

Deadly Weapons the Devil Is Using

WHAT'S
HURTING
US
RIGHT
NOW

SECOND EDITION

Materialism
Our Fascination with Fun
Overcrowded Lifestyles
Crippled Families
Our Shortage of Personal Evangelism

Gary Henry

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Brass Tacks Press

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First Edition, January 1993
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PREFACE

The following material is based on some outlines I prepared for a weekend series of sermons in January 1993 at the Douglass Hills congregation in Louisville, Kentucky. Considerable revision has been done, but the basic outlines remain as they were when I handed them out to the members at Douglass Hills. I am still deeply grateful to them for asking me to speak. We were fortunate that weekend to enjoy one of those powerful, transforming experiences that are rare and unpredictable. The publication of this material is dedicated to the saints at Douglass Hills — that remarkable congregation — with its elders, its deacons, and its evangelists.

Since doing the series at Douglass Hills, I have been asked to present this material to a number of other congregations. I am grateful for the opportunity to preach these sermons in so many places, and I am thankful for numerous listeners' suggestions that have improved the lessons.

These studies were intended to discuss five of our top problems today, five ways the devil is wreaking the greatest havoc among us. I cannot think of a problem that is doing any greater damage *at the practical level* than these five. When I try to imagine the challenges that, if we could overcome them, would pay the biggest dividends, these are the ones that come to my mind. This is my list of the five problems I would most like to see us work on.

If someone thinks he knows of another problem as bad as these, I will not argue the point. We do have more than these five problems to cope with. All I am saying is that I believe these five are critical concerns, areas where we are sustaining very heavy damage — much heavier, I fear, than that caused by some of the problems we tend to spend more time on.

The devil would surely like us to be preoccupied with problems that have less potential for destruction than these. He is clever enough to know the value of smokescreens, red herrings, and such. He knows that all of us tend to be interested in certain kinds of problems more than others. If he can attract our interest to problems other than the ones where he is really hurting us, it will be much easier for him to destroy us. If we fail to fight where *he* has pitched the battle at any given moment, disaster will be the result.

When the basic plan of this material was laid out, I did not have any certain congregation in mind. I am not engaged in a vendetta against any particular group of Christians. The material is needed, I believe, everywhere I have ever preached.

I hope the reader will understand that I do not mean either to take a “holier than thou” stance or to pose as an expert in these studies. These are all difficulties that I myself struggle with, sometimes

very painfully. I certainly do not have all the answers to the questions these issues raise. While I do make some suggestions, my main purpose has been simply to sound the alarm and call attention to the fact that we are in trouble in these various ways.

These problems can be looked at in more than one way. They are obviously problems in and of themselves. They involve sin, they can cause us to be lost, and by themselves they are responsible for much of our misery in this life. In these outlines, however, I am looking at them primarily as problems that create other problems. They are *means* the devil is using to hinder our spiritual lives and the Lord's work in general. They make our other problems worse than they would be otherwise.

It is also helpful to notice that these problems are related to one another. It is impossible to talk, for example, about the breakdown of the family without discussing materialism, for that is one reason the family is in trouble. It is impossible to deal with our shortage of personal evangelism without confronting the overcommitment of our time, for that is one reason we do not engage in personal evangelism any more than we do. In real life, all of these problems are tangled up together. It is only for purposes of study that we separate them into distinct topics.

Ultimately, of course, all of our specific difficulties are but symptoms of our failure to love God and our fellow man as we ought. Everything else eventually gets back to these two problems. If we would do these two things — truly love God and love others — the devil could hardly create for us the kinds of problems discussed in these outlines.

It is hard to make presentations like these without seeming to be overly negative. **In calling attention to these issues, I do not wish to be just a doomsayer. There is hope. But the hope is only in the Lord. And it is available only to those whose eyes are open wide enough to what is happening to arm themselves with the Lord's might.** I am persuaded that the Lord would say to us precisely what He said to Cain long ago: "If you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). Sin's disasters can be avoided only by those who are willing to be warned!

We are allowing ourselves to be hurt in ways that seem to escape our notice. These studies are meant to be a wake up call. We need to rise from our slumber and get indignant with the devil. We need to determine that, God helping us, we are simply not going to take it any longer. It is later than we think. Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Let us be strong in the Lord.

G.P.H.
San Antonio, Texas

If I protest with the loudest and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is a mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

— Martin Luther

What's Hurting Us Right Now: Deadly Weapons the Devil Is Using

MATERIALISM

Introduction

- A. In Mt. 19:16-22, we are told about a young man who turned away from the Lord rather than part with his wealth.
- B. We may not know how to define *materialism* exactly, but we know it when we see it — and we know this young man had it.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines materialism as "a great or excessive regard for worldly concerns."

- C. The person who would follow Christ faces no greater problem than the problem of wrong attitudes about money and material things.
 - 1. To see the magnitude of the problem we need only consider the sheer bulk of teaching devoted to it in the New Testament.
 - a. Someone has calculated that nearly one-half of Jesus' sayings have to do with problems related to money in one way or another.
 - b. Today, a preacher who taught on the subject as often as the Lord did would be accused of riding a hobbyhorse.
 - c. Many assume that preachers who preach very much on materialism just resent having a lower standard of living than some of their fellow Christians.
 - 2. There is a sense in which materialism is truly a "first principles" subject.
 - a. Judging from the Lord's own teaching, one of the most basic, fundamental choices a human being ever makes is whether to serve God or money.
 - b. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt. 6:24).

- D. Of the various weapons the devil can use against the Lord's people, none does any more damage than materialism.
- E. Perhaps this has always been so, but it is an especially critical problem for us in present-day America.

I. CLARIFYING THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

- A. First, let it be admitted and emphasized that there is no inherent virtue or spiritual value in being poor.
 - 1. To warn against the sin of materialism is not to advocate a "theology of poverty."
 - 2. The poor may be very wicked. Indeed, they may be very materialistic.
 - 3. An *ascetic* is a "person who renounces the comforts of society and leads a life of austere self-discipline, especially as an act of religious devotion" (*American Heritage Dictionary*).
 - 4. Ascetic religions are those in which the most serious participants are expected to follow a life of poverty.

Christianity is not an ascetic religion.

