shalt not own a television," but see nothing wrong with watching ungodly TV shows in public places or in a motel room. The non-legalist will be quick to spot the danger because it violates his principles. He will abstain, not merely because someone forbade it, but because it is detrimental to and incompatible with his spiritual life.

The legalistic leader constantly finds himself trying to invent and enforce new rules to cover new situations, because his followers do not know how to apply principles. This effort will always fail because it is impossible to invent enough rules to cover every possible circumstance.

Here are some extreme examples to illustrate how a

legalist can actually miss the true teaching of God's Word even while supposedly following it literally. Jesus taught that if someone strikes me on the right cheek I should turn the other cheek. The legalist may say, "Ah, but Christ did not restrict my actions after that. After turning the other cheek, then I can get revenge." The legalist technically follows the letter of Christ's teaching as if it were a rule book, but he misses the whole spirit of the passage, which teaches us not to react violently to insult and not to seek vengeance. In one place, Christ said we should forgive a brother seven times in one day, and in another place said we should forgive someone seventy times seven. The legalist may say, "I will forgive seven times in one day but not eight, or I will forgive 490 times but not 491." He misses the true teaching of complete, perfect, unlimited forgiveness.

Living by Minimum Requirements and Loopholes

Ironically, then, legalism frequently causes people to observe only the minimum of what they feel is absolutely required. Often they do this out of a desire to impress others. Their attitude is, "What are the minimum requirements of this church, of this pastor, and of salvation itself?" They have little desire to seek positive holiness, but define holiness in terms of the negative. They have little principles or conscience to guide them, and feel little restraint on indulging in non-Christian behavior if they can get away with it. They look for loopholes in their rules so they can justify whatever they want to do. They may justify participation in a questionable practice because no

one has ever preached specifically against it or established a rule that definitely covered it.

In short, legalists treat Christianity as if it were a collection of rules like the U.S. Tax Code. They feel no obligation other than what the rules specifically require. As long as they live by the letter of the law, they are free to exploit every doubtful situation or “loophole” without regard to God’s will.

Hypocrisy and Inconsistency

Legalism leads to hypocrisy. Since no set of rules can ever cover all situations, the legalist usually ends up doing as he pleases. If he cannot satisfy the desires of the flesh in one way, he usually manages to do so in another way. For example, some would never wear a necklace or an earring because of rules against them, but they will satisfy their desire for ornamentation by wearing extremely flashy rings and watches. Some will shun all jewelry but flaunt extravagant, outrageously expensive clothing. Others do not wear lipstick, but think nothing of wearing mascara or blush. They base their conduct only on specific rules of limited application. They are not truly concerned with upholding under all circumstances the biblical teachings against ornamentation, vanity, immodesty, and costly array.

Likewise, the legalist may strongly condemn drinking but be oblivious to his own gluttony. He may avoid dirty movies but delight in dirty jokes. He may abhor idolatry but be a slave to materialism.

Man-Made Rules

Legalism takes man-made rules and treats them as if they were the Word of God. It imposes rules that cannot be justified from the Bible. It goes much farther than the biblical text will warrant.

The Christian must limit himself to the Bible in establishing guidelines for conduct. All teachings must be taken either from a specific biblical injunction or from a valid application of biblical principles. For example, the Bible specifically describes drunkenness as sin, so we can and we must preach against drunkenness. In addition, the underlying biblical principle is that all intoxication is wrong; therefore we can preach against marijuana even though the Bible does not mention that drug by name. However, legalism goes beyond either biblical statements or principles, and establishes rules that originate in the mind of man.

Misapplication of Principles

Legalists often take guidelines that once made some sense under certain circumstances and blindly misapply them to different circumstances. Without understanding the scriptural principle behind a certain guideline, they transplant it to a situation where it is unnecessary and inappropriate,

This causes confusion when someone tries to understand the system rationally or scripturally. For example, many holiness people do not attend roller skating rinks in their community because of the worldly atmosphere, the

type of people that attend them, and the type of ungodly activities associated with them. The legalist enshrines this as a rule: "Thou shalt not roller skate or thou shalt not attend roller skating rinks." The non-legalist recognizes this as a practical application of important scriptural principles: "Abstain from the appearance of evil, love not the world nor the things of the world, avoid worldly pleasures, and avoid fellowship with unrighteousness." However, we should not look legalistically at the label "skating" but should evaluate whether skating is worldly or not in a given situation. We should understand the reason for the guideline. Someone could roller skate down the sidewalk without violating the above principles. Perhaps a church could provide skating in a wholesome atmosphere without worldly music by renting a facility.

Difficulty in Maintaining the System

It is extremely difficult to maintain a legalistic system. First, it is simply impossible for someone to abide by all the rules. The legalist will always fail. Either he will become a hypocrite, condemning others but excusing himself, or he will live under continual guilt and fear.

Furthermore, those who follow a legalistic leader will eventually begin to doubt the validity of the system because of its harsh and arbitrary rules. As children grow up in the system they begin to question the rules. When new converts enter the system they often accept everything uncritically, but sooner or later they, too, begin to analyze the rules.

If a church is founded on true scriptural principles it

will withstand scrutiny of its teachings. The legalist, however, usually gives no justification for his man-made rules except tradition and authority. "This is what our church believes, and you must obey the church. This is what the pastor teaches, and you must obey the pastor." This kind of teaching will not be successful in developing true holiness.

Particularly in our questioning age, it simply does not work. People today are more sophisticated and educated than ever before. There is a greater willingness to challenge tradition and authority. Autocratic methods that people sometimes accepted in the past are less and less effective today. Furthermore, as the church enters an era of great revival, it must be prepared for the influx of thousands of new converts. If it relies on tradition and legalism, the new converts will either overwhelm it or fall away. If it teaches biblical principles of holiness, the new converts will embrace them as their own beliefs.

Judgmental and Condemnatory Attitude

Finally, legalism fosters a judgmental, condemnatory attitude towards others. Legalists tend to pigeonhole everyone and then make their disapproval obvious to those found wanting. Legalistic church members often develop a harsh, intolerant, defensive attitude towards those who do not conform exactly to their rules, even towards visitors and new converts.

Even if someone is living in violation of God's Word, the Bible forbids the individual Christian to judge or condemn him. Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged"

(Matthew 7:1). We must simply present the Word of God without setting ourselves up as judges over someone else. Christ did not come to condemn the people of the world, for they are already condemned by their sin, but He came to offer salvation (John 3:17; 8:11). Likewise, the church's business is to offer salvation to all. We must let the Word and the Spirit bring conviction, and let God be the final judge.

Once, a long-haired man visited a certain church. He received so many stares and disapproving expressions that he felt very uncomfortable. Because of that experience, he vowed never to return again. This is a sad example of legalistic condemnation. The church does not have to *approve* of everything about a visitor, but it should *accept* the visitor for what he is and love him unconditionally. After all, that is how Christ treated sinners while on earth and how He treats everyone today.

In one church a new convert heard a minister proclaim, "It is a sin for a man to have hair on his ears." The new convert, whose hair covered his ears, decided that this church was a cult and resolved never to return again. Of course, the Bible does teach men to have short hair. A reasonable application of that principle in our day would result in cutting the hair above the ear and collar. Furthermore, the new convert should not have allowed anything to offend him. However, it seems to be legalistic overkill to state that a man will go to hell if his hair touches his ear. We simply cannot find Scripture to support this statement. In any event, it serves no useful purpose to present this view in a harsh way to someone who does not have the spiritual maturity to evaluate it properly. It is the responsibility of the mature saint not to

place a stumbling block in the path of others.

The Legalism of the Pharisees

The Jewish religious leaders of Christ's day, particularly the scribes and Pharisees, exhibited all these errors of legalism. Their self-righteous reliance on works for salvation as well as their judgmental attitude is demonstrated by one of Christ's parables. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:10-14, *NKJV*).

Jesus rebuked them for failure to develop inward holiness and for hypocritical, inconsistent conduct. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. . . . Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also

outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:23-24, 27-28).

We can see their failure to develop a mature understanding of principles by their attitude towards the Sabbath. They were so zealous to keep the Sabbath that they condemned Jesus for healing the sick on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). They failed to realize that God created the Sabbath for man rather than vice versa (Mark 2:27). He meant for it to bring man rest and refreshing. Therefore, it was essentially right to save and heal on the Sabbath.

This example also shows how the Pharisees took valid teachings from God’s Word and applied them inappropriately or stretched them far beyond the original teaching. In this case, they actually used one of the Ten Commandments to criticize Jesus for healing people on the Sabbath!

Despite their show of holiness, the scribes and Pharisees observed only a minimum of moral law. Their main purpose was to be seen of men, not to please God. “But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. . . . Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Matthew 23:5-7, 14).

They frequently evaded the spirit of Scripture by creating loopholes in their law. For example, they invented a doctrine to excuse them from certain vows. If one swore by the Temple or the altar he could disregard his vow, but if he swore by the gold of the Temple or gifts on the altar

then it was truly binding (Matthew 23:16-22). They also invented a doctrine to avoid the responsibility to care for aged parents, which is implied by the command to honor father and mother. If a son declared that the money needed to support his parents was vowed as a gift to the Temple, he did not have to provide for his parents (Mark 7:10-12). Jesus indicted this legalistic twisting of God's Word. "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. . . . Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:9, 13).

The Pharisees had many man-made traditions that were not of God. For instance, they held to the tradition of the elders with regard to ceremonial washings and found fault with Christ's disciples for not observing these rituals (Mark 7:1-7). The Lord responded that man is not spiritually defiled by things entering the body from without, but by filthy things which proceed from a man's heart (Mark 7:14-23).

The legalism of the Pharisees was such an intolerable system that no one could meet its demands. Peter described the legalistic Judaism of his day as a yoke that even the Jews could not bear (Acts 15:10). Jesus said the Pharisees "bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers . . . But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in . . . ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matthew 23:4, 13, 15).

We see their condemnatory attitude in the parable of

the self-righteous Pharisee who compared himself favorably with the repentant tax collector. The Pharisees bitterly condemned Jesus for associating with tax collectors and known sinners (Luke 7:30-39). They were not truly concerned with the needs of a lost world, but only with maintaining their legalistic system and their power within the system.

Improper Alternatives to Legalism

Many people who see the dangers of legalism reject it, but in the process they sometimes discard practical holiness altogether. Frequently what happens is this: one generation discovers a life-changing relationship with God and embraces scriptural holiness. They rearrange their entire lifestyle around the concepts of separation from the world and dedication to God, and they pass this new-found lifestyle to the next generation. Somewhere in the process of transmission to future generations, legalistic tendencies creep in. What began as joyous submission to the will of God becomes a codified set of rules and regulations, which are justified on the basis of tradition and ritual.

Finally, one generation rebels against this cold, dry system and begins to question its values. Sometimes they fail to realize that many good and precious truths have been handed to them, albeit in the wrong way; they have been taught many right things for the wrong reasons. When they rightfully reject legalism, they also discard true holiness principles and valid practical applications. They throw the baby out with the bath water.

In such a case, the preceding generation is to blame for making the truth vulnerable by their nonbiblical approach in teaching it. On the other hand, the new generation is to blame for not studying these issues prayerfully and for not developing a genuine love for truth at all costs. They see legalistic tendencies they rightfully reject, but they use the occasion as an excuse to disregard any holiness standards and to indulge in the desires of the flesh. The root problem on both sides is a failure to commit quality time in serious, prayerful study of the Word of God.

Some suppose that we must abandon holiness teaching in order to have revival. However, we should never sacrifice quality in favor of quantity. In fact, the more we emphasize and implement the Word of God the more we will have true, apostolic revival. A church does not have to be legalistic to emphasize holiness. Nor does a church have to go to the opposite extreme of worldliness in order to grow. A conservative, holiness church can have revival. Indeed, most of our great revival churches strongly advocate holiness of life on a practical level.

In short, many suppose that the proper alternative to legalism is antinomianism (no law), license (freedom without responsibility), or libertinism (no moral restraints). They insist they can have inward holiness without any guidelines as to outward appearance and conduct. However, this attitude totally contradicts God's Word. True holiness is not freedom to act and look like the world, but freedom from conformity to the world. Intellectual freedom is not freedom from truth, but freedom to know and submit to truth. There can be no real freedom outside truth. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make

you free” (John 8:32). Genuine spiritual freedom is not freedom to commit sin, but freedom from the bondage to sin.

The Importance of Moral Law

We must repudiate legalism as inadequate to bring about true holiness, but we must not repudiate God’s moral law or the necessity of obedience to God’s Word. God has always had law; He has always had specific commands that men must obey. Even in the age of innocence in the Garden of Eden He gave Adam and Eve a specific prohibition. God’s moral nature never changes, and therefore neither does His moral law.

He has progressively revealed more of His moral law from Old Testament to New Testament times, but He has never abrogated moral law. Jesus Himself told us that law or commandments would continue to exist in the New Testament church. “If ye love me, keep my commandments. . . . If a man love me, he will keep my words” (John 14:15, 23). He commissioned His disciples to teach all converts “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).

Jesus did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* has rightly observed, “The time-honored distinction between the OT as a book of law and the NT as a book of divine grace is without grounds or justification. Divine grace and mercy are the presupposition of law in the OT; and the grace and love of God displayed in the NT events issue in the legal obligations of the New Covenant. . . .

Paul's polemics against the law in Galatians and Romans are directed against an understanding of law which is by no means characteristic of the OT as a whole."¹ Rousas Rushdoony wrote, "There is no contradiction between law and grace. The question in James's Epistle is faith and works, not faith and law. Judaism had made *law* the mediator between God and man, and between God and the world. It was this view of law, not the law itself, which Jesus attacked. As Himself the Mediator, Jesus rejected the law as a mediator in order to re-establish the law in its God-appointed role as law, the way of holiness. He established the law by dispensing forgiveness as the lawgiver in full support of the law as the convicting word which makes men sinners. The law was rejected only as a mediator and as the source of justification. Jesus fully recognized the law, and obeyed the law. It was only the absurd interpretations of the law He rejected."²

When Jesus opposed the Jewish legalism of His day, He indicated that true holiness would be even more demanding spiritually. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). He recognized that in most cases the Pharisees taught correct doctrine. He did not reject their teachings as much as he rejected their attitude and their inconsistent conduct. He told the people, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matthew 23:2-3).

The Pharisees were such sticklers for the law that they paid tithes even on small herbs, which grew in gardens. Jesus rebuked them for their attention to detail

while disregarding more important things spiritually. Some today would say such attention to petty detail does not matter, but it only matters that motives and intentions be pure. However, Jesus did not rebuke the scrupulous tithing, but in fact commended it. He endorsed obedience to God's Word in both the seemingly insignificant details and in the larger principles (Matthew 23:23).

The doctrine of justification by faith does not destroy the principle of law but rather establishes it (Romans 3:31), for we do not need justification if there is no law to condemn us. God's laws are written in the believer's heart (Hebrews 10:16). The Spirit enables us to fulfill the righteousness that the law taught but could not produce (Romans 8:4).

As we have seen, Paul rejected ritualistic laws that forbade Christians to touch, taste, or handle foods regarded as ceremonially unclean (Colossians 2:14-23). Some today use this teaching to reject all moral guidelines and all restraints on worldly conduct. However, Paul also wrote, "Touch not the unclean thing" (II Corinthians 6:17). Paul did not contradict himself.

Christians today should still abstain from immoral, ungodly, worldly things. The ceremonial law has been abolished, but there are still many activities in this world that Christians must avoid as morally or spiritually unclean. Paul even compared the Christian life to a game with certain rules that must be obeyed to obtain victory: "And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules" (II Timothy 2:5, *NKJV*).

God still has many specific, practical guidelines as to what His people should and should not do. As J. C. Ryle

noted, if we followed the definition of legalism that some use, Christ's Sermon on the Mount and many portions of Paul's epistles would be legalistic.

Some think our practical application of moral law is too restrictive. Moral law is indeed a restricting force, but that does not make it bad. The sinful nature needs a restraint upon its desires. The spiritual man needs protection against the evils of the world. Railroad tracks keep the train on course; without them the train would go nowhere. Gravity binds us to the earth; without it we would drift off into our own little world and die. Gravity keeps the earth allied with the sun; without it the earth would fly off on its own separate path without the life-sustaining light, heat, and energy that the sun provides.

The banks of a river define it and channel it. If the banks were moved farther apart without increasing the volume of water, the river would lose force and velocity. If the banks were eliminated, the river would dissipate its strength without arriving at its destination. It would lose its identity as a river. Likewise, holiness teachings do not force hardship on us, but bind us closely to a holy God who is our source of life and strength. They preserve our identity, channel our spiritual energy, provide direction, and enhance our spiritual strength, so that we can arrive at our final destination safely.

The fence around a garden does not serve to curb the freedom of the garden but to preserve its freedom. The fence protects the garden from external encroachment that would bring damage or destruction. In like manner, holiness teachings do not curb our freedom in Christ but protect us from evils that would destroy our freedom.

In rejecting legalism, then, we must be careful not to

reject moral law or practical applications of moral law. We must still uphold specific biblical teachings as well as valid application of biblical principles to situations in modern society. We must not allow either the legalistic teachings of some or the “anti-law” teachings of others to deflect us from the path of holiness.

God’s Nature: Holiness and Love

Those who reject moral law and practical holiness fail to understand that holiness is the fundamental characteristic of God upon which all His other moral attributes depend. In particular, God’s holiness is the foundation of His love and gives direction to His love. His holiness determines His love, not vice versa. Because He is holy, He does not love sin or evil. Because He is holy, His love is impartial and eternal rather than arbitrary, capricious, and fickle. God’s love can never contradict or override His holiness.

Sin is a direct challenge to God’s sovereignty and a violation of His holiness. God’s love will never cause Him to overlook sin, because sin contradicts His basic nature of holiness. When God forgives sin He does not simply excuse it, but He accepts Christ’s death as the sufficient penalty for that sin. In this way, God’s love can provide forgiveness without violating His justice. “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished” (Romans 3:25, *NIV*). The death of Christ showed that God demands punishment for all sin.

If we have faith in Christ, which includes repentance from sin and obedience to His Word, then Christ's death will pay the penalty of our sin. Otherwise, we will receive punishment for our sin.

Receiving the Holy Spirit

Since holiness is God's very nature, when we receive the Holy Spirit of God we receive a holy nature. Holiness is not an external law but an integral part of our new nature. The Spirit places God's moral law within us, not written on tables of stone but written in our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 10:16). The Spirit brings power to live righteously. (See Romans 8:24 and the discussion of that passage in Chapter 1.)

In living for God, we do not merely follow an outward list of rules, but we follow the nature of the Holy Spirit within us. We live holy because that is what the new man is and wants to be. We abstain from sin and worldliness because it is anathema to our new nature. We still struggle against the continual desires and lusts of the old nature, but this is an internal struggle. No dictator imposes rules on us from the outside; we impose restrictions on our sinful nature because we no longer wish to follow the flesh but to follow the Spirit. As Bruce said, *the difference between legalism and Christianity rests in the enabling power of the Spirit.*

Faith

By faith we receive the Spirit that enables us to be

holy. By faith we do God's will and obey His Word.

Faith in God will inevitably result in obedience to God (Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5; 10:16; 16:26; James 2:14-26). If we believe God we will believe His Word, and if we believe His Word we will accept its teachings and apply them to our lives. By faith we accept Christ's atonement as sufficient for our salvation and apply His death, burial, and resurrection to our lives. Specifically, by faith we repent, receive remission of sins at water baptism, and receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost. By faith we continue to walk with God until final salvation. (For a full discussion of faith and its necessary relation to obedience and works, see Chapter 2 of *The New Birth* by David Bernard.)

Love

Along with faith in God, we must have a love for God, His Word, and holiness. Without love, all attempts to live for God are in vain (I Corinthians 13:1-13; Revelation 2:1-7). If we love God, we will obey His commandments and seek to implement holiness in our lives (John 14:15, 23; I John 2:3-6). When we truly love God, we will actively hate evil (Psalm 97:10) and we will seek to become like our holy God. The greater our love for God, the greater our desire for holiness.

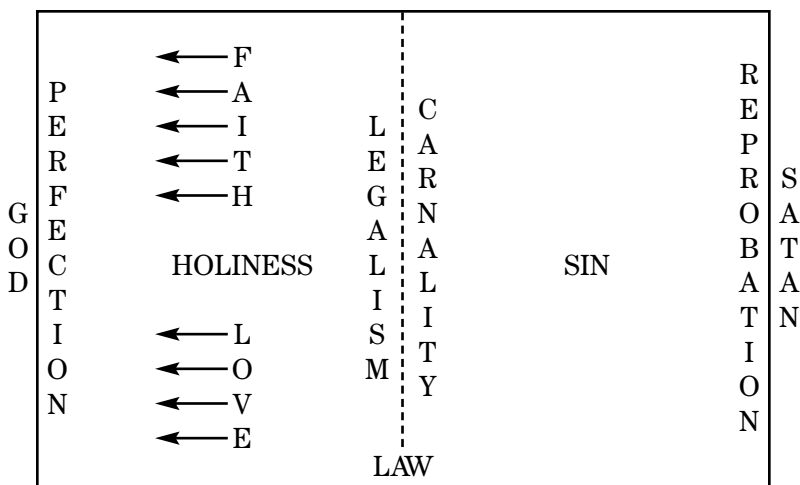
Love is far stricter and more demanding than law, for love always goes farther than duty. Love for God will cause someone to draw much closer to God than legalism will, both in attitudes and in disciplined living. Love will cause someone to avoid everything that displeases God or that hinders a closer walk with God. Love rejects every-

thing that is not clearly compatible with godliness, or that is not conducive to Christianity, even though no rules have specifically labelled these things as sin. In this way, the principle of love replaces the Law of Moses or a codification of rules.

Love dominates all actions and all relationships. All the law is summed up in love: we are to love God with all our being and to love our fellow man as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10). Instead of the Law of Moses we have “the perfect law of liberty,” which is the “royal law” of love (James 1:25; 2:8; 2:12).

Rejecting legalism should lead to greater holiness both inwardly and outwardly. This is depicted in the following diagram:

Faith and Love Versus Legalism



Conclusion

The proper Christian alternative to legalism, then, is to live by love, faith, and the Spirit. When we love God, have faith in His Word, and walk after His Holy Spirit, we will apply holiness principles to every situation of life. We will not depend upon man-made rules, but we will rely upon the teachings of God's Word and the leadership of God's Spirit within us. In this way, we can overcome the dangers of legalism.

Our salvation and our holiness rest in Christ and the working of His Spirit, not in our own goodness. His Spirit produces holiness, both internally and externally, as we discipline ourselves, submit to Him, and obey Him.

We have principles to guide our conduct under all circumstances. We should not seek minimum requirements, but the application of principles to every situation, new or old. We must not be hypocritical, but should strive to live consistently by biblical principles, which are not made irrelevant by changes of culture, time, or geography.

Correct principles, both logically and scripturally, carry their own authority with them since they stem from the Word of God. We must not be judgmental of others because we recognize that our holiness comes from God and not from any goodness inherent within ourselves. We should not be condemnatory of others because our lives must be dominated by love.

Faith and love make us to be more concerned with leading sinners to salvation than changing their conduct. When they are born again, they will receive the desire and power to change, making it unnecessary to use harsh, dictatorial methods to teach them. Our reliance will be

upon the power of the Word, the Spirit, and personal example. Instead of instantly imposing rules on new converts, we should exercise love, patience, and tolerance to let them mature at an individual rate of growth. We must preach that holiness results from salvation, and that biblical principles form the base of all practical guidelines. Practical holiness is indeed scriptural and a sincere convert will see this as he matures.

In conclusion, we can reject legalism and still emphasize practical holiness. This will be done when we place total faith in Jesus Christ, let our lives be dominated by love for Him, sincerely seek to obey the teachings of the Word of God, live in submission to the indwelling Holy Spirit, and make the personal effort required to implement holiness principles in our lives.

FOOTNOTES

¹"Law in the OT," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon), III, 77.

²Rushdoony, Rousas. *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 6-7.

4 CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

Biblical Christianity is not a life of drudgery but a life of liberty. Unfortunately, some people use this concept to justify their rejection of practical holiness teachings. Some discard many important aspects of moral law under this guise. Chapter 3 has shown that rejection of legalism does not nullify moral law, nor does it justify libertinism. This chapter discusses the biblical meaning of liberty in Christ and demonstrates that Christian liberty does not eliminate the need for personal holiness.

Freedom from Sin

First and foremost, Christian liberty means that we are no longer under bondage to sin. Before our conversion we were at the mercy of the sinful nature and could not help but sin. If we seemingly conquered sin in one

area, it would reassert its position in another aspect of our lives.

Through the Holy Spirit we now have power over sin—power not to sin. We can freely choose to sin or not to sin. Of course, as Christians we must choose not to sin. If we abuse our liberty and choose to live in sin again, we will surrender our new-found freedom. When a prisoner receives freedom, he has liberty to rejoin society; he is not given the liberty to return to jail each day. Likewise, we receive freedom from sin in order to have fellowship with God, not to return to the slavery of sin. For the first time, we are free to obey God and to become His servants.

“Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. . . . As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. . . . But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Romans 6:14-20, 22).

A person will either serve good or evil, God or Satan. He will either receive eternal life or death. There is no middle ground in which a man can live his own life with-

out choosing either alternative.

Christian liberty cannot mean a Christian is free to do as he pleases without reference to the will of God. By rejecting the will of God, he automatically chooses the world, sin, and Satan. To be freed from the will of God automatically means submission to the dominion of sin. To be freed from sin automatically means submission to the will of God. By definition, to exercise Christian liberty means to break free from sin's bondage, to obey and serve God, which in turn means to serve "righteousness unto holiness" and to bear "fruit unto holiness."

Freedom from the Law

Christian liberty also means freedom from the law. As we discussed in Chapter 3 and in the preceding section, Christian liberty cannot mean that moral law has been abolished. Rather, it means that we have been freed from the law of the Old Testament in at least four specific ways: we are free from (1) the penalty of the law, (2) the attempt to fulfill the law by human effort alone, (3) the destructive power of the law that arises from man's abuse of it, and (4) the ceremonial law.

First, we are freed from the penalty and condemnation of the law. The law condemned us to death, but when we apply Christ's atonement to our lives we are pardoned: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Galatians 3:13). The law has no more power to condemn us when we are in Christ.

Second, we are freed from the attempt to fulfill the law through human effort alone. Of course, God never

meant for the law to bring righteousness in itself; salvation has never been by works, but always by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), both before and during the law (Romans 4:1-12). God gave the law to define sin, to prove man's utter sinfulness, to prove man's need of God's grace, and to point man to Christ (Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7; Galatians 3:24).

In order to fulfill these purposes, God subjected man to the law, even though man did not have power to fulfill the law. God's people were actually under bondage to the law, just as a child is treated like a servant (slave) under tutors (guardians) and governors (administrators) until he reaches maturity (Galatians 4:1-11, 21-31).

Godly people in the Old Testament did not have the full power of the Holy Ghost available to them to overcome sin on a daily basis (Romans 8:3-4; Hebrews 8:7-13; I Peter 1:10-12). They were never able to live up to the law because they had to rely on weak, sinful flesh. They were saved by faith expressed in obedience to God's plan for that day; they attempted to fulfill the law and offered sacrifices continually to atone for their failures.

The gospel of Christ has delivered us from this bondage to the law. By faith in Christ, we receive the righteousness of Christ without the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28). Through the Holy Spirit, we can fulfill all the righteousness that the law demanded but could not impart. God counts us righteous (justifies us) through faith in Christ and progressively makes us righteous (sanctifies us) as we submit to and cooperate with His indwelling Spirit. Rather than being bound to an externally imposed law, we receive the moral law of God in our hearts as part of the regenerated nature.

“For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (Romans 7:5-6, *NIV*).

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1-4).

“If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:18, 22-23).

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:24-25).

Third, we are freed from the destructive power of the law caused by man’s abuse of it. Many Jews falsely believed they could obtain righteousness merely by the works of the law (Romans 9:31-10:4). This was a gross distortion of God’s original purpose for giving the law. The law, which was good in itself, actually became a harmful force because they relied on it for salvation and

so rejected Christ. Paul attacked this legalistic thinking in his day. Acts 15, Romans, and Galatians refute this doctrine as taught by some Jewish Christians.

Lewis Smedes explained the problem well: “When the law came, the ‘flesh’ made the law an instrument of self-righteousness. The law became part of a religious system which fostered man’s sense of self-sufficiency. It became party to man’s monstrous delusion. This was the Judaistic religious system that Paul recognized as the enemy of Christ. The law had been turned inside out; rather than a witness to man’s need of being saved, it had become a technique to save oneself. The inner meaning of the law had been forgotten. . . . The law teamed with flesh produces sin. And sin ends in death.”¹

Smedes also summarized the true meaning of Christian liberty: “Clearly, freedom in Christ does not retire us from obedience to the moral law . . . [it] change[s] our way of looking at the law. Once, in our stupidity, we thought that with the help of the law we could conquer the moral life. But we are weak and the law was unable to protect our flanks. But Christ created a new alliance; now we are under Him as Lord, with the Spirit enabling us to ‘fulfill the just requirements of the law.’”² Smedes concluded that the law teaches submission to Christ and obedience to the leading of the Spirit. In short, we have been liberated from the condemnation of the law so that we can freely serve in the Spirit.

Finally, we are specifically freed from the ceremonial law of the Old Testament (Mark 7:15; Galatians 3:24-25; 4:9-11, 21-31). God used the ceremonial law—including blood sacrifices, dietary laws, circumcision, sabbaths, and feasts—as types and foreshadowings of

truth to be found in Christ and His gospel. Now that we have the substance (antitype) we no longer need the shadow (type). “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us at. our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. . . . Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Colossians 2:13-14, 16-17, *NIV*). Thus, the New Testament church refused to impose the Jewish law upon Gentile Christians (Acts 15).

Freedom in Non-Moral Matters

True to the principle of freedom from ceremonial law, Christians have liberty of action in non-moral matters. In general, the Christian is free to participate in any activity or practice that does not violate biblical morality. He has freedom to follow his individual judgment, desire, and conscience in areas where the Bible is silent.

Romans 14 gives guidelines for situations in which consciences differ. This chapter deals with morally indifferent issues, so we must be careful to apply its teachings within that context. The first controversial issue Paul addressed was the eating of meat. This could refer to vegetarianism, eating meat possibly offered to idols, or eating meat classified as unclean under Jewish law.

Secondly, Paul discussed the proper observance of certain days, such as sabbaths and other Jewish holy days. Later in the chapter, Paul mentioned the drinking of wine (any juice from the grape). This, too, involved Jewish law, for juice from the grape could be ceremonially unclean (Daniel 1:8-16) or forbidden by a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:3).

In each of these cases, the New Testament nowhere prohibits the questioned conduct, but in fact expressly forbids anyone to establish rules against it (Acts 15:19-29; Colossians 2:16; I Timothy 4:1-5). This chapter does not deal with morally objectionable practices or practices condemned by the Word of God.

With respect to these morally neutral issues, Paul presented several important guidelines: (1) We must not judge others, but must avoid controversies over these issues. The one who participates should not despise or ridicule the one who abstains. The one who abstains should not condemn the one who participates. (2) Every man should have his own convictions and should follow them. If the participator has faith in his liberty, he should keep it to himself; if he has doubts he should stop. The abstainer should continue to abstain if he has any doubts at all. (3) Whatever a person does should be done unto the Lord, that is, with the conviction that he is obeying and glorifying the Lord in everything. In all things he must acknowledge the lordship of Christ. (4) In no case should one Christian allow his exercise of Christian liberty to put an obstacle in the path of another. Rather than judging others, we should judge ourselves so that our actions will not cause others to stumble. We should not let our liberty destroy others or the work of God, but in all

things we should seek peace and edification.

Paul also explained the proper use of Christian liberty in his discussion of food offered to idols (I Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:23-33). Since an idol is nothing, there is nothing inherently immoral or dangerous about eating food that someone had offered to an idol. However, if others saw a Christian eating food offered to idols, they probably would interpret it as endorsing or condoning idol worship. For their sakes, therefore, Paul told the Corinthians not to eat food that they knew was offered to idols.

What if the Christian buys food in the market or eats food at someone else's house? There is no need to worry about whether it has previously been offered to idols or not. For the sake of an onlooker's conscience, he should innocently eat the food without asking questions. In no case, however, can the Christian insist upon liberty if his actions will harm others.

We Must Always Obey God's Word

Some people abuse the concept of Christian liberty in order to condone violation of holiness principles. In the last days ungodly men will "change the grace of our God into a license for immorality" (Jude 4, *NIV*). False teachers will appeal to lustful desires and promise liberty but will actually be under bondage to sin (II Peter 2:18-19). Some think they can continue to sin because they are no longer under the law but under grace. Their attitude is, "I can sin because I know God will forgive me." Paul rejected this philosophy emphatically: "God forbid!" (Romans 6:15).

As Chapter 3 discussed, God's moral law is still binding, and Christian liberty means freedom to submit to truth, not freedom from truth. Even though we have liberty, we must not use it to gratify the desires of the flesh. Christian liberty does not give us license to disobey God's moral law or the principles of God's Word. Paul explained, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. . . . The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:13, 19-20, *NIV*).

God's Word also teaches submission to godly authority. Christian liberty does not eliminate our responsibility to follow His church and His leaders when they apply biblical principles of holiness to contemporary issues. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17). The apostles and elders in Jerusalem wrote letters to Gentile Christians specifying what was required of them: "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things" (Acts 15:28).

Some people quote a few passages out of context in order to justify abandonment of all moral restraints. For example, Paul wrote, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to

him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (Romans 14:14). The context of this verse makes it clear that Paul was not referring to all activities but to non-moral issues. The immediate context shows that he specifically referred to the eating of certain types of food sometimes considered to be unclean (Romans 14:6, 15, 20). In fact, the *NIV* translates this clause as "I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself." This verse could not mean no activity is immoral in itself, for this would contradict all of Paul's practical teaching in chapters 12 and 13. Nor could it mean that all physical things are intended and fit for human consumption. Surely, Paul did not recommend for us to drink hemlock, bathe in poison ivy, smoke opium, or get drunk on alcohol!

In two other verses, Paul stated, "All things are lawful unto [for] me, but all things are not expedient" (I Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). Again, the context of each verse indicates that he was dealing with non-moral matters and specifically meant all foods are permissible to eat. I Corinthians 6:13 states, "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them." The passage in I Corinthians 10 deals with the question of eating food offered to idols. Neither passage can be interpreted to mean that all activities are permissible, for I Corinthians 6:9-10 states, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

Guidelines for Proper Use of Christian Liberty

Our liberty does not permit us to indulge in fleshly desires, to commit sin, or to violate God's Word. We find other important guidelines for the proper exercise of Christian liberty, even with respect to non-moral matters.³

(1) All exercise of liberty should be to the glory of God: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

(2) We should avoid anything detrimental to us, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually, even if it is not inherently sinful: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient" (I Corinthians 6:12). Many commentators believe Paul quoted an expression the Corinthians used to justify questionable conduct and then commented upon it. Thus, the *NIV* translates, "Everything is permissible for me'—but not everything is beneficial." I Corinthians 10:23 uses the word *edify*: "All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."

(3) We must regulate our activities so that none of them controls us. We must not allow anything to dominate our will or rob us of too much energy, time, and money. We must not let anything interfere with our relationship with God. "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (I Corinthians 6:12).

(4) The Christian must never exercise liberty in a way that would harm others. "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. . . . Wherefore, if meat make my brother to

offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (I Corinthians 8:9, 13). “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (I Corinthians 10:32-33). “If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. . . . Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food” (Romans 14:15-16, 20, *NIV*).

It is possible for something to be morally neutral in itself and yet violate one of these principles. Some things may be detrimental to one person and not to another, because of differences of personality, background, or experience before conversion. A certain situation may pose a great temptation for one person but not for another.

Jerry Bridges gave the example of a new convert who decided not to attend a Christian skating party. Prior to his conversion, he had frequently used skating rinks as places to pick up girls. At that particular time in his life any skating tended to inflame old lusts. Consequently, he decided to flee these lusts by avoiding the seemingly innocent situation.

Bridges gave another example of a tennis champion who realized that tennis was totally dominating her to the detriment of her spiritual life. Because of this, she quit playing altogether. Years later, after the danger was gone, she began to play again solely for recreation. (For further discussion of Christian liberty as it relates to worldly amusements, see Chapter 14.)

The preceding examples illustrate the importance of following the teaching of Romans 14. Each person must be careful to follow his own convictions even though others do not share them. Something could be wrong for one person even if not wrong for another person. If someone violates a conviction solely because of pressure from others, he violates the faith principle in his life and may place himself into a damaging situation from which God is trying to protect him. Other should not ridicule his conviction because they may destroy a defense mechanism God has erected for him. At the same time, he should not try to impose his convictions on someone who may not need it as much as he does. Of course, this discussion applies only to situations not specifically covered by scriptural teachings.

Tolerance But Not Compromise

The concept of Christian liberty teaches us to be tolerant of the different personal convictions and preferences of fellow Christians. In no case can we compromise with sin. We must avoid the one extreme of legalism and the other extreme of condoning ungodly and immoral practices. A mature understanding of Christian liberty will show us that certain things are not sinful but yet are detrimental to us spiritually. Therefore, we can personally avoid them and even point out their dangers without necessarily condemning those who do not understand the dangers.