- 5. Being a deeply spiritual Christian does not necessarily involve renouncing worldly goods and taking a vow of poverty, although it may be God's will for us to make great sacrifices sometimes.
- B. But neither is there any inherent virtue or spiritual value in being wealthy.
 - 1. The rich have no advantage or special relationship with God because of their wealth. In Job, Elihu correctly observed that God "is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of His hands" (Job 34:19).
 - 2. Riches are not necessarily a sign of virtue or evidence that God approves of one's character.
 - a. The rich man who assumes that the riches God has given him are a reward for his own personal righteousness makes a big assumption. More often than not, the riches have not come because of one's righteousness, but in spite of one's unrighteousness.
 - b. Asaph noted the wickedness of many of the wealthy: "Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches" (Psa. 73:12).
 - c. Also, it is worth considering that riches may be as much a curse as a blessing. It is quite accurate in some situations to speak of a person's having been "stricken" with wealth. (Some of God's greatest blessings happen to be requests that are *not* granted!)
- C. The term *materialism* actually encompasses several related problems.
 - 1. For one thing, there is *the problem of discontent* in regard to what we ourselves do not have. "Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Hb. 13:5).

2. But also, there is *the problem of envy or jealousy* in regard to what other people have.
 - a. We may wish we had what others have.
 - b. Or we may — and this is worse — wish others did *not* have what they have, begrudging them anything that appears to make them happy, whether we ourselves would want what they have or not.

- D. The desire to work hard and better one’s “station” in life is not in itself materialistic. The sinfulness of materialism has to do with two characteristics that distinguish it from an honorable work ethic:
 1. *Selfishness*. The primary motivation of the materialistic person is to satisfy self.
 2. *Excessiveness*. The materialistic person pursues material ends at the expense of spiritual priorities, upsetting the proper balance and proportion God intends our lives to have.

Being objective about self is the difficult thing, of course.
 Nobody ever thinks his own material pursuits are either
 selfish or excessive.

- E. Actually, the term *materialism* comes fairly close to the biblical term *covetousness* — and covetousness is a sin much talked about in the Scriptures.

II. THE SIN OF COVETOUSNESS

- A. In the Bible, covetousness is a very serious matter.
 1. It keeps extremely unsavory company, frequently appearing in contexts where sins of an obviously serious nature are being discussed. “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints” (Eph. 5:3).
 2. It is a form of idolatry.
 - a. “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Eph. 5:5).
 - b. “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5).
 3. It will keep us out of heaven and send us to hell. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9,10).

- B. Yet despite heavy emphasis on the topic in the Bible, we tend to dismiss the whole idea.
 1. We say “*Well, where do you draw the line?*” as if covetousness were such a totally subjective concept that it would be wrong to make an actual charge of covetousness against any particular person.

2. In any matter where a line has to be drawn, however, we need to draw the line where the Lord draws it, knowing that failure to do so is serious business and that one day we shall give an account.
- C. Covetousness is one of the few specific sins singled out as grounds for withdrawal of fellowship. “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person” (1 Cor. 5:11).
1. The instruction to withdraw from the covetous would be pointless if it were not possible to know objectively when a person is guilty of it.
 2. And yet, how many instances do any of us know of where someone has been withdrawn from for covetousness?
 3. With respect to the covetous, what are the reasons why congregational discipline is so rarely exercised?
 4. Do we think that, in one of the most materialistic societies in the history of the world, the sin of covetousness is just not committed as much as it was in New Testament times?

Covetousness is one of the most talked about problems in the New Testament. How likely is it that it has ceased to be a problem in *our* society?

5. Is it not more probable that we fail to exhort and discipline the covetous because we would appear to be somewhat hypocritical if we did so?
- D. One irony is that, as dangerous as it is, covetousness is an exceedingly hard sin to detect in ourselves.
1. It is among the most insidious of Satan’s weapons.
 2. In an article on covetousness, Paul Keller tells about a Roman Catholic priest who was reported as saying that in his many years of hearing “confession,” he had heard people admit to every sin imaginable — *except the sin of covetousness!*
 3. When it comes to the desire for money and material things, it appears to be difficult for any of us to see and admit that our own desires have become selfish or excessive.
- E. There is an urgent need for us to “get real” about the problem, to own up to it if we are guilty, and to repent of it.

III. OUR MATERIALISTIC ADDICTION

- A. Our pattern of behavior in regard to money and material things very often fits the pattern of an addiction.
1. Certain elements are common to all addictive experiences.

2. The following is a list of widely acknowledged characteristics of an addiction. Consider this list in relation to the problem that many people have with money and material things. An addictive experience:
 - a. *Creates predictable, reliable sensations.*
 - b. *Becomes the primary focus and absorbs attention.*
 - c. *Temporarily eradicates pain and other negative sensations.*
 - d. *Provides artificial sense of self-worth, power, control, security, intimacy, accomplishment.*
 - e. *Exacerbates the problems and feelings it is sought to remedy.*
 - f. *Worsens functioning, creates loss of relationships.*
3. This list is from Steven R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First: To Live, To Learn, To Leave a Legacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 35. The list is adapted from S. Peele, *Diseasing of America: Addiction Treatment Out of Control* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1989), p. 147.
4. Can it be denied that millions of Americans display these very same addictive traits in their behavior with regard to material things?

B. Unlike the addictions which our society frowns on, however, materialism is an addiction that America applauds. See Robert Hemfelt, Frank Minirth, and Paul Meier, *We Are Driven: The Compulsive Behaviors America Applauds* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), pp. 1-114.

1. We praise the person driven by materialism for pursuing “the American Dream.”
2. We buy millions of books, tapes, and videos that exalt the pursuit of wealth.
3. We flock to financial seminars, workshops, and rallies that inflame our materialistic tendencies, giving loud ovations to motivational speakers who specialize in the dream of wealth.

C. With materialism, as with any addiction, the fix never lasts — though we always think it will.

1. If the money and the things were really the objects of our need, then having them would be satisfying.
2. But having them is not satisfying in any lasting way; we have no sooner made one acquisition than we are craving another.
3. It is not *having* the money and the things that we get high on; it is *acquiring* them. Once we get what we so desperately “need,” the fix wears off quickly and we are off in search of a new high.

“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity”
(Eccl. 5:10).

D. Materialism is not a problem limited to the wealthy (any more than drug addiction is a problem limited to those who can get an ample supply of their drug).

1. Materialism is a problem of attitude. It is just as much a sin for those who have little as it is for those who have much.

- a. The *rich man* may be materialistic.
 - (1) He may trust in his treasure more than he trusts in God.
 - (2) He may neglect spiritual priorities for material ones.
 - b. But the *poor man* may also be materialistic.
 - (1) He may envy the rich.
 - (2) He may go into debt over his head to have the things he wants.
 - 2. A person's outward standard of living, whether high or low, is not always an accurate indicator of whether he is materialistic.
 - 3. The fact that Sam Walton, for example, drove an old pickup truck does not guarantee that he was not materialistic. He may have simply been too miserly to buy a better truck or just preferred to invest his fortune in securities rather than vehicles!
 - 4. Whether we are rich or poor, it is a sin to have excessive, selfish desires for money or material things.
- E. The problem of *consumer debt* among the Lord's people is a disgrace.
- 1. Not being able to say *no* to what we want is more than just a childish bad habit — it is a grown-up sin.
 - 2. Many of us are living beyond our means.

We are proof of the adage that *when a person's outgo exceeds his income, then his upkeep will be his downfall.*

- 3. In typical cases, we had parents who wanted to give us “all the things they never had” and never taught us how to do without anything we really want.
- 4. As adults, our buying habits are undisciplined.
 - a. Our desires are not restrained by common sense, income, or anything else.
 - b. We simply will not be held back from having whatever we want.
- 5. We are at the mercy of our impulses. It is simply too easy to charge what we want on credit cards, indulging our desires immediately with no need to pay until later.

We buy too many *Zoogles* (materialistic gadgets we want, but have little, if any, need for) — and we compound the problem by buying them with credit cards.

- 6. Not many of us have escaped the dangers of living in an economy based on the principle of *consumerism*: the economic theory that a progressively greater consumption of goods is beneficial.
- 7. Consequently, we are plagued by two different kinds of pressure, both of which destroy our peace of mind. See Patrick M. Morley, *The Man in the Mirror* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1989), p. 16.
 - a. First, *the advertisers and the entertainment media* generate a *standard of living pressure* by portraying as the norm a standard of living that is above what all but a few

will ever have, implying that if we do not live at this level we are missing out on something that is the birthright of every American.

- b. Second, *we* generate a harmful *debt pressure* by spending more than we make trying to achieve the standard of living “norm” we have been led to believe is our right.
 8. Our entertainment and recreation alone require vast amounts of money. See chapter on *Our Fascination with Fun*.
 9. Distinguishing between needs and wants may sometimes be hard, but it is not a totally subjective exercise. Whether *we* are objective about it or not, *God* knows precisely what it is we need!
 - a. “Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Mt. 6:8).
 - b. Do we draw the line between needs and wants where God draws it?
 - c. It is to Him that we will one day give account.
- F. Another aspect of our materialistic addiction is the competitive aspect of it.
1. We get so caught up in standard-of-living comparisons that our enjoyment of what we have often depends on how few other people have the same thing.

Consider the marketing problems of a company like American Express, the success of whose products depends on a perception that very few people have them.

2. Young married couples are especially prone to materialistic competition among themselves. There is an unspoken pressure to have what other couples have, and denying the tendency only makes the problem more difficult.
- G. Our materialism is one thing that has made us a nation of neurotics.
1. How ironic it is that the higher the standard of living in a society, the higher the incidence of worry, anxiety, and neurosis.
 2. Is contentment in inverse proportion to affluence? Does contentment go down as affluence goes up?
 3. Most of us would have *more peace* if we had *less money* and *fewer things*. Solomon said, “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep” (Eccl. 5:12).
- H. We need to meditate on the wisdom contained in this saying: we can have *anything* we want, but we cannot have *everything* we want.
- I. Some choices have to be made, some possibilities have to be let go.

IV. THE DANGERS OF WEALTH

- A. How honestly do we confront the dangers of wealth?

B. The New Testament clearly teaches that wealth, while not inherently evil, does involve some real dangers.

1. Paul wrote, “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” (1 Tim. 6:9,10).
2. Warnings like these, unfortunately, have little effect on most of us *at the practical level*.
 - a. We seem to believe that, if there are such dangers, they are not so great as to keep us from pursuing however much wealth we happen to want.
 - b. Denying that what we desire is “to be rich,” we conveniently define “rich” as a level of affluence above what we aspire to.
3. Nevertheless, most of us do need to hear the warning that although money itself is not sinful, it is fraught with *danger that is both real and serious*.
4. Most of us already have more money than we can safely handle — but rather than cutting back on our efforts toward affluence, we are as busy as we can be trying to elevate our standard of living even more.

C. Everybody acknowledges the difficulties of being hungry; too few are honest about the difficulties of being full.

1. Paul said that he had to learn how to abound as well as how to suffer need: “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:11-13).
2. For obvious reasons, we pray not to be stricken with poverty. But if we understood what the realities are, we would pray even more fervently not to be stricken with wealth.

Affluence is not an aid in getting to heaven — it is a difficulty to be overcome.

3. “Give me neither poverty nor riches — feed me with the food You prescribe for me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Prov. 30:8,9).

D. One critical danger of wealth is that it tends to draw our trust and our gratitude away from God.

1. “He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage” (Prov. 11:28).
2. Prefacing the parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12:13-21), Jesus warned, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist of the things he possesses” (v.15).
3. The story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk.16:19-31) makes a similar point.

4. Paul instructed Timothy, “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” (1 Tim. 6:17).
- E. Concerning our treasure and our hearts, Jesus said: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt. 6:21).
1. The Lord taught that it is a very rare rich man who will be saved. “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mt. 19:23,24).
 2. Most of us, however, naively assume that, whatever dangers wealth may involve for other people, we are that rarest of camels who can get through the eye of the needle!
- F. The church in Laodicea illustrates how out of touch we can be about the damage that affluence has done to us personally. Sometimes we just do not see the truth about what our real spiritual condition is in relation to how prosperous we are materially.

“You say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17).

- G. Before it is too late, we need to soberly assess what our pursuit of an ever-higher standard of living has already cost us — and decide if we wish to continue paying the price.

V. HOW OUR PURSUIT OF MONEY IS HURTING US

A. *In our character.*

1. Godly virtues and character qualities are being eroded by monetary motivations and economic values.
2. In terms of integrity and spiritual-mindedness, there is not a person any farther away from having the mind of the Lord than the covetous person.

For a good example of the consequences that covetousness has in a person’s *character*, simply consider the inner character of Judas Iscariot (e.g. Jn. 12:6).