The legalist who does not understand Christian liberty

is forced to pigeonhole everything in one of two categories: either a practice is sinful and will send one to hell or it is not sinful and therefore perfectly permissible. However, it is scriptural to recognize that some things are not necessarily sinful in themselves but yet are not beneficial to Christian living.

Some things can be a “weight” or hindrance and yet not be sin (Hebrews 12:1). In such cases, a proper exercise of Christian liberty would cause us to avoid them. Yet, if someone does not agree totally on this issue, we can still accept his status as a Christian. In this way, we can warn of the dangers of certain practices without being legalistic. This allows us to have fellowship with other believers without having to agree 100% on every personal conviction.

Legalism, Liberty, and Church Standards

How does our discussion in the last two chapters affect the establishment of specific church standards for conduct? Certainly, the church must continue to teach against practices the Bible opposes. To do this effectively, ministers cannot merely parrot certain phrases but must explain the Bible’s teachings and apply them to contemporary situations. The church must define clearly what it means to lie, to defraud, to dress immodestly, and so on. The writers of the epistles gave some very specific instructions with respect to situations in their day, and the church must do likewise today.

In some cases, the Bible presents a general principle but does not give detailed instructions for our culture. For

example, it teaches men to have short hair but does not specify the precise length. It teaches women to dress modestly but does not describe a dress length. In such cases the church should reach a consensus as to the implementation of these principles. It must send forth a clear sound, presenting clear guidance to the believer and a clear witness to the unbeliever.

The church should not be chaotic but orderly, and its members should walk orderly and in unity (II Thessalonians 3:6-7). (See I Corinthians 14:8, 10 for an analogous situation.) If everyone did what was right in his own eyes without submitting to leadership, the result would be chaos and confusion (Judges 21:25). Some differences of opinion will exist, but since one Spirit has baptized us into one body we should be able to reach a reasonable position that all can uphold before the world.

This position should not be what we regard as the absolute minimum, but rather a moderate stance. It should be conservative, for we must live within biblically acceptable limits. (Only a legalist would insist on an absolute minimum. Others would rather be “extra” close to God rather than risk being too close to the world.)

Honest-hearted converts truly desire to know how to apply scriptural principles. They want practical direction from experienced, mature, spiritual leaders. A wise person appreciates counsel, instruction, correction, and reproof (Proverbs 11:14; 13:1; 17:10). The true child of God seeks godly leaders who will warn of danger and protect his soul (Hebrews 13:17). He will not despise or reject authority (II Peter 2:10; Jude 8), for God has established authority and government in the church to give specific guidance (I Corinthians 12:28; I Thessalonians

5:12-13; I Timothy 5:17; II Timothy 4:2).

Even in areas where we have Christian liberty, if the four principles we have discussed lead to one conclusion, then the church should teach that conclusion. Even though eating meat offered to idols fell within the scope of Christian liberty, Paul taught against it in all situations where it could be a stumbling block. Similarly, the council at Jerusalem did not hesitate to forbid this practice and to announce their decision as binding upon the whole church (Acts 15:28-29).

The church can uphold biblical standards of holiness and not be legalistic or violate Christian liberty. Standards can become legalistic, however, if we present them in the manner described in Chapter 3.

Legalism, Liberty, and Teaching

In particular, when we try to apply biblical principles to modern situations, we must be careful not to claim the same authority for our particular application that exists for the principle itself. If we maintain that every conceivable deviation from our particular application is a sin, we can fall into legalism.

For example, we believe quite strongly that it is not God's will for us to drink alcoholic beverages. Yet can we say the actual taste of alcohol is sinful? If so, it would be a sin to go to a restaurant and eat cherries jubilee or meat cooked in a wine sauce. It would be sinful to use vanilla extract. Those who use fermented wine at communion would be committing sin.

We also believe that owning a television is not the will

of God and that watching programs can be sinful. Yet can we say the machine itself is evil or the act of watching the news for one minute is necessarily a sin? If so, glancing at a TV in a store display would be sinful. Watching a presidential address or a moon landing on TV would be a sin.

The purpose of these examples is not to undermine solid holiness teaching, but to demonstrate the proper approach to holiness teaching. We do not have to take such arbitrary positions in order to maintain holy living. If we use a legalistic approach in teaching against certain practices, our rules will either be inconsistent or ridiculously harsh. We will alienate sincere, thinking people with unwarranted extremism. On the other hand, we can use a mature understanding of Christian liberty to approach holiness in a positive way. This approach will be moderate, temperate, and rational without surrendering important practical teachings. In fact, it will enhance those teachings and facilitate their acceptance.

For example, by properly applying Christian liberty we can teach that Christians should not drink alcoholic beverages or watch television. Both practices violate scriptural guidelines for the proper exercise of Christian liberty: (1) They fail to give God glory in any way, but in fact they could bring a reproach. (2) They are physically, mentally, and spiritually damaging. (3) They have strong potential for getting mastery over us. (4) They are stumbling blocks to others, particularly to members of our own family.

Contemporary Non-Moral Issues

In the preceding examples, the serious application of

the guidelines for Christian liberty will draw a clear line between proper and improper conduct. In some cases, however, these guidelines do not demand such a clear-cut decision. These are essentially non-moral issues upon which Christians may legitimately differ and which should be handled in accordance with Romans 14. Let us give modern examples.

Some people oppose the celebration of Christmas because of pagan associations. Undoubtedly, December 25 was once a pagan holiday. However, there is no sin in choosing December 25 to celebrate Christ's birth and in using some decorations. For us it is not an act of pagan worship but a part of our cultural heritage and tradition. The names for the days of the week, the names of the planets, and many other things originated in pagan religions, but we routinely use them without question because we have eliminated the pagan meaning and retained only a cultural meaning.

We can divorce our celebration of Christmas from pagan worship so that it becomes no more dangerous for us than eating food offered to idols was to the mature believer of Paul's day. Since no one in our society realistically believes that we actually worship pagan deities by our Christmas celebration, we can exercise Christian liberty in this matter without creating a stumbling block for someone else. However, if a person feels uneasy about ancient pagan associations, he should be true to his own conscience and abstain from the celebration. Both those who observe the day and those who do not observe it can do it as unto the Lord (Romans 14:6). Neither should condemn, judge, or ridicule the other.

A related example concerns the Sabbath. Some believe

we should still keep Saturday as the Sabbath. Others believe the Sabbath has been changed to Sunday, and therefore we must not work, buy, or sell on Sunday. It seems clear that the gospel has abolished all literal Sabbath-keeping (Acts 15:19-29; Romans 14:5-6; Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17). The literal Sabbath was uniquely associated with the nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 5:15; Ezekiel 20:12). Jesus compared it to ceremonial law, which could be superseded in cases of necessity (Matthew 12:1-13). It foreshadowed the rest, refreshing and sanctification we enjoy every day in the Holy Ghost and the eternal sabbath rest we shall enjoy in the life to come (Isaiah 28:11-12; Acts 3:19; Hebrews 4:1-11).

We should attend church services whenever our local congregation has designated them (Hebrews 10:25), and early Christians chose Sunday in commemoration of the Lord's resurrection (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2). But there is no legalistic requirement as to a certain day. Those who observe a certain day as holy must not judge those who do not, and vice versa (Romans 14:5-6).

A third example is the use of fermented wine at Communion. We do not find any biblical support to demand this practice. In fact, we can see potential dangers that using wine could be a stumbling block. It poses unnecessary temptation to reformed alcoholics, and some may see it as inconsistent with our stand against drinking in general. However, we do not find any biblical passage that would label using wine in the Communion a sin. In accordance with his own conscience a person may not use wine at Communion, but he cannot condemn as sinful those who do. Likewise, those who use wine have no scriptural ground to condemn those who do not. If they make it a

basis of salvation, they transform the Lord's Supper into a sacrament with saving power and make alcohol the means of salvation. There is simply no biblical support for this assertion.

Another example is the use of wedding rings. A person may not wear a ring of any sort, basing his conscientious scruple on biblical warnings against the use of jewelry for adornment and his desire to be consistent in the sight of everyone. However, in some cultures failure to wear the wedding ring can imply that one is living in fornication, thereby creating a possible stumbling block for an observer. In such cases, we cannot label the wearing of the ring as sin. We can respect the conviction of one who wears a simple wedding band (assuming it is not for ornamentation) just as we ask him to respect those who have a conviction not to wear it.

Finally, we can use the example of beards and mustaches. In the 1960's, men used facial hair to symbolize rebellion against authority and the acceptance of an immoral lifestyle. Frequently, the same men wore long hair, which violates biblical teaching. In some segments of society and in many conservative churches, beards and mustaches still carry these negative connotations. If they create an appearance of evil or a stumbling block in a society, Christians should not wear them.

We must agree, however, that the Bible does not condemn them as inherently evil. Many godly men of Bible days wore beards (I Samuel 21:13; Psalm 133:2; Ezekiel 5:1). One prophecy indicates that Jesus probably had a beard (Isaiah 50:6). In American society of the 19th century, beards had no ungodly associations. Many Pentecostal pioneers of the early 20th century had beards. In

many foreign cultures and among many minority groups, beards and mustaches have never had and do not now have negative associations. Perhaps our society as a whole will revert to the use of facial hair. In light of these facts, we cannot legalistically condemn facial hair itself as sinful. We can warn of the attitudes often associated with it in our culture, but we must be flexible enough to accept it in times, places, and cultures where these problems do not exist.

Conclusion

John Calvin defined Christian liberty as consisting of three things.⁴ First, we renounce the righteousness that comes by observing law and look solely to Christ for righteousness. Second, the conscience is freed from the yoke of the law and voluntarily obeys the will of God. Third, we have the free use of morally indifferent things. Calvin observed that Christian liberty is “perversely interpreted by some who use it as a cloak for their lust, and they may licentiously abuse the good gifts of God.”⁵

In summary, the Christian life is characterized by liberty. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ we receive freedom from sin, freedom from the law, and freedom to act as we will in non-moral matters. We follow “the law of liberty,” which means freedom to do God’s will and to obey His Word (James 1:25; 2:12).

In no case does Christian liberty give us license to commit sin, violate God’s Word, or gratify the lusts of the flesh. Furthermore, our exercise of Christian liberty must always be regulated by four questions: (1) Can I glorify

God in this activity? (2) Is this activity detrimental physically, mentally, or spiritually? (3) Can this activity gain mastery over me and bring me under its control? (4) Is this activity a stumbling block to another believer or to an unbeliever? These guidelines even extend to things morally neutral or innocent in themselves.

If the Bible condemns a practice either specifically or in principle, then we must obey. If the four basic guidelines for exercise of Christian liberty point to a certain course of action, then again we obey. If an issue is morally neutral and the four guidelines do not define a certain response, we apply the teaching of Romans 14. We must grant liberty to others and not treat our private convictions as gospel. We must not impose our tradition, preferences, or habits upon others and condemn them as sinners if they do not conform. The participator should not despise the abstainer and the abstainer should not condemn the participator, but everyone should avoid contention, seek peace, and seek to edify. No one should judge another in the matter, but each must be true to his own convictions.

When we implement the concept of Christian liberty, we will find that it does not detract from but rather it enhances holiness teaching. It is the biblical alternative to legalism. A mature understanding of our liberty in Christ will motivate us to live a holy life worthy of the freedom given to us. Christian liberty will lead to a life of greater holiness, because it enables us for the first time to submit voluntarily to the will of God. Liberated from the bondage of sin and the law, we freely choose to obey the Word of God.

FOOTNOTES

¹Lewis Smedes, *Union with Christ*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 72.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

³See Bridges, p. 91.

⁴John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Henry Beveridge, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rpt. 1981), II, 130-42.

⁵*Ibid.*, II, 135-36.

5

PRACTICAL HOLINESS IN CHURCH HISTORY

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Many people today view our practical application of holiness principles as extremely narrow and even fanatical. Jesus Christ did teach that the Christian walk was narrow compared to the one chosen by the majority of the world. “Enter ye in at the strait [small] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. . . . Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:13, 14, 21). “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24).

While we expect the world to think the holy life is unnecessarily narrow and restrictive, it is somewhat surprising to hear professing Christians voice this opinion. Our defense rests in the Word of God itself, for we have based all our conclusions on solid biblical teachings. However, we also find our position vindicated by many respected leaders and groups throughout the history of Christendom. This chapter demonstrates that many in church history have advocated the same holiness teachings we do, even though we do not necessarily endorse all their doctrines. In many ways, 20th century Christendom has departed from the Christian lifestyle taught by historic church leaders.

The Early Church Fathers

Holiness was an important theme in the writings of the early post-apostolic fathers. Ignatius (30?-107?) described the church as “adorned with holiness.”¹

Clement of Rome (30?-100?) wrote to the Corinthian church, “Let us then draw near to Him with holiness of spirit, lifting up pure and undefiled hands unto Him. . . . Seeing, therefore, that we are the portion of the Holy One, let us do all those things which pertain to holiness, avoiding all evil-speaking, all abominable and impure embraces, together with all drunkenness, seeking after change, all abominable lusts, detestable adultery, and execrable pride. . . . How blessed and wonderful, beloved, are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendour in righteousness, truth in perfect confidence, faith in assurance, self-control in holiness! . . . May God . . . who chose our

Lord Jesus Christ and us through Him to be a peculiar people—grant to every soul that calleth upon His glorious and holy Name, faith, fear, peace, patience, long-suffering, self-control, purity and sobriety, to the well-pleasing of His Name.”²

The church fathers prior to the time of the Emperor Constantine unanimously advocated a life of separation from the world. They applied their teachings on holiness to specific issues in their day. Kenneth Scott Latourette, a leading authority on church history, stated that the early Christians opposed polytheism, sexual immorality, gladiatorial contests, the indecencies of the theater, infanticide, abortion, pagan festivals, public amusements, sports of the amphitheater, and warfare.³ They taught against all forms of luxury, and preached simplicity in clothing, eating, and drinking.⁴ As subsequent chapters describe, they specifically opposed astrology, magic, abortion, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, effeminate dress by males, immodesty of dress, jewelry, makeup, worldly music, dancing, gambling, gluttony, drunkenness, and swearing by oath.

In the latter half of the 2nd century, a Christian named Montanus proclaimed himself a prophet and began to attract a large following. He emphasized holiness of life, the operation of the gifts of the Spirit, and the priesthood of all believers, all of which he felt the church was losing. As Latourette explained, Montanism was “a call to Christians to stricter living . . . It stressed a high standard of Christian living among Christian communities into which laxity was beginning to creep.”⁵ According to his opponents, Montanus claimed to be the last prophet before the end of the world. They also accused him of

claiming to be the Holy Spirit because he always prophesied in the first person. Historical accounts indicate that Montanism ultimately went to extremes in emphasizing prophecy and asceticism. Eventually it was condemned as heresy. However, it did represent an attempt to maintain the purity of life characteristic of earliest Christianity, and it attracted some highly respected followers.

Although some laxity began to creep into the church in this early time, prominent Christian writers took strong stands for holiness of lifestyle. These include Hermas (c. 110), the authors of the *Didache* (2nd century), Justin Martyr (110-165), Tatian (110-172), Theophilus (115-188), Athenagoras (177), Clement of Alexandria (150-220), Tertullian (160-230), Hippolytus (170-236), Origen (180-254), Minucius Felix (210), Commodianus (240), Cyprian (200-258), and Lactantius (260-330). (Dates before 300 are uncertain.) Subsequent chapters refer to some of their specific teachings.

The conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine sometime after 312 marked a turning point in the history of Christendom. Constantine ended the persecution of Christians and used the power of the Roman Empire to promote Christianity actively. His successors established Christianity as the official state religion. They persecuted paganism and eventually outlawed it. Pagans converted to Christendom without being spiritually reborn, carrying their pagan doctrines and practices into the church with them. Genuine Christian doctrines of the Holy Spirit, worship, and holiness were overwhelmed. Historian Walter Nigg wrote, "As soon as Emperor Constantine opened the floodgates and the masses of the people poured into the Church out of sheer opportunism, the loftiness of the

Christian ethos was done for.”⁶

We do find some holiness teaching during this time, such as in the writings of John Chrysostom (345-407) and in the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*. Most of the latter dates from the 4th century, but many scholars believe it basically preserves church tradition from the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

The Middle Ages

The gradual doctrinal shift over the centuries led to what we know as the Roman Catholic Church, which was the undisputed religion of Western Europe until the Protestant Reformation in 1517. During the medieval period, the Catholic Church actively suppressed “heretics” (people who opposed its doctrines), so very little historical records remain of them. However, we do find evidence of several large “heretical” groups that were strongly committed to holiness of lifestyle. The Waldensians, founded in 12th century France by Peter Waldo, rejected papal authority and attempted to base their beliefs solely on the Bible. Specifically, they refused to lie, to take oaths, or to take human life. They were chaste, were temperate in eating and drinking, opposed taverns, did not dance, avoided the accumulation of great wealth, and avoided anger.⁷ The Humiliati in Lombardy were closely associated with the Waldensians. “Its adherents were plain in dress and abstained from oaths and falsehoods and lawsuits.”⁸

The Albigensians, also founded in 12th century France, were known as Cathari. This latter name was

derived from a word meaning pure because they stressed purity of lifestyle. They apparently held some questionable doctrines taken from Persian dualism, but they were a positive reaction to the immorality of the times, particularly clerical corruption. The Inquisition severely persecuted both Waldensians and Albigensians, and Catholic armies massacred thousands of them.

John Hus (1369-1415) of Bohemia challenged papal primacy and emphasized the supreme authority of Scripture. He was burned at the stake with the approval of Pope John XXIII. The Hussites prohibited dancing, gambling, and the appearance of “loose women” on the streets, and one group of them rejected oaths and warfare.⁹

Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) was an Italian priest who preached against the immorality that existed in the papacy, Italian politics, and the lives of the people of his day. Inspired by his preaching, the people of Florence burned trinkets, masks, cosmetics, obscene books, dice, games of chance and objects of luxury.¹⁰ Savonarola was eventually hanged by the Catholic Church.

Luther and the Protestant Reformation

In 1517 Martin Luther challenged the Roman Catholic practice of selling indulgences to remit punishment for sin. This led to the formation of Protestant Christianity, which stresses justification by faith rather than works. Luther taught that we are justified by faith in Christ even though we are not actually righteous and that we live by faith rather than by the law. He did not reject moral law,

however, but, taught that the moral law of both Testaments shows how a justified person should live in order to please God. Luther opposed the immorality and corruption of the Catholic Church in his day and advocated a godly life. Because of his total preoccupation with defending justification by faith against salvation by works and Catholic legalism, however, he did not stress the doctrine of sanctification. This singleness of vision even caused him to question the validity of the Book of James because it teaches the necessity of works as proof of genuine faith.

Protestantism in the early 16th century soon developed into four distinct branches: Lutherans, Reformed, Anabaptists, and Anglicans (Church of England). Following Luther's example, the Lutherans as a whole never developed a strong emphasis on holiness in their theology. However, it was inevitable that other Protestants would. Since Protestants affirmed the sole authority of Scripture, many of them began to study the Bible, interpret it literally, and apply its teachings to their own lives. On the whole, then, the Protestant Reformation brought a renewed concern for biblical holiness.

The Anabaptists

The Anabaptists believed in the restoration of apostolic worship and lifestyle, a definite conversion experience, baptism of believers only, baptism by immersion, and separation of church and state. They taught that power over sin comes at conversion and that the Christian must live a holy life. They did not see holiness of

life as a means to earn salvation, but as a necessary expression of new life in Christ that results from salvation. They interpreted the Sermon on the Mount literally. They adhered to a simple piety and a strict morality, denouncing luxury, drinking, and intemperance in eating.¹¹ “Most Anabaptists adopted a Puritan severity of morals and simplicity of manners and dress . . . They rejected military service on the ground that it is invariably sinful to take human life. Like the early Christians, they refused to swear oaths.”¹²

Many Anabaptists today retain this emphasis on practical holiness. For example, the Hutterites wear plain clothing, do not own televisions, do not dance, do not smoke, and are pacifists.¹³ The Mennonites advocate modesty and simplicity of dress, pacifism, and a head covering for women, while the Old German Baptist Brethren oppose all worldly amusements.¹⁴ With respect to modern Mennonites, “the doctrines of nonconformity to the world, nonswearing of oaths, non-resistance in lieu of military service, and church discipline are generally affirmed but not practiced universally.”¹⁵ The Amish, who emerged from the Mennonites, are very strict in modesty of dress and simplicity of lifestyle. Most Anabaptist women today do not cut their hair or wear makeup, jewelry, short skirts, or pants.

John Calvin and the Reformed

The branch of 16th century Protestantism known as the Reformed is represented today by various Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Its most famous leader was

John Calvin. Calvin gave much more attention in his theology to ethics than did Luther. While Luther emphasized that the gospel abolished the law, Calvin stressed that the gospel is a continuation of the moral law and that it only annulled the ceremonial law. Calvin lived by a strict morality and taught that the basic rule of Christian life is self-denial. When he and his followers gained control of the city government of Geneva, Switzerland, they attempted to impose much of their lifestyle on the entire population. "Dancing, gambling, drunkenness, frequentation of taverns, profanity, luxury, excesses at public entertainments, extravagance and immodesty in dress, licentious or irreligious songs were forbidden."¹⁶ Wearing jewelry and playing cards were illegal. Early Calvinists also prohibited the theater and other worldly amusements.¹⁷

Calvin wrote, "He who makes it his rule to use this world as if he used it not, not only cuts off all gluttony in regard to meat and drink, and all effeminacy, ambition, pride, excessive show, and austerity, in regard to his table, his house, and his clothes, but removes every care and affection which might withdraw or hinder him from aspiring to the heavenly life, and decks the soul with its true ornaments."¹⁸ He admonished his readers to use earthly blessings as if they constantly heard God say, "Give an account of your stewardship." He continued, "Let us remember by whom the account is to be taken—viz. by him who while he so highly commends abstinence, sobriety, frugality, and moderation, abominates luxury, pride, ostentation, and vanity; who approves of no administration but that which is combined with charity, who with his own lips has already condemned all those pleasures

which withdraw the heart from chastity and purity, or darken the intellect.”¹⁹

The Puritans

The Puritan movement began in the 16th century Church of England. The Puritans basically followed Calvin’s theology, and as their name suggests they sought to purify their church. They ruled England from 1649 to 1660. Like the Calvinists in Geneva, they emphasized holiness of life and tried to impose their lifestyle to some extent on the entire society. “Their clothing was modest, somber, and unadorned; their speech was grave and slow. They were expected to abstain from all profane amusements and sensual pleasure. The theaters, which had been closed in 1642 because of war, remained closed till 1656 because of Puritan condemnation. Horse races, cockfights, wrestling matches, bear or bull baiting, were forbidden.”²⁰ They prohibited gambling, dancing, and fancy dress as well, although many Puritans opposed making all these restrictions mandatory for the general public.²¹ The majority of the early New England colonists were Puritans, and they brought their holiness lifestyle to America.

The Anglicans

Historically, the Anglicans (or the Episcopalians as they became known in America) have had a strong holiness element in their midst. As we have seen, the Puritans

came from within the Church of England and for a time gained control of both church and state. Other groups that emphasized holiness of life emerged from an Anglican background, including the Quakers and the Methodists.

An interesting witness from the 19th century, Anglican Bishop J. C. Ryle, whom we quoted extensively in Chapter 2, wrote, "The times require of us a higher standard of personal holiness, and an increased attention to practical religion in daily life. . . . Since the days of the Reformation, there never has been so much profession of religion without practice. . . . The whole tone of men's minds on what constitutes practical Christianity seems lowered. The old golden standard of the behaviour which becomes a Christian man or woman appears debased and degenerated. You may see scores of religious people (so-called) continually doing things which in days gone by would have been thought utterly inconsistent with vital religion. They see no harm in such things as card-playing, theatre-going, dancing, incessant novel-reading, and Sunday-travelling, and they cannot in the least understand what you mean by objecting to them!"²² He appealed to the writings of 17th century Anglicans who strongly advocated the need for holiness.

His writings highlight two points: (1) Some 19th century Anglicans were very holiness minded. (2) He believed that his holiness teaching reflected generally held views of Anglicans of prior centuries.

The Quakers

The Quakers, a group that originated in 17th century

England, emphasized holiness and simplicity of life. They were “Puritans of the Puritans” who rejected all worldly show, all ornaments on clothing, all oaths, and all war.²³ George Fox, their founder, taught simplicity of dress, with no wigs, gold, or vain decorations.²⁴

The Pietists

Pietism was a 17th century movement that began in Lutheran Germany. Today, it is represented by the Moravians and the Brethren. The Pietists basically retained orthodox Lutheran theology. However, they emphasized spiritual experience, practical Christian living, and the devotional life in contrast to the cold formalism and traditionalism of their day. The founder of the Pietist movement, John Philipp Spener, warned of the evils of the theater, playing cards, jewelry, finery of apparel, and drunkenness. He taught moderation in dress, food, and drink. Other early Pietists wrote against dancing. Spener said the mark of a Pietist was his willingness “to give up freedom in questionable little things.”²⁵ The Brethren have advocated plain clothing, veils on women, abstention from worldly amusements, no oaths, no war, and no lawsuits. In particular, the Church of the Brethren today believes in pacifism, total abstinence from alcoholic beverages, and a simple lifestyle, shunning unwholesome amusements and luxuries.²⁶

The Baptists

Early Baptists were at first grouped with the Puritans,

but they began to organize separately in England in the 17th century. They, too, adhered to holiness teaching. Some Baptist groups still remain quite conservative on holiness issues. For example, the Baptist Bible Fellowship opposes dancing, drinking, smoking, gambling, and the movies.²⁷ In 1984 the Southern Baptist Convention admonished all members not to use tobacco or alcohol. Many independent Baptists teach against worldly amusements, immodest dress, women wearing pants, and women cutting their hair. Sword of the Lord Publishers prints a number of books and booklets that deal with these issues, including John R. Rice's *Amusements for Christians* and Elizabeth Rice Handford's *Your Clothes Say it For You*. Liberty Baptist College, founded by Jerry Falwell, has a dress and conduct code for its student body of over 4000: "Men are not allowed to grow beards or mustaches, or to wear hair that touches their shirt collars or covers the tops of their ears. . . . Women are expected to dress modestly. Students are not allowed to dance or attend movies."²⁸

John Wesley and the Methodists

The Methodist movement began in 18th century England with a club founded by Oxford University students Charles and John Wesley. This club emphasized devotional life and academics. Detractors called it the Holy Club because of its emphasis on holiness of life and called its members Methodists because of their methodical system of devotion. John Wesley worked as an Anglican clergyman for a number of years, but eventually

his teachings on personal and social morality and his organizational ability led to the formation of a separate church. He did not originally intend to oppose Anglican church structure or doctrine, but saw himself as working to renew and strengthen Christians.

Wesley taught that sanctification is a process which begins with justification. According to him, the ultimate goal of sanctification is Christian perfection, which is purification from inward sin. Achieving this state does not mean one cannot sin or does not need grace any longer, but that one no longer willfully breaks God's law. It is not a sinless perfection but a perfection of motives, desires, and thoughts. The Christian is still subject to ignorance, mistakes, external temptation, and infirmities of the flesh. Wesley believed that Christian perfection could be attained in this life, but that most Christians in his day did not attain it. He aimed to change this by preaching that Christians can and should be holy, and perfectionism became the distinguishing doctrine of Methodism. Basically, Wesley's Methodism held that the sanctified person can live a life of victory over sin through self-examination, godly discipline, methodical devotion, and avoidance of worldly pleasures.

In applying these principles to practical living, John Wesley "forbade the ladies of his congregation to wear rich dresses or gold ornaments . . . [He] thought it a sin to go to fairs, to wear jewelry or fine clothes, to attend a theater or to dance."²⁹ He also wrote against luxuries, taverns, and things harmful to the body. Members of his United Society pledged to abstain from (among other things) drinking, suing Christians at law, wearing of gold and costly apparel, worldly diversions, worldly music,

worldly literature, and borrowing without the probability of repayment.³⁰ Until recent years, most Methodists adhered to these standards. As late as 1952, The Methodist Church passed resolutions that strongly condemned drinking, smoking, and gambling.

The Holiness Movement

The Holiness movement developed in the 19th century among American and English Methodists who felt that Methodism was losing its traditional zeal for holiness. In 1867 a New Jersey camp meeting was organized as a call to holiness, and this led to the creation of the National Holiness Association. The Methodists as a whole rejected this renewal of holiness preaching. Consequently, a number of Holiness organizations came into being, including The Church of the Nazarene, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, The Salvation Army, The Wesleyan Church, The Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), and The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee).

Two different doctrines of holiness were advocated during this time. One belief, represented by Oberlin College and Charles Finney, was called Oberlin perfectionism. This view continued to emphasize Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection and taught that it is obtained by an instantaneous experience subsequent to salvation. At this "second work of grace" or "baptism of the Holy Ghost" (without tongues), the Christian receives entire sanctification. This granted purification from indwelling sin or eradication of the sinful nature.

The second view became known as Keswick holiness,

and was represented by Keswick Parish in England and Dwight L. Moody. According to this view, the sinful nature is never eradicated in this life, but at justification the Christian is endowed with power to overcome sin. Man's old nature remains the same but the new, regenerated nature has power to override the old, sinful nature on a daily basis. Advocates of both Oberlin perfectionism and Keswick holiness agreed that the Christian can and should live a holy life of obedience to God's moral law with victory over sin.

The Holiness churches are characterized by "a doctrine of separation that advocates the avoidance of 'worldly' practices such as attending the movies, dancing, using tobacco or alcohol, or belonging to 'secret societies.'"³¹ They followed John Wesley in disapproving of flashy clothes, costly apparel, and expensive jewelry; and in the 20th century, many Holiness churches have opposed women wearing pants, television, cosmetics, mixed swimming, cutting of women's hair, and immodest clothing.³² Other Holiness groups have largely abandoned their stand on these issues, just as the Methodists did before them.

The Pentecostals

At the start of the 20th century, many people began to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the sign of speaking in tongues. These Pentecostals, many of whom had come from the Holiness movement, stressed the necessity of living a holy life. One of the earliest Pentecostal organizations was The Apostolic Faith, founded in

1907. It took a stand against worldly amusements, dancing, the theater, card playing, drinking, smoking, makeup, and women cutting their hair.³³ The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), a Holiness group that accepted the Pentecostal experience, opposed alcohol, tobacco, jewelry, and secret societies.³⁴ The other Pentecostal denominations also started with a strong belief in personal holiness, but many have relaxed their stand in recent years.

A non-Pentecostal scholar, Walter Hollenweger, has described this shift: "The ethical rigorism of the Church of God (the prohibition of mixed bathing, of permanently waved hair, of going to the cinema or the theatre and of make-up) seems according to some observers no longer to be exercised very strictly."³⁵ "As a Holiness church, the Assemblies of God began by making rigorist demands upon its members," teaching against makeup, the cinema, and worldly dress.³⁶ However, he wrote, both insiders and outsiders have noticed a considerable modification of this original stance. According to Hollenweger, the older leaders still dislike "worldly" things such as movies, makeup, and rock music, but today's leaders seem to be retreating from this position so they will not lose influence with the younger generation.

Oneness Pentecostal groups have been more conservative on these issues. As late as 1963, The Pentecostal Assemblies of the World went on record as opposing "all unnecessary jewelry, such as rings (not including wedding rings), bracelets, earrings, stick-pins, and flashy breast pins . . . showy colors in dress, attractive hosiery, short dresses, low necks, short sleeves (that is, above the elbow), and bright ties."³⁷

The Articles of Faith of The United Pentecostal Church International contain the following: "Godly living should characterize the life of every child of the Lord, and we should live according to the pattern and example given in the Word of God. . . . We wholeheartedly disapprove of our people indulging in any activities which are not conducive to good Christianity and godly living, such as theaters, dances, mixed bathing, women cutting their hair, make-up, and apparel that immodestly exposes the body, all worldly sports and amusements, and unwholesome radio programs and music. Furthermore, because of the display of all these evils on television, we disapprove of any of our people having television sets in their homes. We admonish all of our people to refrain from any of these practices in the interest of spiritual progress and the soon coming of the Lord for His church."³⁸ The UPCI also opposes in its Articles of Faith the bearing of arms, the taking of human life, secret societies, organizations that bind believers and unbelievers with an oath, and public school activities that violate any of its religious scruples.

20th Century Changes

At the beginning of the 20th century, Christendom as a whole and even society as a whole observed many aspects of practical holiness. Most Protestant churches were very conservative in lifestyle by modern standards, and even the general public acknowledged the truth of many holiness teachings. However, the 20th century brought drastic changes to society, and Christendom as a

whole changed with society. Only a minority of Christian churches today advocate the holiness of life generally accepted less than a century ago.

This is particularly noticeable with respect to outward appearance. *Encyclopedia Britannica* describes the changes in this area.³⁹ After World War I (1914-1918) the following practices developed in American society: Women began to cut their hair, extremely short skirts began to appear (i.e., skirts that exposed the knee), women's sportswear and swimwear became scanty, and women began to wear trousers for sports activities. During and after World War II (1939-1945) women began to wear pants to work in factories and then to wear at home. In the 1960's miniskirts, short shorts, and unisex styles came into vogue, as well as long hair on men.

Social changes particularly affected women. Historian Carl Degler has written, "Early in the twentieth century upper middle-class women . . . learned to . . . smoke cigarettes, and embrace men in the modern ballroom dance. . . . The more advanced also insisted on their right to go anywhere unchaperoned, to drink, smoke, and swear in public, and generally to behave as men did."⁴⁰ Evils that society had restricted to men were now extended to include women, and society no longer retained even a facade of morality in these areas.

In 1933 the U.S. government repealed its prohibition on the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors. In the 1960's, American society lifted legal as well as moral restraints on divorce and abortion.

It is difficult today to recapture the feeling of society before and during these changes. My mother can remember when a woman was arrested in the 1940's for indecent

exposure because she wore shorts on a public street in Louisiana. My uncle remembers his Baptist mother sitting in the car crying while her family watched movies at the cinema. Some senior citizens can remember when only disreputable women cut their hair, wore makeup, wore short skirts, or wore pants in public. I can remember when divorce would have doomed a politician's chance for election and when no public figure would have dared confess to homosexuality.

When we view these modern changes from biblical and historical standards of holiness, we realize that it is the modern departure that is strange, not the holiness teachings on outward appearance. History calls us to return to scriptural practices from which our society and our churches have strayed.

Where will modern changes end? Will Christian churches one day accept men wearing dresses as they do women wearing pants? Will they accept men wearing makeup and jewelry as they do women? Will they allow the use of marijuana and cocaine "in moderation" as they do the use of alcohol and tobacco? Will they condone total nudity on the beach as they do near nudity? Will they practice infanticide or euthanasia as they do abortion? Will they watch live sex shows as they do sex shows on TV and in movies? Will they overlook homosexual affairs and adulterous affairs as they do divorce and remarriage? Will they be unashamed for women to shave their heads as they are for women to cut their hair?

What about holiness people today? Will we follow the drift of other churches and of society until we are indistinguishable from the world? To most people today holiness is an archaic, quaint word. However, if we ever

abandon the concept of holiness, referring to it as old fashioned, legalistic, and unnecessarily restrictive, there will be no logical stopping place. Without biblical holiness as a foundation, we will absorb the evils of a worldly, ungodly society as it becomes progressively worse.

Non-Christian Religions

Before concluding our survey of holiness teaching, it is interesting to note the teachings of some non-Christian religions.⁴¹ Of course, we do not take their teachings as normative, but to a certain extent even pagan religious systems have recognized the dangers of some practices. As Romans 1 and 2 point out, even the heathen can know from nature and conscience that many things are evil.

Islam is a monotheistic religion founded by Mohammed in 7th century Arabia. Moslems worship the God of the Bible, but believe that Mohammed's book, the Koran, is God's Word for today. They are forbidden to drink alcoholic beverages, eat blood, or gamble. Conservative Moslem women wear very modest clothing and refuse to wear masculine clothing. Saudi Arabia, controlled by a strict Moslem sect, placed a ban upon television because of its immoral influences, while Iran banned rock music for the same reason.

Hinduism is the ancient polytheistic religion of India. According to one Indian Christian leader, many Indians disapprove of Christianity because so many Christians wear clothing considered to be immodest by Indian standards.⁴² Jainism, a religion that emerged from Hinduism,

forbids all followers to lie, steal, commit adultery, gamble, drink wine, or kill. Sikhism, another offshoot from Hinduism, requires its adherents to abstain from tobacco and alcohol.

Theravada Buddhism, the branch of Buddhism that adheres most closely to the original teachings of Buddha, has five precepts for all laymen to obey. These are to abstain from killing, theft, adultery or sensuality, lying or deceit, and use of intoxicants. Furthermore, monks must obey additional precepts which include abstention from self-adornment, dancing, and the theater.

Many non-Western countries have resisted the changes in morality brought about by the West. Below are a few examples from the present or recent past: TV censorship in South Africa, banning many U.S. TV shows in Mexico because of excessive violence, banning immodest clothing on women and long hair on men in Korea, and banning long hair on men in Singapore. Even atheistic Communism has denounced “western decadence,” and many Communist regimes have taken steps to curb or eliminate rock music, pornography, long hair on men, and immodest dress.