B. *In our families.*

1. Can it be denied that, in many instances, we are losing our families to materialism?

2. Are we not sacrificing real life and real relationships for money and the things it can buy? See chapter on *Crippled Families*.
 - a. For materialistic and otherwise worldly rewards, many husbands and fathers are expending themselves so completely on their professional careers that they have nothing left to give to their families.
 - (1) Significant, well-rounded male *leadership* in the home is rare.
 - (2) The *relationship* of many career-driven men with their families is a wreck.
 - b. When it comes to decisions that impact our families in far-reaching ways, we are often making those decisions mainly on the basis of monetary considerations, not infrequently with disastrous results for our families.

Consider the consequences of Lot's decision to move his family to Sodom for reasons that were primarily economic.

- c. The combined hours spent by fathers and mothers in moneymaking pursuits is leaving too little time for the building of godly families that are strong and stable.
 - (1) The often-used excuse is that, although the time we are having to devote to our careers and jobs is too much right now, the situation is only *temporary* — later we will have even more family time than most people.
 - (2) Often, however, the adage holds true: there is nothing quite as permanent as a temporary arrangement.
 - (3) Even if, at some point in the future, we do quit spending too much time making money, we will have missed critical opportunities with our families and done damage that we may not be able to undo.
 - d. One of Satan's oldest lies is that there is no damage we can do in the present that cannot be undone later. It is a most dangerous thing to assume!
3. The implications of our materialism with respect to our *children* are nothing short of frightening.
 - a. What kind of values do we think we are passing along to our children by the way we are living our lives?
 - (1) By our *example* we are canceling out the *words* we have said about spiritual matters being the most important thing in our hearts.
 - (2) When they compare our enthusiasm for money with our enthusiasm for the Lord, our kids do not have any trouble figuring out what we are really after in life.
 - b. In our (perhaps well-intentioned) efforts to give our children "all the things we never had," we are inflicting on them one of life's greatest disadvantages.
 - (1) By giving them basically everything they want, we are ingraining in them a view of "the way the world works" that is out of touch with the reality they will face in the adult world.

As adults, our kids will not get 100% of everything they are able to dream of; what they do get will be obtained by working, not by whining and manipulating.

- (2) Too few of our kids even know what it is to want something and not get it immediately. They may never know what it is like to dream about something, to plan and work and save for it for a long time, and *then* to enjoy it.
- (3) By overdosing them with material things they have had to expend no effort for, we are not only producing ungrateful offspring, we are depriving them of the *pleasure* that comes from things that have been waited for and worked for.
- (4) In the age of credit cards, our kids will likely spend their adult years deep in debt, having learned from us that they have a right to get everything they want — right now.
- (5) By giving our kids too much of what they want and too little of what they need, we are creating emotional and spiritual cripples who have no idea how to tolerate frustration, overcome difficulties, and work toward goals. See the “The Fruits of Frustration” in John K. Rosemond, *Six-Point Plan for Raising Happy, Healthy Children* (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1989), pp. 113-34.

If they ever learn how to be self-sufficient, effective adults, our offspring will probably have to learn it the hard way from someone other than us, their materialistic parents.

- c. Spiritually, we are hazarding our children’s lives by encouraging them into careers that involve the making of great sums of money.
 - (1) Again, the point is not that wealth is inherently evil — it is just that, spiritually, wealth is very *dangerous*. Remember Paul’s warning: “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” (1 Tim. 6:9,10).
 - (2) Consider an analogous situation. Most of us would not think of encouraging our kids to pursue a career in, say, show business. Our argument would not be that it is *impossible* for a Christian to be an entertainer; it would be that the *dangers* are simply too great to risk.
 - (3) If we worry about careers that, for one reason or another, involve special dangers, why are we so unconcerned when our young people enter vocations that are dangerous because of the money involved? Are we blind to *these* dangers to our kids’ faith?
4. In general, it simply has to be said that, with respect to our families, we are making the wrong *investment* of ourselves.
 - a. We are “going all out” for all the wrong things.
 - b. We are going to get to the top of the ladder and find out that it is leaning against the wrong wall.
5. On our deathbeds, we will not wish we had spent more time at the office or more time in other moneymaking endeavors; we will wish we had spent more time *building quality relationships* with the people around us, especially our families.

- C. ***In the work of the Lord.*** Too often, what should be going to the Lord is going to higher standards of living for ourselves.
1. *Our money.*
 - a. In most places, the Lord's Day contribution is not nearly what it ought to be.
 - b. Many Christians are making far more money than they ever dreamed possible and the contribution looks good when compared to the past, but from the Lord's vantage point, it may not look so good because it represents so little sacrifice.
 - (1) The Lord measures liberality in terms of sacrifice.
 - (2) "So He called His disciples to Him and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood'" (Mk. 12:43,44).
 - c. Doors for the gospel are opening up all over the world right now, but at our present level of giving, many of these opportunities cannot be taken advantage of.
 - (1) Generally, we are willing to give to support the gospel up to the point where it impinges on our standard of living.
 - (2) At that point, we claim we cannot "afford" to send more evangelists to the field.
 - (3) Really what that says is that we are not willing to sacrifice and reduce our standard of living in order that others may hear the gospel.

If there are souls that never hear the gospel because American brethren were unwilling to cut into our standard of living, will we not stand in judgment before the Lord with blood on our hands?

- d. The amount of money now spent on "upscale" church buildings by conservative brethren in some places ought to give us pause to think. Are there not some implications here with regard to our values and our attitudes?
2. *Our time.*
 - a. Affluent people tend to be very busy people. The simple truth is that we have less time for the Lord's work than we would if we were not so occupied with material matters. See chapter on *Overcrowded Lifestyles*.
 - b. We allow work to keep us away from the services of the church.
 - (1) Is it any more than an assumption on our part that work obligations should automatically take precedence over church services?
 - (2) Even when we attend, we sometimes give the appearance of hurrying through the services of the Lord so that we can get back to our commerce.
 - (3) Amos charged the Jews of his day with being eager for the days of religious observance to be over: "When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade our wheat?" (Amos 8:5).

Uninterrupted attendance and significant involvement in any congregational activity is often hard to get now from even our “stronger” members — largely because of obligations to careers and other economic pursuits.

- c. Personal evangelism is not the least of the things that suffer because of the time we spend making and spending money. See chapter on *Our Shortage of Personal Evangelism*.
- 3. *Our hearts*.
 - a. Our *attention* and *affection* are being distracted by activities that relate primarily to the making and spending of money.
 - b. Precious *interest* and *enthusiasm* are being drained away from the Lord’s work by materialistic endeavors.
 - c. The devil is undermining our wholehearted *devotion* to the Lord with economic enticements. There is not a more powerful tactic he is using today to keep us from loving God with *all* our hearts.

VI. SOME SUGGESTIONS ABOUT WHAT WE CAN DO

- A. Plenty of suggestions can be made about dealing with materialism. Most of these are commonsense ideas, things we already know to do.

The difficulty is not really that we do not know what to do about this kind of a problem — it is that we will not admit we *have* the problem!

- B. Here are some examples of specific things we can do, some real changes it is possible for us to make.
 - 1. To an American, the most radical suggestion of all would probably be this one: *we can put a moderate ceiling on our standard of living*.
 - a. Do we have the outright faith and courage it would take to do this?
 - b. Can we not at some *modest* point say we have enough?
 - c. I know a brother in the Lord who actually does have this attitude. He once surprised a telephone salesman for an investment company by saying, “No thanks, I would not be interested in your offer. I already have all the money I need.”
 - d. Our culture assumes that a family will live, for example, in the most expensive house it can afford, automatically trading up as soon as possible. Can we not call this assumption into question?

Would it not make a big difference in the Lord's work if even a few of us imposed a significant limitation on our standard of living and determined to spend everything above that in the Lord's work?

2. We can set some limits and impose a time budget on our moneymaking activities: *husbands and wives can determine that, between the two of them, they will spend no more than _____ hours a week making money.*
 - a. We only get a fixed amount of time: exactly 168 hours a week for each individual.
 - (1) Within this limited amount of time, we must take care of the various things we need to do in life.
 - (2) This obviously requires that we wisely allocate our time resources among the different priorities that we have.
 - (3) If we spend too much time on one priority, something else will get shorted.
 - b. In most families, somebody has to spend some time each week making money so that the family can live.
 - c. But how much time should this be? *How much time can the members of a family spend making money without taking time away from other things that are more important?*
 - d. Each family must make its own decision about the combined number of hours that can be spent making money in that family each week.
 - e. A wise and godly family will not only seek the Lord's will in making this decision, it will stand firm when the temptation comes to increase the family's earnings by spending more time in moneymaking activities.
 - f. Once a family has decided the maximum amount of time that husband and wife combined can afford to spend making money each week, it has only two alternatives when the "need" arises for yet more money:
 - (1) It can find a way to make more money *within the same amount of time.*
 - (2) It can *lower its standard of living* to decrease the amount of money needed.
 - g. We should rarely, if ever, consider the third option: breaking the family's time budget by borrowing time from other priorities to satisfy materialistic desires.
 - h. If living on what we are able to earn within our prayerfully determined time budget does not allow us to have as big a slice of the pie as we would like, so be it.

"Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing"
(Lk. 12:23).

3. We can make it a rule that work will never keep us from the services of the church.
 - a. More and more jobs require travel and other requirements that prevent assembling with the saints.
 - b. If our present job requires missing services, then the finding of another job, perhaps lower-paying, that does not interfere with our attendance probably should be an immediate priority.
4. We can maintain time for personal evangelism.

5. We can maintain time for the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study.
6. We can maintain time for our families.
7. We can quit giving our children everything they want and teach them the meaning of work.
8. We can go out of our way to spend time with the poor, we can see to it that our children do so, and we can consciously hold on to the ability to relate to the poor.
9. We can find some regular charitable work to do that is anonymous and unpaid.
10. We can increase what we are giving to the Lord's work — and make it an actual increase, not just a “cost of living” increase.
11. We can cut up our credit cards, get out of debt, and learn to live within (if not below) our means.
12. In short, we can repent of our covetousness.

C. These suggestions are useful and effective only if we *act* on them in concrete ways.

Conclusion

A. It is foolish to pretend that materialism is not a problem.

1. We have our heads stuck in the sand if we cannot see that, as a whole, the Lord's people in this country have been affected by the materialism that surrounds us in our culture.
2. The damage being done is cause for real concern.

B. But lessons on materialism, covetousness, etc. are easily misunderstood.

1. The point is not that any member of the church who happens to be affluent should be embarrassed or apologetic about it — unless, of course, he got that way by compromising his spiritual priorities.
2. The point is not that anyone should turn down his next raise at the office.
3. The point is not that we should be indifferent or slothful in the work of providing for our families.

C. What we are saying is that maintaining spiritual priorities in a materialistic environment like ours is not easy.

D. Our greatest mistake would be to *assume* that we have met the challenge and that our own personal priorities are what they ought to be.

For better or worse, others can tell what our priorities really are by how we spend our time, not by what we say.

E. The Scriptures contain special warnings that need to be heard by those among the Lord's people who are, in fact, wealthy. “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” (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

What happens to us in the hereafter depends on what we are here after!

- F. There is more to life than money, mammon, and material things.
 - 1. Jesus resisted Satan’s temptation concerning physical needs with the truth contained in the Old Testament: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4).
 - 2. He warned the multitudes, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist of the things he possesses” (Lk. 12:15).
 - 3. He said, “Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing” (Lk. 12:23).

- G. It is urgent that we learn *contentment*. “Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hb. 13:5).
 - 1. We need to be able say with Paul, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil. 4:11).
 - 2. “But godliness with contentment is great gain. 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” (1 Tim. 6:6-8).

- H. It is vital that we lay up *treasures in heaven* rather than upon earth: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt. 6:19-21).

What's Hurting Us Right Now: Deadly Weapons the Devil Is Using

OUR FASCINATION WITH FUN

Introduction

- A. Paul wrote that in the last days people would be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4).
- B. In our modern nation of big business, “fun” is the biggest of the big businesses.
 - 1. We are a society all but obsessed with leisure, amusement, and play in all its many forms: arts, entertainment, recreation, sports, hobbies, crafts, travel, and the innumerable personal “interests” that we are involved with.
 - 2. It would be impossible even to estimate the *time*, the *money*, and the *interest* we invest in these activities as a nation.
 - 3. Consider, for example, the importance we place on sports.

In a study reported in 1988, over one hundred amateur athletes were asked, “If you could take a drug that would guarantee you’d win an Olympic gold medal but would kill you within the year, would you take that drug?” More than half of these young people said yes.