We do not recommend that the church should try to legislate holiness for all of society. Nor do we accept many of the practices and teachings of the religions we have cited. However, we have presented this evidence to make the following points: (1) Many sincere people all over the world have recognized the moral detriments associated with things that modern Western society accepts. (2) Many non-Christians willingly restrict their behavior in certain ways for the sake of conscience or religious tradition even though they do not recognize the

authority of the Bible and the Spirit as we do. Some have attained a higher morality than many professing Christians. This does not justify them, but it does indict those Christians. Do the heathen love their gods more than some Christians love the true God? Are the heathen more willing to live sacrificially for their religions than some Christians are to surrender worldly pleasures detrimental to true spirituality?

Conclusion

In summary, prominent Christian leaders and groups throughout church history have advocated a separated lifestyle with an avoidance of worldliness. Many of them applied the biblical principles of holiness to practical living in the same ways we have done in this book. In addition, Western society prior to the 20th century and many non-Christian societies in recent times bear witness that the human race has recognized (if not always adhered to) certain moral principles that are being rapidly discarded today.

Not only are holiness teachings biblically sound, but they also represent the beliefs of the ante-Nicene fathers, Calvin, Wesley, and many other respected religious figures. Whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, all professing Christians will find that many of their highly regarded leaders were strict holiness preachers. Those who reject practical holiness are the ones who have deviated from the biblical and historical norm.

In light of this evidence, holiness people today should maintain their ground against the onslaught of worldliness

and compromise. We can stand confidently upon our biblical and historical heritage.

FOOTNOTES

¹Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, superscription, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds. and trans.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rpt. 1981) [hereinafter *ANF*], I, 86.

²Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 29, 35, 39 & 58, *ANF*, I, 12-14, 21.

³Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), I, 81-82 & 239-48.

⁴*Ibid.*, I, 246.

⁵*Ibid.*, I, 128-29.

⁶Walter Nigg, *The Heretics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 102.

⁷Latourette, I, 452-53.

⁸Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (1890; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), V, 211.

⁹*Ibid.*, VII, 181-82.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, VII, 321.

¹¹*Ibid.*, VIII, 40.

¹²Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1935-1967), VI, 395.

¹³J. Gordon Melton, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath Publishing Co., 1978), II, 31-32.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, I, 331, 345.

¹⁵"Mennonites," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1976), VIII, 993.

¹⁶Schaff, VIII, 232.

¹⁷Crane Brinton et al, *A History of Civilization*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), I, 479.

¹⁸Calvin, II, 33. The last clause uses the literal translation, taken from footnote 1.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, II, 34.

²⁰Durant, VIII, 194-95.

- ²¹Brinton, I, 596-97.
- ²²Ryle, pp. 301-02. Emphasis in original has been omitted.
- ²³Brinton, I, 597.
- ²⁴Melton, I, 348.
- ²⁵Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 122-23.
- ²⁶Frank Mead, *Handbook of Denominations In the United States*, 7th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), pp. 62-63.
- ²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 44
- ²⁸"Falwell's College Strives to Become a Fundamentalist University Serving 50,000," *Christianity Today*, November 25, 1983, p. 43. More recently it has relaxed its rule against facial hair.
- ²⁹Durant, IX, 131 & 135.
- ³⁰*Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church 1952*, Nolan Harmon (ed.) (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1952), pp. 34-35.
- ³¹"Holiness Churches," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, VIII, 993.
- ³²Melton, I, 200.
- ³³Mead, p. 30.
- ³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 85.
- ³⁵Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, R. A. Wilson, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), p. 50.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 402.
- ³⁸*Manual, United Pentecostal Church International* (Hazelwood, Mo.: Pentecostal Publishing House, 1984), pp. 22-23.
- ³⁹"Dress," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, V, 1033-35.
- ⁴⁰Carl Degler, *The Democratic Experience*, 3rd. ed (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1973), pp. 437-38.
- ⁴¹See Sir Norman Anderson (ed.), *The World's Religions*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) and John Noss, *Man's Religions*, 5th ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1969).
- ⁴²Anselm Rosario, "Witness to Hindu Neighbors," *Theology Today*, Princeton, N.J., Vol. 40, No. 3 (October 1983), p. 317.

6

TELEVISION AND MOVIES

*“I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes”
(Psalm 101:3).*

Biblical Foundation

In addition to Psalm 101:3, many biblical passages admonish us to guard our eyes from beholding evil scenes and our minds from entertaining evil thoughts (Job 31:1; Psalm 19:14; 119:37; Isaiah 33:15-16; Romans 1:32; I Thessalonians 5:22). Philippians 4:8 instructs us to think on things that are true, honest (noble), just (right), pure, lovely, of good report (admirable), virtuous (excellent), and praiseworthy. Evil thoughts defile us (Matthew 15:18-20; Mark 7:21-23). Our thoughts determine in a large measure what we are or will become (Proverbs 23:7). The eye is the primary means by which external information enters the mind, thereby stimulating our thought life.

For this reason the eye is the light of the body, and the lust of the eyes is a major source of temptation (Matthew 6:22-23; Luke 11:34; I John 2:16). To a large degree, then, what we allow our eyes to indulge in both shapes and reveals our inner spiritual character.

As both secular and religious evidence, presented in *In Search of Holiness*, demonstrates, television and movies depict so much evil that watching them violates biblical principles. Violence and illicit sex are two prominent subjects they display. In addition, they portray many other evils (usually with no indication that they are in fact evil), such as immodest dress, profanity, smoking, drinking, lying, hatred, assault, cursing, and indecent speech. These are the very things that defile a person (Matthew 15:18-20). In addition, TV programs and movies have little or no redeeming value. They unjustifiably waste the Christian's valuable time (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5).

In addition to these specific teachings, we can also apply the principles of Christian liberty discussed in Chapter 4. When we do, it becomes clear that we should avoid television and movies. (1) They do not glorify God, but glorify evil. (2) They are detrimental physically, mentally, and spiritually. (3) They have tremendous power to gain mastery over us. (4) They become stumbling blocks to others, particularly to our own children.

New evidence of their detrimental effects continues to surface, and other conservative Christians have begun to voice their concern about the evils on the screen. This chapter presents some developments in recent years.

Additional Findings

* “Why Johnny can’t listen to the sermon,” *Ministry*, May, 1981. Television is shortening children’s attention span. Commercials teach that all problems can be solved and solved quickly by modern technology. Life on TV is a caricature of real life.

* “Gays to the Fore, Cautiously,” *Time*, May 17, 1982. A number of new movies have portrayed homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle and as a legitimate choice.

* “Warning from Washington,” *Time*, May 17, 1982. The National Institute of Mental Health issued a report based on a two-year study. It says there is overwhelming evidence that violence on TV causes aggressive behavior in children.

* “What is TV Doing to America?” *U.S. News & World Report*, August 2, 1982. The average American home watched TV $6\frac{3}{4}$ hours per day in 1981 compared to $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours in 1951. The average person watches TV from 23 hours per week (teenagers) to $36\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week (older women). Anything from partial nudity to simulated intercourse is available on cable TV. Almost 100,000 households have a two-way system in which a computer scans the household every 6 seconds.

* “TV Violence: The Shocking New Evidence,” *Reader’s Digest*, January 1983. Studies have shown that TV violence produces lasting and serious harm, violent cartoons are definitely damaging, TV erodes inhibitions, TV causes antisocial behavior, and TV contributes to poor academic performance.

* “As TV Violence Grows, the Campaign Against It Alters Course,” *Christianity Today*, November 25, 1983.

The National Coalition on Television Violence advocates a law to require TV networks to broadcast warnings of possible hazards of TV violence. The American Medical Association asserts that TV violence is a hazard to young Americans and to the future of our society. U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop has been an outspoken critic of TV violence, as have his predecessors. The National Institute of Mental Health says that TV is a major socializing institution comparable in influence to family, church, and school. The Coalition for Better Television is attacking the widespread immorality on television.

* "Children Spend More Time Before TV Than in Classroom," UPI, *Korea Times*, November 12, 1983. According to David Pearl, Chief of the Behavioral Sciences Research Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health, parents significantly underestimate the time their children spend watching TV and the type of programs they watch. The average American child, age 9-12, spends about 1000 hours per year in the classroom but 1340 hours per year watching TV. By age 18 he will have spent 11,000 hours in the classroom but 22,000 hours in front of the TV.

* Television morality has continued to degenerate rapidly. In the last few years *Time Magazine* has documented the following "firsts" on the screen: the first sympathetic portrayals of homosexuality, incest, prostitution, and transvestitism, as well as the first television commercial to feature a totally nude woman.

"Taming the TV Habit"

Of great interest is a recent book by Kevin Perrotta,

managing editor of *Pastoral Renewal*, which is a monthly magazine for evangelical ministers.¹ The back cover states, “Certainly the continuous display of folly, sex, and violence is deplorable to Christians. And much has been written about the decadence in television’s content. In *Taming the TV Habit*, Kevin Perrotta looks at another issue as well—television’s dominating role in the home. He points out, ‘It’s not *what* you watch, it’s *that* you watch.’ He argues persuasively that extensive television viewing produces serious, detrimental consequences in the Christian home: it erodes our children’s intellectual and social development, undermines parental authority, and contributes to the fragmentation of family relationships.” Perrotta surveyed many articles and scientific studies and arrived at the following conclusions:

(1) *Television is a thief of time.* The average American watches 50,000 to 75,000 hours of TV during his life, which is the equivalent of 5 to 8 years of his life. The TV is on more than 7 hours per day in the average American home.

(2) *Television viewing displaces many more important activities.* It is the greatest rearranger of time in the 20th century. It replaces talking, dealing with problems, reading, thinking, praying, and meditating. It detracts significantly from relationships with God, family, church, and neighbors. It becomes an escape from problems such as tension and loneliness, without providing real solutions. It acts like a drug, as Marie Winn described in her book, *The Plug-In Drug*. Children are especially heavy viewers, and this heavy viewing negatively affects reading skills, intellectual learning, overall scholastic performance, and amount of parental training received. Perrotta concluded, “Our heavy investment in television viewing squanders our

time. It is a bad deal. . . . We need to bring our use of time into closer alignment with our priorities in life.”²

(3) *Television is an empty experience.* It is not truly relaxing, for the best form of relaxation is not inactivity but participation in a contrasting activity. It brings none of the benefits associated with other forms of relaxation, such as physical exercise, reading, or meditation. The constantly changing scenes make it impossible for the viewer to engage his imagination; he is carried along by the pace of the program. Viewers consistently report feeling weak, passive, drowsy, lonely, unconcentrated, and unchallenged, but they continue to watch out of habit long after most of the pleasure has gone. TV viewing creates a passive state, much like daydreaming. The viewer is highly suggestible, but has a greatly lessened ability to process information and deal intelligently with it. (Note: In view of the content of TV programming, this fact shows how damaging TV is spiritually.)

(4) *Television is detrimental to thinking.* By its very nature, TV emphasizes the superficial, the exciting, the vivid, and the individual personality. It is not conducive to logical thought. It decreases the attention span, greatly increasing the degree of stimulation needed to attract and maintain attention. It appeals to the emotions rather than the intellect. It is a form of passive rather than active learning.

(5) *Television has powerful and dangerous access to the mind.* Viewers relate to programs as real, many believing that TV characters are living people. TV derives great power from our instinctive feeling that “seeing is believing.” For the first time in history, the vast majority of people give 5 to 8 years of their lives to a small, elite group of

programmers. Throughout their lives, they see the world through the eyes of others, giving TV's view of reality an extraordinary access to their minds. Unquestionably, this will greatly affect both individuals and society as a whole.

(6) *Television modifies behavior in negative ways.* Commercial TV is not designed primarily for entertainment but for the arousal of desires. TV stimulates aggressive behavior. All researchers, regardless of moral beliefs, agree television is sexually arousing. One recent study found that the ratio of unmarried sexual activity to married sexual activity on prime time was 11 to 1. The soap operas attack the family and present sin as routine behavior. TV cultivates change and offers new role models. It magnifies trends in certain elite groups and transfers this to society as a whole; subgroups tend to lose their distinctive views.

"In many ways television programming works to broaden our thinking, so that we accept viewpoints and behavior which we previously ruled out of bounds. It deadens our reactions to social patterns which we previously found wrong and reacted against. Television cultivates the response, 'Well, what I always thought was right turns out not to be right for everyone, at least today. And what I thought was wrong may actually be right for some people. What I used to find shocking maybe isn't so bad. I suppose we have to accept it and learn to live with it.' And finally television disinhibits us from actually doing things we would have restrained ourselves from doing."³

(7) *The world view presented by television is very dangerous.* For example, TV subtly teaches that sex underlies everything and that new forms of behavior are acceptable. People believe that TV actually portrays what

the world is like. In this way it promotes conformity to the “mainstream.” For example, it cultivates youth’s dissatisfaction with their lack of sexual experience by making it appear that everyone else has it.

(8) *TV is unchristian.* It totally ignores God, concentrating exclusively on the created and not on the Creator. It consistently confuses moral issues, constantly presenting arguments in favor of situation ethics. It presents no concept of sin. “To spend many hours with the television is to fail to love God. . . . We enter a receptive communion with the images and messages of a culture. We begin with relaxing, and end with loving the world. Part of the problem is that we have lost a sense of how vulnerable our minds can be to the influences of the world. Many Christians of the past would undoubtedly be amazed at the unworried way we expose our minds to the television world.”⁴ The well-known Christian writer Malcolm Muggeridge has severely criticized TV viewing, charging that it constitutes the making and worship of graven images, in violation of the Second Commandment.

(9) *In the future, television will have an even greater impact upon our society, due to such technological advances as video cassettes and cable television.* In particular, there will be an increase in pornography. Already, between 25% and 50% of all video cassettes sold are X-rated.

(10) *It is very difficult to make positive use of TV or to control its influence in our lives.* Here are five reasons why: TV is fascinating, it is easier to watch TV than to do anything else, TV tends to produce a passive mentality, we overestimate our ability to overcome TV’s evil influence, and the possibility of countering TV’s influence by family discussion is very limited.

Perrotta suggested the following cure: repent, ask God's help to overcome, and associate with supportive Christians. He cited with approval some who have limited TV watching to one hour per day or two to three hours per week, but stated that some should stop totally. "To give it up completely is preferable to spending large amounts of time—almost against one's will—stupefied before the screen. Better to be thought odd by one's friends than to have one's life at the mercy of an electronic master."⁵

"Book Burning"

Cal Thomas, journalist and vice-president of Moral Majority, Inc, has written *Book Burning*, which discusses the ways in which our society censors Christian values. One chapter deals with television and contains the following significant observations.⁶

* Fewer than 200 producers in Hollywood and New York decide what the entire United States will watch on network television. Hollywood writer and newspaper columnist Ben Stein described this entertainment elite as egotistical, materialistic, and sexually promiscuous.

* As Stein further noted, most of this elite see religion as innocuous, irrelevant, or bizarre. When clergymen appear on the screen they are pictured as irrelevant, impotent, or fanatical. No character is motivated by religious feelings to do an important act.

* As reported in a 1981 *TV Guide* series entitled "The Gay Lobby in Hollywood," network executives have been sending scripts dealing with homosexuality to homosexual representatives for review. These people practically had

veto power over a script if it did not depict homosexuality in a favorable light. A person can only imagine what would happen if conservative Christians tried to exert such influence!

* “Prime-time television is a contest to see which network can cram in the most sex and violence in thirty-minute segments . . . It is rare to find on TV any view of the traditional family (in the twentieth century), any hint of goodness or ‘right’ values, much less any non-profane allusion to God.”

* One journalism school study found that an average of two fornications per hour occur on daytime soap operas.

* At least 29 people shot themselves trying to imitate a Russian roulette scene in a movie called *The Deer Hunter*; after they saw it on TV.

* “Television is a passive medium; once on, it is hard to shut off. Many people may personally object to the message of some shows, but leave them on because they are too tired to do anything else, or because they find them titillating.”

* Thomas concluded that Christians could stop watching TV altogether, but he preferred to work towards changing its content.

Unfortunately, it is highly unlikely that we will be able to persuade the world to clean up TV enough so that it would be wholesome to watch. At any rate, if we are waiting for TV to convert to Christianity, our only practical present alternative is to stop watching it altogether.

Movies

In 1938, independent fundamentalist John R. Rice wrote a booklet entitled *What is Wrong with the Movies?* This was based on his sermon, "The Sins of the Movies." In the introduction to the 19th edition, he stated that he had personally investigated the movies all over again to see if his original opposition to them was still valid. He concluded that "the very best of the movies are still bad, that the weight of their influence is constantly immoral and unchristian, and that Christians ought to leave them absolutely alone."⁷

Rice objected to these evils associated with the movies: the immoral lifestyles of the stars (who become role models and heroes in our society), tobacco, gambling, sex, crime, and impure love themes. He noted that producers make movies for greed and notoriety, having no feeling of responsibility to society and morality. Rice said that movies teach and encourage crime, endorse sin, teach and incite lust, break down virtue, and contribute to delinquency.

In response to objections, he pointed out: (1) A few movies are not bad, such as some for children, but if we take children to them we will break down their resistance to attending bad movies. (2) Not all moviegoers fall into the evils that movies promote, but so many viewers *are* influenced to do evil that we should all avoid movies. (3) It would be good if we could totally reform movies, but we will never be able to do so.

Teaching in Early Church History

Since television and movies are 20th century inventions, we do not find information on them in ancient church history. However, it is very enlightening to see that ancient Christians avoided the Roman theater for much the same reasons that we refuse to watch TV and movies. Prior to the time of Constantine, Christians were forbidden to “attend the theatre where the performances were lewd and the faith might be ridiculed.”⁸ “Leading Christians unhesitatingly condemned the theatre” because of the lewdness and hypocrisy associated with it.⁹

Tatian in his *Address to the Greeks* described the actor as “giving himself excessive airs of daintiness and indulging in all sorts of effeminacy . . . an epitome of superstition, a vituperator of heroic deed, an actor of murders, a chronicler of adultery, a storehouse of madness . . . and yet such a man is praised by all. But I have rejected all his falsehoods, his impiety, his practices . . . But you are led captive by such men . . . They utter ribaldry in affected tones, and go through indecent movements; your daughters and your sons behold them giving lessons in adultery on the stage.”¹⁰

Theophilus warned against attending dramas, “lest our eyes and ears be defiled, participating in the utterances there sung.”¹¹

Clement of Alexandria in his *Exhortation to the Heathen* taught some relevant principles when he described the evil paintings and statues of his society: “You are not ashamed in the eyes of all to look at representations of all forms of licentiousness which are portrayed in public places . . . Your ears are debauched,

your eyes commit fornication, your looks commit adultery.”¹² In *The Instructor*, written to new converts, he warned: “From shameful things addressed to the ears, and words and sights, we must entirely abstain. . . . Let . . . plays that are full of scurrility and of abundant gossip, be forbidden. For what base action is it that is not exhibited in the theaters? And what shameless saying is it that is not brought forward by the buffoons?”¹³

Tertullian opposed the theater in his treatise *The Shows*: “Are we not . . . enjoined to put away from us all immodesty? On this ground, again, we are excluded from the theatre, which is immodesty’s own peculiar abode, where nothing is in repute but what elsewhere is disreputable . . . If we ought to abominate all that is immodest, on what ground is it right to hear what we must not speak? . . . Why, in the same way, is it right to look on what it is disgraceful to do? How is it that the things which defile a man in going out of his mouth, are not regarded as doing so when they go in at his eyes and ears—when eyes and ears are the immediate attendants on the spirit—and that can never be pure whose servants-in-waiting are impure? . . . If tragedies and comedies are the bloody and wanton, the impious and licentious inventors of crimes and lusts, it is not good even that there should be any calling to remembrance the atrocious or the vile. What you reject in deed, you are not to bid welcome in word.”¹⁴ In this treatise, Tertullian related the actual case of a Christian woman who visited the theater and became possessed by an unclean spirit. At the time when the spirit was rebuked and cast out, the spirit reportedly said, “I did it most righteously, for I found her in my domain.”¹⁵

Cyprian condemned the crimes, adultery, incest,

effeminacy, and homosexuality portrayed by plays and pantomimes. He observed: "Adultery is learnt while it is seen; and while the mischief having public authority panders to vices, the matron, who perchance had gone to the spectacle a modest woman, returns from it immodest. . . . [An effeminate actor] is looked upon—oh shame! and looked upon with pleasure."¹⁶ Cyprian taught that an actor who converted to Christianity could not continue to act or to teach acting.¹⁷

A treatise attributed to Cyprian contains the following teaching. "What has Scripture interdicted? Certainly it has forbidden gazing upon what it forbids to be done. . . . He is shameless who in the church exorcises demons while he praises their delights in public shows . . . I am ashamed to tell what things are said; I am even ashamed to denounce the things that are done—the tricks of arguments, the cheatings of adulterers, the immodesties of women, the scurrile jokes, the sordid parasites, even the toga'd fathers of families themselves, sometimes stupid, sometimes obscene, but in all cases dull, in all cases immodest. . . . Even if they were not criminal, they are characterized by a worthlessness which is extreme, and which is little suited to believers. . . . Such things as these should be avoided by faithful Christians, as I have frequently said already; spectacles so vain, so mischievous, so sacrilegious, from which both our eyes and our ears should be guarded. We quickly get accustomed to what we hear and what we see."¹⁸

Lactantius wrote of the "contaminating [and] corrupting influence of the stage . . . For the subject of comedies are the dishonouring of virgins, or the loves of harlots . . . In like manner, the stories of the tragedians

place before the eye the parricides and incests of wicked kings, and represent tragic crimes. And what other effect do the immodest gestures of the players produce, but both teach and excite lusts? . . . Why should I speak of the actors of mimes, who hold forth instruction in corrupting influences, who teach adulteries while they feign them . . . What can young men or virgins do, when they see that these things are practiced without shame, and willingly beheld by all? They are plainly admonished of what they can do, and are inflamed with lust, which is especially excited by seeing . . . And they approve of these things, while they laugh at them, and with vices clinging to them, they return more corrupted to their apartments; and not boys only, who ought not to be inured to vices prematurely, but also old men, whom it does not become at their age to sin.”¹⁹

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* admonished Christians to avoid the theater.²⁰

John Chrysostom preached against the popular farces and pantomimes even after the Roman Empire became nominally Christian.²¹

Teaching in Later Church History

Early Calvinists prohibited theater attendance. The Puritans in 17th century England shut down the theaters when they came to power, because they regarded them as profane and sensual. They also stated that most actresses were prostitutes. John Philipp Spener, founder of the Pietist movement, warned against the theater.

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, thought it a sin

to attend the theater. Wesley wrote a letter to the mayor and city of Bristol in an effort to persuade them not to build a theater: “Most of the present stage-entertainments sap the foundation of all religion, as they naturally tend to efface all traces of piety and seriousness out of the minds of men . . . giving a wrong turn to youth especially, gay, trifling, and directly opposite to the spirit of industry and close application to business; and as drinking and debauchery of every kind are constant attendants on these entertainments, with indolence, effeminacy, and idleness.”²²

In the 19th century, the editors of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* repeatedly endorsed the ancient condemnations of the theater. They noted the emphatic “hostility to theatrical amusements, which in our days are re-asserting the deadly influence over Christians which Cyprian and Tertullian and other Fathers so solemnly denounced.”²³

In the early 20th century, many respected leaders in Christendom opposed movies, including H. A. Ironside, R. A. Torrey, the leaders of Moody Church, and Roman Catholic Archbishop George Mudelein of Chicago.²⁴ One characteristic of most Holiness denominations was their strong opposition to attending the movies. Early Pentecostals did not attend movies, and Pentecostal denominations such as The Apostolic Faith, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), the Assemblies of God, and the United Pentecostal Church officially took a stand against the practice. Many conservative Baptist groups have done the same, including the Baptist Bible Fellowship, the followers of John R. Rice, and Jerry Falwell’s Liberty Baptist College. Today, some of these groups have relaxed their stand.

Many religious groups opposed television when it came along, on the ground that it simply brought worldly movies into the home. For example, many Holiness people have rejected the use of television. Some Anabaptist groups, such as the Hutterites, refuse to own TV's, as do the United Pentecostals, many independent Baptists, and other fundamentalists.

In 1955 (shortly after TV was introduced to society), John R. Rice wrote: "Television could be, if carelessly used, a real menace to the morals and manners of Christian homes." He called television a "very serious problem."²⁵ However, he did not oppose TV ownership because he regarded it as just a radio with sight added to hearing. We reject his conclusion for several reasons. (1) As the Bible, psychological studies and common experience demonstrate, sight has a much more powerful influence upon the mind than hearing alone. (2) TV displays many sins that cannot be portrayed as vividly on radio, such as immodest dress, nudity, smoking, drinking, bloodshed, and fornication. (3) Most of TV's programming today is objectionable using the principles Rice himself established in his book against movies.

Jerry Bridges, secretary-treasurer of The Navigators, wrote in 1978: "Too many Christians, instead of resisting, are more and more giving ground to the world's constant pressure. A few years ago sincere Christians were quite selective about the movies they attended, if they attended them at all. Today the same movies that were avoided are being shown on television in the living rooms of Christians across the nation. A friend of mine told me of a young couple in full-time Christian work who came to him wanting to know if it was wrong to attend X-rated movies!"²⁶

Many well-known Christian leaders now warn of TV's evils, including James Dobson (family life specialist) and Donald Wildmon (Methodist minister who founded the National Federation for Decency). Wildmon's book, *The Home Invaders*, provides detailed evidence of TV's anti-Christian, humanistic, sinful programming. *Christianity Today* discussed TV's dangers in a major article (October 4, 1985). Leaders who advocate total abstention from TV include Malcolm Muggeridge (media figure turned Christian writer), Bill Gothard (seminar speaker), and David Wilkerson (founder of Then Challenge). Wilkerson related in *The Cross and the Switchblade* how God convicted him of wasting time by watching TV instead of praying. In *Set the Trumpet to Thy Mouth* he calls TV an idol, abomination, and accursed thing, giving "thirty-one scriptural reasons why overcoming Christians should remove the idol of television from their homes."

Entire congregations of Baptists, Nazarenes, charismatics, and other groups have sold or destroyed their TV sets. Recently, two independent Pentecostal congregations sold their televisions after studying *In Search of Holiness*. As that book documented, even the secular world has become aware of the evils of television. An experienced advertising executive has written a nonreligious book entitled *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, which advocates precisely what its title states.

Home Video

New technological advances such as home movie systems and video cassettes confront us with new situations.

Since the owner can program these systems himself, we see the possibility of harmless and even beneficial use. However, whatever is objectionable at the movie theater or on television is certainly objectionable on these systems. Therefore, we must reject the showing of Hollywood movies on home video equipment.

In some cases, families that do not view movies or TV have allowed a worldly spirit to enter their homes through video. This can become a great danger to the church. We should not own video equipment unless we are mature enough to regulate its use in accordance with holiness principles. We should view only those things that are clearly compatible with the Christian lifestyle, such as recordings of family and church activities and videos for teaching and business.

Conclusion

It is difficult to imagine how television, movies, and commercial videos could become much more worldly and ungodly than they already are. They have presented our society with the depths of immorality, displaying in graphic color things shameful even to mention (Ephesians 5:12). They feed ungodliness directly to the mind through the eyes, often in the sanctity of the home.

Those who take biblical admonitions seriously will separate from worldliness, guard their eyes, elevate their thoughts, protect their families, and redeem the time by refusing to watch television programs and movies. In doing so, they will follow the spirit of the Bible as well as that of stalwart champions of morality from early church history to the present.

FOOTNOTES

¹Kevin Perrotta, *Taming the TV Habit* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1982).

²*Ibid.*, p. 39.

³*Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 125-26.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁶Cal Thomas, *Book Burning* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, Good News Publishers, 1983), pp. 127-33.

⁷John R. Rice, *What is Wrong with the Movies?*, 19th ed. (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1938), p. 38.

⁸Bainton, p. 50.

⁹Latourette, I, 244-45.

¹⁰Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, 22, *ANF*, II, 75.

¹¹Theophilus, *To Autolytus*, 15, *ANF*, II, 115.

¹²Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, 4, *ANF*, II, 189.

¹³Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, 2.6 & 3.11, *ANF*, II, 251 & 289-90.

¹⁴Tertullian, *The Shows*, 17, *ANF*, III, 86-87.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, III, 90.

¹⁶Cyprian, *Epistles*, 1.8, *ANF*, V, 277.

¹⁷Cyprian, *Epistles*, 60, *ANF*, V, 356.

¹⁸Cyprian (?), *On the Public Shows*, 4-8, *ANF*, V, 576-78.

¹⁹Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, 6.20, *ANF*, VII, 187.

²⁰*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 2.62, *ANF*, VII, 424.

²¹Latourette, I, 245.

²²John Wesley, "To the Mayor and Corporation of Bristol," *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, rpt. 1978), XII, 128.

²³*ANF*, V, 595.

²⁴Rice, *What is Wrong with the Movies?*, pp. 98-101.

²⁵John R. Rice, *Amusements for Christians* (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1955), pp. 16, 18.

²⁶Bridges, p. 119.

7

SCRIPTURAL TEACHING ON ADORNMENT AND DRESS

“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair; or gold, or pearls, or costly array” (I Timothy 2:9).

“Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair; and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel” (I Peter 3:3).

“The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God” (Deuteronomy, 22:5).

Biblical Foundation

God desires for His people to display the spirit of

holiness in outward appearance. Paul exhorted men and women to approach God in holiness, mentioning specific problems each sex had in his day. “Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works” (I Timothy 2:8-10, *NKJV*). As stated in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, “Paul was shrewd enough to know that a woman’s dress is a mirror of her mind. Outward ostentation is not in keeping with a prayerful and devout attitude. . . . Paul leaves no doubt as to what he means, by adding a list of prohibitions relating to outward adornment. . . . The plaiting of the hair was a usual feature of Jewish women’s hairstyle, and in the more elaborate types the plaits were fastened with ribbons and bows . . . Such tendencies to ostentatious adornment must be resisted by Christian women, and the same applies to the use of jewelry and costly clothing. In all these injunctions the dominating idea is the avoidance of anything designed merely to promote ostentation, with all its accompanying dangers.”¹

To be modest means to be decent, chaste, proper, unpretentious and pure, with particular reference to dress, speech, conduct and deportment. The word *shamefacedness* (*KJV*) or *propriety* (*NKJV*) comes from the Greek word *aidos*. The *KJV* of 1611 used the word *shamefastness*, meaning to be steadfast in modesty. According to Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, *aidos* means a sense of shame, modesty, and reverence. The word *sobriety* (*KJV*) or *moderation*

(*NKJV*) comes from the Greek word *sophrosune*, which Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines as soundness of mind, sound judgment, habitual inner self-government with constant rein on all passions and desires. Thayer defined the adjective form as curbing one's desires and impulses, self-controlled, temperate.

Peter wrote, "Likewise you wives, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands" (I Peter 3:1-5, *NKJV*). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* says of the wife in I Peter 3:1-6, "She is not to seek attention by the artificialities of coiffure, jewelry, or ostentatious dress, but to be distinguished by that meek and quiet spirit so rare in the world and so prized by God. The wives of the patriarchs are seen as examples of this deportment (v. 5). Apparently gaudy and showy adornment is viewed as contrary to the spirit of self-effacement and modesty toward husbands. The same implication appears in I Timothy 2:9-12. Modesty of woman's dress is associated with becoming modesty of deportment. Apparently Christian faith implies a different standard of dress and adornment from the world's."²

Paul and Peter did not oppose the simple braiding or

arranging of the hair. Many women of the day arranged their hair lavishly and extravagantly. They often braided into their hair strands of pearls and silk cords with gold coins attached. Many wore ornamental crowns and head-dresses. These passages, then, reject very elaborate hair arrangements as well as the use of ornaments in the hair. As Fred Wight stated, "Peter and Paul condemned an elaborate braiding of women's hair . . . and the use of ornaments may possibly have been involved in the custom."³

When we take Peter's advice and look at the holy women of the Old Testament, we find that women should not wear clothing pertaining to men, and vice versa (Deuteronomy 22:5). Protestant theologian Rousas Rushdoony has said, "A fifth aspect of holiness has reference to dress. Transvestite dress is an 'abomination' to the Lord (Deuteronomy 22:5); it is a sterile and perverse hostility to God's created order."⁴ He cited Keil and Delitzsch with approval: "The immediate design of this prohibition was not to prevent licentiousness, or to oppose idolatrous practices . . . but to maintain the sanctity of that distinction of the sexes which was established by the creation of man and woman . . . Every violation or wiping out of a woman . . . was unnatural, and therefore an abomination in the sight of God."⁵ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* notes, "The distinction between man and woman should not be blurred by the one's appropriating the characteristic articles of the other (Deuteronomy 22:5). God created them male and female, with distinctive natures and functions."⁶ Other passages support this teaching. The New Testament affirms that effeminate men will not inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians

6:9-10). Nature itself teaches us to maintain a clear, visible distinction between male and female (I Corinthians 11:13-15).

The Spiritual Significance of Dress

The Bible does speak on the subject of adornment and dress. If we are to apply its teaching properly in our day, we must understand some of the underlying reasoning. Why is God concerned with the way we dress? Why is it important for Christians to maintain holiness in outward appearance?

* Our dress reflects what we truly are inside. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* says, "The clothing worn by the Hebrew people of Biblical times was graceful, modest, and exceedingly significant. They were considered so much a part of those who wore them that they not only told who and what they were, but were intended as external symbols of the individual's innermost feelings and deepest desires and his moral urge to represent God aright."⁷ We can see this by the use of special dress for religious ceremonies, festive occasions, mourning, and repentance. In this light Elizabeth Rice Handford, wife of an independent Baptist pastor, has asked, "Why does a woman insist on wearing short skirts, tight knits, low necklines, and seem oblivious to the stress she puts on others? Can it be she subconsciously invites a proposition to sin? Does she like the gleam of desire she sees in a man's eyes?"⁸

* As the preceding discussion indicates, our dress is an important statement to God. It signifies to Him our

attitude, lifestyle, and choice of identity. Some say outward appearance is irrelevant because, “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (I Samuel 16:7). However, this verse does not say God approves of sinful or ungodly appearance, but that He does not evaluate someone by outward beauty or lack of beauty. It does not give license to Christians to adorn their bodies in ungodly ways. To the contrary, it shows that God is not interested in adornment. All attention given to adornment of the body is vain and useless. We should not spend excessive time on the external, but should emphasize what God emphasizes. If we want to please God and godly people, we will not concentrate on ornamentation of the body but on that of spirit.

* Our dress reveals to others our commitments and beliefs. It is important for Christians to appear to be holy and godly in front of others. Since man does look on the outward appearance, it is important for Christians to display godliness in outward appearance. Other people know us by our fruit (Matthew 7:16-20), which means our entire lifestyle, including actions and appearance. We must not only be right in the sight of God, we must appear right in the sight of all mankind (Romans 12:17; II Corinthians 8:21). We are to abstain from all appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). One writer tried to justify the Christian woman in wearing makeup and jewelry by saying, “If the motive of her heart is right, her efforts are not wrong.”⁹ However, sincere motives are not enough; it is possible to be sincerely wrong. Despite innocent motives, if one’s actions violate God’s will and create spiritual problems for self or others, then those actions are wrong.

Dress and Christian Values

* The Christian is to exhibit self-control and moderation in all aspects of life (I Corinthians 9:25; Galatians 5:23). Temperance or self-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit. The Christian must discipline the flesh, subdue its desires, and turn the spotlight away from it. Excessive preoccupation with adornment, significant alteration of the natural physical appearance, and lavish expenditure of money on ornamentation all violate this principle.

* The Christian is not to love the things of the world (James 4:4; I John 2:15). “Be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). Other translations of this verse elaborate upon its meaning: “Do not live according to the fashions of the times” (*Norlie*). “You must not adopt the customs of this world” (*Goodspeed*). “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold” (*Phillips*). “Do not be conformed to this world—this age, fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs” (*Amplified*).

People everywhere use dress to identify themselves with certain beliefs and lifestyles. We can give many examples: dress and hairstyle of hippies in the 1960’s, Mao suits of the Communist Chinese, use of uniforms by many organizations, business clothes, clothing of ethnic groups, similarity of dress among teenagers, dress of rock stars and fans, styles worn by homosexuals, clothing worn by prostitutes, and fads and fashions in general.

If Christians follow worldly fashions, they will often identify themselves with ungodliness. They put on the uniform of the devil’s team. They associate themselves with the world’s emphasis on sensuality, its focus on ego, and its blurring of sex roles. God does not want Christians

to live in slavish conformity to worldly fashions and thus to identify with worldliness. Rather, He wants Christians to be identified clearly as such even in outward appearance.

* The Christian is to be a good steward of the blessings God has bestowed, including financial blessings (Luke 16:10-13). We are to store up treasure in heaven, not hoard it on earth (Luke 12:33-34). Jewelry, makeup, and very expensive clothing are poor investments. Without them people can still be clean, neat, attractive, and beautiful. The money saved can be used in many more beneficial ways: for necessities, for less fortunate people, and for the church. A preoccupation with outward adorning invests time and energy in something that simply is not profitable.

* The Christian is to be content with the way God has made him and the position in which he finds himself. "For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11). Everything God creates is good, and we should not try to alter our natural, God-given appearance by using false colors for the face, false hair dyes, false eyelashes, or false hair. What is wrong with the way God made us? What is wrong with the complexion and hair we inherited? Why be ashamed of what we are? Why base our identity on the outward man? Why evaluate self-worth by physical appearance?