- 4. Our basic value system revolves around our fun.
- C. It is widely understood that these things have radically changed the society that surrounds us. But are we fully aware of how much impact the “leisure revolution” has had on those of us who are the Lord’s people?
- D. Do we have our eyes open to how powerfully the devil can use “fun” to hinder us in the Lord’s work?
- E. Let it be said at the very beginning that recreation in itself is not wrong.

1. It was God, not the devil, who created pleasure.
 2. Whatever *sinful* pleasures there may be are nothing but *cheap counterfeits* of some good thing God created for us enjoy within His will.
- F. But granting that pleasure itself is not evil, let us admit that a greater proportion of the average Christian's time, money, and interest is going *to* the pursuit of pleasure than was true in our grandparents' generation.
1. Here is the question we need to ask: where is this time, money, and interest being taken *from*?
 2. In all too many cases, it is being taken from time, money, and interest that would *otherwise be going to the Lord's work*.
- G. Is it not a fact that our *overemphasis* on entertainment, recreation, sports, etc. is detracting from our spiritual lives and from the Lord's work?

The thing that is wrong is not fun — it is our *fascination* with fun, our near-obsession with it.

- H. What needs to be said about this fascination of ours with fun?

I. WHAT "RE-CREATION" WAS MEANT TO BE

- A. The environment that God created for the first man and woman was surely filled with delights of both the mind and the senses.
1. "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen. 2:8,9).
 2. God knew that beings created in His image would need things that would give pleasure and enjoyment.
- B. There was work to be done in the Garden of Eden: "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (Gen. 2:15).
- C. We do not doubt that God provided for man to be refreshed and rejuvenated from his work.
- D. The perfect *balance* between work and rest/play — between being emptied and refilled — must have been a part of what made work itself pleasant and satisfying, rather than onerous as it came to be after sin. "Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return'" (Gen. 3:17-19).

- E. Rejuvenation so that we can return to productive work is the essence of “re-creation.” True recreation replenishes our energies by giving pleasure in the doing of things that vary from our routine work.

Life needs rhythm and balance between alternating cycles. In nature, God provided for the refreshment that comes from variation: the round of the seasons, the alternation between day and night, the variety in the weather.

- F. Happiness, pleasure, merriment — even fun — are gifts of God to man. “Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage” (Eccl. 5:18).

1. “A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken....All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast” (Prov. 15:13,15).

“A merry heart does good, like a medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones” (Prov. 17:22).

2. “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: ...A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Eccl. 3:1,4).
3. “I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor — it is the gift of God” (Eccl. 3:12,13).
4. “So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor for the days of his life which God gives him under the sun” (Eccl. 8:15).
5. “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (Eccl. 11:9-12:1).

II. WHAT WE HAVE MADE OUT OF RECREATION

- A. We err anytime we take a good thing that was meant to be a *part* of life and exaggerate it, making it more important than it was meant to be.
- B. With fun, we have made a secondary part of life our primary focus.

C. Our interest in fun is bigger than our interest in the main business of life.

What we have done with recreation is comparable to what children would like to do with dessert at mealtime: elevate a treat to the status of the main course.

D. The evidence suggests that we have virtually made a *god* out of entertainment, recreation, sports, etc.

1. We pay entertainers and sports stars far more money than anyone else in our society. Surely this makes some kind of comment on how important we believe these things to be.
2. As for sports, our interest in athletics is part of a long tradition in Western civilization.
 - a. In ancient times, body culture and athletic competition were so important that actual religious cults were often based upon them. In Greco-Roman society, there were a variety of gymnasial cults.
 - b. The sexual promiscuity and debauchery that were often associated with athletics in ancient times suggest some interesting parallels with the sexual exploits of modern sports and entertainment stars.
 - c. The “Nicolaitans” (Rev. 2:6,15) may have been a group involved in practices similar to the gymnasial cults of Asia.

Nike was the Greek goddess of victory. Today, ads for Nike® sports equipment urge us to “Just Do It.”

- d. In practical terms, is our modern emphasis on physical fitness, sports, etc. different in any significant way from that of ancient times?
3. There is obviously value in bodily exercise, but it pales in comparison to the profit of godliness. “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).
4. Anything that we come to love and treat as more important than God is *idolatry*. Consider the error of those “who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 1:25).

E. We have devoted *inordinate attention* to our fun.

1. We simply think about it too much; it has become a preoccupation, if not an obsession.
2. We make a *fetish* (an object of abnormally excessive attention or reverence) out of fun.
3. Spiritual things need to get more of our attention. Paul said, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1,2).

- F. We have let fun infringe on *priorities* that are higher on the scale of importance. In our “budget” of time, money, and interest, we have allowed fun to get too big a slice of the pie.
1. We spend untold billions of dollars and hours in recreational and entertainment activities. See figures in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.
 2. All of us have borrowed money (on credit cards, if not otherwise) for fun and entertainment. How many of us would borrow money to supply needs in the Lord’s work?

We will make bigger sacrifices and endure greater hardships for our fun than for anything else in our lives, including the Lord’s work.

- G. We have let fun gain too much *power* over us.
1. We are serving it rather than it serving us.
 - a. “Therefore hear this now, you who are *given to pleasures*, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children’” (Isa. 47:8).
 - b. “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, *serving various lusts and pleasures*, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Tit. 3:3).
 2. Our *character* and the *direction of our entire society* are being influenced too heavily by the entertainment business. It would be hard to overestimate the power of Hollywood in our culture. See “The Poison Factory” in Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 1-34.
 3. Our young people name sports stars as their most admired role models.
 4. We are getting too many of our basic character values from the business whose product is supposed to be only “fun.”
 - a. This situation is a reversal of what should be the case. The entertainment business should serve our *needs*, and it might reasonably be expected to *reflect* our values; but it should not *dictate* our needs and values.

It is evidence of how powerful the producers of entertainment are that Bill Clinton, as a presidential candidate in 1992, felt the need to court them and promise them power in His administration.

- b. The truth is, Hollywood is leading this country down the wrong road — and many of the Lord’s people are following like lambs led to the slaughter.
- H. We have made fun a *value*, a unquestioned criterion by which we judge all other things; it has become a benchmark by which everything else is measured.

1. We have accepted two false premises:
 - a. *Pleasantness is an unqualified good.*
 - b. *Unpleasantness is an unqualified evil.*

We are not far from adopting *hedonism* as our national philosophy: the concept that pleasure is the *summum bonum*, the highest good, the moral goal.