Instead of accepting themselves for what they are and what God wants them to be, many mistakenly try to fight nature. The Bible teaches that gray hair is a crown of glory and a mark of beauty or splendor (Proverbs 16:31; 20:29), yet many people with a false sense of values try to change it. Jesus taught that people could not alter the

color of their hair (Matthew 5:36), yet many people today try to prove Him wrong. Nature itself teaches a distinction between male and female in behavior and appearance (Romans 1:26-27; I Corinthians 11:13-15), yet society today tries to destroy that God-ordained separation.

* Jewelry and makeup reflect a false set of values. They overemphasize the temporal, the unimportant, the physical, and even the ungodly. One author tried to justify jewelry and makeup by saying, "God does not require a drab and dull appearance. Why shouldn't a woman try to look nice? . . . The extreme view that God requires a dull appearance (often accompanied with a dull personality) is certainly not consistent with the over-all teaching of the Bible."¹⁰

This statement actually insults both God and women. Who says a woman is dull and drab unless she wears makeup and jewelry? Who says a woman's personality is dull unless she attempts to look seductive or showy? Certainly a Christian woman should seek to be attractive in both appearance and personality. However, we reject the notion that it takes cosmetics to make a woman attractive. What is wrong with God's creative ability? What is wrong with natural beauty? What is wrong with the beauty that emanates from within? The movie producers in Hollywood, the fashion designers in Paris, and the advertising agencies on Madison Avenue in New York will tell us that beauty comes from sex appeal, bottles, tubes, potions, colors, dyes, and the latest fashions, but why should Christians believe this satanic deception? According to Paul and Peter, a woman develops her beauty by concentrating on spiritual values.

Detrimental Effects of Unholy Dress

* Immodest clothing, jewelry, and makeup feed the lust of the flesh, which is one of the three major areas of worldliness (I John 2:16). The woman who wears these things emphasizes physical sex appeal towards men to whom she is not married. In the minds of self and others, she defines her identity in terms of appeal to sinful lusts.

* Immodest clothing, jewelry, and makeup appeal to the lust of the eyes, which is the second major area of worldliness. Both psychology and common experience tell us that the male sex drive is often triggered by visual stimuli alone. Many women do not fully realize how visually oriented the male is. Jesus recognized this problem, for He said it was possible to commit adultery with the eyes only (Matthew 5:28).

Women who wear immodest clothing and adorn themselves sensually are actually placing temptation before men. If they cause someone to sin, God will not hold them blameless. A fundamental principle of Christian liberty is that we should not do anything to cause others to stumble, but this type of adornment uses one of the most dangerous forms of temptation to do precisely that.

* Immodest clothing, jewelry, and makeup cater to the pride of life, the third major area of worldliness. These things breed pride and vanity, building up the human ego. They make a woman feel powerful because she can attract lustful attention. They make a woman proud of her own appearance. They give honor to the flesh, which actually contains no good thing (Romans 7:18), instead of giving honor to things of true value, such as good works and

beauty of spirit, which can only come by God's grace. In this context, we note that God hates a proud look, not only a proud spirit (Proverbs 6:16-17).

* External appearance has a profound impact on the inner self. What we wear can drastically change our moods in the short-term and our attitudes in the long-term. We become what we think upon and spend time upon. If we act out a part long enough it affects the way we think about ourselves. The perceptions others have of us also affect the way we think about ourselves. If we are with someone who thinks we are bold, humorous, brilliant, or seductive, we tend to act in accordance with those expectations.

Many times what we wear helps to mold their expectations as well as our own. When a woman wears an immodest dress, she begins to think of herself as seductive and acts accordingly. Other people perceive her as provocative and treat her as such, which reinforces her behavior. In short, appearance both reflects and to a large degree determines what we are in the eyes of self and others.

Elizabeth Handford has elaborated on this subject: "Clothing a woman puts on can affect how she feels. . . . What you wear affects your performance. . . . How you dress does affect how you feel! . . . This is, I believe, an important reason for a woman to dress modestly—not only for the sake of those who might be tempted to sin, but for her own sake. She herself may be affected by what she wears. . . . Does she put on a scanty skirt because she feels provocative, or does the skirt bring out her feeling of seductiveness? Perhaps it is both. . . . A woman sets herself up for falling into sin when she chooses hair styles

and clothes that are sensual. They will affect how she feels, and she won't want to resist temptation."¹¹

We can give many specific examples. Girls who wear pants all the time gradually become more and more masculine in their behavior. They sit, recline, and prop their legs up in masculine ways. When they do wear dresses, they often do not know how to act with modesty, grace, and femininity. Many men prefer for their wives or girlfriends to wear dresses, particularly on special occasions, because they look and act more feminine this way.

When a woman begins to wear a new article of jewelry, such as a ring, often her behavior and attitude will change noticeably. By her actions and looks she manifests pride, vanity, and a desire to be seen and noticed.

When a girl first begins to wear makeup and to dress immodestly there is often an observable change in her spirit. She becomes aware of her sexual power and often delights to influence men by it. It brings out a dark current of sensuality and seduction.

On one occasion, I observed a group of Pentecostal women putting on makeup for a video production. I was shocked at the subtle change in their conduct and the conduct of men towards them. At first, there was some nervousness and embarrassment, covered up by hesitant humor. Soon, however, the humor, behavior of the women, and comments of the men became bold and suggestive. The atmosphere became charged with sensuality.

* Ultimately, ungodly dress styles have a profound impact on society as a whole. Immodesty of dress, jewelry, and makeup teach false values to the entire society. In our day, a new generation has grown up not knowing

anything else, and this has distorted their value system. Just because a woman wears slacks certainly does not mean she personally has usurped her husband's role or condoned lesbianism. However, when all women in society wear slacks, the distinction between male and female blurs. The greater masculinity in dress and conduct helps to confuse societal, familial, and sexual roles.

The feminist movement is certainly aware of this; they promote the wearing of pants as part of their "liberation." Feminist Susan Brownmiller's recent book *Femininity* holds that femininity is "a nostalgic tradition of imposed limitations" and that women who adopt a feminine style are "trapped."¹² As part of her revolt against the God-given distinction between male and female, she stopped wearing dresses and skirts altogether.

This is precisely the development God sought to prevent when He instituted Deuteronomy 22:5. An individual woman may not see how her particular violation of this principle will cause great moral damage to her, but we must obey God whether we understand His reasons or not. When air entire society abandons God's law, then the consequences become more obvious.

In light of all these problems, why would a Christian woman want to use makeup and jewelry? For whom is she adorning herself? If for God, it does not impress Him at all. If for herself, it is a dangerous, unjustifiable expression of pride. If for her husband, he should be more interested in her inner beauty, and any physical display should be in private for his eyes only. If for others, it is an unjustifiable expression of ostentation or seduction. If unmarried, she should seek to attract those interested in true beauty rather than in false, transient trappings.

Biblical Examples: Immodesty

The Bible contains a number of examples that illustrate the problems we have discussed.

When Adam and Eve sinned they became aware of their nakedness and sought to cover themselves with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). Originally, God created their bodies with glory and beauty. There was no need for false modesty between husband and wife, for they were one flesh. After they sinned, however, they recognized that wholesome, God-given sexuality had the capacity for evil. God gave them a sense of shame so they would cover their bodies, thereby minimizing temptation for sexual sin in the future. The clothing they made was inadequate; God had to cover them with garments made from animal skins (Genesis 3:21).

From that time forward, immodest exposure of the body has often resulted in sin. In fact, "to uncover nakedness" is an Old Testament idiomatic expression for sex acts (Leviticus 18:6-19). Ham's reaction to seeing the nakedness of his father Noah was sinful (Genesis 9:20-25). When David saw Bathsheba bathing, he yielded to the temptation to commit adultery (II Samuel 11:1-5).

Satan delights to cause immodest exposure of the body. The demons in the maniac of Gadara caused him to tear his clothes off, but when Jesus cast the demons out the man began to wear clothes (Luke 8:26-36). A demon-possessed man tore the clothes off seven Jews who tried to exorcise him (Acts 19:13-17).

God compared Babylon's downfall to a woman's shame in having her nakedness exposed, when she bares her leg and uncovers her thigh (Isaiah 47:1-3).

The Bible also shows that certain types of clothing can be particularly associated with adulterous behavior. When Judah's daughter-in-law seduced him, she took off her widow's garments and put on prostitutes' garb (Genesis 38:14-19). The immoral woman in Proverbs 7:10 wore the attire of a harlot.

Biblical Examples: Makeup

Without exception, the Bible always associates the use of makeup with wicked women. When heathen Queen Jezebel tried to seduce Jehu so that he would not execute her, she used makeup and ornamentation. "And when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window" (II Kings 9:30, *NKJV*). Solomon warned young men to avoid the immoral woman, who would use painted eyelids as one of her seductive techniques. "Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, Nor let her allure you with her eyelids" (Proverbs 6:25, *NKJV*).

God compared His unfaithful people to an adulteress who adorns herself for her lovers. "And when you are plundered, What will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, Though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, Though you enlarge your eyes with paint, In vain you will make yourself fair; Your lovers will despise you; They will seek your life" (Jeremiah 4:30, *NKJV*). "Furthermore you sent for men to come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and there they came. And you washed yourself for them, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself with ornaments" (Ezekiel 23:40, *NKJV*). (The

name of one of Job's daughters in Job 42:14 means "horn of eye paint," but this no more endorses the wearing of makeup than the names Ruby and Jewel endorse the wearing of jewelry or the name Jade endorses the contents of a jade box.)

Biblical Examples: Jewelry

The Bible frequently associates jewelry with a proud attitude, an immoral lifestyle, or pagan worship. When Jacob went back to Bethel to renew his relationship with God, he disposed of all the idols and earrings belonging to his family (Genesis 35:1-7).

The Israelites melted down earrings and made a golden calf to worship (Exodus 32:2-4). After Moses interceded for them, God spared their lives but announced He would not go with them to Canaan. "And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments. For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiffnecked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb" (Exodus 33:4-6). As a sign of their humility, repentance, and consecration, God ordered them to take off these badges of vanity, pride, and lust. They gave all their jewelry to God, to be melted down and used in construction of the Tabernacle (Exodus 35:22).

Where did they get this jewelry originally? They

received “jewels” of silver and gold from the Egyptians (Exodus 11:2). The more accurate translation is probably “articles” of silver and gold. (See *NKJV, NIV.*) In any case, God meant for them to take the Egyptian gold and silver for use in His service, not for personal ornamentation. Another time the Israelites captured much jewelry from the Midianites, and again they offered it all to God (Numbers 31:50-54).

In Gideon’s day, Ishmaelites and Midianites were distinguished from Israelites by their use of earrings and other jewelry (Judges 8:24-27). This jewelry became a snare for Gideon and his men. When they captured it in war, he fashioned it into a gold ephod (sacred garment) to which they offered idolatrous worship.

When Jezebel tried to seduce Jehu, she “tired her head” (II Kings 9:30) or “adorned her head” (*NKJV*). In light of the context, it is unlikely that she simply arranged her hair in a modest manner. It means she arranged her hair elaborately and apparently put ornaments on her head or in her hair.

The adulterous woman in Jeremiah 4:30 used extravagant clothing and ornaments of gold to attract her lovers. The adulterous woman in Ezekiel 23:40 also allured her lovers by ornaments. Her many lovers gave her bracelets and crowns, but God warned that all her jewels would be stripped away in judgment (Ezekiel 23:26, 42). Again, in Hosea 2:13, God likened His unfaithful people to an adulterous woman who wore jewelry: “She decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the LORD.”

The Lord pronounced judgment upon the proud, haughty, vain women of Jerusalem who gloried in their

ornamentation. “Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, making a jingling with their feet, therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will uncover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the finery: the jingling anklets, the scarves, and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the veils; the headdresses, the leg ornaments, and the headbands; the perfume boxes, the charms, and the rings; the nose jewels, the festal apparel, and the mantles; the outer garments, the purses, and the mirrors; the fine linen, the turbans, and the robes” (Isaiah 3:16-23, *NKJV*).

The perfume boxes, purses, and mirrors were usually worn on the body as ornamentation. Most of the listed items can be used only for ornamentation and so always come under condemnation for their association with pride and vanity. Some of them, such as the articles of clothing, can be used innocently, but in this case they too were worn with ostentation and pride. They come under the condemnation of this passage whenever they are worn with the wrong spirit or with great extravagance, expense, and show.

The spirit of Esther stands in contrast to this. When a woman was brought before the Persian king, she was allowed access to anything she desired in order to beautify herself (Esther 2:13). This included jewelry and cosmetics, which ancient royal courts used. Esther, however, desired and requested nothing, but used only what the king’s eunuch (who had charge of her) selected (Esther 2:15). The Bible only records that she used oil of myrrh, perfume, and other preparations to purify (beautify) the skin (Esther 2:12).

Application: Sex Distinction in Dress

In applying the foregoing scriptural concepts, we can draw several important biblical principles and make practical applications for our day.

At least part of our daily attire must be exclusively associated with our gender, providing an unmistakable visual identification at first impression. Men should not wear attire that is distinctively female, which for Western clothing means dresses and skirts. Women should not wear attire that is distinctively male, which for Western clothing means trousers, slacks, or pants.

Different cultures have different types of clothing. If clothing is modest and if there is a clear differentiation between male and female, the precise style of clothing in a particular culture is not important. Care should be taken to dress appropriately for the culture and occasion. For example, it may be proper for a Scotsman to wear a kilt for a ceremonial occasion, but improper for an American male to wear the same thing to the office. Interestingly, priests in the Old Testament wore breeches or trousers (Leviticus 6:10; 16:4), indicating that this has been distinctively masculine attire in Judeo-Christian culture from the earliest times.

Application: Modesty of Dress

We seek to be decent, chaste, and proper in dress, specifically avoiding immodest exposure of the body before someone of the opposite sex (other than one's spouse). What is considered immodest? In answering this

question we must look to the biblical context, the purpose behind modesty, our culture, and our motives.

If we take I Timothy 2:9 seriously, we must agree that some clothing is immodest. Those articles of clothing which are one step away from nudity—such as bikinis, miniskirts, shorts, and halter tops—must be considered immodest. Otherwise, no clothing could be immodest.

We must ask what practices of the time concerned God enough for Him to inspire this passage. What clothing did Paul have in mind when he warned against immodesty of dress? In a day when women wore robes to the ankle, what type of immodest dress existed? If Paul found immodest clothing in an age characterized by greater modesty of dress than our own, certainly he would consider many styles of clothing today to be immodest. As Chapter 8 will note, many women of the time tucked in their tunics above the knee for convenience in certain activities, and the early church fathers considered this immodest. God was concerned about modesty of dress in a day when even exposing the upper leg was considered immodest. In Isaiah 47:2-3 God considered baring the leg and uncovering the thigh to be shameful exposure of nakedness. This gives us a good idea as to what God would regard as the minimum standard of modesty, regardless of culture.

The basic reason for modesty of dress is to subdue the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The exposed body tends to arouse improper thoughts in both wearer and onlooker. To implement the purpose behind modest dress, the body should basically be covered, except for those parts which we must use openly for normal living. This suggests that clothes should cover the torso and upper limbs. Reasonable guidelines, then, would

be women's dresses over the knee and sleeves to the elbow. In addition, we should avoid low necklines, sleeveless dresses or shirts, very tight clothes, very thin clothes, and slacks on women because they immodestly reveal the feminine contours of upper leg, thigh, and hip. Likewise, swimming in mixed company is immodest. Since the primary effect of makeup is to highlight sex appeal, we reject makeup as immodest.

To some degree modesty is culturally relative. We must certainly dress in a manner that would be considered modest for the occasion and in the judgment of our culture. For example, 19th century society considered it improper for a woman to expose any of her leg in public. Applying principles of Christian liberty, a Christian woman of that day should not have worn a knee-length dress, for this would have brought reproach upon her and her Lord. However, there must be a minimum of modesty that is absolute. Otherwise, if society condoned total nudity, Christians could walk around nude. If so, we could delete I Timothy 2:9 from the Bible as irrelevant.

Finally, the heart must be modest and motives pure. Conduct, gestures, gait, body language, and speech must be modest. If a woman wants to, she can display her body immodestly and act seductively even in the most modest of dresses. We must never use dress to promote immodest conduct, and no degree of external modesty can cover up an immodest, lustful spirit.

A sign posted in an Orthodox Jewish district of Jerusalem provides an interesting definition of modesty for women's dress:

“Passage permitted ‘only’ to women dressed modestly!

Long dress, lower than knee length (no slacks).
Long sleeves, beyond elbow length.
Closed Neckline”
(*National Geographic*, July 1985, p. 30).

Application: Adornment

Christians should avoid outward adornment (decoration or ornamentation). True adornment in the sight of God and godly men is holiness of spirit, not physical beauty. As part of Christian stewardship of the body, we believe in being physically fit, neat, clean, and attractive. We should not place undue emphasis on physical beauty, but should accept whatever God has given us. We should seek to present ourselves as best we can using natural rather than artificial methods. We should avoid colored makeup, tattoos, and ornamental jewelry because their sole purpose is ornamentation of the body. We have seen many Old Testament passages that associate jewelry and especially makeup with evil. I Timothy 2:9 and I Peter 3:3 stand in direct opposition to gold, silver, and precious stones for personal ornamentation; apparently they are always excessive in appearance and cost.

Some minor aspects of ornamentation are allowable since they do not highlight sexuality (as makeup does) or extravagance (as jewelry does), are not condemned by Scripture (as both makeup and jewelry are), and are considered standard attire. Examples are colored clothing, ribbons, ties, and scarves.

We emphasize simplicity and functional use for things which have a valid purpose other than ornamen-

tation such as hairstyles and clothes. We can try to be attractive in these areas, but even here we must take care not to be too elaborate and showy, for both Paul and Peter warned against extravagant hair arrangement and clothing.

Some things classified as jewelry actually have a valid purpose other than adornment, such as watches. If their primary purpose is functional use, not ornamentation, nothing is wrong with using them in moderation. Some things have both functional and ornamental use, such as cuff links, tie clasps, tie bars, watch chains, and brooches. We must carefully evaluate their use if we use them at all.

Moderation in cost is an important scriptural concept. We reject extreme luxury and ostentation in all areas of life. In accordance with the explicit teaching of I Timothy 2:9 and I Peter 3:3, we do not wear extremely expensive or extravagant clothing. This is another reason why we do not wear jewelry.

When does clothing, hair arrangement, and functional jewelry become extravagant, excessively ornamental, or unreasonably expensive? The answer may vary somewhat depending on culture, society, station in life, and occasion. Here are some questions to consider in making this evaluation:

- * What is my motive for wearing it? Do I wear it out of pride, show, a desire to be noticed, a desire to provoke envy?

- * Is this wise stewardship on my part? How does it compare with the time and money I spend for necessities, for others, for God's church?

- * How do others view it? Do they see it as flaunting wealth, showy, a manifestation of pride, or an object of

envy? Do they see it as inconsistent with the Bible's stand and my own stand against ornamentation in general?

* What would Jesus do? Would He wear it? Would He spend His time and money in this fashion?

Rings

What about rings? Rings are undoubtedly a form of jewelry. There seems to be no clear way to distinguish a finger ring from an earring, a nose ring, or a bracelet. As with other jewelry, the primary motivation for wearing rings seems to be for ornamentation, show, and impressing others. One possible exception might be wedding rings, particularly simple wedding bands. Arguably, they could have a functional use far more significant than any ornamental use. However, many people use even wedding rings to satisfy their desire for expensive, showy ornamentation. Both toleration and caution are necessary in this area.

We personally do not wear wedding rings because: (1) They are uncomfortably close to other types of jewelry that we avoid based on the New Testament prohibition against wearing gold, pearls, and costly array. (2) We do not wish to appear inconsistent in our stand against jewelry. (3) We do not wish to give others an excuse to wear showy rings primarily for the sake of adornment. (4) There is no evidence for them in the New Testament; in fact, some maintain that they are pagan in origin. (5) As a practical matter, in our society wedding rings do not significantly deter advances by the opposite sex. Christian conduct and deportment are far more effective. (6) We

desire to make a consecration to God in this area, after Old Testament examples.

Objections to Deuteronomy 22:5

At this point, let us consider a number of objections to the teaching on adornment and dress. Below are several that have been raised.¹³

* *“Deuteronomy 22:5 does not apply to us today.”* This objection points to other teachings in the same chapter, such as the prohibition on plowing with an ox and a donkey together (verse 10), the prohibition on mixing wool and linen together in one garment (verse 11), and the instruction to wear fringes on garments (verse 12). If these do not apply, why should the prohibition of verse 5? This argument is not valid because chapter 22 contains laws against adultery (verse 22), rape (verses 23-27), and incest (verse 30). Are these laws void? Obviously not.

The key to interpreting this chapter is to realize that Christ's death abolished the ceremonial law, but not the moral law (Colossians 2:16-17); God's moral law stands forever. Verses 10-12 teach the principle of separation. The Israelites fulfilled this ceremonial law physically, but today we fulfill the principle spiritually. Verse 5, however, is manifestly part of the moral law: (1) God designed it to prevent certain moral evils such as blurring of sexual roles and homosexuality. (2) It enunciates the principle of distinction between male and female, taught by nature as well as other scriptural passages. (3) The verse itself says those who do the prohibited acts are “abomination unto the LORD thy God,” which means something

God detests or hates. God's character never changes, and neither does His love for righteousness or hatred of sin. If He hated a certain practice in the Old Testament, He hates it now.

* *“Deuteronomy 22:5 was only given to oppose cultic transvestitism (transvestite behavior associated with pagan worship).”* If so, that hardly commends the practice to us today. In fact, Satan incorporated it as part of pagan worship because he knew it would violate God's law, contradict the natural order, and cause problems for society.

Homosexuality and prostitution were associated with pagan religions of that day, but was that the only reason God condemned those practices? Using this objection, we could condone these practices today. This objection also ignores New Testament support for distinction of male and female in appearance.

* *“There was little difference between male and female clothing in the Old Testament. In fact, men wore skirts.”* Deuteronomy 22:5 stands as evidence that there was a significant difference. Men and women wore different types of robes and headgear, and women wore veils. “Among the Hebrews neither sex was permitted by Mosaic law to wear the same form of clothing as was used by the other (Deuteronomy 22:5). A few articles of female clothing carried somewhat the same name and basic pattern, yet there was always sufficient difference in embossing, embroidery, and needlework so that in appearance the line of demarcation between men and women could be readily detected.”¹⁴ Even in modern times Wight noted, “Among the Bedouin Arabs of Palestine there is great care taken that either sex shall

not imitate the other in matters of dress.”¹⁵

These differences were significant enough for one to ascertain a person’s gender from far away, as the story of Rebekah and Isaac indicates (Genesis 24:64-65). The “skirts” of the *KJV* are “robes,” as both *NKJV* and *NIV* translate.

* “*Deuteronomy 22:5 really means a woman should not wear a soldier’s clothing and vice versa.*” This objection alleges that the Hebrew word for “man” in this verse should be rendered “soldier.” The word is *geber* instead of the more common word *ish*. However, no major translation has adopted this reading.

According to Gesenius’ *Hebrew Lexicon*, *geber* means “a man . . . Specially—(a) opp. to a woman, a male, Deuteronomy 22:5; Jeremiah 30:6; 31:22; and even used of male offspring newly born; Job 3:3 . . . (b) opp. to wife, a husband, Proverbs 6:34 . . . (e) a soldier . . . Judges 5:30.”¹⁶ *Nelson’s Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* says, “The root meaning ‘to be strong’ is no longer obvious in the usage of *geber*, since it is a synonym of *ish*. . . . A *geber* denotes a ‘male,’ as an antonym of a ‘woman.’”¹⁷ It also says the word appears sixty times in the Hebrew Old Testament. According to *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, in none of these places is it translated as “soldier” in English. Even if this objection were valid, why was it detestable for a soldier to wear feminine attire? It could only be due to the larger principle of sex distinction in dress.

* “*Modern work and sports activities require women to wear pants.*” This statement is historically false; even the pioneer women of the past were able to get their work done in dresses. If women find themselves in an activity

so masculine that they are forced to wear pants, they should re-evaluate their own sex role in life. In any event, convenience is a poor excuse for violating the Word of God.

Pants are definitely not required for modesty, for they reveal the feminine outlines of leg, thigh, and hip. A girl who always wears dresses can learn how to conduct herself modestly in most activities. Even in very strenuous activities there are ways to protect both modesty and femininity. For example, a woman can wear a jump suit or a ski suit under a skirt. In cold weather, women can dress as warmly as men by using hose, stockings, leotards, long skirts, or leg warmers.

* *“Pants are made in women’s styles today, so they do not violate Deuteronomy 22:5.”* Even if we accepted this objection, it would not permit women to wear many things that they do such as men’s jeans and military fatigues. In our culture pants have always been associated with men, so that all forms of pants are still “that which pertaineth to a man.” Accepting women’s pants would leave men without any style of clothing that is uniquely male. Furthermore, the ways in which women’s pants are distinguished from men’s pants are very minor. The first impression, the silhouette, the view from a distance, the overall picture is still the same. (It is no use responding that a woman’s curves make the difference, because this retort would concede that women’s pants are immodest!)

The Pulpit Commentary clearly states the teachings of Deuteronomy 22:5 and dispels the foregoing objections: “*That which pertaineth to a man; literally, the apparatus of a man, (including, not dress merely, but implements, tools, weapons, and utensils).* This is an ethical regulation

in the interests of morality. There is no reference . . . to the practice of priests at heathen festivals of wearing masks of their gods. Whatever tends to obliterate the distinction between the sexes tends to licentiousness; and that the one sex should assume the dress of the other has always been regarded as unnatural and indecent.”¹⁸

Objections in Favor of Makeup

“The Bible speaks favorably of perfume in the Song of Solomon. Using a pleasant smell is the same as using a pleasant color in makeup.” This objection ignores the evidence of Scripture itself. The Bible does mention perfumes favorably, but it always mentions makeup unfavorably.

Furthermore, there is a qualitative difference between smell and sight. The Bible contains strong warnings about the lust of the eyes, but nowhere mentions the lust of the nose. The Bible describes the eye as the light of the body, but does not give a prominent role to the nose. Compared to vision, smell plays a very minor part in sensory perception and in stimulation of thought life. Perfume could possibly play a small part in seduction (and should not be so used), but it has only a fraction of the power that immodest dress, makeup, and ornaments have to attract attention, accentuate sensuality, and encourage lust.

Perfume has always been considered part of a chaste, modest woman’s attire in a way that makeup has not. Perfume helps to mask, eliminate, and replace unpleasant body odors caused by bacterial activity and perspiration. The visual counterpart to this is not to apply colored

makeup, but to wash and cleanse the skin, using water, soap, oil, and other cleansing preparations.

* *“Our culture now accepts the use of makeup; the negative connotations of makeup no longer exist.”* Perhaps society does not associate makeup with harlotry as it used to, but does this mean God no longer thinks of those associations? Are the illustrations of the prophets no longer relevant? No matter how much society changes, we must seek to please God rather than man. Also, society’s acceptance does not change all the spiritual reasoning we have discussed. Makeup still highlights lust, sensuality, vanity, and pride as much as it ever did. The effects on the wearer and the observer are still as powerful as ever. It still teaches a distorted value system as much as always.

* *“The Old Testament descriptions of wicked women who wore makeup also describe those women doing acceptable things such as washing with water and wearing colored clothing.”* Many acceptable things can be done by an evil person or can become evil only because of an evil motive. However, makeup does not fall under this category. The other things mentioned all have valid purposes other than ornamentation or seduction, but makeup does not. The other things are all mentioned favorably in other passages of Scripture, but makeup is not.

Objections in Favor of Jewelry

* *“Godly people in the Old Testament used jewelry.”* To a limited extent this is true; however, we must keep in mind these points: (1) From Old Testament to New Testa-

ment God has progressively revealed more and more of His perfect will for His people. Through the Holy Spirit, we have power to live a holy life in a way that Old Testament saints did not. The inspired writings of Paul and Peter supersede any contrary examples from the Old Testament. (2) Even in the Old Testament God pointed to a high standard in this area (Genesis 35:4; Exodus 33:4-6) and alluded to the dangers of jewelry (Isaiah 3:16-23; Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 23:40). (3) God moved on His people to dedicate to His service the jewelry they acquired (Exodus 35:22; Numbers 31:50-54). (4) Heavy use of jewelry seems to have been primarily associated with heathen peoples (Numbers 31:50-54; Judges 8:24-27). (5) The few passages that do mention jewelry in a favorable light are symbolic of blessings or spiritual treasures and do not endorse personal ornamentation (Proverbs 1:9; 25:12; Song of Solomon 5:14-15; Ezekiel 16:11-13; Malachi 3:17). (6) When godly people used jewelry, there was usually an important functional value other than adornment.

Here are some examples of Old Testament functional use: (1) People in ancient times used seals or signet rings to transact legal business (Genesis 41:42; Esther 8:2, 8; Haggai 2:23; Luke 15:22). Judah's "signet and bracelet" was actually a seal with its cord (Genesis 38:18, *NKJV* and *NIV*). (2) Crowns, chains, and bands (*KJV* "bracelet") were used to signify royalty or high official position (Genesis 41:42; II Samuel 1:10; Daniel 5:29). Like the signet, they conveyed legal authority. The high priest's use of precious stones had a similar function, with the added dimension of worship (Exodus 28:17-38). (3) Jewelry was used as a wedding token, with the bride and

groom adorning themselves for each other (Genesis 24:22, 47; Song of Solomon 1:10-17; Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 2:32). (4) In ancient times when coinage was rare, precious stones and metals were important means of saving or giving something of monetary value (Job 42:11). We find only one clear exception to these categories: ornaments on clothing as a sign of luxury in Saul's reign (II Samuel 1:24-27).

Wight stated, "As a rule, Jewish men did not indulge in extravagance of dress, and there was little ornamentation among them. . . . Certain men wore a ring on their right hand, or suspended by a cord or chain around the neck. Actually this was the signet ring or seal, and served as the personal signature of its owner, and so was not usually worn as an ornament."¹⁹ According to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, finger rings were used to signify rank and seal rings worn on a cord or on the hand were used to seal documents.²⁰ It says the ring worn by the prodigal son had this same general meaning.

* *"I Timothy 2:9 uses an idiomatic expression, which does not mean to avoid all outward adorning, but only to emphasize inward adorning more."* Under this view Paul meant, "Do not adorn yourselves on the outside only, but adorn yourselves inwardly also." However, no major version translates the passage in this way.

This is a devious interpretation, for it adds words to the Bible, twisting them to mean the opposite of what they literally say. Using this interpretation Romans 13:13-14 would mean, "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness only, not in chambering and wantonness only, not in strife and envying only, But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ also." I John 2:15

would mean, “Love not the world only, neither the things that are in the world only.” I Timothy 3:8 would mean a deacon could be doubletongued, given to much wine, and greedy of filthy lucre as long as he was grave also.

In reality, I Timothy 2:9-10 describes two contrasting, mutually incompatible lifestyles. To be modest, shame-faced, and sober is the opposite of wearing gold, pearls, elaborately ornamented hair, and costly clothing. Verse 8 teaches men to lift holy hands in prayer, without wrath or doubting. It does not imply that wrath and doubting are permissible if the men have holy hands too. Verse 9 draws a parallel with verse 8 by saying “in like manner.” Verse 8 teaches men to put away certain unholy things and acquire certain contrasting holy things, while verse 9 does the same for women.

* *“I Peter 3:3 is not an absolute prohibition on wearing of jewelry, for then it would prohibit all use of gold and all wearing of clothes.”* This verse tells women, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes” (NIV). The KJV says “putting on of apparel,” but the NKJV corroborates the NIV by saying “putting on fine apparel.” Interpreted this way, the passage parallels I Timothy 2:9 exactly. Like that verse, it is an absolute prohibition on elaborate hair arrangement, gold jewelry, and extravagant clothing.

If we interpret I Peter 3:3 to refer to all hair arrangements, all wearing of gold, and all wearing of clothing, then obviously it is not an absolute prohibition. Even so, it would prohibit the use of such things for adornment and show. Clothing has many other uses besides adornment, such as modesty, warmth, and protection. Hair

arrangement also has other functions such as neatness and convenience. Even gold itself or gold colored metal can possibly have other functional uses such as in watches, glasses, and teeth. However, gold earrings, nose rings, necklaces, and so on can have no function other than adornment. Even if I Peter 3:3 were only a prohibition on the use of certain things for adornment, it would permit functional use of clothing and gold metal but still forbid the use of gold jewelry.

* *“If Christians should not wear gold and jewels, why did God make them? Why will they be part of the New Jerusalem?”* This objection misses the whole point of our refusal to wear gold and jewelry. We recognize gems and metals as beautiful things created by God for our visual pleasure and for many practical uses. For example, gold’s inertness and the diamond’s hardness make them very valuable for many industrial uses. God simply forbids us to use these things for personal adornment because of the many spiritual dangers to self and others in this present evil world. These things can still be used in God’s service and for our pleasure, particularly in the life to come.

Chapter 8 will present historical teaching on the subject of adornment and dress and will conclude our discussion of the subject.

FOOTNOTES

¹Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Vol. 14 of *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (1957), pp. 74-75.

²*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Charles Pfeiffer and Everett Harrison (eds.) (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 1448.

³Fred Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), p. 100.

⁴Rushdoony, p. 87.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 435, quoting C. F. Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), III, 409.

⁶*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 185.

⁷"Dress," *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, Merrill Tenney (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), p. 225.

⁸Elizabeth Rice Handford, *Your Clothes Say It For You* (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1976), p. 88.

⁹Ralph Woodrow, *Women's Adornment: What Does the Bible Really Say?* (Riverside, Cal.: By the author, 1976), p. 27.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 27, 35.

¹¹Handford, pp. 81-84.

¹²John Leo, "The Comeback of Womanly Wiles," *Time Magazine*, January 30, 1984, p. 82.

¹³Most of these objections can be found in Woodrow.

¹⁴"Dress," *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 227.

¹⁵Wight, p. 97.

¹⁶William Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, Samuel Tregelles (trans.) (1847; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 156.

¹⁷*Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Merrill Unger and William White (eds.) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), p. 241.

¹⁸Spence and Exell (eds.), *The Pulpit Commentary*, V, 355.

¹⁹Wight, p. 100.

²⁰"Dress and Ornaments," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), I, 871.

8

HISTORICAL TEACHING ON ADORNMENT AND DRESS

“For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves” (1 Peter 3:5).

Chapter 7 discussed the scriptural teaching on adornment and dress. This chapter will show that many leaders throughout church history have firmly advocated biblical standards in this area.

Clement of Alexandria

The ante-Nicene church fathers were forthright in their teaching on adornment and dress. The writings of Clement of Alexandria are surprisingly relevant to our day. Most of the following excerpts are taken from his book for new converts, *The Instructor*.

Clement taught modesty of dress.¹ "We [must] keep pure from shameful deeds: on the one hand, from exhibiting and exposing parts of the body which we ought not; and on the other, from beholding what is forbidden. . . . Let [women] be well clothed—without by raiment, within by modesty." He warned against extremely thin or tight clothing. "Superfluous and diaphanous materials are the proof of a weak mind, covering as they do the shame of the body with a slender veil. For luxurious clothing, which cannot conceal the shape of the body, is no more a covering. For such clothing, falling close to the body, takes its form more easily, and adhering as it were to the flesh, receives its shape, and marks out the woman's figure, so that the whole make of the body is visible to spectators." He felt that the proper degree of modesty for a woman in his culture was to wear robes to the ankle and veils around the face.

According to an editorial footnote, in Clement's day women frequently tucked up their tunics to give freedom to the knee, and he warned against this practice. "For neither is it seemly for the clothes to be above the knee, as they say was the case with the Lacedaemonian virgins; nor is it becoming for any part of a woman to be exposed. Though you may with great propriety use the language addressed to him who said, 'Your arm is beautiful; yes, but it is not for the public gaze. Your thighs are beautiful; but, was the reply, for my husband alone.'"

He rebuked women for going to the public baths. "For there they are not ashamed to strip before spectators . . . The baths are opened promiscuously to men and women; and there they strip for licentious indulgence . . . Those who have not become utterly destitute of modesty shut

out strangers; but bathe with their own servants, and strip naked before their slaves . . . The ancient athletes, ashamed to exhibit a man naked, preserved their modesty by going through the contest in drawers; but these women, divesting themselves of their modesty along with their tunic, wish to appear beautiful, but contrary to their wish are simply proved to be wicked." According to the editors, the reference to athletes comes from the secular Greek historian Thucydides (i, 6), and it demonstrated "the recent invasion of immodest exposure even among athletes."

Modesty must include behavior. Women "must as far as possible, correct their gestures, looks, steps, and speech. For they must not do as some, who . . . conduct themselves in society as if on the stage, with voluptuous movements, and gliding steps, and affected voices, casting languishing glances around, tricked out with the bait of pleasure."

Clement upheld the teaching of Deuteronomy 22:5. In his day the problem was men wearing effeminate clothing.² What reason is there in the law's prohibiting a man from 'wearing woman's clothing'? Is it not that it would have us to be manly, and not to be effeminate neither in person and actions, nor in thought and word? . . . We ought not to call such as these men, but lewd wretches, and effeminate, whose voices are feeble, and whose clothes are womanish both in feel and dye. And such creatures are manifestly shown to be what they are from their external appearance, their clothes, shoes, form, walk, cut of their hair, look. . . . For these, for the most part, plucking out the rest of their hair, only dress that on the head, all but binding their locks with fillets like

women. . . . A true gentleman must have no mark of effeminacy.”

Quoting I Timothy 2:9 and I Peter 3:3, Clement taught against very costly clothing, jewelry, makeup, plucking out the eyebrows (to paint them back on), elaborate hair arrangement, false hair, and hair dye.³ In his day, dye for clothing was very expensive and luxurious, so he recommended that Christians wear simple, white clothing. In opposing ornamentation, he specifically rejected head crowns, headdresses, ornaments for the hand, earrings, and finger rings. He did allow finger rings for two reasons: (1) for a woman with an unsaved husband and (2) as a seal or signet for conducting business but not for ornamentation.

He wrote, “If, then, He takes away anxious care for clothes and food, and superfluities in general, as unnecessary; what are we to imagine ought to be said of love of ornament, and dyeing of wool, and variety of colours, and fastidiousness about gems, and exquisite working of gold, and still more, of artificial hair and wreathed curls; and furthermore, of staining the eyes, and plucking out hairs, and painting with rouge and white lead, and dyeing of the hair, and the wicked arts that are employed in such deceptions? . . . It becomes us to rouse ourselves and haste to that which is truly beautiful and comely, and desire to grasp this alone, leaving the ornaments of earth to the world, and bidding them farewell before we fall quite asleep. . . . How much wiser to spend money on human beings, than on jewels and gold! How much more useful to acquire decorous friends, than lifeless ornaments! . . . But the love of ornament, which is far from caring for virtue, but claims the body for itself, when the love of the

beautiful has changed to empty show, is to be utterly expelled. . . . But these women obscure true beauty, shading it with gold. . . . I am weary and vexed at enumerating the multitude of ornaments; and I am compelled to wonder how those who bear such a burden are not worried to death. . . .

“But for those women who have been trained under Christ, it is suitable to adorn themselves not with gold, but with the Word, through whom alone the gold comes to light. . . . It is suitable, therefore, for women who serve Christ to adopt simplicity. . . . Modesty and chastity are collars and necklaces; such are the chains which God forges. . . . And let not their ears be pierced, contrary to nature, in order to attach to them ear-rings and ear-drops. For it is not right to force nature against her wishes. Nor could there be, any better ornament for the ears than true instruction, which finds its way naturally into the passages of hearing. . . .

“It is not, then, the aspect of the outward man, but the soul that is to be decorated with the ornament of goodness; we may say also the flesh with the adornment of temperance. . . . Those women who wear gold, occupying themselves in curling at their locks, and engaged in anointing their cheeks, painting their eyes, and dyeing their hair, and practising the other pernicious arts of luxury, decking the covering of flesh,—in truth, imitate the Egyptians, In order to attract their infatuated lovers . . . For love of display is not for a lady, but a courtesan. Such women care little for keeping at home with their husbands; but loosing their husbands’ purse-strings, they spend its supplies on their lusts, that they may have many witnesses of their seemingly fair appearance. . . .

“The Instructor permits us, then, to use simple clothing. . . . Let the women wear a plain and becoming dress, but softer than what is suitable for a man, yet not quite immodest or entirely gone in luxury. And let the garments be suited to age, person, figure, nature, pursuits.”

Tertullian

Another very relevant ante-Nicene writing is *On the Apparel of Women* by Tertullian. Tertullian taught against makeup, hair dye, elaborate hair arrangement, false hair, extravagant clothing, and jewelry.⁴ He also warned against men who adorned themselves.

“Perfect modesty will abstain from whatever tends to sin, as well as from sin itself. . . . If secure ourselves, we must not put temptation in the way of others.” He pointed out that if a man who looks on a woman with lust is guilty of sin, the woman who adorns herself in a lustprovoking manner is not blameless.

Tertullian gave this response to women who wanted to adorn themselves to please their husbands: “You will please them in proportion as you take no care to please others . . . No wife is ‘ugly’ to her own husband. She ‘pleased’ him enough when she was selected (by him as his wife); whether commended by form or by character. . . . Every husband is the exactor of chastity; but beauty a believing (husband) does not require, because we are not captivated by the same graces which the Gentiles think (to be) graces; an unbelieving one, on the other hand, ever regards with suspicion. . . . For whom, then, is it that you cherish your beauty? If for a believer, he does not exact it: if for an

unbeliever, he does not believe in it unless it be artless. "Why are you eager to please either one who is suspicious, or else one who desires it not? . . .

"These suggestions are not made to you, of course, to be developed into an entire crudity and wildness of appearance; nor are we seeking to persuade you of the good of squalor and slovenliness; but of the limit and norm and just measure of cultivation of the person. There must be no overstepping of that line to which simple and sufficient refinements limit their desires—that line which is pleasing to God. For they who rub their skin with medicaments, stain their cheeks with rouge, make their eyes prominent with antimony, sin against HIM. To them, I suppose, the plastic skill of God is displeasing! In their own persons, I suppose, they convict, they censure, the Artificer of all things! For censure they do when they amend, when they add to, (His work;) taking these their additions, of course, from the adversary artificer. That adversary artificer is the devil. . . . What ever is born is the work of God. What ever, then, is plastered on (that), is the devil's work. . . . How unworthy the Christian name, to wear a fictitious face, (you,) on whom simplicity in every form is enjoined!—to lie in your appearance, (you,) to whom (lying) with the tongue is not lawful!—to seek after what is another's (you,) to whom is delivered (the precept of) abstinence from what is another's—to practise adultery in your mien, (you,) who make modesty your study! . . . (Take heed) that you admit not to use meretricious and prostitutionary garbs and garments. . . .

"How much more provocative of blasphemy is it that you, who are called modesty's priestesses, should appear

in public decked and painted out after the manner of the immodest? Else, (if you do so,) what inferiority would the poor unhappy victims of the public lusts have (beneath you)? whom, albeit some laws were (formerly) wont to restrain them from (the use of) matrimonial and matronly decorations, now, at all events, the daily increasing depravity of the age has raised so nearly to an equality with all the most honourable women, that the difficulty is to distinguish them. And yet, even the Scriptures suggest (to us the reflection), that meretricious attractivenesses of form are invariably conjoined with and appropriated to bodily prostitution. . . .

“It is not enough that God know us to be chaste: we must seem so before men. Especially in these times of persecution we must inure our bodies to the hardship which they may not improbably be called to suffer. . . . To Christian modesty it is not enough to be so, but to seem so too. . . . I know not whether the wrist that has been wont to be surrounded with the palmleaf-like bracelet will endure till it grow into the numb hardness of its own chain! I know not whether the leg that has rejoiced in the anklet will suffer itself to be squeezed into the gyve! I fear the neck, beset with pearl and emerald nooses, will give no room to the broadsword! . . . Let us abandon luxuries, and we shall not regret them. . . . Let us cast away earthly ornament if we desire heavenly. . . .

“The angels who are to carry us are (now) being awaited. Do you go forth (to meet them) already arrayed in the cosmetics and ornaments of prophets and apostles; drawing your whiteness from simplicity, your ruddy hue from modesty; painting your eyes with bashfulness, and your mouth with silence; implanting in your ears the

words of God; fitting on your necks the yoke of Christ. Submit your head to your husbands, and you will be enough adorned. Busy your hands with spinning; keep your feet at home; and you will 'please' better than (by arraying yourselves) in gold. Clothe yourselves with the silk of uprightness, the fine linen of holiness, the purple of modesty. Thus painted, you will have God as your Lover!"

Other Teaching in Early Church History

Tatian wrote against ornaments on the ground that they lead to fornication.⁵

Commodianus wrote, "Thou wishest, O Christian woman, that the matrons should be as the ladies of the world. Thou surroundest thyself with gold. . . . Thou affectest vanity with all the pomp of the devil. . . . And moreover, with evil purposes, thou puttest on false medicaments, on thy pure eyes the stibium, with painted beauty, or thou dyest thy hair that it may be always black. . . . But these things are not necessary for modest women. . . . Do ye, O good matrons, flee from the adornment of vanity; such attire is fitting for women who haunt the brothels. . . .

"It is not right in God that a faithful Christian woman should be adorned. Dost thou seek to go forth after the fashion of the Gentiles, O thou who art consecrated to God? God's heralds, crying aloud in the law, condemn such to be unrighteous women, who in such wise adorn themselves. Ye stain your hair; ye paint the opening of your eyes with black; ye lift up your pretty hairs one by

one on your painted brow; ye anoint your cheeks with some sort of ruddy colour laid on; and, moreover, earrings hang down with very heavy weight. Ye bury your neck with necklaces; with gems and gold ye bind hands worthy of God with an evil presage. Why should I tell of your dresses, or of the whole pomp of the devil? Ye are rejecting the law when ye wish to please the world.”⁶

Cyprian referred to Deuteronomy 22:5 in teaching against effeminacy. “For since, in the law, men are forbidden to put on a woman’s garment, and those that offend in this manner are judged accursed, how much greater is the crime, not only to take women’s garments, but also to express base and effeminate and luxurious gestures.”⁷

Cyprian also quoted I Timothy 2:9 and I Peter 3:3 in opposition to immodest dress, makeup, and jewelry.⁸ “Has God willed that wounds should be made in the ears, wherewith infancy, as yet innocent, and unconscious of worldly evil, may be put to pain, that subsequently from the scars and holes of the ears precious beads may hang, heavy, if not by their weight, still by the amount of their cost? . . . I think that not virgins only and widows, but married women also, and all of the sex alike, should be admonished, that the work of God and His fashioning and formation ought in no manner to be adulterated, either with the application of yellow colour, or with black dust or rouge, or with any kind of medicament which can corrupt the native lineaments. . . . Does any one dare to alter and to change what God has made? They are laying hands on God when they try to re-form that which He formed, and to transfigure it, not knowing that everything which comes into being is God’s work, everything that is changed

is the devil's. . . .

“Does she groan and lament who has time to put on the clothing of precious apparel, and not to consider the robe of Christ which she has lost; to receive valuable ornaments and richly wrought necklaces, and not to bewail the loss of divine and heavenly ornaments? Although thou clothest thyself in foreign garments and silken robes, thou art naked; although thou adornest thyself to excess both in pearls, and gems, and gold, yet without the adornment of Christ thou art unsightly. And you who stain your hair, now at least cease in the midst of sorrows; and you who paint the edges of our eyes with a line drawn around them of black powder, now at least wash your eyes with tears.”

In two works of questionable authorship but attributed to Gyprian, we find teaching against immodest exposure of the body in athletic contests, immodesty of dress, cosmetics, and jewelry.⁹

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* addressed the adornment of both men and women.¹⁰ It admonished husbands not to adorn themselves “in such a manner as may entice another woman to thee. . . . Neither do thou wear over-fine garments to seduce any; neither do thou, with an evil subtilty, affect over-fine stockings or shoes for thy feet, but only such as suit the measures of decency and usefulness. Neither do thou put a gold ring upon thy fingers; for all these ornaments are the signs of lasciviousness.” To wives it said, “Do not superadd ornaments to thy beauty, in order to please other men: neither affect to wear fine broidering, garments, or shoes, to entice those who are allured by such things. For although thou dost not these wicked things with design

of sinning thyself, but only for the sake of ornament and beauty, yet wilt thou not so escape future punishment, as having compelled another to look so hard at thee as to lust after thee. . . . Do not paint thy face, which is God's workmanship; for there is no part of thee which wants ornament, inasmuch as all things which God has made are very good. But the lascivious addition adorning of what is already good is an affront to the bounty of the Creator."

John Chrysostom explained that I Timothy 2:9 taught women not to use outward ornaments but inward ornaments. He wrote, "Imitate not therefore the courtesan."¹¹

Teaching in Later Church History

As Chapter 5 noted, many groups in later church history have emphasized simplicity and modesty of dress, avoiding ornaments and luxury. These include the following, listed according to the times when they emerged as significant movements:

- Middle Ages: Waldensians, Humiliati, Hussites, followers of Savonarola.
- Reformation (16th century): Anabaptists, Calvinists, Reformed.
- 17th century: Puritans, Baptists, Quakers, Pietists.
- 18th century: Methodists.
- 19th century: Holiness movement.
- 20th century: Pentecostals, many fundamentalists.

John Wesley

The teachings of John Wesley, founder of Methodism, are particularly interesting. In "Advice to the People Called Methodist with Regard to Dress," he taught that Christians should be neat but plain in dress.¹² He admonished, "(1) That your apparel be cheap, not expensive; far cheaper than others in your circumstances wear, or than you would wear, if you knew not God: (2) That it be grave, not gay, airy, or showy; not in the point of the fashion." He quoted I Timothy 2:9-10 and I Peter 3:3-4, then commented: "Nothing can be more express; the wearing of gold, of precious stones, and of costly apparel, together with curling of hair, is here forbidden by name. . . . Whoever, therefore, says, 'There is no harm in these things,' may as well say, 'There is no harm in stealing or adultery.'" Wesley also endorsed a tract that said, "Let every one, when he appears in public, be decently clothed, according to his age, and the custom of the place where he lives."¹³

Wesley gave specific directions to insure that the early Methodist societies adhered to these teachings on dress. He said no Band-tickets (membership cards) should be issued to people "till they have left off superfluous ornaments. . . . Let every Assistant read the 'Thoughts on Dress' at least once a year. . . . Be very mild, but strict. . . . Give no ticket to any that wear calashes, highheads, or enormous bonnets."¹⁴

Here are some excerpts from Wesley's sermon "On Dress," which used I Peter 3:3-4 as its text and also cited I Timothy 2:9-10. "Slovenliness is no part of religion. . . . They [the texts] manifestly forbid ordinary Christians . . .

to be adorned with gold, or pearls, or costly apparel. But why? . . . The first harm it does, is, it engenders pride, and, where it is already, increases it. . . . The wearing gay or costly apparel naturally tends to breed and to increase vanity. By vanity I here mean, the love and desire of being admired and praised. . . . The wearing of gay and costly apparel naturally tends to beget anger, and every turbulent and uneasy passion. . . . Gay and costly apparel directly tends to create and inflame lust. . . . It has this effect both on the wearer and the beholder. . . . The wearing of costly apparel is directly opposite to the being adorned with good works. . . . Every shilling which you needlessly expend on your apparel is, in effect, stolen from God and the poor! . . . The putting on of costly apparel is directly opposite to what the Apostle terms, ‘the hidden man of the heart.’”¹⁵

In another sermon Wesley gave advice to parents about their children. “Instil diligently into them the love of plain dress, and hatred of finery. Show them the reason of your own plainness of dress, and show it is equally reasonable for them.”¹⁶

The 20th Century

Until the 20th century, Western society generally upheld at least some aspects of propriety in dress. This century introduced many practices that would have been unthinkable in earlier times, such as extremely short skirts (i.e., above the knee), women wearing trousers, shorts, scanty swimwear, scanty sportswear, and unisex fashion. *Encyclopedia Britannica* documents this development.¹⁷

The major changes began to take place after World War I. Extremely short skirts first appeared in 1925. In 1927 skirts were so short that women exposed their knees when sitting. In 1930 skirts went back to mid-calf or lower in length, but other changes occurred. "Women's sports clothes became more and more scanty, and it became usual to play tennis in shorts or very short skirts, without stockings. Swimsuits were extremely scanty. . . . Trousers, in the form of slacks, were increasingly worn for sports but not yet for shopping."

In 1939, the year World War II began, short skirts appeared again. During the war, "housewives as well as factory workers took to slacks."

In the 1960's miniskirts, pants suits, hot pants, and short shorts came into being. "Borrowing freely from the opposite sex, unisex fashions came into vogue by the end of the 1960's. Women often adopted such masculine attire as military surplus and work clothes and the stylish male had long, hair, carried a pocketbook, wore jewelry, and used a wide variety of cosmetics."

We also note that the bikini received widespread acceptance during the 1960's, followed by the topless bikini. Today, many places around the world permit nude swimming in mixed company.

A recent *Reader's Digest* article discussed the psychological and social need for a clear differentiation between male and female.¹⁸ "There is compelling evidence that men need . . . a clearly defined difference between the sexes. Every human culture, until the late 20th century, has provided such a difference, creating an elaborate and often arbitrary contrast between men's and women's activities, dress, and behavior." Just as society has accepted women

wearing men's clothing, so now it is apparently beginning to accept men wearing women's clothing. For example, some prominent male entertainers routinely appear in female dress and makeup.

Recently, a Pentecostal lady was hired to work at an eating establishment and told to report for work in slacks. When she declined to wear slacks, she was refused employment. When contacted about this religious discrimination, the manager defended his action by saying, "Nowhere on her application did she specify that she would not wear slacks."

How far our society has gone! Should a Christian woman have to inform every prospective employer that she does not wear masculine clothing? Should the wearing of masculine clothing be a prerequisite for a woman to be employed? Will employers also insist that women cut their hair and wear makeup? Will Christian men one day have to tell job interviewers that they will not wear dresses?

A few Christian groups are still determined to maintain scriptural holiness of dress. Outstanding examples in the late 20th century include many in the following groups:

- * Anabaptists (Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites)
- * Holiness groups (Wesleyan, Church of God, etc.)
- * Independent Baptists and other fundamentalists
- * Pentecostals (particularly United Pentecostals)

Independent Baptist Elizabeth Handford teaches: (1) Women should not wear trousers or slacks of any kind. (2) Attention should be given to modesty of dress. (3) There should be no mixed swimming because of the immodesty.

Conclusion

Christendom has abandoned many godly standards of dress once held by all churches and society as a whole. It has departed from holiness of dress as taught by the Bible and historic Christian movements. One by one, even holiness movements have largely abandoned their position on outward appearance. Historic Christian leaders would stand aghast at our society's acceptance of immodesty of dress, lavish makeup, excessive ornamentation, and masculine clothing styles on females. These things are not only accepted but even considered necessary for proper attire.

This situation challenges holiness people to live in literal fulfillment of the Scriptures as never before. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (II Corinthians 6:17). "Be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2). "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold" (*Phillips*). "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (I Peter 2:9). 'We are indeed a peculiar or unique people; as the *NKJV* says, "His own special people." This has always been true spiritually, but now it is becoming more and more evident outwardly as well. The challenge before us is to maintain our unique God-given identity, refusing to succumb to the pressures of this world.

FOOTNOTES

¹Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*; 2.6-7, 2.11, 3.5 & 3.11, ANF, II, 251-52, 265-66, 279 & 287.

²Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*; 3.3 & 3.11 and *Miscellanies*, 2.18, ANF, II, 276-77, 289 & 365.

³Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*; 2.8, 2.11-13, 3.1, 3.2 & 3.11, ANF, II, 256, 263-73, 284-86.

⁴Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, 2, ANF, IV, 18-25.

⁵Tatian, *Fragments*, 6, ANF, II, 82.

⁶Commodianus, *The Instructions*, 59-60, ANF, IV, 214-15.

⁷Cyprian, *Epistles*, 60, ANF, V, 356.

⁸Cyprian, *Treatises*, 2.8, 2.19 & 2.30, ANF, V, 432-35 & 445.

⁹Cyprian (?), *On the Public Shows*, 8 and *Of the Discipline and Advantage of Chastity*, 12, ANF, V, 578 & 591.

¹⁰*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 1.2 & 1.3, ANF, VII, 392 & 395.

¹¹Chrysostom, *Homilies on Timothy*, 8, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [hereinafter *NPNF*], Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.) (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, rpt. 1976), 1st ser., XIII, 433-34.

¹²Wesley, "Advice to the People Called Methodist with Regard to Dress," *Works*, XI, 466-69.

¹³Wesley, "Thoughts on Dress," *Works*, XI, 477-78.

¹⁴Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations," *Works*, VIII, 307.

¹⁵Wesley, "On Dress," Sermon 88, *Works*, VII, 16-22.

¹⁶Wesley, "On Obedience to Parents," Sermon 96, *Works*, VII, 106.

¹⁷"Dress," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, V, 1033-35.

¹⁸Annie Gottlieb, "What Men Need From Women," *Reader's Digest*, January 1984, p. 145.

9

HAIR

“Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering” (I Corinthians 11:14-15).

Biblical Foundation

I Corinthians 11:1-16 establishes that men should have short hair but that women should have long, uncut hair. We obey this teaching for the following reasons derived from that passage: (1) It demonstrates the wife’s submission to the husband. (2) It demonstrates the church’s submission to Christ. (3) It is a sign to angels of the Christian woman’s obedience to God. (4) It is a shame for a man to pray with long hair or for a woman to pray with short hair. (5) Nature itself teaches these principles. (6) Long hair is a shame for a man but is a woman’s glory. (7) This is one of God’s methods for maintaining a clear distinction between male and female.

In the Old Testament, God used abundant hair to symbolize perfection, strength, glory, and separation for a holy purpose. Cutting the hair off symbolized disgrace, mourning, and glory departed. With this in mind, it is easy to see how long hair on a woman fulfills all the objectives described above.

In this chapter we address several important questions that have arisen with respect to hair.

I Corinthians 11: Long Hair as a Covering

Theologians have interpreted I Corinthians 11:1-16 in one of two ways. First, some have understood the entire passage to refer directly to hair. We basically presented this point of view in *In Search of Holiness*. So did Elizabeth Rice Handford in *Your Clothes Say It For You*, teaching that women should have long, uncut hair while men should have short hair. This is a respectable position as demonstrated by a footnote in the *New International Version* of the Bible, which offers the following alternative translation of verses 4-7:

“Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering of hair on her head dishonors her head—she is just like one of the ‘shorn women.’ If a woman has no covering, let her be for now with short hair, but since it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again. A man ought not to have long hair. . . .

I Corinthians 11: A Literal Veil?

The majority of scholars hold that verses 4-7 refer to a literal veil or covering of cloth. In this section, let us assume they are correct. If so, Paul was teaching Corinthian women to wear veils in public assemblies because this was the proper dress for virtuous women in that culture. As one reference states, “The veil was the distinctive female wearing apparel. . . . Prostitutes went unveiled.”¹ Therefore, the Christian women of Corinth were not supposed to exercise their Christian liberty to flaunt local custom and dress like prostitutes, adulterers, or un-submissive women.

The wearing of literal veils does not apply to women today unless their culture demands it for the sake of propriety. However, Paul’s appeal in verses 13-16 to the universal, God-ordained principle of women having long hair still stands. Even nature teaches that women should wear a veil of long hair; therefore it was reasonable for Paul to insist upon a veil of cloth as well. In establishing the culturally relative rule regarding veils, he appealed to the universal truth that women should have long (uncut) hair.

Daniel Segraves takes this approach in *Women’s Hair—The Long and Short of It*. This view is also represented in *Good News for Modern Man (Today’s English Version)*, verses 5-6 and 13-16, given below:

“And any woman who prays or speaks God’s message in public worship with nothing on her head disgraces her husband; there is no difference between her and a woman whose head has been

shaved. If the woman does not cover her head, she might as well cut her hair. And since it is a shameful thing for a woman to shave her head or cut her hair, she should cover her head. . . . Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God in public worship with nothing on her head? Why, nature itself teaches you that long hair is a disgraceful thing for a man, but it is a woman's pride. Her long hair has been given her to serve as a covering. But if anyone wants to argue about it, all I have to say is that neither we nor the churches, of God have any other custom in worship."

Some people insist that women of all cultures today must wear a veil of cloth. However, a literal translation of the Greek indicates that long hair alone is a sufficient covering as far as nature's teaching is concerned. *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* states, "The long hair instead of a veil has been given to her" (verse 15).

A Universal Teaching

Some teach that I Corinthians 11:1-16 relates only to Corinthian culture and has no application today. However, Paul based his teaching on nature itself (I Corinthians 11:14). All churches in Paul's day adhered to his teaching on hair, regardless of cultural background. Jewish, Greek, and Roman Christians all agreed on this issue. This was not merely a local custom, but a universal practice in all the churches. "If anyone wants to be

contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God” (I Corinthians 11:16, *NIV*). Even if we interpret verses 4-7 as a discussion of literal veils in Corinthian culture, we cannot relegate the teaching on hair in verses 13-16 merely to Corinthian culture.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states, “Some say that the custom was peculiar to Corinth, but Paul’s words, *neither the churches of God*, argue against this view. Still others insist that the custom is not to be applied today. . . . It should be noted, however, that each of the reasons given for the wearing of a veil is taken from permanent facts, lasting as long as the present earthly economy. . . . A final word: In the final analysis, the . . . veil is not the important thing, but the subordination for which it stands. The presence of both is ideal.”² To this analysis, we add that the woman’s long hair is the covering or veil given by nature. Therefore, this passage teaches both that the woman should submit to her husband and to God and that she should have long hair as a symbol of that submission.

Of course, we should emphasize the spiritual principles involved. It does little good for a woman to have uncut hair if she is rebellious, contentious, or brazen. The long hair itself will not make her holy in God’s sight. She must have the proper attitude of which the long hair is a symbol. However, she need not choose between attitude and appearance. God desires for her to have holiness both inwardly and outwardly. She should have a submissive, modest spirit inwardly but also display it outwardly by her actions and by the God-ordained symbol of long hair.

The Teaching of Nature

Although Paul appealed to the Corinthians' judgment and by implication to their culture, he appealed to nature (and therefore to the God who established the natural state) in order to teach long hair on women. Exactly how does nature teach this?

Paul referred to the instinctive, universal knowledge of the natural, God-given order of things. Rousas Rushdoony quoted Charles Hodge with approval: "To a woman, however, in all ages and countries, long hair has been considered an ornament. It is given to her, Paul says, as a *covering* or as a natural veil; and it is a glory to her *because* it is a veil."³ The ancient society of Paul's world understood this principle of nature or else he would not have written what he did. *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states that women throughout biblical times wore the hair long, basically uncut.⁴ According to *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, "In NT times the length of the hair was one mark of distinction between the sexes."⁵

Unfortunately, our society has so departed from godly principles that this natural, instinctive teaching is no longer part of our culture. Similarly, Paul appealed to nature to teach against homosexuality and lesbianism (Romans 1:26-31), but this teaching of nature is also rapidly vanishing from modern consciousness.

Even today, however, there is at least one specific way in which nature yet teaches us about hair. "Baldness . . . is apparently inherited and is, in a small way, a sign of masculinity, since the tendency does not manifest itself, even though inherited, unless there is more than a certain critical concentration of male sex hormone in

the blood. As a result, women rarely go bald, and men who are castrated before adolescence apparently never do.”⁶ Thus, men who grow bald do so as a normal consequence of being male, while women usually do not grow bald except as the result of hormonal imbalance, illness, or disease. In this way nature teaches us that little or no hair on a man is an ordinary, normal occurrence, but that little or no hair on a woman is unnatural and shameful.

The Teaching of Other Scriptural Passages

Since this teaching of nature was very evident to God’s people in both Old Testament and New Testament times, it is no surprise to find little direct teaching on the subject in Scripture. Even in I Corinthians 11 Paul assumed that everyone was aware of this basic teaching. Even so, other biblical passages allude to this truth.

In the Old Testament God pronounced judgment upon the haughty, bejeweled women of Judah. “Therefore the LORD will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald” (Isaiah 3:17, *NIV*). Instead of “well set hair” God would send them “baldness” (Isaiah 3:24). By taking away their long hair God intended to take away their womanly glory and to bring them shame.

In Jeremiah 7:29 God said, “Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the LORD hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath.” This entire passage depicts Jerusalem as a backslider (Jeremiah 8:5). Therefore, God metaphorically commanded her to cut off her hair as a

symbol of shame, disgrace, lamentation, and mourning. Cutting the hair did not represent a normal, godly action here, but a shameful act of a backslidden people that God had rejected and forsaken.

The New Testament shows that women of those days had long hair. An unnamed woman washed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair (Luke 7:37-38). On another occasion, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointed Christ's feet with costly ointment and wiped them with her hair (John 11:2; 12:3). Certainly these women had long hair to be able to do this. Peter and Paul both taught against elaborate hair arrangements with ornaments braided into the hair (I Timothy 2:9; I Peter 3:3). This could have been a problem only if women had long hair. Revelation 9:8 describes an army of demons that will have "hair as the hair of women." This description has meaning only when we understand that the New Testament expects women to have long hair and men to have short hair.

In addition to these specific references, other passages deal with the underlying principle of separation between the sexes. It is an abomination to God for a man to wear clothing that is distinctively feminine or for a woman to wear clothing that is distinctively masculine (Deuteronomy 22:5). No effeminate man will inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9-10). When I Corinthians 11 teaches that there should be a clear distinction between male and female with respect to hair, it does not establish a totally new doctrine but simply applies an important principle taught elsewhere in Scripture.

We should note that the Bible nowhere commands a certain hairstyle, such as having hair worn up, although

many women throughout history have worn long hair up as a matter of neatness and convenience.

Men's Hair and the Nazarite Vow

The Nazarite vow prohibited the cutting of hair. Why did God establish this vow for men since long hair is a shame for them? Numbers 6:18 shows that the typical male vow was temporary in nature. After the time of his vow was completed, he shaved his head and offered the hair as a peace offering.

The Bible records only two men who definitely had life-long vows not to cut their hair—Samson and Samuel (Judges 13:5; I Samuel 1:11). In addition, John the Baptist was probably a Nazarite (Luke 1:15). In each of these cases, the Nazarite did not choose this status for himself, but God and his parents determined it before his birth. The long hair was a sign that set him apart from the normal male in his society, and it probably served as a badge of shame that he bore for God's sake. Everyone in Israel knew about the Nazarite vow, so his unique long hair was not a sign of effeminacy as it would have been otherwise.

In view of the exceptional nature of these cases, we cannot use them to justify a violation of I Corinthians 11:14, just as we cannot use Isaiah's temporary nakedness (whether it was partial or total) or Christ's shame on the cross to justify immodesty of dress (Isaiah 20; Hebrews 12:2).

Miscellaneous Objections

In an attempt to avoid the teaching of Scripture on the

subject of hair, several objections have been offered, which we state and answer below.⁷

* *“Absalom had long hair.”* Absalom is certainly a poor example to follow since he was very ungodly and died in rebellion against God’s anointed king, his own father David. In fact, his hair apparently caused him to be caught in the branches of a tree and thus captured and killed (II Samuel 18:9). Also, we find that he did cut his hair from time to time, at least once a year (II Samuel 14:26).

* *“If long hair on a woman means uncut hair, then a man’s hair is technically short if he cuts it just once in a great while.”* I Corinthians 11:5-6 indicates that if a woman cuts her hair then it is the same as if she shaves it totally. Since nature teaches that women should have long hair, we should let nature determine the length, by allowing the hair to grow freely. (This is what the Nazarite vow required.) Any other definition of long hair for a woman would be arbitrary, would not be of universal applicability, and would be subject to uncertainty and abuse. Any other definition could be altered inch by inch until it would have no meaning at all. So, long hair for a woman must mean uncut hair.

However, I Corinthians 11:14-15 indicates that a man should have hair short enough to distinguish him clearly from a woman. Therefore, it is not enough for a man to cut his hair a few times in his life; his hair must be observably short. The precise length may change somewhat from age to age and culture to culture. In ages past, when all women had uncut hair and when modern barbers’ equipment was not available, men could wear their hair somewhat longer and still not confuse the sexes. In our

day, however, most women wear shorter hair. Moreover, in our culture long hair on men has been used to symbolize rebellion against society and traditional morality. For these reasons, it behooves Christian men today to wear their hair noticeably and unquestionably short. The hair-line is a good, natural guide to follow in deciding how short to cut a man's hair.

* *"Some women cannot grow long hair."* I Corinthians 11 does not specify any dimensions for hair length. The woman should let nature determine the length of the hair. If she lets her hair grow freely, as the Nazarites did, then God considers her hair to be long.

* *"A woman's hair is not really a covering."* This statement directly contradicts Paul's statement that a woman's hair is a covering or veil for her. He did not mean for us to count the square inches of skin covered. Instead, he meant that a woman's long hair was a symbolic covering which represented her submission to God and to her husband. Obviously, long hair does not provide the type of covering that literal clothing does, nor does it replace the need for clothing. Rather it serves as a symbolic veil or article of apparel.

* *"The Israelites shaved the heads of captive women according to Deuteronomy 21:10-14."* As in Jeremiah 7:29, this action does not characterize normal, godly women but ungodly women. The shaving of the head took away the heathen woman's former glory, humbled and shamed her, and prepared her for a month of mourning. It symbolized total renunciation of her past identity so she could become an Israelite and be eligible to marry an Israelite. The implication is that after she became an Israelite, her hair would not be shaved again.

* *“To shear means to cut the hair off totally.”* To the contrary, a study of standard dictionaries and lexicons will show that the English verb “to shear” and the corresponding Greek verb *keiro* simply mean “to cut or to cut off.” I Corinthians 11:5-6 specifically distinguishes this word in meaning from the different word “to shave” (Greek *xurao*).

* *“In I Corinthians 11:1-16 Paul simply quoted a letter from the Corinthians and did not himself teach this as doctrine.”* This objection twists the Scriptures to mean exactly the opposite of what they plainly say. No reputable translation of the Bible has followed this strange and dangerous method of interpretation. If this view is correct, Paul is guilty of writing a very confusing, incomprehensible passage and of failing to answer the Corinthians’ question adequately. Furthermore, how would we explain all the other evidence from Scripture, nature, and culture that women were expected to have long hair and men short hair? How would we explain Paul’s statement in verse 16 that the churches of God have no other custom than that which he has just described?

Teaching in Church History

With respect to men’s hair in early church history, Rousas Rushdoony has stated, “Church councils very early censured long hair in men as a mark of effeminacy, as had the Romans before them. There is no evidence to support the usual portrayal of Christ and the apostles as long-haired men; the evidence of the age indicates very short hair.”⁸ We only need look at the sculpture and coinage of

that age to verify this statement.

Clement of Alexandria had much to say about hair in *The Instructor*.⁹ He taught against elaborate braiding, curling and dressing of the hair, elaborate headdresses, dyeing the hair, and wearing false hair. He admonished women to bind their hair simply and not to cut it, stating, "God wishes women to . . . rejoice in their locks alone growing spontaneously." He told men not to adorn their hair like women or to let it hang in long, womanish ringlets. To avoid any womanly appearance, he recommended that men shave their heads or at least keep the hair very short. Because his culture considered a beardless man to be effeminate, he also counselled men to let their beards grow or to shave them only partially.

Tertullian wrote in his treatise *On the Apparel of Women* that women should not dye the hair, use wigs, or arrange the hair elaborately.¹⁰ Tertullian agreed with Scripture that it was a shame for a woman to have shaved or shorn hair. He remarked, "Let the world, the rival of God, see to it, if it asserts that close-cut hair is graceful to a virgin in like manner as that flowing hair is to a boy."¹¹

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* admonished men, "Do not thou permit the hair of thy head to grow too long, but rather cut it short . . . It is not lawful for thee, a believer and a man of God, to permit the hair of thy head to grow long, and to brush it up together, nor to suffer it to spread abroad, nor to puff it up, nor by nice combing and plating to make it curl and shine."¹²

John Chrysostom interpreted Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 11 to refer to long hair. In a sermon on that chapter, Chrysostom wrote that Paul "both affirms the covering and

the hair to be one, and also that she again who is shaven is the same with her whose head is bare. . . . He signifies that not at the time of prayer only but also continually, she ought to be covered. . . . But with regard to the man . . . the wearing long hair he discourages at all times.”¹³ In the same sermon, Chrysostom compared this teaching with Deuteronomy 22:5, noting that both passages teach a distinction between male and female in appearance.

Throughout the centuries, the question of women cutting the hair was not a major issue because women traditionally have always had long hair. As the above writings indicate, a greater historical problem has been men wearing and fixing hair in a womanly fashion. Only in the 20th century has society generally accepted the practice of women cutting their hair. Even so, our society still has some lingering distaste for a shaved or bald female head. After World War II, many European communities took the women who had collaborated and fraternized with the Nazis and shaved their heads as a mark of shame.

Standard encyclopedias record few instances of women cutting their hair in ages past. One exception is that in ancient Egypt many women shaved their heads and wore veils. In Judeo-Christian lands women wore long hair until the 20th century. As the *Encyclopedia Britannica* states, after World War I “hair was bobbed.”¹⁴

As women began to cut their hair, some conservative Christian groups began to take a stand against it. Most of the Holiness groups opposed it, although they have largely relaxed their stand. Early Pentecostals generally opposed it, as demonstrated by the position of the Apostolic Faith and the United Pentecostal Church. Many

women in other Holiness or Pentecostal denominations today still refuse to cut their hair, such as in the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). Many independent Baptists and other fundamentalists also oppose it today, as exemplified by Elizabeth Rice Handford.

We conclude that, regardless of the changing attitudes of modern society, God still desires for men to have short hair and women to have long, uncut hair.

FOOTNOTES

¹Wight, pp. 98-99.

²*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1248.

³Rushdoony, p. 348, quoting Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 213.

⁴"Hair," *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1980), II, 600.

⁵"Hair," *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 330.

⁶Isaac Asimov, *The Human Body* (New York: The New American Library, 1963), p. 273.

⁷For a presentation of these objections, see Woodrow, pp. 50-54.

⁸Rushdoony, p. 348.

⁹Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, 3.2-3 & 11, ANF, II, 272-75 & 290.

¹⁰Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, 2.6-7, ANF, IV, 21-22.

¹¹Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, 7, ANF, IV, 31.

¹²*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 1.2, ANF, VII, 392.

¹³John Chrysostom, *Homilies on I Corinthians*, 26, NPNF, 1st ser., XII, 152.

¹⁴"Dress," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, V, 1033.

10

STEWARDSHIP OF THE BODY

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (I Corinthians 3:17).