2. We have come to judge nearly everything by its entertainment value, by how fun it is — even things that were never meant to be judged by this standard.
 3. Even in the Lord’s work, we are demanding to be entertained.
 - a. “Good” sermons, Bible classes, etc. are automatically equated with those that are “interesting.” If we say a teaching presentation was *boring* or *dry*, we believe we have said the worst that can be said about it.
 - b. The Lord’s work simply cannot compete with temporal activities at the level of fun. *It is a mistake to try to make it do so!*
 - c. It would clarify our thinking if we would just go ahead and recognize that church buildings will never fill up like baseball parks and football stadiums.
 - d. Our demand that the church “interest” us is just as childish as the toddler’s insistence that his parents must keep him entertained. The truth is, keeping ourselves interested in the Lord’s work is our own responsibility.
- I. Our attitude toward fun is sometimes remarkably similar to a child’s.
1. It is a matter of principle with us that “*fun = good*” and “*good = fun.*”
 2. We insist that everything must be fun — or we will not participate.
 3. We put others on notice that if they expect to hold our attention, they must do or say things that are entertaining.
 4. We believe that fun is more important than eating or sleeping.
- J. In some cases, especially when we are young, we seem to have missed the point that recreation is to be a replenishment of our energies from work. All too often, we have done little that we need to be re-created from!
- K. We have sometimes pursued pleasure in such a way that it *dissipates* us. In our culture, that which ought to make us *more* often degrades us and makes us *less*.
1. Consider the implications of terms like the following:
 - a. *Dissipation* — dissolute indulgence in pleasure; intemperance.
 - b. *Indulgence* — the act of allowing oneself unrestrained gratification.
 - c. *Debauchery* — extreme indulgence, the act of being led away from excellence or virtue.
 - d. *Decadence* — the state of having deteriorated or decayed morally.
 2. Unbelievers should be able to notice that we do not “run with them in the same flood of dissipation” (1 Pt. 4:3,4). Cf. “the same excess of riot” (KJV).

3. “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (Eph. 5:3,4).
- L. We have tried to find ultimate meaning and goodness in a thing that is only transitory. Cf. Eccl. 2:1-11.
1. The pleasures of sin, of course, are only “passing pleasures” (Hb. 11:25).
 2. But in the realm of *temporal* things, even the *good* things God created for us to enjoy are only *temporary*.
 3. We get less pleasure out of our pleasure when we make it an end in itself. Ironically, by making too much out of it, we get less from it than we would if we put less emphasis on it.

Fun and frolic, even when good, do not constitute the “end all and be all” of life.

4. The person who “lives in pleasure” is dead spiritually even while alive physically. “But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives” (1 Tim. 5:6).
5. The pursuit of pleasure cannot support the weight we are placing on it; we are expecting more of it than it can deliver.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT WE HAVE DONE WITH RECREATION

- A. Our problem of overemphasizing entertainment, sports, etc. is connected to nearly every other major problem we have in the Lord’s work.
- B. ***Our fascination with fun is one reason why we have to work overtime, are so deeply in debt, and have so little money for the Lord’s work.*** See chapter on *Materialism*.

It is not only our children who have to have expensive toys and enjoy expensive fun!

1. Addiction to temporal enjoyments is often to blame when we run out of money to take care of ourselves.
 2. “He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich” (Prov. 21:17).
- C. ***Our fascination with fun is one reason why we have the problems we do in our families.*** See chapter on *Crippled Families*.

1. When it comes to our spiritual health as families, there is a sense in which we are entertaining and recreating ourselves to death. We are pursuing these interests at the expense of higher priorities, and our families are hurting because of it.
2. To judge by the time and money we spend on our various activities, some of us as parents appear to be more concerned about the *athletic* success of our kids than we are about their *spiritual* welfare.
3. In particular, organized sports for young people have gotten completely out of hand — and they were of questionable value in the first place. See John Rosemond, *Six-Point Plan for Raising Happy, Healthy Children* (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1989), pp. 148-52, and John Rosemond, *Parent Power!* rev. ed. (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1990), pp. 147,48.

D. *Our fascination with fun is one reason why we stay overcommitted and have so little time for the Lord's work.* See chapter on *Overcrowded Lifestyles*.

1. We are driving ourselves crazy trying to *have* it all (materialism) and *do* it all (overcommitment).

We work at our play,
play at our worship,
and worship our work.

2. We are being dangerously foolish if we think there is time in life to pursue every interest that appeals to us without our part in the Lord's work suffering.

E. *Our fascination with fun is one reason why we have so little time or inclination for personal evangelism.* See chapter on *Our Shortage of Personal Evangelism*.

1. Think about it. Very many of us play in summer softball leagues that require at least one night a week, but how many of us spend one night a week in personal evangelism?
2. The fact is, the reason many of us do not *have* as much as one night a week for personal evangelism is that we have so many recreational and entertainment “obligations.”
3. If the congregation began a program of personal work that required exactly the same number of evenings a week as our softball leagues, etc., many of us would insist that it was an unreasonable demand.

F. Apart from the problem of overemphasis on fun that is good and clean in itself, it needs to be said that some of what we “entertain” ourselves with is just pure *filth*.

1. We are guilty of polluting our minds and hearts with things that *degrade* and *dissipate* rather than re-create.
2. We sometimes seem to be unable to distinguish what is “fitting” for the Christian to indulge in from what is not. “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, *which are not fitting*, but rather giving of thanks” (Eph. 5:3,4).

G. But whatever damage we have done to ourselves by entertainment that is immoral in itself, the greater problem is simply that our *heart* is in our fun — however clean — more than it is in the Lord’s work.

1. All too often, we display a first-rate devotion to second-rate things.
2. Sometimes the Lord’s people are simply not as interested in the Lord’s work as they are in things that are more fun.
3. What would those who know us well say our real passions and enthusiasms are?
 - a. What is it that really “turns us on”: recreation or the Lord’s work?
 - b. What does the evidence suggest?
4. How many of us can say we have never forsaken the assembling of the saints for a sports event or an entertainment activity?

Might we not sometimes be, despite our protests to the contrary, “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”
(2 Tim. 3:4)?

5. We need to learn better how to set our minds “on things above” (Col. 3:1,2).

Conclusion

A. When we read about the Israelites who “sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play” (Exo. 32:6; 1 Cor. 10:7), can we help but think of ourselves?

1. “Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them! The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute, and wine are in their feasts; but they do not regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of His hands” (Isa. 5:11,12).