Biblical Foundation

The Bible places strong emphasis on the stewardship of our physical bodies. Certainly I Corinthians 3:17 teaches us not to commit sin with our physical members, but it also teaches us to care for our physical bodies, which God designed, created, gave, and now indwells. Specifically, we should not use anything that would physically defile or harm our bodies. Other passages reiterate our responsibility to sanctify and protect the body as well as the spirit.

“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”

(Romans 12:1). “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (I Corinthians 6:19-20). “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Corinthians 7:1). “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thessalonians 5:23). Paul said, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (I Corinthians 9:27, *NKJV*).

Why so much emphasis on discipline of the body? Here are several reasons: (1) Temperance must characterize the whole man, in physical as well as spiritual things. (2) Unrestrained indulgence even in physical appetites can be sinful. (3) Overindulgence in physical appetites makes it difficult to discipline ourselves spiritually and to curb lusts. (4) Overindulgence in physical appetites makes us soft, lazy, and decadent, which in turn makes us unable or unwilling to sacrifice, endure hardship, and withstand persecution for Christ’s sake. (5) Salvation extends to the whole man, providing physical as well as spiritual healing, so God desires for us to protect our physical as well as spiritual well-being.

As part of good stewardship of the body, we should be temperate in our eating habits and avoid gluttony (Deuteronomy 21:20; Proverbs 23:21; 25:16; Luke 21:34). Gluttony is sinful (Numbers 11:32-34).

The New Testament states that drunkenness is sin

(I Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:19-21). Other New Testament passages warn against getting drunk (Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; Ephesians 5:18; I Peter 4:3; I Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7; 2:3). Even moderate drinking affects the brain and body. More importantly, it affects spirituality, because it breaks down restraints placed by the Spirit and the conscience against commission of sin. Anytime we undermine the control of the Holy Spirit in this fashion, the sinful nature will lead us into sin. The Bible's disapproval of drunkenness applies to any form of intoxication, whether caused by alcohol or other drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, LSD, and heroin.

The New Testament teaches us not to allow ourselves to come under the influence of a power other than God. This principle excludes addiction as well as temporary intoxication. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Romans 6:16). "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (I Corinthians 6:12). Since the dietary laws of Moses, with their designation of unclean foods and drinks, do not apply to Christians, all foods are permissible. But the Christian will not use any substance that will be intoxicating or addictive.

Finally, Christians must avoid anything that has the appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). We must avoid eating or drinking anything that could become a stumbling block to others or set a bad example for them (Romans 14:21).

In applying these biblical principles, we avoid all use of tobacco because it is harmful to the body, physically

defiling, and addictive. We abstain from alcoholic beverages and other intoxicating drugs because of the harm to the body, intoxicating effects, danger of addiction, stumbling block to others, and detriment to society as a whole. An analysis of the four principles of Christian liberty given in Chapter 4 demonstrates that we should avoid alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and drugs: (1) We do not glorify God by using them. (2) They are detrimental physically, mentally, and spiritually. (3) They have great power to gain mastery over us. (4) Our use of them will be a stumbling block to many others who have had or will have trouble with them.

This chapter presents some recent evidence on these substances.

Alcohol

“Churches are Slow to Respond in the Fight Against Alcoholism,” *Christianity Today*, November 11, 1983. Alcohol is a factor in the majority of all deaths caused by falls, drownings, fire accidents, and spouse beatings. In addition, it is a factor in one half of all traffic fatalities. The cost of alcohol abuse in medical bills, property damage, and time lost from work is estimated at \$100 billion per year in the U.S. Alcohol causes between 50,000 and 200,000 deaths per year in the U.S.

The statistics for automobile fatalities only include deaths caused by drivers who are drunk by law. If the statistics included all victims of accidents involving a drinking driver, many researchers believe we would find that almost 90% of traffic fatalities are related to alcohol use.

About 50,000 U.S. servicemen died during the course of the entire Vietnam war, which caused massive social unrest, protest, and rebellion. Yet very few people in our society seem concerned over the evils of alcohol. Many of the same people who protest against war and social injustice personally contribute to the alcohol-fueled slaughter that is endemic to our society.

According to a column in the *Clarion-Ledger*, Jackson, Mississippi, January 15, 1984, page 13E, "Alcohol or other drugs are a factor in 80% of crimes in general."

Tobacco

"Report from the Surgeon General," *Time*, March 8, 1982. The U.S. Surgeon-General described smoking as the chief preventable cause of death. Smoking is now responsible for 340,000 deaths annually in the U.S., costing \$13 billion a year in health care and \$25 billion in lost production and wages.

"Can Nicotine Help Smokers Quit?" *Reader's Digest*, February, 1981. The National Institute on Drug Abuse said, "Cigarette smoking is an addiction [and] . . . should be viewed as a disease." One prominent doctor called it "probably the most addictive and dependence-producing form of behavior known to man."

Marijuana

"Marijuana Alert II: More of the Grim Story," *Reader's Digest*, November, 1980. Marijuana has been shown to

damage almost every human organ and system tested. This article documents damage to the lungs, heart, and immune system.

“Another Sort of Smoke,” *Time*, March 8, 1982. The Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences has issued a report documenting the following consequences of marijuana use: adverse behavioral effects, heart and lung damage, impairment of reproductive and immune systems.

Prescription Drugs

“Danger! Prescription Drug Abuse,” *Reader’s Digest*, April, 1980. Millions of Americans are addicted to commonly prescribed medications, such as tranquilizers. Usually this results from overuse or failure to follow prescription directions.

Drugs such as valium are a major problem today, even among conservative Christians. We do not oppose an occasional, moderate use of prescription drugs for medicinal purposes. However, our stand against intoxication causes us to oppose a degree of use so great as to distort the user’s thinking and consciousness over an extended period of time. Likewise, our stand against addiction causes us to oppose long term use that results in dependency, either physically or psychologically.

Caffeine

“All About Caffeine,” *Reader’s Digest*, January, 1983. Recent studies have basically acquitted caffeine of charges that it is physically dangerous. With the exception of

pregnant women and people with special health problems, coffee drinkers incur little or no health risk from caffeine. Therefore, total abstention from caffeinated substances such as coffee, chocolate, tea, and colas does not seem to be necessary in most cases.

However, caffeine is a stimulant, and it is very possible to develop a dependency on or addiction to caffeine. Some people get a headache if they do not get their morning coffee or midmorning cola. Some cannot seem to start their day without coffee, while others cannot fast without coffee. These are symptoms of caffeine addiction. If we are true to scriptural principles, we will break any addiction of this kind. This suggests that we should use caffeinated substances only occasionally or in moderation. For some, the only way to avoid this problem may be total abstinence.

Objections to Total Abstinence

Many people today dispute our conclusion that Christians should abstain totally from alcoholic beverages. Let us analyze some of the most popular objections.

* *“People in the Old Testament drank alcoholic beverages.”* This is true, but we must remember that God calls Spirit-filled believers today to a higher standard of perfection. The Bible records the progressive revelation of God’s perfect will for the human race and the progressive instruction of His people. The New Testament teaches a deeper life of holiness in other areas as well, such as polygamy, divorce, and warfare.

Even the Old Testament indicates that God desired to

lead mankind to a higher standard. It contains many examples of sin caused by alcohol (Genesis 9:20-25; 19:32-38), and many passages warn of the evils of alcohol (Proverbs 20:1; 21:17; 23:29-35; Isaiah 5:11; 28:7; Hosea 4:11; Habakkuk 2:15). Under the old covenant alcoholic beverages were not for Nazarites, kings, princes, ministering priests, and other specially called people (Leviticus 10:8-10; Numbers 6:3; Judges 13:7; Proverbs 31:4-5; Ezekiel 44:21; Luke 1:15). Since every Christian is a separated person, king, and priest, this principle should apply to us all.

* *“The Old Testament describes wine as a blessing.* The answer to the preceding objection is relevant here also. In addition, we must remember that the Hebrew words for wine could apply either to unfermented or fermented juice from the grape. They could apply to juice in any stage of fermentation, including drinks with such a low alcoholic content as to be considered non-alcoholic under modern legal classifications. Most Old Testament occurrences of the word *wine* are translated from one of two Hebrew words, *yayin* and *tiyrosh*. *Yayin* ordinarily refers to fermented grape juice, although in some contexts it clearly means unfermented juice (Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 48:33). *Tiyrosh* usually refers to fresh, unfermented grape juice (Isaiah 65:8). It is the word used in the phrase “corn and wine,” which refers to blessings and prosperity (Genesis 27:28; Deuteronomy 7:13). It is the word used of the grape juice to be given in tithes (Deuteronomy 12:17; 14:23). This usage of the word *wine* is not unknown even in modern English. An American company has advertised “nonalcoholic wine,” wine with 99.5% of its alcoholic content removed.

* “*The New Testament records the use of wine. Jesus was called a winebibber; He turned water into wine, He used wine at the Last Supper; and Paul advised Timothy to drink wine.*” Although the New Testament does record some use of vine, we must not conclude that it necessarily endorses strong alcoholic beverages. The Greek word for wine is *oinos*. It usually refers to fermented juice, but sometimes it refers to unfermented juice (Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37). The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament before the time of Christ) used *oinos* to translate *tiyrosh*, meaning fresh, unfermented grape juice.¹

In New Testament times unfermented juice was a common drink, and fermented juice was often heavily diluted with water so that it was not intoxicating. “Before NT times, the Hellenistic practice of mixing it [wine] with water was common in Palestine. Wine was a disinfectant (Luke 10:34) and medicine (I Timothy 5:23). . . . Means for preserving grape-juice were well known,” including one ancient method for preserving juice in an unfermented state for a period of one year.²

“The wines of antiquity were more like sirups; many of them were not intoxicant; many more intoxicant in a small degree; and all of them, as a rule, taken only when largely diluted with water. They contained, even undiluted, but 4 or 5 percent of alcohol.”³

In view of these facts, we are persuaded that Jesus did not drink or create a strongly intoxicating beverage. The God who warned of the evils of alcohol did not set a bad example for us. The God who condemned drunkenness as sin and who tempts no man to sin did not provide an opportunity for men to get drunk at the wedding feast

in Cana. Presumably the Creator created a new substance (unfermented), not a partially decayed substance (fermented). It was the best wine at the feast, not because it was the most intoxicating but because it was the best tasting.

Paul did not advise Timothy to drink a strong alcoholic beverage for his weak stomach, but advised him to use wine for medicinal purposes or to use strengthening juice instead of unsanitary local water.

Significantly, the Bible does not say Jesus used wine at the Last Supper but “the fruit of the vine.” As *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* notes, this “may be a studied avoidance of the term wine, indicating that the drink was unfermented, as the bread was unleavened. Whatever use Jesus or others made of wine is no proof that its use in our tense age is wise. The Bible gives more space to the dangers than to the benefit of wine.”⁴

Interestingly, the scoffers on the Day of Pentecost described the Spirit-filled disciples as being drunk on *gleukos*, which means new wine or sweet wine (Acts 2:13). This word normally means unfermented juice. Perhaps the onlookers sarcastically alluded to the disciples’ reputation for abstention, which was apparently violated. The usage “may imply that the disciples, known to drink only unfermented grape juice, in that exuberant enthusiasm appeared intoxicated.”⁵

Teaching in Early Church History

The early church fathers spoke out against gluttonous eating. Hermas warned Christians to avoid “the richest

delicacies, and drunken revels, and divers luxuries” and to restrain themselves from “unlawful revelling, from wicked luxury, from indulgence in many kinds of foods and the extravagance of riches.”⁶

Clement of Alexandria taught Christians to eat simply, for health and strength rather than for sensuous pleasure and luxury. “The Instructor enjoins us to eat that we may live. . . . We are not . . . to abstain wholly from various kinds of food, but only are not to be taken up about them. We are to partake of what is set before us, as becomes a Christian, out of respect to him who has invited us, by a harmless and moderate participation in the social meeting; regarding the sumptuousness of what is put on the table as a matter of indifference, despising the dainties, as after a little destined to perish. . . .

“How senseless to besmear their hands with the condiments, and to be constantly reaching to the sauce, cramming themselves immoderately and shamelessly, not like people tasting, but ravenously seizing! For you may see such people, liker swine or dogs for gluttony than men, in such a hurry to feed themselves full, that both jaws are stuffed out at once, the veins about the face raised, and besides, the perspiration running all over, as they are tightened with their insatiable greed, and panting with their excess. . . . Excess, which in all things is an evil, is very highly reprehensible in the matter of food. . . . From all slavish habits and excess we must abstain.”⁷

The Greek and Latin cultures of the early church fathers regarded wine as the everyday mealtime beverage and often did not clearly distinguish between unfermented and fermented juice. Aside from wine, practically the

only other beverages were milk, which the Greeks regarded as barbaric, and water, which was often unsanitary. Under these circumstances, the early church fathers usually praised total abstinence but allowed some drinking of wine under very controlled conditions. They did bar vintners (wine merchants) from baptism until they forsook their profession.⁸

Tatian taught that wine was not to be drunk at all.⁹

Clement of Alexandria recommended total abstinence. He allowed a small amount of wine to be drunk for certain purposes, but even then recommended that it be diluted with much water and warned against any intoxication. "I therefore admire those who have adopted an austere life, and who are fond of water, the medicine of temperance, and flee as far as possible from wine, shunning it as they would the danger of fire. . . . For hence wild impulses and burning lusts and fiery habits are kindled. . . . And we must, as far as possible, try to quench the impulses of youth by removing the Bacchic fuel of the threatened danger. . . . And in the case of grown-up people, let those with whom it agrees sometimes partake of dinner, tasting bread only, and let them abstain wholly from drink. . . . And if thirst come on, let the appetite be satisfied with a little water. . . . Towards evening, about supper-time, wine may be used . . . but even then it must only be a little wine that is to be used. . . . And it is best to mix the wine with as much water as possible. . . . For if He made water wine at the marriage, He did not give permission to get drunk. . . . It is agreeable, therefore, to drink on account of the cold of winter, till the numbness is dispelled from those who are subject to feel it; and on other occasions as a medicine for the intestines. For, as

we are to use food to satisfy hunger, so also are we to use drink to satisfy thirst, taking the most careful precautions against a slip.”¹⁰

Tertullian regarded abstinence from wine as highly honorable. He interpreted Paul’s advice to Timothy as follows: Out of devotion to God (not a legalistic rule) Timothy did not drink wine, and Paul recommended such abstinence as worthy. In this particular case, however, he advised Timothy to make an exception on a ground of necessity, namely to use a little wine for medicinal purposes on account of his stomach and his constant weakness.¹¹

Cyprian mentioned some who used water alone, even abstaining from unfermented grape juice and even using water for the eucharist. He indicated that this was a common practice, in earlier times and referred to it sympathetically, but taught that a mixture of wine and water should be used for the eucharist.¹²

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* states, “Let a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon who indulges himself in dice or drinking, either leave off those practices, or let him be deprived.”¹³

Teaching in Later Church History

Many later Christian leaders and groups have spoken out against gluttony and intemperance in eating, including the Anabaptists, John Calvin, the Puritans, the Pietists, John Wesley, and the Methodists.

Most conservative Christian leaders have recommended total abstention from alcohol or at least extreme

caution in its use. Various Christian groups have advocated total abstention from alcohol, including the Anabaptists, the Puritans, John Wesley and the Methodists, many Baptists, the Holiness denominations, and the Pentecostals.

Christian groups in America spearheaded a movement in the 19th century to ban all alcoholic beverages. The temperance movement became so strong that 1919 the United States amended its Constitution to ban the manufacture, sale, transportation, importation or exportation of intoxicating liquors. This social experiment was a failure, for unregenerate man can never be legislated into holiness, and Prohibition was repealed in 1933.

The use of tobacco was introduced to the world by early American settlers, who learned it from the Indians. From the beginning many Christian groups opposed its use, including many Anabaptist groups, Wesley and the Methodists, many Baptists, the Holiness denominations, and the Pentecostals.

John Wesley opposed all use of things harmful to the body unless prescribed by a doctor for medicinal purposes. He taught against the use of tobacco as well as drinking, buying, or selling intoxicating liquors. He advised, "Use no tobacco. . . . It is an uncleanly and unwholesome self-indulgence; and the more customary it is, the more resolutely should you break off from every degree of that evil custom. . . . Use no snuff. . . . Touch no dram [a small drink of alcohol]."¹⁴

Conservative Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries of the late 1800's and early 1900's taught against smoking and drinking. As a result, even non-Christian Koreans have traditionally perceived the Christian lifestyle to be incompatible with these practices.

Unfortunately, this is now changing due to the influx of smoking and drinking missionaries in recent years.

As late as 1952, the General Conference of the Methodist Church (representing over 9,000,000 American members at the time) passed the following resolutions:

“Among the confused moral judgments of our age with respect to drinking and the liquor traffic, The Methodist Church lifts the clear voice of the Christian conscience. . . . The use of alcoholic beverages impairs the functions of the body and mind. It slows perception and judgment. It delays reaction. It not only impairs physical health but more important, impairs the tenderness of conscience. It deteriorates character. We are stewards of our bodies. We are stewards of an ability to think straight. Anything which blights and destroys human personality is fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Christ. We therefore stand for the Christian principle of total abstinence from the use of alcoholic beverages of any kind. Our people should regard abstinence as an essential part of witness to the faith we profess and as evidence of loyalty to the high ideals for which the Church stands. The use of alcoholic beverages violates the Christian principle that we are each our brother’s keeper. We are stewards of our influence upon others. . . .

“It is recommended that no member be nominated for or appointed to any official position in the church or church school who is not a morally disciplined person, with special reference to total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. . . .

“We issue our solemn warning to youth . . . and urge them to abstain from the use of tobacco in all its forms.”¹⁵

Anyone who desired to be licensed as a local preacher

or recognized as a traveling preacher was required to abstain totally from tobacco.¹⁶ No one was qualified to be even a church board member unless he abstained totally from alcohol.¹⁷

One of the largest groups today to practice total abstinence from alcoholic beverages is the Salvation Army.

In 1984 the 17,000 delegates to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention voted to oppose the personal use of tobacco in any form, to encourage tobacco farmers to switch to other crops, and to support abstinence from the use of alcohol.¹⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have the support both of Scripture and of historic Christian movements when we advocate total abstinence from the drinking of alcoholic beverages and the use of tobacco in any form. In view of the many documented evils of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco and their devastating impact on modern society, this is the wisest, safest, and holiest course of action for Christians to take.

FOOTNOTES

¹Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1885; rpt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan), p. 442.

²"Wine," *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 895.

³William Smith, "Wine," *A Dictionary of the Bible* (McLean, Va.: MacDonald Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 747.

⁴"Wine," *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 895.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 894.

⁶Hermas, *The Shepherd*, 2.6-8, *ANF*, II, 24-25.

⁷Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*; 2.1, *ANF*, II, 237-40.

⁸Rushdoony, p. 757.

⁹Tatian, *Fragments*, 10, *ANF*, II, 82.

¹⁰Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*; 2.2, *ANF*, II, 242-46.

¹¹Tertullian, *On Fasting*, 9, *ANF*, IV, 108.

¹²Cyprian, *Epistles*, 62, *ANF*, V, 360-63.

¹³*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 8.67.42, *ANF*, VII, 502.

¹⁴John Wesley, "To Mr. S., at Armagh," Letter 211, *Works*, XII, 248.

¹⁵*Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church 1952*, secs. 2022-25, pp. 639-43.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, secs. 304(4) & 321, pp. 105 & 110.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, sec. 207, pp. 79-80.

¹⁸Ron Lee, "A Southern Baptist Battle Rages On," *Christianity Today*, July 13, 1984, p. 33.

11

THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

“Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her” (Mark 10:11).

Biblical Foundation

Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. A fully valid marriage must involve these elements: mutual consent, commitment to a life-long relationship, public (legal) witness and recognition, and sexual union.

There must be a public leaving, a cleaving, and a physical union (Genesis 2:24). Since God gave authority to civil government for society’s regulation and benefit (Romans 13:1-7), the civil law’s requirements should be fulfilled.

Sexual union consummates a marriage (Genesis 2:24),

but sexual union alone does not create a marriage (Exodus 22:16-17). The Bible teaches lifelong, monogamous marriage between a man and a woman. It condemns all extra-marital sexual relationships such as fornication, adultery, homosexuality, incest, and bestiality (Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18; 20:10-21; Deuteronomy 22:20-30; Romans 1:24-27; I Corinthians 6:9-18; Galatians 5:19-21).

The Bible condemns all lustful thoughts and actions (Matthew 5:28; Mark 7:21-23; Colossians 3:5; I Thessalonians 4:3-7). For this reason, the unmarried should avoid “necking or petting,” which means anything beyond a kiss. Even the kiss should be reserved for a meaningful relationship built on friendship and respect; it is not appropriate in casual relationships, or whenever the primary motive is sensual gratification. (For further discussion, see *Dating Tips* by Nathanael Pugh.)

This chapter discusses Christian marriage, the sanctity of the sexual union in marriage, and the biblical teaching against divorce.

The Problem Today

The U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families reported these statistics relative to the U.S.:¹

- * Approximately 12.5 million children live with their mothers only, due to an increase in divorces and out-of-wedlock births.
- * In 1980 there were 666,000 births out of wedlock, or one in every five births. This compared to 142,000 in 1950.

- * There are 5.87 million families headed by a woman.
- * Over 20% of all children do not live in a two-parent family.

No wonder we have severe problems with poverty, juvenile delinquency, immorality, homosexuality, crime, and mental problems! Millions of children do not grow up in the family unit that God designed. We must uphold the Christian family and Christian marriage.

The Christian Husband

Christian marriage is a voluntary, cooperative partnership characterized by mutual love, respect, and caring. The husband is the family head—the family’s chief representative—even as Adam was the head of the human race. Eve sinned first, but Adam’s sin represented the entire human family (Romans 5:12-19).

In any unit, one person must have ultimate responsibility and authority, and God chose the man to fulfill this role. This is apparent because God created man first and then created woman from man’s side to be his helper (Genesis 2:15-24). “The head of the woman is the man. . . . For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (I Corinthians 11:3, 8-9).

The husband has no right to be dictatorial, or to disregard the wishes of his wife. He has no right to abuse her—psychologically, verbally, or physically. At the least, both husband and wife owe each other the same consideration they owe everyone else. They must bear the fruit of the Spirit, “with all lowliness and meekness, with

longsuffering, forbearing one another in love,” and “in honour preferring one another” (Ephesians 4:2; Romans 12:10). As Christians, husbands and wives have a responsibility to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21, *NIV*), not to antagonize, criticize, attack, abuse, ignore, or lord it over one another.

Major decisions in the marriage must be made on a cooperative, mutually agreeable basis, but in situations where someone must assume final authority and responsibility, the husband should do so. He should be the spiritual leader. He should bear the primary burden of providing for the necessities of the family. He is responsible to protect and shelter the family from want and from worry. “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (I Timothy 5:8). God places a heavy responsibility upon the husband and gives him a corresponding authority to fulfill his obligations.

Both husband and wife are equally important to the relationship and to each other. The views and contributions of both are of equal worth. After establishing that the husband is the head, Paul was careful to insist upon an equality of personhood: “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God” (I Corinthians 11:11-12).

Therefore, the husband must respect, honor, cherish and protect his wife, regarding her as a partner and coheir, not as a servant, child, or inferior person. He must recognize that she is physically (not mentally or spiritually) weaker and make allowances for that. He must be

sensitive to her needs, desires, and feelings. If he does not treat his wife with proper consideration, care, and respect, his relationship with God will suffer. “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (I Peter 3:7).

The husband must genuinely love his wife and give himself sacrificially for her. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. . . . Let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself” (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33). “Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them” (Colossians 3:19). This leaves no room for the husband to make selfish demands on the wife or to make arbitrary decisions based on his wishes alone. He must seek to please and benefit his wife as much as he would his own body.

The Christian Wife

In turn, the wife should love her husband and submit to his leadership. This does not mean servitude or lack of freedom to participate in making decisions, but it means to defer to the husband’s final authority. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing”

(Ephesians 5:22-24). “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18).

The wife should love her husband and children. She has an important responsibility to oversee the operation of the household. “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (I Timothy 5:14). “Teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:4-5). In particular, Paul wrote that Christian women are not to abuse their new-found status in Christ to neglect family responsibilities, disrupt the home, rebel against the husband’s leadership, and so be a poor witness to the unsaved.

The wife has great responsibility and authority second only to the husband. She is to guide and keep the home. The description of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 demonstrates how lofty a godly wife’s status really is: she has the confidence of her husband, she has charge of various domestic responsibilities such as food and clothing, her words are full of wisdom and kindness, and she receives praise from children, husband, and the community. She has considerable discretion in family business and investment; in this passage she purchases a piece of land on her own, plants a vineyard, manufactures various items for sale, and actually manages the household.

Although the husband is the ultimate head of the family, the wife can and should have many areas of authority and discretion under his overall leadership. Her work and efforts can be just as valuable to the family as the hus-

band's. Her advice can be just as wise and her viewpoints just as worthy as that of the husband.

We should note that the wife need never submit to the husband's authority to the extent of violating her personal ethics, morality, convictions, or salvation. The general principle still stands: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Neither must a wife submit to constant verbal or physical abuse, because we have already seen that the husband does not have the right to inflict such. If a woman has an unsaved husband, she should still submit to his family leadership, but the way to win him is to live a pure life before him without compromising her holiness. "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without talk by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (I Peter 3:1-2, *NIV*).

As for the status, rights, and privileges of a human being and a Christian there is no difference between man and woman. "There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Indeed, the Early Church placed high value on the contribution of women to gospel work. The New Testament describes women who prophesied often (Acts 21:9), were fellow laborers with Paul in the gospel (Philippians 4:3), and were possibly apostles (Romans 16:7). Women prayed and prophesied (any anointed speaking) in church services (Acts 2:17-18; I Corinthians 11:5; 14:31). Paul described a woman named Phebe as a "servant" of the church at Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). Apparently she was a leader there, probably a deaconess since the Greek word *diakonos* is elsewhere translated as "deacon" (Philippians

1:1; I Timothy 3:8). Priscilla was an equal partner with her husband Aquila in teaching the Word of God to Apollos the preacher and in working with Paul the apostle (Acts 18:1-3, 18, 26). However, women could not interrupt public meetings by asking questions aloud (as men were privileged to do in ancient times), but had to ask their husbands privately at home (I Corinthians 14:33-35). Likewise, women could not have the supreme position of teaching doctrine or exercising authority over men, but exercised their rights to prophesy, teach, or pray under the authority of men (I Timothy 2:11-12).

Understanding the biblical roles that husband and wife should have is the key to a successful, happy marriage. When the husband acts like Christ—loving his wife, sacrificing his all for her, and gently leading her to future happiness—and when the wife acts like the church—living to please her husband, submitting to his leadership, and helping him accomplish his tasks—then the marriage will be a success.

The Sexual Relationship within Marriage

The sexual relationship is a very important component of marriage. Not only does it provide for propagation of the human race, but it is a vital part of the physical, mental, and spiritual union of husband and wife. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). In fact, God intends for this kind of intimate union to occur only within marriage. “What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for

two, saith he, shall be one flesh. . . . Flee fornication” (I Corinthians 6:16, 18).

A stable, lasting marriage forms the ideal environment for successful childrearing and is the basic building block of family, church, and society. Therefore, God designed sex not merely for procreation but as a means of uniting husband and wife and maintaining them in an intimate, permanent relationship for their own and their children’s benefit.

Some think sex is strictly for procreation and husband and wife should not allow sex for any other reason. Usually, these people see sex as somehow sinful or dirty and the sexual drive as part of the sinful nature. However, Hebrews 13:4 directly contradicts this view, saying, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.”

Several Old Testament passages describe with approval the sexual relationship within marriage (Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Solomon 1:13-17; 2:3-6) and the physical attraction between married lovers (Song of Solomon 4:1-7; 5:10-16; 7:1-13). Although many use Song of Solomon for typological teaching, we must first understand its literal meaning—which is an affirmation of love, sex, and fidelity within marriage—before we can proceed to typology. The book clearly extols sex only within marriage (Song of Solomon 4:10-12; 8:8-10).

Paul recommended the single life, since a single person has less distractions in serving God (I Corinthians 7:1, 7-8, 32-35). However, he gave this advice particularly in view of the unsettled conditions of his time (“the present distress”), including persecution (I Corinthians 7:26). Since not everyone has the special “gift” required to remain single, he recommended marriage in order to

avoid fornication (I Corinthians 7:2, 7-9).

Paul recognized the importance of sex in the total marriage relationship. He taught that married couples must fulfill each other's sexual needs and should not deprive each other of this privilege except by mutual consent for a limited time of prayer and fasting (I Corinthians 7:3-5). (For further discussion of the sexual union in marriage, see *The Act of Marriage* by Tim and Beverly LaHaye and *Sexual Happiness in Marriage* by Herbert Miles.)

We should briefly note that, while the Bible does not specifically discuss masturbation, it is definitely sinful if associated with lustful fantasies. In marriage, it does not serve either valid purpose of sex (procreation and union) and can defraud or deprive spouses of their conjugal rights. Basically the sexual relationship is a matter to be decided between husband and wife alone. The Old Testament did place ceremonial regulations on the relationship (Leviticus 18:19), although a few passages indicate a moral dimension may be involved (Leviticus 20:18; Ezekiel 18:6; 22:10). Spouses should not participate in anything deemed by either one to be degrading, unclean, or unnatural. No one should violate, or ask a spouse to violate, conscience in these matters. As we have seen, full mutual enjoyment is a normal, natural part of the relationship.

Birth Control

Since procreation is not the only valid purpose for sex within marriage, birth control is not inherently wrong. We find no scriptural prohibition on family planning or birth

control. However, we should avoid any method that deliberately aborts life after conception. (See Chapter 12.)

In opposition to birth control, some cite God's command to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. God gave this command to the human race as a whole after Creation and again after the Flood. It is not an absolute order to every individual, for then everyone would have an obligation to marry, contrary to Matthew 19:10-12 and I Corinthians 7. The human race has more than fulfilled this command; indeed as stewards over God's earth we now must deal with the drastic problems caused by overpopulation. In a day when the conversion rate does not keep pace with the birth rate, we have a spiritual incentive to support birth control worldwide. Children are a blessing and a gift from God, but God does not require every family to have the maximum number of children physically possible, especially when this would limit effective service to God in many ways.

The story of Onan in Genesis 38:7-10 does not teach anything about birth control or a particular sexual practice as such. Onan married his deceased brother's widow, but selfishly refused to beget a child to perpetuate the dead man's name. (See Deuteronomy 25:5-9.) Onan's sin was not a particular form of birth control as such, but his rebellion against God's will.

Divorce: Old Testament Teaching

When God instituted marriage He intended for husband and wife to unite inseparably for as long as they both lived (Genesis 2:23-24). He regards divorce as a

treacherous breaking of the marriage covenant. “Another thing you do: You flood the LORD’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. ‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel . . . So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith” (Malachi 2:13-16, *NIV*).

God recognized divorce in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), but only because of the hardness of people’s hearts (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:5). Actually, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 did not explicitly grant a right to divorce, but simply established regulations for an existing human practice. As the *NKJV* and *NIV* make clear, it taught: if a man divorces his wife and if she marries another man and if he divorces her, then it is an abomination for her to remarry her first husband. God did not want the divorce laws to allow, in effect, a legal affair. When divorce and remarriage occurred, He still wanted to retain as much of the original design for marriage as possible.

God sought to regulate and place restraints upon what people would do, even when they violated His plan. He permitted the lesser of two evils for a society that could not and would not live up to His moral law. Since some would abandon their spouses regardless of what

God wanted, it was well to establish legal protection for the deserted spouse. Since some would persist in adulterous affairs, it was better for society to allow divorce and remarriage than to condone those affairs. Of course, God does not plan for these problems to exist within the Spirit-filled church today, as we see in the teaching of the New Testament.

Divorce: The Teaching of Jesus

The Pharisees tested Jesus by asking Him if divorce was lawful (Mark 10:2). Jesus explained that Moses permitted divorce only because of the hardness of their hearts, but that from the beginning divorce was not God's plan (Mark 10:3-8). He concluded, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9).

God instituted marriage and ordained civil authority, so all valid marriages are a joining by God (unless the civil law allows marriages that do not meet the biblical definition of marriage, such as homosexual or incestuous marriage). Some claim the right to divorce if they conclude a marriage was not God's perfect will, but the context of Mark 10:9 excludes this interpretation. God's way of joining husband and wife is by legal and sexual union.

In elaborating on the permanent nature of marriage, Jesus taught, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:11-12). "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another,

committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery” (Luke 16:18). This strict teaching surprised the disciples, and at first they did not see how men could live up to God’s ideal (Matthew 19:10).

We should understand Christ’s teaching against divorce as a statement of principle. In some situations, the sinful lifestyle and behavior of an unbelieving spouse will make it impossible to uphold God’s ideal. Separation or even legal divorce may become necessary to protect the Christian from a morally degrading lifestyle, physical abuse, or legal liability. The New Testament recognizes that separation will occur in some cases, although it does not grant an automatic right to remarry in such cases (I Corinthians 7:11).

The fundamental principle for God’s people today, then, is that marriage is binding until death (Romans 7:1-3). If separation or divorce occurs, Christians are given only two options: remain unmarried or be reconciled (I Corinthians 7:10-11).

The “Exception” Clause

Today many people are more interested in possible exceptions to God’s prohibition on divorce than to the actual prohibition. Their interest centers on the “exception” clause, which only Matthew records. “Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matthew 5:32). “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it

be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:9).

Below are four prominent explanations of the “exception” clause.

* *One view is that God allows divorce only on the grounds of betrothal (pre-marital) infidelity.* According to Jewish custom of that day, the two parties were legally bound to each other at a betrothal (engagement) ceremony, but the betrothal contract specified a time lapse before they actually consummated the marriage (Deuteronomy 20:7). Only a legal divorce could break the betrothal contract. A subsequent marriage would not be adulterous because the first marriage was never actually consummated. For example, Joseph planned to divorce Mary during their betrothal, due to her pregnancy (Matthew 1:18-19).

* *A second view is that fornication here specifically means incestuous marriage as defined and prohibited by Leviticus 18.* It certainly has this meaning in I Corinthians 5:1. Arguably, this is what it means in Acts 15, where the church was not defining or altering moral law but listing four legal regulations still binding upon Gentile Christians. It seems that they took these prohibitions from Leviticus 17:1-18:18. That passage forbids (in this order): (1) sacrificing to false gods and devils, (2) eating blood, (3) eating an animal not butchered in a way that its blood would drain out, and (4) twenty types of incest. Acts 15:29 instructs Christians to abstain from (in this order): (1) food offered to idols, (2) blood, (3) things strangled, and (4) fornication. If God does not recognize an incestuous marriage as legitimate, its vows cannot be

binding. Thus, John preached that Herod's marriage to his brother's wife was continuing sin and illegality, not just one act of adultery (Mark 6:17-18).

These first two views both emphasize several points: (1) The word *fornication* seems to be used in a strict sense and distinguished from the word *adultery* in the same verse. (2) Only Matthew—the gospel written for Jews—records the exception clause, so possibly it involves Jewish custom and law. The Roman reader of Mark or the Greek reader of Luke would not be aware of the exception. (3) One should interpret the clause in light of Christ's strict teachings in Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18, and even Matthew 19:6.

* *A third view is that the "innocent" party can divorce and remarry in cases of marital infidelity.* If Jesus used the word *fornication* in a general, non-technical sense here, then it does indeed mean all sexual sin. Sexual acts that break the marriage vow—whether homosexual, incestuous, or adulterous—could be the basis of an exception to Christ's general teaching against divorce and remarriage.

* *A fourth view is that God allows divorce for marital infidelity but does not allow remarriage.* This view also understands fornication to mean all sexual sin, but seeks to reconcile the exception clause with the rest of the Bible by allowing divorce but not remarriage. Proponents emphasize that the exception clause only modifies the verb *put away* and not the verb *marry*. Furthermore, Matthew 5:32 may mean that if a man divorces his wife he causes her to commit adultery upon remarriage, unless he divorces her for marital infidelity. In this case he does not cause her to commit adultery because she has already done so.

The Restrictive Nature of the “Exception” Clause

Regardless of which interpretation one accepts, we must recognize the restrictive nature of the exception clause. To demonstrate this point, in the following discussion we will assume the most expansive interpretation; namely, that one can divorce and remarry on the ground of marital infidelity.

First, there is no right to a second marriage just because the first is unsatisfactory, unhappy, a mistake, or even a disaster. One person’s misfortune or sin may cause a seemingly unfair hardship on another, but this is true in many other unalterable situations, such as a parent-child relationship. The exception clause does not allow divorce when one spouse becomes severely handicapped, contracts a fatal disease, or goes insane. Nor does it allow divorce and remarriage on grounds of cruelty, alcoholism or criminality, although separation or divorce may be necessary in some such cases. “Incompatibility,” “falling out of love,” and “spiritual adultery” are not grounds for divorce.

Marriage is a lifelong commitment that a couple must carefully consider in advance. Once they make this commitment, they must work to maintain the marriage even if the initial infatuation or romance disappears. If they fall out of love, they must learn to fall back in love like they did the first time—and they can.

Second, God calls the Christian to a life of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4). Our emphasis must be on repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Even in the Old Testament, God showed His higher plan: leaving the door of reconciliation open (Hosea 1-3). Hosea stayed true to his wife through years of desertion and unfaithfulness;

when her lovers finally abandoned her he accepted her back. Through this God showed Israel that He, too, would remain faithful to His covenant despite Israel's spiritual adultery.

In one modern case, a husband backslid, divorced his wife, and led a deeply sinful life, but she remained unmarried. Several years later, the husband repented and remarried his wife, and together they have worked faithfully for God.

Third, even if fornication means marital infidelity, in light of Christ's teaching on forgiveness, it may not refer to a single act of infidelity but to a permanent, unrepentant lifestyle of unfaithfulness with no realistic chance of reconciliation at any time.

Fourth, we cannot determine the "innocent" party by a mechanical application of rules. In one case, a husband deliberately arranged temptations for his wife to commit adultery. Is he "innocent" and free to remarry in the sight of God? Who actually broke the marriage vow first? In another case, a husband so alienated, abused, and ignored his wife that she finally ran off with another man. Is the husband free to remarry? Seldom is there a case in which one party is totally innocent of contributing to the destruction of a marriage.

What options does the "guilty" party have after a divorce? If he repents, God will certainly forgive him of the adultery and divorce, but God will not forgive him in advance for an unscriptural remarriage. Forgiveness of sin does not wipe out a valid marriage or any other contract, nor does it grant an indulgence for future sin.

If his former spouse is unmarried, his only options are to remain single or to be reconciled. If his former

spouse has remarried, there are two possible lines of thought. If this dissolves the marriage scripturally for both parties, then the “guilty” party could remarry after genuine repentance. On the other hand, it may be that God releases the “innocent” but not the “guilty” party from the marriage vow. If so, the “guilty” would never be free to remarry.

Should a single Christian who divorced before conversion be treated differently from one who divorced after conversion? On the one hand, the divorced convert has received forgiveness of past sin, is a new creature in Christ, and has begun a new life. On the other hand, conversion does not automatically erase all his previous contracts and obligations.

“Judgment begins at the house of God,” but when read in context that statement means God judges the righteous first, i.e., in this life. In other words, if God hates evil so much that He even judges the righteous in this life when they sin, how much more will he punish sinners in the end? “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’” (I Peter 4:17-18, *NKJV*). I Corinthians 7:20 says, “Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him” (*NIV*). Does this apply here? If so, should one view the convert as single (free to many) or wrongly divorced (not free)?

Divorce: The Teaching of Paul

The Corinthians wrote to Paul asking for his views on

whether it was good to marry or not (I Corinthians 7:1). Paul answered that it was good not to marry but also good to marry, especially since marriage helps one avoid the sin of fornication (I Corinthians 7:1-2).

To married people, Paul emphasized Christ's teachings against divorce and remarriage. "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. . . . But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? . . . The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (I Corinthians 7:10-13; 15-16, 39).

Paul upheld the marriage vow between a believer and an unbeliever, but taught that a Christian is not bound to an unbelieving spouse if the unbeliever insists on departing. Some teach that a Christian can divorce a spouse who is spiritually "dead," i.e. dead in sin, but Paul rejected that view. Furthermore, what happens if the spouse becomes "alive" through later repentance? Some teach that Paul gave a new ground for divorce and remarriage, namely desertion. However, he apparently taught freedom

to separate (with no obligation to follow the departed spouse), not freedom to remarry beyond what Christ allowed. The context indicates that the options upon separation are to remain unmarried or be reconciled (I Corinthians 7:11, 39). Paul simply applied Christ's teachings on divorce to the case of an unsaved spouse, which Christ did not specifically address, but he did not alter Christ's teachings.

I Corinthians 7:27-28 says, "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned." This last statement applies to an unmarried person or one loosed from marriage by the spouse's death (as in verse 39). It does not apply to a divorced person, for then it would apply equally to the "guilty" as well as the "innocent" party. It does not relate to divorced people but to the general question under discussion in the chapter, namely, whether it is good and right for a Christian to marry. "Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned" (I Corinthians 7:26-28, *NIV*).

Remarriage

A Christian widow or widower may remarry, as long as the new spouse is also a Christian (I Corinthians 7:39).

If a marriage never possessed all the essential elements—mutual consent, legal witness and recognition, and sexual consummation—then it is not a genuine marriage.

It can be annulled—declared null and void—and each party is then free to marry someone else.

Although God opposes divorce and remarriage, He apparently recognizes the legal fact of a second marriage and considers it binding (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Jesus recognized (but did not approve) the situation of the Samaritan woman at the well. She had had five legal husbands but at that time had no husband, only an unmarried companion (John 4:17-18). He did not say she still had one husband and had had five unmarried companions. Jesus acknowledged man's power (but not his right) to split what God had joined in marriage (Mark 10:9).

Even though it is a sin to divorce and remarry, when a remarriage occurs God holds the partners to their new vows. If they repent of the sin of breaking their original vows, it is not continuing immorality for them to stay together. In fact, it is immoral for them to break the new vows. Otherwise, a remarried person could have an affair with his or her original spouse and be blameless. It is an abomination before the Lord for a divorced and remarried spouse ever to return to the first spouse (Deuteronomy 24:3-4).

What should someone do if he has divorced and remarried against the will of God? He has entered two lifelong vows, and it is impossible to fulfill both. Furthermore, he has already broken the first covenant beyond repair. Therefore, he must repent of his sin in destroying the first covenant. Then, he must keep the second covenant, which God recognizes.

Conclusion Regarding Divorce and Remarriage

The discussion of Mark 10:11-12 in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* contains a thought-provoking summary of the biblical teaching: “The Lord, it is noteworthy, assumes as a matter of course that a divorced party will, in either case, remarry, and such remarriage is branded as plain adultery. Perhaps . . . this is the link between Paul’s words (I Corinthians vii. 15) and this Gospel passage. Separation of the two parties is seen as a last resort, but remarriage does not seem to be contemplated. It is true that some commentators see a deeper meaning in ‘not under bondage’ of the Pauline passage, and thus think it permits remarriage, but that would be in direct contradiction to I Corinthians vii. 11, and it is a fundamental principle of biblical exegesis that no one scripture may be expounded in such a way that it is contradictory to another. The so-called ‘Matthean exception’ (‘saving for the cause of fornication,’ v. 32, and ‘except it be for fornication,’ xix. 9, lit. ‘except because of immorality’), whatever its exact meaning, has no certain reference to remarriage, although certain Protestant divines have so used it.”²

As a minister, I have made a personal decision not to perform a marriage ceremony where one party has a divorced spouse still living, for the following reasons.

* Divorce is not God’s perfect will, but at most would be allowed only due to man’s sin.

* I do not wish to glamorize remarriage and establish it as a model for others to follow. If the church does not send forth a clear message on this subject, the divorce epidemic that is sweeping our society will overwhelm the

church also.

* I do not feel competent to judge the “innocence” of someone in such a situation; this is between the individual person and God.

* There is no universal “right” to married life as many think today. When questioned about the strictness of His teaching on divorce, Jesus said some people were celibate for the sake of the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:10-12). Paul taught that the single life was preferable in many situations and that it was a gift (I Corinthians 7:7, 26). A single person can live a happy, fulfilled life in the perfect will of God.

* God desires for reconciliation to occur, and I do not want to be the instrument for barring this possibility.

* I hesitate to base such an important decision on one debated interpretation of one clause, when so many other passages speak out strongly against divorce.

* If I officially approve of one remarriage, I may open the door to a host of more questionable exceptions. It will be impossible to explain to everyone’s satisfaction my approval in one case but disapproval in another. Eventually, the integrity of the scriptural teaching against divorce may suffer.

After taking into consideration all the scriptural teachings, if someone concludes he or she has a right to remarry, I recommend a private, civil ceremony. In this way, the church will publicly uphold God’s original intention for the institution of marriage.

I recommend that church leaders avoid remarriage after divorce. In addition to all the reasons given above, the Bible sets a higher standard for leadership: (1) No priest in the Old Testament could marry a divorced

woman. “Neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband: for he is holy unto his God” (Leviticus 21:7). (2) Bishops, deacons, and elders are to be the husband of one wife, blameless, and of good report (I Timothy 3:1-12; Titus 1:6). The Early Church did not condone anyone in polygamy, so the requirement of one wife probably excluded from leadership those with multiple marriages in sequence. (3) Ministers must be role models and examples to the saints (I Peter 5:3). If a minister remarries under circumstances he deems appropriate, saints will see this as justification for remarriage under more questionable circumstances.

Teaching in Church History

Historic Christendom has strongly opposed fornication, adultery, and homosexuality. The early church fathers stood firm on these issues, even though ancient societies generally accepted such practices as religious prostitution and homosexuality. Tertullian wrote, “The Christian confines himself to the female sex. . . . The Christian husband has nothing to do with any but his own wife.”³ Athenagoras wrote against the immorality of the pagans, describing them as those “who have set up a market for fornication, and established infamous resorts for the young for every kind of vile pleasure,—who do not abstain even from males, males with males committing shocking abominations, outraging all the noblest and comeliest bodies in all sorts of ways, so dishonouring the fair workmanship of God . . . adulterers and paederasts.”⁴ We find other early condemnations of homosexuality in

Justin, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, and the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*.⁵ In addition, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Lactantius, and the *Constitutions* specifically condemned effeminate behavior and dress in men.⁶

Until the 20th century no major Christian group has challenged these moral teachings. Those who advocate situation ethics teach that adultery, fornication, and even prostitution are morally justifiable under some circumstances. Some Protestant denominations have ordained avowed homosexuals to the ministry. One Methodist bishop recently appointed a homosexual to a pastoral position. When some protested, the denomination ruled that it had no disciplinary law prohibiting such an action. As of this writing the National Council of Churches is seriously considering the admittance of a predominately homosexual denomination, the Metropolitan Community Church.

Early church fathers condemned birth control, but directed this against couples who refused to have any children at all.⁷ The Roman Catholic Church opposes any artificial means of birth control, on the ground that sex is for procreation. Protestants generally allow birth control, and often highly recommend it in view of present day problems caused by overpopulation.

Ancient church leaders of the first few centuries opposed divorce and remarriage. In this they had an ally in traditional Roman culture of earlier times. "In ancient Rome divorce was regarded as dishonorable, and therefore undesirable. For five hundred and twenty years it was boasted that divorce was unknown in Rome."⁸ The church fathers basically allowed divorce but not remarriage for

the “innocent” party. “In East and West alike, in the earlier period . . . the Fathers were strong in their denunciations of re-marriage, even in the case of an innocent partner.”⁹

The Shepherd of Hermas, which was extremely popular among second century Christians, gave this direction in a case where the wife continues to commit adultery and is unrepentant: “The husband should put her away, and remain by himself. But if he puts his wife away and marry another, he also commits adultery. . . . In case, therefore, that the divorced wife may repent, the husband ought not to marry another, when his wife has been put away.”¹⁰

Athenagoras wrote, “A second marriage is only a specious adultery.”¹¹

Tertullian also taught that a second marriage was adultery. He stated, “Heretics do away with marriage, psychics [the carnal] accumulate them. The former marry not even once; the latter not only once. . . . We admit one marriage, just as we do one God.”¹² According to Tertullian, “Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not to be bound” (I Corinthians 7:27) referred to those who were loosed from their spouses by death (as I Corinthians 7:39). Thus when Paul said “If thou marry, thou hast not sinned” (I Corinthians 7:28) he did not mean the divorced could remarry, “inasmuch as to the divorced he would grant no permission to marry.”¹³ The Montanists, whom Tertullian joined, eventually forbade all second marriages, even remarriage of widows.¹⁴

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* taught that a minister could not marry a divorced person.¹⁵ One of its canons, which most scholars think dates from a very

early time, states, "If a layman divorces his own wife, and takes another, or one divorced by another, let him be suspended."¹⁶

The Roman Catholic Church officially forbids divorce and remarriage. However, it has allowed large loopholes to develop by granting annulments in cases where marriages were actually consummated and maintained for years.

Protestants generally have adhered to the third view of the exception clause as described above. "The Protestant and Reforming divines held that divorce with the permission of re-marriage was justified in the case of adultery."¹⁷ However, many conservatives oppose remarriage of either party, particularly for the ministry. The Evangelical Free Church recently reaffirmed this position as did *The Divorce Myth* by J. Carl Laney of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary. Laney and Charles C. Ryrie interpret the exception clause to refer to incest (the second view above), and F. F. Bruce has commended this view as probable. Bill Gothard and J. Dwight Pentecost teach that the clause refers to betrothal unfaithfulness (the first view above).

One non-Pentecostal researcher described the general position of Pentecostals: "As far as divorce is concerned, the letter of the New Testament is strictly observed. Originally divorce and remarriage were rejected. But at the present day this practice has been somewhat relaxed. Divorce in the case of adultery and remarriage of the innocent party is possible in the older denominations. . . . In the groups in which a high dignitary of the group concerned obtained a divorce and remarried, these regulations have been lifted altogether."¹⁸

The Assemblies of God takes the position that the scriptural ground for divorce is habitual marital unfaithfulness but disapproves of ministers remarrying (similar to the fourth view above). No one can obtain ministerial license with the Assemblies of God if he is remarried with a former companion still living, even if his divorce and remarriage occurred before conversion.

The Articles of Faith of the United Pentecostal Church cite Matthew 19:9 and 5:32 with this commentary: "When this sin has been committed, the innocent party may be free to remarry only in the Lord. Our desire being to raise a higher standard for the ministry, we recommend that ministers do not marry again."¹⁹ The General Constitution of the UPC interprets "fornication" in the cited verses to mean "fornication or adultery."²⁰

Divorce Today

Well into the 20th century, U.S. law frowned upon divorce, generally allowing it only upon proof of adultery, extreme cruelty, or desertion. In 1966 New York and California became the first states to make divorce available when "irreconcilable differences" exist.²¹ Today, for all practical purposes, divorce is available on demand.

In fact, divorce is now almost as common as marriage, and most people enter marriage with the idea that divorce is an acceptable solution to marital difficulties. In 1920 the U.S. divorce to marriage ratio was 1 to 7; in 1960 it was 1 to 4; and in 1972 it was 1 to 3. By 1977 there was one divorce for every two marriages. In 1978 alone there were 1,130,000 divorces.²²

Most Protestants have abandoned any attempt to adhere to a literal interpretation of the exception clause and will accept divorce and remarriage for most marital conflicts and difficulties. Roman Catholics officially oppose divorce, but in practice many Catholics accept it. The Catholic Church is under strong pressure to relax its antdivorce law, and it already grants annulments to almost anyone who can afford the complicated church legal procedures.

In view of this, it is imperative that Christians stand firmly against the pressures of an ungodly society. Regardless of our precise interpretation of the exception clause, we must recognize its essentially limited, restrictive nature. The central thrust of the Bible message on divorce is that it is not the will of God. Rather than seeking ways to justify divorce we should seek ways to overcome difficulties and effect reconciliation.

What can ministers do to combat the rising divorce rate? As preventive medicine, they must teach biblical concepts of marriage and emphasize the lifelong commitment to building and maintaining a marriage. They should also teach proper respect for the single life, establishing that single person can live a happy, successful, fulfilled life and can serve the Lord in ways that would be more difficult for a married person. It is much better to live a single life than to make a mistake in choosing a mate or to marry against the will of God as stated in Scripture. Furthermore, they should not perform a marriage ceremony if either party believes that divorce would be an acceptable way of settling conflict. By word and action, they must lift high God's ideal of marriage and stress the sanctity and inviolability of the marriage vow.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹*Parade Magazine*, September 11, 1983, p. 10.
- ²Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Vol. II of *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (1961), pp. 158-59.
- ³Tertullian, *Apology*, 46.10, ANF, III, 51.
- ⁴Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 34, ANF, II, 147.
- ⁵See ANF, I, 172; II, 89, 147, 261; V, 278.
- ⁶See ANF, II, 75, 266, 289; V, 277.
- ⁷Bainton, p, 56.
- ⁸"Marriage (Christian)," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, James Hastings, et al (eds.) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), VIII, 434.
- ⁹*Ibid.*, VIII, 439.
- ¹⁰Hermas, *The Shepherd*, 2.4.1, ANF, II, 21.
- ¹¹Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 33, ANF, II, 146.
- ¹²Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, 1, ANF, IV, 59.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, 11, ANF, II, 68.
- ¹⁴"Marriage (Christian)," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, VIII, 439.
- ¹⁵*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 6.3.17, ANF, VII, 457.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, 8.47.48, ANF, VII, 503.
- ¹⁷"Marriage (Christian)," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, VIII, 439.
- ¹⁸Hollenweger, pp. 403-404.
- ¹⁹*Manual, United Pentecostal Church International* (1984), pp. 24-25.
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 39.
- ²¹"The Sexual Revolution of the Twentieth Century," *Christianity Today*, November 11, 1983, p. 29.
- ²²The statistics in this paragraph come from J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1981), p. 12.

12

THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

“Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17).

“Abstain . . . from blood” (Acts 15:29).

Biblical Foundation

The Bible affirms the sanctity of human life in strong terms. When one person kills another he violates God’s law and destroys God’s image-creature (Genesis 9:5-6). Furthermore, the killer destroys the victim’s future potential, including the possibility of future salvation in the case of an unsaved person.

The Law prohibited all murder (Exodus 20:13), and the New Testament affirms this teaching (Matthew 15:18-20; Galatians 5:19-21; James 2:11; I Peter 4:15). By extension this forbids violence and aggression. John the Baptist told repentant soldiers, “Do violence to no

man” (Luke 3:14). He who hates is a murderer and does not have eternal life (I John 3:14-15).

Jesus went beyond the Law in teaching nonviolence and no retaliation. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:38-39, 43-44). (See also Romans 12:19; I Peter 3:9.)

The Jerusalem Council admonished Gentile Christians to abstain from blood (Acts 15:29). If Acts 15 teaches us not to eat blood because it symbolizes life (Leviticus 17:10-11), surely it also teaches us to abstain from actual bloodshed (taking of human life).

The New Testament thus leads us to reject the killing of human beings under all circumstances, even in warfare, self-defense, and suicide. In addition, the Bible indicates that God considers the child in the womb to be a human life; therefore we reject abortion since it is a form of murder.

Killing in Warfare and Self Defense

Many biblical examples specifically indicate that God does not will for a Christian to take the life of another person, even in warfare or self-defense. When Peter began to use his sword in an attempt to defend the Lord from cap-

ture, Jesus said to him, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26:52). (See also Revelation 13:10.) In calling the rich to repentance, James noted, "Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you" (James 5:6).

The New Testament admonishes us to pay taxes, to submit to governmental authority, and to pray for civil leaders (Romans 13:1-7; I Timothy 2:1-3; Titus 3:1; I Peter 2:13-17), but it does not tell us to bear arms to support the government. Although the Roman Empire was a pagan government and a foreign dictatorship, Jesus did not endorse Jewish rebellion against it, but taught submission to civil government (Matthew 5:40-41; 17:24-27; 22:17-21). When slaves converted to Christianity, Paul and Peter did not condone rebellion against their masters but taught them to serve their masters, even harsh masters, as they would the Lord (Ephesians 6:5; I Peter 2:18-21).

When Christians were persecuted, they did not respond violently. Stephen did not throw stones back at his murderers, but prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). The Christians did not storm the prison where Peter was, but prayed for God to deliver him. Paul endured numerous imprisonments, five scourgings, three beatings, and a stoning without retaliating violently.

The New Testament teaches that each individual is of infinite value, that God is no respecter of persons, and that society should conform to the will of God. These principles certainly exclude any form of dictatorship, tyranny, persecution, or slavery. However, when Christians

actually faced such situations, God never willed for them to respond with physical violence, rebellion, or bloodshed.

It is difficult to justify any killing in view of Christ's admonitions not to be violent, not to retaliate, not to seek revenge, to love enemies, and to pray for persecutors. Some say His teaching relates only to personal not social situations, but how can a person separate personal morality from social responsibility? At the minimum, one cannot morally justify all wars simply because the government prosecutes them. How can a Christian participate in the massacre of innocent people, a war of conquest, an unprovoked nuclear attack, a war of revenge, or a war to maintain an oppressive dictatorship?

If we affirm that some wars are just, how can a Christian know when a war is justifiable, especially in light of governmental deception and the individual's limited information? In World War II, most Nazi soldiers thought they were defending their homeland, race, and culture against enemies that would destroy them if they were not destroyed first. They usually did not know of the atrocities committed by their own government. If we justify an individual's participation in killing simply because it seems justifiable based on his limited knowledge, then almost every soldier in every war is blameless. Even most Nazi and Communist soldiers have sincerely believed their cause was right. The only way for an individual to know with certainty that a war is just is if he fights for a theocracy, a government with God as the Commander-in-Chief. No such government exists today or will exist until Christ returns to earth, and at that time God Himself will do all the fighting necessary.

If it is right for a Christian to kill for country, then is

it right for a Christian to lie, steal, become a prostitute, worship idols or commit any other violation of God's moral law for country? Are we adrift on a sea of moral relativism and situation ethics, in which we base moral decisions on an individual's subjective utilitarian analysis or an unchristian government's proclamations?

When we make the decision to take a human life, we are making an exception to God's Word because we do not think it will work in our particular situation. However, God's moral law always brings the best results when viewed from an eternal perspective.

We deplore the militaristic spirit often associated with conservative religious movements today. We must not equate Christianity with carnal warfare, or patriotism with bloodshed. Even if we think some wars are justifiable or even if we appreciate the positive benefits of some wars, we must emphasize that war is essentially evil. It is a scourge of mankind. We must never glorify war. If our world were Christian, there would be no war, and if our nation were Christian, God could protect us without war.

Israel's Wars

Why did God allow and even command the Israelites to destroy their enemies in the Old Testament? First, the Old Testament Israelites did not have the Holy Ghost baptism with its overcoming power, nor did they have a complete understanding of God's perfect will in this area. God worked with them on the level they had attained.

Even in the Old Testament it seems that God preferred to do all the fighting. When the Egyptians pursued

the Israelites, Moses proclaimed, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD . . . The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (Exodus 14:13-14). God miraculously delivered Elisha from the Syrian army (II Kings 6:13-23) and miraculously delivered Samaria from the Syrian army (II Kings 7:6-7). Likewise, God sent an angel to defeat the Assyrian army singlehandedly (II Kings 19:35). When Jehoshaphat appointed singers to praise the Lord and the beauty of holiness before the army, God miraculously ambushed the enemy, apparently using angelic hosts (II Chronicles 20:20-25). Perhaps God would have done this more had Israel trusted Him fully and understood His perfect will. God refused to let David build the temple because he was a man of war and had shed blood (I Chronicles 28:3).

In the New Testament, Christ specifically went beyond the Old Testament revelation on this subject, calling us to a higher personal morality. Just after implementing this higher teaching, Christ said, “Be ye therefore perfect” (Matthew 5:48). This parallels God’s progressively stricter dealings from Old to New Testament in other areas such as incest, polygamy, and divorce.

Second, God used Israel as a unique theocratic instrument for several reasons which do not apply today: to bring judgment upon ungodly nations, to teach that the penalty for sin is death, and to protect His chosen nation so that His plan of salvation would survive. “The Canaanites against whom Israel waged war were under judicial sentence of death by God. They were spiritually and morally degenerate. . . . Thus, God ordered all the Canaanites to be killed. . . . both because they were under

God's death sentence, and to avoid the contamination of Israel."¹

Today, God no longer deals primarily with nations but with individuals. He reserves judgment and tells His people not to judge others. We call this the age of grace, because God has revealed grace, mercy, and longsuffering in a greater measure than ever before and because He does not execute judgment speedily as usually occurred under the Law.

God's chosen people are not a *physically* unique nation which He must protect against enemy nations. God's salvation plan no longer depends upon a physical nation. Our weapons are not physical, but spiritual. The Israelites were physically separated from the world by diet, farming practices, and keeping of the Sabbath, but we are spiritually separated from the world. The Israelites fought the world physically, but we fight the world spiritually. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds)" (II Corinthians 10:3-4). "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Defense of Country

If everyone believed that all wars are wrong, how would his country defend itself from attack? This objection ignores Christ's teaching that the true church would

be a relatively small, persecuted minority in this world, composed of the few who follow the narrow way rather than the many who follow the broad path. Jesus said that His church would not be part of the world system. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14, 16). "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36). We are aliens and strangers in this world, with our first allegiance to a heavenly country (Hebrews 11:13-16).

If patriotism justifies killing, then two Spirit-filled members of the same "holy nation" (I Peter 2:9) could justifiably kill each other in a war between their respective earthly nations!

If the world did convert to apostolic Christianity there would be no war. In the unlikely event that one nation so converted while its enemies did not, that nation would have greater protection by prayer and faith in God than by faith in its own carnal weapons. If God allowed an aggressor to attack a genuinely Christian nation, it would be better to submit to dictatorship or to resist nonviolently than to cause the destruction of thousands of people. This is effectively what Jesus and Paul taught by saying it was better to live under a dictatorial or enslaving condition instead of rebelling. Even advocates of just war agree that this is true in some cases. "Allowing evil aggression would be better than total annihilation."²

God can use the non-Christian society to further His will and to protect His people. Thus, God may allow a nation to go to war and win so that His purpose will be accomplished. However, this does not mean He desires for His church to take part in the killing. In the Old Testa-

ment God allowed the Assyrians to chastise Israel, but then punished them for their own aggression (Isaiah 8:1-7; 10:12-27). God can channel ungodly actions into furthering His plans, but if the nation turns to Him He can achieve the same results in a better way.

There are many ways to serve one's country well without participating in killing. The Bible teaches us to pay taxes and to pray for governmental leaders. Our prayers can be very effective weapons for justice and righteousness. We can also contribute to the strength of our country by working diligently and by helping those less fortunate than we are. In fact, the Bible commands both (Ephesians 6:5-7; I Thessalonians 4:11; James 1:27; 2:15-17). Finally, even in the armed forces there are many legitimate, noncombatant jobs such as medical assistant, quartermaster, chaplain's assistant, and clerk. Even in combat, the medic can be just as courageous in saving life as others are in destroying life.

Defense of Self and Family

How should we defend ourselves or our families against murderous attacks? John Yoder's book, *What Would You Do?*, lists the options available to the Christian who is committed to pacifism: martyrdom, divine intervention, ruse, nonlethal violence, or moral disarming. This last category includes such things as showing respect, showing love, or asserting moral authority, which often so affect the attacker that he changes his mind. Yoder gave six actual case studies, ranging from war-time to a prison riot to a mugging, in which nonviolent

methods stopped a lethal attack.

We do not interpret Christ's teaching to mean we must passively, idly watch while an attacker seriously injures or kills someone. Under some circumstances, it would be appropriate to use the minimum force necessary to halt, ward off, or incapacitate the attacker. The motivation in such a case must not be hatred, retaliation, revenge, desire to harm, or desire to fight, but simply protection against harm. Under no circumstances, however, should we deliberately seek to kill the attacker. We can seek to prevent evil, but not at the expense of performing an equal or greater evil. It is essentially wrong to use physical force except in cases of extreme necessity, and then not to the point of taking a life.

From a spiritual perspective, the Christian should not fear death. It would be better for the Christian to die and be with the Lord than for his attacker to die and be forever lost. Jesus and Stephen set the example by praying for their murderers. Through their courageous deaths onlookers such as the Roman centurion and (as some scholars propose) Saul of Tarsus came to a knowledge of the truth.

In the vast majority of self defense situations, we would not face the choice of killing or being killed. We must trust God to keep us from or to protect us in the extremely rare cases of this nature. Moreover, we must use prudence and not place ourselves in situations where we might be forced to make this decision.

Bearing Arms

If we reject deadly force as an option, then the bear-

ing of arms becomes problematic. It could reflect a fundamental lack of faith in God's protective power (Job 1:9-12; 2:6) and the protective ministry of angels (Psalm 34:7; 91:11). If God prohibits killing, what is the purpose of carrying a deadly weapon? In a time of crisis, can we trust ourselves not to use it lethally? If a potential victim produces a weapon, he forces the attacker to act violently and often places himself in greater danger. Furthermore, these weapons kill many more people in accidents and arguments than in self-defense situations.

Why did Jesus tell His disciples on one occasion to carry swords? (Luke 22:35-38). After the Last Supper, Jesus gave new instructions to His disciples relative to the preaching of the gospel. Earlier in His ministry, He had sent them out without purse (money) or bag (supply of food), telling them to depend upon the hospitality of the people. Now, however, He told them to take purse, bag, and sword. Possibly, He meant for them to take swords for protection against wild beasts and robbers (to frighten off or ward off the latter, not to kill them).

More probably, His allusion to the sword was metaphoric. In other words, He was warning that they would no longer enjoy a hearty welcome in every place, but would face bitter opposition. Therefore, they should learn to provide for themselves and to brace themselves spiritually against attack and persecution.

Upon hearing this, the disciples found two swords and brought them to Christ. He told them, "It is enough." Two swords are not adequate for twelve men. Apparently, the disciples failed to understand Christ's real meaning at that time. When He saw them bringing two literal swords, He decided to drop the subject. This view receives

support from Christ's admonition to Peter a short time later. When Peter actually tried to use one of these swords in Christ's defense, He forbade him with words that denounce all killing. Furthermore, never again do we hear of the disciples resisting violence with violence, although they were subjected to violence many times.

Capital Punishment

Does not the Bible teach capital punishment? The Old Testament did establish capital punishment for many sins. One key passage says, "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Exodus 21:23-24).

Jesus specifically superseded this passage, however. If we use Old Testament precedent to justify our participation in capital punishment, we must support capital punishment for crimes such as adultery, breaking the Sabbath, false prophecy, rebellion against parents, gluttony, drunkenness, and negligent manslaughter (Exodus 21:28-29; Numbers 15:32-36; Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 21:18-21; 22:22). Likewise, the church would have to pass judgment, and individual members would have to cast stones at the criminal. However, Jesus specifically superseded this practice by refusing to condemn the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11).

Like just war, capital punishment could only work perfectly in a theocracy. God's purpose under the law was to demonstrate that the penalty for sin is death. Now that He has established this principle, He grants a greater measure of mercy and time to repent. Christians cannot participate in capital punishment today, for then they would

pass judgment before God has done so and cut off mercy before God desires to do so. How ironic it would be to promote capital punishment and prison ministry at the same time!

The civil government bears the sword as a servant of God in maintaining order, exacting vengeance and causing the evildoer to fear (Romans 13:4). This implies capital punishment, although it may simply mean the use of physical force or restraint to maintain order. Apparently, the civil government can impose capital punishment for some offenses. God uses the ungodly society as an instrument to bring judgment upon ungodly lawbreakers. However, this does not mean He desires for His people to perform executions, for Christians are warned not to take vengeance (Romans 12:19).

A Christian should refuse to condemn a person to death as juror, judge, or executioner. To be logically consistent, if one will participate in the sentencing process, he should be willing to perform the execution. However, in light of Christ's teachings, this is not a proper role for a Christian.

Abortion and the Scriptures

One can view abortion in one of three ways: (1) The unborn child is a human being with a right to life. (2) The unborn child is a potential human life; we must protect it unless more significant harm will be done to an actual human life. (3) The unborn child is not a human life, so deliberate abortion is morally acceptable.

It appears that God Himself views the unborn child as

a human being. Psalm 139:13-16 plainly teaches that God creates, cares for, and makes plans for the child in the womb. “For You have formed my inward parts; You have covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them” (*NKJV*).

God fashions and forms the unborn child (Job 10:8-12; 31:15). God made plans for both Isaiah and Jeremiah while they were yet in the womb (Isaiah 49:1-5; Jeremiah 1:5). The Holy Ghost moved upon John the Baptist while he was in the womb (Luke 1:41, 44).

The law imposed a penalty for those who hurt the unborn child: “If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no lasting harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any lasting harm follows, then you shall give life for life” (Exodus 21:22-23, *NKJV*).

According to Genesis 9:6, God forbids the killing of man because He made man in His image. Doctors have no difficulty in identifying the unborn child as human; it shares the image of God with the rest of humanity. Consequently, killing this child violates God’s law.

When does the child become human? When does it become a soul? Many alternatives have been proposed: conception, implantation (when the fertilized egg attaches to the wall of the womb), forty days, quickening (when

the mother first feels movement), viability (when it becomes capable of surviving outside the womb), birth, or ten days after birth.

Since God treats the unborn child as human, we can eliminate birth as the time when life begins. Adam became a living soul when he breathed the breath of life, but God uniquely created Adam and Eve as adults while creating everyone else in the womb. Moreover, the unborn child does “breathe” amniotic fluid.

Conception is the most clearly defined point for the unborn child to receive its spiritual identity. Scripture indicates that the child inherits its sinful human nature at conception. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). The Spirit of God caused the conception of Jesus in the womb of a virgin (Matthew 1:18, 20). Specifically because of this miraculous conception, the child was God with us, the Son of God, and the only begotten of the Father (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:35; John 1:14). The Son of Mary received the nature of deity at conception; the Incarnation took place at that time.

All alternatives other than conception are highly arbitrary, incapable of clear determination, and without biblical support. Modern technology has pushed the point of detection of movement and the point of viability to earlier times than ever before. In view of the extreme uncertainty and lack of biblical evidence associated with the other alternatives, we cannot afford to act upon them. This means we should avoid abortion at every stage, including birth control methods that do not prevent conception but only prevent implantation of the fertilized egg. This would include some types of birth control pills (the mini-pill)

and the interuterine device (IUD).

We conclude from Scripture that the unborn child is a human being with a right to life as great as our own.

Medical Evidence on the Unborn Child

The scientific evidence supports our conclusion. (See *Rites of Life: The Scientific Evidence for Life before Birth*.³) Here are some key facts relative to the development of the unborn baby, taken from *When You Were Formed in Secret* by Gary Bergel with remarks by C. Everett Koop M.D.⁴ (Koop has since served as Surgeon General of the U.S.) It is significant to note how much development takes place in the first few weeks, before the mother even knows she is pregnant.

Week 1: The fertilized egg attaches to the wall of the womb.

Week 2: The tiny organism begins to send hormonal signals to the mother.

Week 3: The heart begins beating. The brain begins to form and soon sends impulses throughout the body. If it were outside the womb, it would be legally alive.

Week 4: Legs and arms form.

Month 2: The inner ear forms. Feeble body movements can be recorded. The fetus swims and responds to touch. All this indicates that the nervous system has developed to the point that the baby can experience pain.

Month 3: The baby sleeps and wakes. He “breathes,” drinks, and excretes amniotic fluid. He can distinguish tastes. The vocal cords are complete; he could cry if he

had air. The fingerprints are complete, giving a unique legal identity.

Month 4: Facial features are distinct. The baby usually begins to suck his thumb.

Months 5-6: The baby hiccups, kicks, punches, and recognizes his mother's voice. He has a favorite position in which to settle.

Months 7-9: By this time, the baby has full use of sight, hearing, taste, and touch. He has experienced his own motions, waking and sleeping, and secretions. He relates to the moods and emotions of his mother. Before he ever leaves the womb he has already experienced a wide range of human activities and stored them in his brain for assistance in facing the future.

Abortion Methods

Five methods of abortion are currently in use in America.⁵ The first two account for over 95% of all abortions.

(1) *Dilatation and Curettage* (D & C). The abortionist uses a curette, a tiny hoe-like instrument, to scrape the wall of the womb. This cuts the baby's body into pieces. Nurses reassemble the body parts to make certain that nothing remains in the womb.

(2) *Suction*. The abortionist uses a suction tube to suck the baby into a jar, again tearing the body into pieces. At a recent Right to Life Convention, Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a former abortionist, showed a movie of this method. The film used new sonographic techniques and showed "the outline of the child in the womb thrashing to

resist the suction device before it tears off the head.”⁶

(3) *Salt Poisoning*. The abortionist uses a long needle to inject a strong salt solution directly into the amniotic fluid. The baby swallows and “breathes” the salt, which poisons and burns him. About a day later the dead, shriveled baby is expelled from the womb. Occasionally, babies survive this process and are born alive with a grotesque physical appearance.

(4) *Hysterotomy or Caesarean Section*. This method is most used in the last three months. The abortionist removes the baby surgically, just as in a Caesarean birth, except that the baby dies.

(5) *Prostaglandin Chemicals*. The abortionist applies hormone-like compounds to the muscle of the womb which cause intense contractions that push out the baby prematurely.

When these last two methods are used, the baby will occasionally be born alive, to the dismay of all concerned. It thereby obtains a legal right to life, although it usually receives minimal medical help and soon dies. In some such cases, abortionists have killed the baby by total neglect or by a direct act, even though this is legally manslaughter or murder. The doctor can legally kill the baby while holding it in the womb; it is illegal for him to kill it once it is outside the womb.

Are Some Abortions Justifiable?

Reasons often given for justifying abortion include preserving the mother’s life, the expectation of a defective child, rape, and incest. However, these account for

only 3% of all abortions; the other 97% occur for matters of convenience and economy.⁷ Pro-abortionists justify the 97% by arguing: (1) a woman should have absolute control over her body and (2) everyone will suffer if a child comes into a family that is emotionally and financially unprepared for it. However, the time to consider these things is when deciding to marry and to engage in sexual activity. The solution is birth control, not abortion. The mother voluntarily subordinates certain of her rights to those of her child when she allows herself to become pregnant. Adoption is always available for those who do not want the child. The real issue is convenience; the mother does not want to undergo the remaining months of her pregnancy. Surely, matters of convenience cannot take precedence over human life. If this reason justifies abortion, what prevents it from justifying infanticide as well?

What if the child will probably be physically or mentally handicapped? We must affirm that all human life is worth living. Handicapped persons can enjoy life as much as anyone else. Otherwise, this reasoning would justify killing of handicapped adults. Once conception occurs, the decision is not ours but God's. Many times, doctors significantly overestimate the health problems of the unborn child. Can we afford to abort this life with its unknown potential when nature has not chosen to do so by miscarriage?

What about cases of rape and incest? These are very difficult situations, but if the unborn child is actually a human being, can we kill it because of its father's sin? If the rape victim reports immediately to a doctor she can almost certainly prevent pregnancy. Can we kill the

unborn baby because its mother was ignorant and failed to take proper action? The child is a result of sin, but can we kill children conceived out of wedlock on the same basis? The rape victim does not deserve what has happened to her, but can we ease her situation by killing an innocent third party? Suppose a married woman is raped by a man of a different race and conceives as a result. Suppose she thinks the child is a product of her marriage, but at birth discovers it is not. If we can justify abortion for rape, can we justify infanticide in this situation? In view of all these moral difficulties, it seems advisable for a victim of rape or incest to have her child and give it up for adoption rather than to have an abortion.

Finally, can we allow abortion to save the mother's life? First, we should rely on the general will of God to heal and to help the holy woman in childbirth (I Timothy 2:15). If the mother's life is actually at stake, however, the doctor should perhaps take the baby early. In this case, the intent is not to kill either mother or child but to save the life of both if possible. Even if the child dies, this is no more than what would happen to the mother otherwise. The choice is not between killing and not killing, but between letting one person die and letting two people die.

This situation is unique to pregnancy, because in no other case are the physical lives of two people inextricably intertwined in this manner. In our day, many prominent doctors maintain that, given the advances of modern medicine, it is never necessary to perform an abortion because of complications of pregnancy.⁸

Teaching in Church History: War

Roland Bainton remarked that “no Christian writer prior to the time of Constantine approved of Christian participation in warfare. . . . The primary reason for the objection to participation in warfare was the aversion to bloodshed. . . . Bloodshed was abhorred by the Church. Therefore, of course, gladiatorial combats were condemned and the Christians could not witness them. Christians could assume no magisterial post that carried with it the possibility of passing a sentence of death.”⁹ Kenneth Latourette affirmed that no Christian writing of the first three centuries condoned participation in war.¹⁰

Tertullian said that God “puts His interdict on every sort of man-killing by that one summary precept, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’”¹¹ Specifically, he concluded that warfare was not proper at all for Christians. He asked, “Shall it be held lawful to make an occupation of the sword, when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword? And shall the son of peace take part in the battle when it does not become him even to sue at law?”¹²

The Canons of Hippolytus stated, “It is not meet for Christians to bear arms.”¹³ Hippolytus claimed apostolic tradition in opposition to all killing. For converts he said, “A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men and refuse to do so if he is commanded, and to refuse to take an oath; if he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected. A military commander or civic magistrate that wears the purple must resign or be rejected.”¹⁴

The pagan Celsus charged Christians with undermining the state because they abstained from war. Origen did

not deny this charge of pacifism, but argued that if everyone became Christians war would become unnecessary. "If all the Romans . . . embrace the Christian faith, they will, when they pray, overcome their enemies; or rather, they will not war at all, being guarded by that divine power which promised to save five entire cities for the sake of fifty just persons. . . . When God gives to the tempter permission to persecute us, then we suffer persecution; and when God wishes us to be free from suffering, even in the midst of a world that hates us, we enjoy a wonderful peace, trusting in the protection of Him who said, 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'"¹⁵

Celsus urged Christians to help the king by going to war. Origen replied that Christians fight spiritually for the king through prayer. "And as we by our prayers vanquish all demons who stir up war, and lead to the violation of oaths, and disturb the peace, we in this way are much more helpful to the kings than those who go into the field to fight for them. . . . We do not indeed fight under him, although he require it; but we fight on his behalf, forming a special army—an army of piety—by offering our prayers to God."¹⁶

Lactantius wrote, "For when God forbids us to kill, He not only prohibits us from open violence, which is not even allowed by the public laws, but He warns us against the commission of those things which are esteemed lawful among men. Thus [it is not] lawful for a just man to engage in warfare. . . . Therefore, with regard to this precept of God, there ought to be no exception at all; but that it is always unlawful to put to death a man."¹⁷

In the Middle Ages, the Waldensians opposed all tak-

ing of human life. During the Reformation, the Anabaptists even rejected military service on the ground that all taking of human life is sinful. Thus the Mennonites and the Hutterites today are pacifists. The Quakers likewise are pacifists. The early Pentecostals were pacifists, with many rejecting all military service. The Assemblies of God originally discouraged military service, but now leaves the decision to the individual. The United Pentecostal Church does not oppose noncombatant military service, but does oppose all killing.

The Articles of Faith of the UPC state, "We believe and interpret, [the Bible] to mean Christians shall not shed blood nor take human life. Therefore we propose to fulfill all the obligations of loyal citizens, but are constrained to declare against participating in combatant service in war, armed insurrection, property destruction, aiding or abetting in or the actual destruction of human life. . . . We believe that we can be consistent in serving our Government in certain noncombatant capacities, but not in the bearing of arms."¹⁸

Teaching in Church History: Abortion

Latourette noted that the early church fathers universally condemned abortion.¹⁹

Athenagorus wrote, "Those women who use drugs to bring on abortion commit murder, and will have to give an account to God for the abortion . . . [We] regard the very foetus in the womb as a created being, and therefore an object of God's care."²⁰

Pagans accused Christians of killing and eating chil-

dren in secret rites. Tertullian countered, "Murder being once for all forbidden, we may not destroy even the foetus in the womb. . . . To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to the birth. . . . Blush for your vile ways before the Christians, who have not even the blood of animals at their meals of simple and natural food; who abstain from things strangled. . . . You tempt Christians with sausages of blood, just because you are perfectly aware that the thing by which you thus try to get them to transgress they hold unlawful. And how unreasonable it is to believe that those, of whom you are convinced that they regard with horror the idea of tasting the blood of oxen, are eager after the blood of men."²¹

Minucius Felix wrote, "There are some women who, by drinking medical preparations, extinguish the source of the future man in their very bowels, and thus commit a parricide [murder of a relative] before they bring forth. . . . To us it is not lawful either to see or to hear of homicide; and so much do we shrink from human blood, that we do not use the blood even of eatable animals in our food."²²

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* say, "Thou shall not slay thy child by causing abortion, nor kill that which is begotten."²³

The Roman Catholic Church today strongly opposes abortion, even in cases of rape, danger to the mother's life, and malformation of the unborn. Most liberal Protestant churches allow it, while conservative Protestants still oppose the practice.

Abortion was illegal throughout most of the history of

the United States. In 1967 Colorado became the first state to make abortion on demand legal in cases of grave danger to the mother's physical or mental health, rape, incest, or likelihood of severe deformity.²⁴ In 1973 the Supreme Court struck down all laws that severely restricted abortion. In 1974, the first full year of legalized abortion, almost 900,000 abortions took place in the U.S.²⁵ According to *U.S. News & World Report*, over 1,500,000 legal abortions were performed in 1980. Literally millions of unborn children die from abortions. Statistically, the most dangerous place for a child is its mother's womb.

Conclusion

In many ways our society is losing its sense of the sanctity of human life. Abortion is now commonplace. People have smothered or starved aborted babies who continued to live outside the womb. Warfare is endemic to our planet. Violence is a favorite topic for television and movies, and audiences love it. The news media routinely portray brutal scenes of war, terrorism, crime, and accidents. Many theologians advocate violent rebellion and terrorism as valid methods of achieving greater social justice and democracy. Most countries use murder to quell political dissent and accept aggressive war as part of international politics. In general, our world accepts violence and bloodshed as legitimate means to publicize issues, resolve differences of opinion, and assert rights.

Recently there have been many specific indications of the decreasing value society places on human life. In Bloomington, Indiana, "a baby with Down's syndrome

was starved to death in a hospital after doctors, parents, and a state court agreed that no treatment should be given.”²⁶ A victim of cerebral palsy sued to force health care workers to let her commit suicide by starvation; fortunately, the court refused her. A U.S. governor discussed the duty of the elderly to die and relieve the next generation of the costly burden of care. The World Council of Churches has provided financial support for “liberation” armies committed to violence. A Nobel prize winner advocates that infants not be declared human until several days after birth so that those with defects can be legally killed. The Humanist Manifesto recognizes the right to commit suicide.

We wonder how the Nazis could have murdered six million Jews and how a nation of civilized, “Christian” people could have allowed such crimes to occur. Yet by desensitizing ourselves to violence and killing, we are conditioning ourselves to the point where our society could accept such crimes on a similar scale. Already we have accepted the killing of more than one million unborn babies per year. Will this philosophy spread to justify infanticide, euthanasia (“mercy killing”), killing of the handicapped, killing of the aged, or assisting someone who wishes to commit suicide? Where will it end?

What would the man Jesus do? Would Christ perform an abortion? Would Christ cut up an unborn child and throw it in a trash can? Would Christ shoot to kill a mugger? Would Christ be a sniper in the army? Would Christ plant a minefield? Would Christ flip the switch on an electric chair? Would Christ be a member of a firing squad? If He would not, then neither can we. The Christian solution is to affirm the sanctity of the individual human life to

such an extent that we will not deliberately take a human life for any reason.

FOOTNOTES

¹Rushdoony, p. 279.

²Norman Geisler, *Ethics: Issues and Alternatives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), p. 176.

³Landrum Shettles, M.D. and Daniel Rorvick, *Rites of Life: The Scientific Evidence for Life before Birth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

⁴Gary Bergel with C. Everett Koop, *Abortion in America and When You Were Formed in Secret* (Elyria, Ohio: Intercessors for America, 1980).

⁵*Ibid.*, p. II-4.

⁶Joseph Sobran, "Burden of proof is now on abortionists," *Jackson Daily News*, June 22, 1984, p. 10A.

- ⁷Bergel, p. II-7.
- ⁸William Nolen, M.D., *The Baby in the Bottle* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1978), pp. 35, 57.
- ⁹Bainton, pp. 50-54.
- ¹⁰Latourette, I, 242-243.
- ¹¹Tertullian, *The Shows*, 2, ANF, III, 80.
- ¹²Tertullian, *The Chaplet [On the Crown]*, 11, ANF, III, 99.
- ¹³“Heds of the Canons of Abulides or Hippolytus,” ANF, V, 256.
- ¹⁴Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, in Bainton, p. 152.
- ¹⁵Origen, *Against Celsus*, 70, ANF, IV, 666.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, 75, ANF, IV, 668.
- ¹⁷Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, 6.22, ANF, VII, 187.
- ¹⁸*Manual, United Pentecostal Church International* (1984), p. 24.
- ¹⁹Latourette, I, 248.
- ²⁰Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 35, ANF, II, 147.
- ²¹Tertullian, *Apology*, 9, ANF, III, 25.
- ²²Minucius Felix, *The Octavius*, 30, ANF, IV, 192.
- ²³*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 7.3, ANF, VII, 466.
- ²⁴“The Sexual Revolution of the Twentieth Century,” *Christianity Today*, November 11, 1983, p. 29.
- ²⁵Donald Shoemaker, *Abortion, The Bible, and the Christian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 9.
- ²⁶“Koop’s Compromise: A Step Toward Protecting the Baby Does of the Future,” *Christianity Today*, February 1984, p. 44.

13

ASTROLOGY

“Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain” (Jeremiah 10:2-3).

Definition

Astrology is “divination that treats of the supposed influences of the stars upon human affairs and of foretelling terrestrial events by their positions and aspects.”¹ Divination is “the art or practice that seeks to foretell or foresee future events or discover hidden knowledge usually by means of augury or by . . . supernatural powers.” Sorcery is “the use of power gained from the assistance or control of evil spirits esp. for divining,” while witchcraft is “an act or instance of employing sorcery.”

Scriptural Teaching Against Astrology

The Bible opposes all forms of witchcraft, sorcery,

and magic, which by definition include fortunetelling and divination. (By magic we mean heathen and demonic practices, not sleight of hand, optical illusions, or other tricks presented merely for entertainment.) This scriptural prohibition includes astrology, since astrology is a type of divination.

Witchcraft is a work of the flesh that leads to damnation (Galatians 5:19-21). All sorcerers shall have their part in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). Paul cast out an evil spirit of divination that possessed a woman in Philippi, and the preaching of the gospel inspired the burning of many occult books in Ephesus (Acts 16:16-18; 19:18-20).

Deuteronomy 18:9-12 says, “When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or cast spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you” (*NIV*).

In Jeremiah 10 the LORD told His people not to learn the ways of heathen nations. Specifically, He instructed Israel not to pay any attention to astrological signs in the sky or to worship idols.

In Isaiah 47, God condemned all forms of witchcraft, explicitly including astrological prediction. This chapter describes the fall of Babylon, a city noted for its astrologers, magicians, and soothsayers. “You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, ‘No one sees me.’ Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to

yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.' Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you. Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. That is all they can do for you—these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you" (Isaiah 47:10-15, *NIV*).

The Book of Daniel also shows the bankruptcy of these Babylonian occult practices. The astrologers, magicians, and soothsayers could not understand or reveal God's truth to the Babylonian king (Daniel 2:27; 5:15).

Job proclaimed his innocence of sun and moon worship (Job 31:26). King Josiah of Judah eliminated the worship of the sun, moon, constellations, planets, and stars (II Kings 23:5). One of Israel's sins was the worship of stars (Amos 5:26; Acts 7:43).

False Science

Astrology is based on a false understanding of the

universe from the perspective of true science, as the following points demonstrate.

* The whole system assumes that the sun circles the earth. Predictions are based on the star constellations that appear in the path of the sun as it supposedly travels around the earth. However, we now know that the earth revolves around the sun and that the sun does not actually travel from one constellation to the other.

* The earth wobbles unevenly as it spins on its axis. Therefore, in our day the sun appears to enter each constellation one month earlier than it did when the astrological charts were invented centuries ago. Even if astrology were valid, one's horoscope would be one month earlier than astrologers say. Yet people claim to see great truth in the horoscopes assigned to them.

* Thousands of stars have been discovered since astrology was invented, yet astrology does not consider their possible influences.

* For many weeks of the year no constellations appear north of the Arctic Circle. Do Scandinavians, Eskimos, and Siberians born under these circumstance not have a horoscope?

* Different religions have contradictory astrological systems. Which system is correct, the one used in the West, the one used in the Far East, or yet another?

* The primary force by which one body in space acts upon another is gravity. Yet the sun and moon's gravitational pull on the earth each outweighs by far that of all stars and planets combined.

* Astrology is based on the moment of birth. Does this mean a mother can change her child's personality by choosing a Caesarean birth? Why would not the moment

of conception be more significant than the moment of birth? (Of course, this would put astrologers out of business since no one can determine the moment of conception.)

* Astrology does not know that the earth is a sphere instead of a flat surface. Two persons may be born at the same time but in opposite hemispheres under totally different astronomical conditions.

In view of astrology's faulty scientific basis, how can some find great predictive value in it? Most are gullible and deceived. Astrology's descriptions are so general that someone who wants to believe in them can usually find a resemblance to real life. Moreover, astrology can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If someone believes his horoscope he will act accordingly. His attitude towards himself and the world around him will significantly influence his actions and others' reactions to him.

When astrologers have predicted specific events, they have often been wrong. Even the most famous diviners of today have made many documented predictions that failed to come to pass. In general, their predictions are no more accurate than any educated guesswork. According to the Bible, if a prophecy fails to come to pass, then the prophet is false (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). We must also recognize that some astrologers and fortunetellers operate with satanic powers (Acts 16:16-19).

There is No "Godly" Astrology

Some claim that there is a true or godly astrology and a false or satanic astrology. However, the scriptural references we have given link all astrology with evil and

prohibit all astrological speculation or prediction. Nowhere does the Bible associate astrology with God. We cannot trace the origin of any astrological system to God but only to pagan religions.

God made the sun, moon, and stars as lights, as rulers over night and day, and for signs, seasons, days, and years (Genesis 1:14-18). They are rulers over night and day because they bring light into an otherwise dark world. They are for signs because they serve as navigational aids and location finders. They are for seasons, days, and years because they determine and display the progression of days, months, seasons of the year, and years. There is no astrological significance to these functions.

Psalm 19:1 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." This psalm speaks of God's creative power as displayed in nature. Through the testimony of creation itself we can know that God exists and we can learn much about His character and power. "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1:20, *NKJV*). Psalm 19:1 and Romans 1:20 express the same basic truth, and it would be a distortion of the Bible message to say the former verse supports astrology.

Deborah's song of victory stated that the stars in heaven fought against the enemy general Sisera (Judges 5:20). We believe this is an example of a poetic figure of speech. If Deborah believed it literally, then the Bible records it as her belief but not as God's truth. Some think this passage actually refers to angelic warfare.

The Star of Bethlehem did not involve the use of mag-

ical astrology. The wise men from the East were probably acquainted with astrology, but the Star of Bethlehem stood out as distinct from any system of astrology known to man. If they were observing the heavens for astrological reasons, they immediately recognized that this star was an exceptional one and followed it precisely because it did not fit into any pagan system. God did not use an astrological sign, but used an unusual astronomical event to attract their attention, just as He has used other forces in nature such as earthquakes, wind, and fire. Just as His use of fire at Mount Sinai does not endorse fire worship, so His use of the star does not endorse astrology.

It is dangerous to use astrology in an attempt to further the claims of Christianity or to predict the future. We must base all doctrine and prophecy solely on the written Word of God. Use of the false claims of astrology can only serve to discredit Christianity.

For example, a few years ago some borrowed the astrological belief that we would enter into a new age when all the planets were in alignment. They predicted all sorts of tumultuous events based on the gravitational pull of the aligned planets, but true scientists accurately predicted that no such events would occur simply because the combined pull of all the planets is insignificant compared to that of the sun and moon on the earth. Of course, the time for this event has come and gone, and “Christian” astrology has failed once again.

In some cases, Christians have actually used astrology to assist them in understanding personalities and in counselling. All such efforts are futile, because both science and Scripture testify that there is no truth to astrology. Furthermore, by using a satanic tool such as astrology,

these people have actually allowed themselves to come under Satan's influence. We can cite examples of Christians who have been led into the occult and who have transformed themselves into cultists because of their superstitious interest in and involvement with astrology.

Teaching in Church History

The ante-Nicene fathers were strong in their denunciation of astrology and all other forms of magic. The *Didache* says, "My child, be not an observer of omens, since it leadeth the way to idolatry, neither an enchanter, nor an astrologer."²

Hippolytus devoted Book IV of his work *The Refutation of All Heresies* to disproving the false claims of astrology. He called it an "art of divination" and an "impotent . . . system."³ He said that according to apostolic tradition no magician, enchanter, astrologer, diviner, or soothsayer could maintain his occupation and be a Christian.⁴

Tertullian also wrote against astrology.⁵

Lactantius said that astrology, soothsaying, divination, necromancy, and magic were all inventions of devils.⁶

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* admonished Christians to avoid all heathen "enchantments, observations of omens, soothsayings, purgations, divinations, observations of birds; their necromancies and invocations."⁷ Furthermore, no Christian could be "a magician, an enchanter, an astrologer, a diviner, an user of magic verses, a juggler, a mountebank, one that makes amulets, a charmer, a soothsayer, a fortune-teller, an observer of palmistry."⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Bible teaches that we should avoid all witchcraft and divination, including all forms of astrology. We must not attempt to find God's truth by using a heathen practice. If we want to know God's truth, let us go to His Word! If we seek insight to help plan our lives, or to counsel others, let us ask wisdom of God, who will give liberally to all who ask in faith (James 1:5-6). If we are curious about the future, let us place our faith in God and the Word of God.

FOOTNOTES

¹The definitions in this paragraph come from *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, pp. 135, 663, 2174, 2625.

²*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 3.4, ANF, VII, 378.

³Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, 4.27, ANF, V, 34.

⁴Bainton, p. 152.

⁵Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, 9, ANF, III, 65.

⁶Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, 2.17, ANF, VII, 65.

⁷*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 2.7.62, ANF, VII, 424.

⁸*Ibid.*, 8.4.32, ANF, VII, 495.

14

WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15).

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures” (Titus 3:3).

Scriptural Concepts

There is nothing wrong with pleasure in itself. God desires for us to enjoy life, and He is not displeased with an activity simply because it brings physical, mental, and emotional pleasure. After all, He designed our capacity for pleasure, and He Himself takes pleasure in His creation. Christ came that we might have abundant life, in the present and throughout eternity (John 10:10).

The Bible stands firmly, however, against pleasures and amusements associated with worldly lusts and attitudes.

According to Christ's parable of the sower, many who initially accept the Word eventually have their spiritual life choked out by thorns, which are the "cares and riches and pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14). The Bible warns against all forms of worldliness (Romans 12:2; James 4:4; I John 2:15-16). Moses chose not to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" but rather to identify with the people of God and to inherit eternal riches (Hebrews 11:24-26). Paul remarked that before our conversion we were foolish, disobedient, and deceived, serving worldly lusts and pleasures (Titus 3:3). He compared the Christian life to that of a disciplined soldier who refuses to become involved in civilian (worldly) affairs. "Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life" (II Timothy 2:3-4). From these passages, it is evident that some pleasures are not conducive to Christian living and can in fact be sinful.

As Titus 3:3 suggests, any amusement that would become our master or that would interfere with our relationship to God is wrong. In general, we must not submit our minds or bodies to anything that will be addictive or will bring us under its power (Romans 6:16; I Corinthians 6:12). All too often the spirit of pleasure so captivates people that they neglect their relationship with God, prayer, church attendance, Bible reading, witnessing, and working for God. We must never let enticing pleasures distort our spiritual priorities or rob us of all our available time. We must always place God first in our lives, followed by family and church. We should redeem the time—make the most of every opportunity—because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5).

Paul warned that in the last days men would be “lovers of their own selves” and “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (II Timothy 3:2, 4). In Noah’s day, people were so busy eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage that they were oblivious to the message of judgment, and the same is true prior to the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:37-39). At some point, even participation in permissible activities becomes excessive and displeasing to God.

Worldly Appearance

For convenience of analysis, we will discuss worldliness in three categories. First, some things should be avoided because of their worldly appearance or association. “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (I Thessalonians 5:22). There may be nothing inherently wrong with a certain activity, but because of its worldly appearance, connotation, or impression it should be avoided. The world says, “I will do what I want regardless of what anyone else thinks.” Even Christians are prone to think, “As long as I know I am not sinning I do not care what anyone else thinks.” However, we must not only be right but also appear right in the sight of everyone. “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody” (Romans 12:17, *NIV*). “For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men” (II Corinthians 8:21, *NIV*). We are stewards of our fellow Christian and our fellow man; it is important that we do nothing to offend them needlessly or to cause them to stumble. (See Chapter 4.)

Worldly Atmosphere

Second, some things are detrimental to Christian living because an excessively worldly atmosphere or environment surrounds them, even though the activities themselves are acceptable. A basic principle of Christian liberty is to avoid activities that become detrimental or get the mastery over us, even if they are morally neutral in themselves (I Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). Harmless activities become harmful when conducted in an openly sinful atmosphere. The biblical injunctions to avoid worldliness certainly direct us not to congregate habitually in such an environment. Perhaps Psalm 1:1 has a literal application here: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” (See Psalm 26:4-5.)

A worldly atmosphere might include things such as gambling, cursing, smoking, drinking, extreme rivalry, violence, gossip, immodest dress, “petting or necking,” lewd language, lewd activities, and immoral music. Of course, the Christian will face these things to some degree simply by living in this world. It is impossible to avoid all worldly influences. At some point, however, a place becomes so saturated with some or all of these evils that the only Christian response is to avoid it totally. In making this decision, the Christian must evaluate specific activities in light of the particular local situation.

Inherently Worldly Amusements

Finally, certain activities are excessively worldly in

themselves, and must always be shunned. “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11). For example, among other things, we must shun revellings (or rioting) and banquetings (Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; I Peter 4:3). The *NKJV* calls them revelries and drinking parties, while the *NIV* calls them orgies and carousing. In many cases, even though there may be no explicit scriptural prohibition against an activity as we know it, an application of scriptural principles shows it to be inimical to Christian values.

Practical Application

The proper role of the church is not merely to forbid leisure activities indiscriminately, but to establish wholesome alternatives compatible with Christianity. We are not bound by externally imposed regulations, but we choose to exercise our Christian liberty to enjoy activities edifying to the whole man rather than those detrimental to the spiritual man. We believe in enjoying Christianity and enjoying life—and we do! We starve the lusts and desires of the sinful nature, but we are able to enjoy life as a whole person. The man bound by sin does things that his inner, moral self hates (Romans 7:15), but with God’s Spirit in control, we can do everything we want to do and lead happy, fulfilled, successful lives.

The places and events that are excessively worldly may vary depending upon time, culture, and locale. We cannot resolve these issues by a universal, legalistic list of do’s and don’ts, but at some point we must judge whether

certain activities sponsored by the world are corrupted by the spirit of the world. We must let the Spirit, the Word, conscience, and godly leadership warn us of situations that are incompatible with a separated, holy lifestyle because of their worldliness.

Innocent activities become detrimental when taken to excess. They become wrong for us when we allow them to dominate our thinking and time, taking us totally away from spiritual things. In recent years, video games have shown their potential to become addictive. Some people become so preoccupied with sports and follow sports events so closely that they are caught up in the spirit of them. It is possible to participate so much in any recreational activity—such as hunting, fishing, sports, and hobbies—that there is no time left for God. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with these things in their proper place.

As a modern example of worldly appearance, we do not use regular playing cards, not because there is anything wrong with the cards themselves but because of their strong association with gambling. As another example, sometimes one office worker will volunteer to buy snacks for everyone. Occasionally, someone will give him money to buy a pack of cigarettes. If a Christian accepts the money and purchases cigarettes, he will give the wrong impression to a casual observer; in this manner he will devalue his witness in the office.

As examples of worldly atmosphere, we have personally avoided certain of the following events and places: musical concerts, office parties, large sports activities organized by the world, fairs, pool halls, bowling alleys, and skating rinks. We have even avoided some

eating establishments characterized by extreme worldliness in music, dress, language, clientele, and total atmosphere. This is not to say that, regardless of circumstances, we would always shun the above activities or all places where such activities are conducted. We recognize that these activities can be perfectly wholesome if conducted in the proper atmosphere and place

As examples of modern amusements inherently worldly under all circumstances, we can cite gambling, modern dancing, listening to hard rock music, attending movies, and participating in the occult.

Chapters 14 and 15 of *In Search of Holiness* specifically discussed the problems with worldly music, dancing, worldly sports, worldly games, and occult practices.

Gambling

Christians have historically opposed gambling because it violates many scriptural principles. First, it manifests covetousness or greed. It is motivated by a desire to get something for nothing. Covetousness or greed is a form of idolatry, with materialism as its god (Colossians 3:5). The Christian should not seek or expect something for nothing, but should earn what he gets (if he is capable of working). "If any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread" (II Thessalonians 3:10-12). (See Ephesians 4:28.)

Gambling violates the principle of love towards others, because the gambler seeks to gain at the expense of others without providing anything in return. Often gambling hurts those who can least afford it. However, Christian love seeks not its own (I Corinthians 13:5). “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being” (I Corinthians 10:24, *NKJV*).

Gambling is poor stewardship. God has given us everything we possess; we are only stewards of His wealth (Luke 16:10-12; I Peter 4:10). He will require an accounting from us for how we use what He has entrusted to our care. Gambling takes these resources and puts them at an unnecessary, artificial risk for the sake of momentary pleasure. Furthermore, in organized gambling the odds are always against the individual gambler, making it that much worse of an investment.

Gambling causes many other violations of scriptural principles, such as falling under the control of an addictive drive (Romans 6:16; I Corinthians 6:12), failure to pay debts (Romans 13:8), and failure to provide adequately for one’s household (I Timothy 5:8). Furthermore, gambling is inevitably associated with cheating, violence, and organized crime. It is evil by association if nothing else.

For these reasons, we personally avoid all forms of gambling, including betting, lotteries, and raffles.

In 1952, the Methodist Church passed this resolution concerning gambling: “Gambling is a menace to business integrity; it breeds crime and is destructive of the interests of good government. . . . We strongly urge all of our churches to abstain from the use of raffles, lotteries, and other forms of games of chance in the raising of money for the purposes of the church.”¹ We concur. If a church

wishes to raise money, let it ask for gifts or let it organize fundraisers to sell goods and services. We should not appeal to greed in order to raise money for God. We should not use a form of gambling, thereby lending legitimacy to an evil practice.

Christianity Today, an evangelical magazine, recently editorialized against gambling as a means of government fundraising. It stated, "The fundamental Christian objection to gambling is that it represents a denial of the God of providence. It replaces him with the universe of pure chance and a dependence on blind luck. Of course, Christians have to take risks. Every businessman does this daily as a necessary part of his business. Insurance is a risk, but it is not a gambling because at its basis it is a sharing of burdens. Gambling is an artificially contrived risk, taken for selfish gain at another's expense, with no constructive product or social good as its goal."²

Rice's "Amusements for Christians"

It is instructive to see how fundamentalist John R. Rice discussed modern amusements in a practical way. Below are conclusions found in his 1955 booklet, *Amusements for Christians*.

* Christians should not dance because dancing arouses lust and passion. This does not apply to noncontact folk dancing or to an individual spontaneous dance for joy as described in the Bible.

* Hollywood movies are wrong because of their content, but there is nothing wrong with the technological device itself.

* Any game regularly used for gambling, such as bridge or regular playing cards, should be avoided because of the appearance of evil and the offense it could cause.

* Sports can be either good or bad, depending upon the atmosphere and type of crowd. Some things that would make a sports event excessively worldly are drinking, foul language, immodest dress, gambling, and unchristian attitudes.

* Secular music can be either wholesome or unwholesome depending upon the content of the songs.

* Indoor games such as checkers and chess are good.

* Tennis is good if players wear modest dress and if women do not wear slacks or shorts.

* Skating and bowling are good in themselves, but the environment can be detrimental. Here are some problems often associated with skating rinks and bowling alleys: indecent dress, bad language, drinking, "necking," and poor reputation in the community.

* Swimming is wholesome, but there should be no mixed swimming because of immodest exposure of the body.

* The modern circus and the opera are usually not objectionable, but Christians should be sensitive to the dictates of conscience.

* Plays and novels must be evaluated individually, depending on their content.

Teaching in Church History

Many today would regard our self disciplined approach to amusements as too narrow and restrictive. In this

regard, it is very instructive to see how Christian groups of ages past handled these and similar amusements.

Early Christians avoided pagan festivals and public amusements because of the pagan beliefs, pagan practices, and immorality associated with them.³ The editors of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* remarked, "Let us note that the whole spirit of antiquity is opposed to worldliness. It reflects the precept, 'Be not conformed to this world' and in nothing more emphatically than in hostility to theatrical amusements."⁴

In particular, Tertullian wrote in *The Shows* that Christians should not attend the circus, theater, combats, racecourse, or amphitheater (public games).⁵ These included gladiatorial combats, wild beast combats, chariot racing, boxing, wrestling, and gymnastics. Here are the reasons he gave: these events were filled with idolatry, blasphemy of God's name, lust of pleasure, rivalry, rage, bitterness, wrath, grief, passionate excitement, passionate desire, betting, cursing, immodest exposure of the body, violence, and bloodshed. He said there could be a lust of pleasure just as there is a lust of money, food, power, or glory. Instead of participating in these worldly pleasures, Tertullian recommended that Christians look forward to the New Jerusalem, where there would be eternal, joyous celebrations worthy of participation.

Clement of Alexandria opposed public spectacles, the racecourse, and the theater.⁶ He disapproved of these public entertainments because of the confusion, lust, gossip, base actions, riots, and cruelty associated with them.

Hippolytus stated that according to apostolic tradition the following professions were off limits to Christians:

actor, pantomimist, charioteer, frequenter of races, gladiator, trainer of gladiators, huntsman (in wild beast shows), anyone else connected with these shows, and official in charge of gladiatorial exhibitions.⁷

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* banned these occupations: anyone associated with the theater, charioteer, dueller, racer, player for prizes, Olympic gamester, musician at the games, ticket seller for the theater, and dancingmaster.⁸

Minucius Felix wrote, "We therefore, who are estimated by our character and our modesty, reasonably abstain from evil pleasures, and from . . . pomps and exhibitions."⁹

Under the heading, "That Worldly Things are Absolutely to be Avoided" we find these comments of Commodianus: "If certain teachers, while looking for your gifts or fearing your persons, relax individual things to you, not only do I . . . grieve, but I am compelled to speak the truth. Thou art going to vain shows with the crowd of the evil one, where Satan is at work in the circus with din. Thou persuadest thyself that everything that shall please thee is lawful. . . . Dost thou wish to see the former things which thou has renounced? . . . Love not the world, nor its contents."¹⁰

Lactantius wrote, "All shows are to be avoided, that we may be able to maintain a tranquil state of mind. We must renounce hurtful pleasures, lest, charmed by pestilential sweetness, we fall into the snares of death."¹¹

Other early Christian writings that oppose the public games include Tatian's *Address to the Greeks* (specifically gladiator fights and boxing), *On the Public Shows* attributed to Cyprian, and the writings of Chrysostom (specifi-

cally horse racing).¹²

The Puritans shut down the theater, horse races, cockfights, wrestling matches, and bear or bull baiting when they came to power in England. We should note that although we share some holiness teachings with the Puritans, we reject two concepts often associated with them. First, we do not consider an amusement to be wrong simply because it is entertaining, pleasurable, or light. Second, we do not seek to legislate holiness or impose our lifestyle upon secular society (except to regulate or ban practices that victimize others).

John Wesley thought fairs were sinful.

Justin Martyr wrote against music that provoked lustful movements.¹³ Clement of Alexandria said, "Let amatory songs be banished far away. . . . For temperate harmonies are to be admitted; but we are to banish as far as possible from our robust mind those liquid harmonies, which, through pernicious arts in the modulations of tones, train to effeminacy and scurrility. . . . Chromatic harmonies are therefore to be abandoned to immodest revels, and to florid and meretricious music."¹⁴ We have also found references to worldly music in the writings of Commodianus and in a work attributed to Hippolytus.¹⁵

With respect to gambling Clement of Alexandria wrote, "The game of dice is to be prohibited, and the pursuit of gain, especially by dicing, which many keenly follow."¹⁶ In our brief research, we have also found specific teachings against gambling by Tertullian, the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Savonarola, Hussites, Calvin, Puritans, Pietists, Quakers, Methodists, Holiness groups, Baptists, other conservative evangelicals, and Pentecostals.¹⁷ In the early 20th century gambling was illegal

in most states of the U.S.

We have found specific teachings against dancing by Clement of Alexandria, Commodianus, a work attributed to Hippolytus, the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Waldensians, Hussites, Anabaptists, Calvin, Puritans, Wesley and Methodists, Holiness groups, many Baptists, and Pentecostals.¹⁸

Conclusion

In sum, many people throughout history who were concerned with holiness of life rejected various forms of worldly amusements, including worldly spectator sports, some other public entertainments, immoral music, gambling, and dancing. This should encourage us today to discriminate carefully between amusements that are wholesome and those that are detrimental to our spiritual lives.

Pulpit Helps (March, 1984, page 1) gave this summarization by an unknown author: "I should refrain from a pastime (1) if it violates another's conscience, (2) if it does harm to my own well being, (3) if it has the appearance of evil, (4) if it offends others whose opinions I value, (5) if it leads in the direction of sin, (6) if it reflects unfavorably upon my Christian profession, (7) if it lessens respect for parents, school, or church, (8) if it hazards my health, (9) if it encourages habits which tend to hamper my efficiency.

"I may indulge in a pastime (1) if it invigorates the mind, rests and restores the body, (2) if it gives pleasure and profit and no regret, (3) if it meets the approval of the best people, (4) if it cultivates the better emotions,

(5) if it brings me into pleasant contact with good people, (6) if it stimulates wholesome attitudes, (7) if it tends to make other people happier.”

We can summarize this chapter and indeed this book in one thought: the essence of true holiness is to be Christlike, to live as He lived and, in any given situation, to act as He would act. In fact, holiness means allowing the Holy Spirit of Christ to live in us and rule our lives.

FOOTNOTES

¹*Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church* 1952, sec. 2025, p. 642.

²Kenneth Kantzer, “Gambling: Everyone’s a Loser,” *Christianity Today*, November 25, 1983, p. 13.

³Durant, III, 598; Latourette, I, 81-82, 239, 244-245; Schaff, II, 153-155.

⁴ANF, V, 595.

⁵Tertullian, *The Shows*, ANF, III, 79-91.

⁶Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*; XI, ANF, 284-290.

⁷Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, quoted in Bainton, p. 152.

⁸*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 8.4.32, ANF, VII, 495.

⁹Minucius Felix, *The Octavius*, 37, ANF, IV, 196.

¹⁰Commodianus, *The Instructions*, 57, ANF, IV, 214.

¹¹Lactantius, *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, 64, ANF, VII, 249.

¹²See ANF, II, 75 and V, 576.

¹³Justin Martyr, *The Discourse to the Greeks*, 4, ANF, 1, 272.

¹⁴Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*; 2.4, ANF, II, 249.

¹⁵See ANF, IV, 215 and V, 254.

¹⁶Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*; 3.11, ANF, II, 289.

¹⁷See ANF, III, 86 and VII, 502.

¹⁸See ANF, II, 290; IV, 215; V, 254; VII, 495.

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