There are reputable historians who argue that one factor in the fall of the Roman Empire was a weakness of the Roman people that had been produced by overindulgence in banqueting, entertainment, and athletic contests. What seeds are we sowing for the future of our own nation?

2. “Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments” (Amos 5:23).
3. “Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near; who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; who chant to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint

yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph” (Amos 6:3-6).

- B. God created pleasure, and He wants us to enjoy the lives He has given us in the world that He has made.
- C. But things that are nourishing in their proper measure can be deadly if we choke ourselves on them. The number of the Lord’s people who are “choked” with the “pleasures of life” is one of the worst problems we have right now. “And the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are *choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life*, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Lk. 8:14).
- D. What real, specific changes are we prepared to make to put recreation back in balance with other things and spend more time on spiritual priorities?

What's Hurting Us Right Now: Deadly Weapons the Devil Is Using

OVERCROWDED LIFESTYLES

Introduction

- A. One of the most dangerous habits of the average American today is the habit of *overcommitment*: the tendency to commit to too many activities and concerns.
- B. Like most problems in society at large, this is one that has affected the Lord's people. It is, in fact, one of the ways the devil is hurting us most.
- C. We tend to get in the same predicament as Martha, about whom the Lord expressed concern: "Martha, Martha, *you are worried and troubled about many things*. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (Lk. 10:41,42).
 - 1. Much of the time, we would have to characterize our own activity as little more than "going to and fro on the earth" (Job 1:7).
 - 2. While "busy here and there" (1 Kgs. 20:40), our very *lives* are gone!
- D. Unlike some of our other problems, the difficulty in dealing with this one is not that we do not recognize we have it. Most of us are fully aware that we are too busy.

Being too busy is like the weather: everybody talks about it,
but nobody does anything about it.

- E. Overcommitment is one of the main things responsible for the lessening of our spiritual vitality and effectiveness.
- F. Our "lifestyles" are simply overcrowded. There is too little time for spiritual refreshment and growth, and our schedules are so full of "this and that" that we are failing to tend to our most important priorities.

- G. What can we do to bring the problem of overcommitment into sharper focus so that we can and will do something about it?

I. GETTING A PROPER PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROBLEM

- A. Two primary reasons for our being overloaded are our *materialism* and our *fascination with fun*. See chapters on *Materialism* and *Our Fascination with Fun*.

1. We are often guilty of spending an inordinate amount of time working, building a career, making money, etc.
2. We are often guilty of spending an inordinate amount of time on entertainment, recreation, sports, hobbies, crafts, travel, etc.

- B. We seek to diminish the seriousness of our problem with the excuse that our overcommitment is “only temporary.”

1. In the first place, the situation is often *not* temporary.
 - a. As someone has said, there is nothing more permanent than a temporary situation.
 - b. Somehow we move out of one set of exigencies into another, so that life becomes one unbroken chain of temporarily overcommitted situations.
2. In the second place, by the time the crunch is over we are apt to have missed one or more critical windows of opportunity in our relationships that can never be gotten back.
 - a. What about our *children*?
 - (1) The time in life when many of us are most busy is the time when our children are at their most formative stage.
 - (2) If we lose these years, we can never get them back. It will not matter that we have more time for our families later; by then it will be, for some things, too late.
 - b. And what about our *spouses*? James C. Dobson makes this observation: “Overcommitment is the Number One Marriage Killer.” James C. Dobson, *Straight Talk*, rev. ed. (Dallas: Word, 1991), p. 161.
3. If we do not watch out, the “cares of this world” will choke God’s word within us and cause us to be unfruitful. “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and *the cares of this world* and the deceitfulness of riches *choke the word*, and he becomes unfruitful” (Mt. 13:22). Cf. Lk. 8:14.

Rather than *rationalize*, we need to *realize* what we are doing with our lives.

4. It is time for us to wake up. “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:11,12).

C. The same thing is true with activities as with money and material things: our inability to say no strongly resembles an addiction.

1. When it comes to doing things we want to do, we just can't say no. We are "activity junkies."
2. We are suffering the negative effects of a culture that offers *too much choice*.
 - a. Presented with an almost limitless variety of things that are possible for us to do, we are like a kid in a candy store.
 - b. We can't make up our minds. We want "one of each." We want to "do it all."
3. We lack self-discipline with respect to activities and involvements. We are overindulging.

Rather than mastering our activities, they are mastering us.

4. We make two mistaken assumptions:
 - a. We believe we have a *right* to do *anything* we want to do.
 - b. We believe there is a *way* to do *everything* we want to do without any of our priorities suffering. We assume that if there is a problem, it is merely a matter of scheduling, efficiency, organization, etc.
5. The word *sacrifice* is not even allowed to enter our minds when we are contemplating the things we want to do.
6. Yet none of us gets any more than 168 hours a week. We cannot do everything that strikes our fancy. (The rare person who can is a person with a truly meager fancy.)
7. Our culture serves up to us far more enticing possibilities than we can pursue without shortchanging some of our priorities.

Some choices have to be made,
some possibilities have to be let go.

D. We end up giving the Lord little more than our *leftover time*.

1. We do with our time the very thing we know is wrong to do with our money and material possessions: we give the Lord only that for which we have no other use.
 - a. "'And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?' says the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 1:8).
 - b. "'You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?' says the Lord" (Mal. 1:13).
2. Indeed, we can sometimes be stingier with our schedule books than with our checkbooks!
3. We may from time to time sacrifice the *having* of certain things for the Lord's work, but very few of us will let the Lord stand in the way of our *doing* anything we want to do.

4. It begins to look as if the Lord gets our time only when there is *absolutely zero else going on* — and, in our society, finding that time when nothing else is going on becomes harder and harder.
5. When it is always the Lord's work that "gives" when we have a schedule conflict, that ought to be a warning signal to us that something is wrong.

Where our priorities are, there will our energy and enthusiasm be also!

6. How we use our time demonstrates what our practical priorities really are.

II. ASSESSING THE DAMAGE

A. We need to see our overcrowded lifestyles not just as an unpleasant problem in itself, but as a problem that has created other problems.

1. This is a difficulty that hinders the cause of Christ by keeping us so preoccupied and distracted that God's purposes in our lives are not fulfilled.
2. Can anyone doubt where this problem comes from? It comes from the devil. When we overcommit ourselves we give in to one of his tactics and play right into his hands.

B. *Our spiritual vitality has been diminished.*

1. As a rule, a person cannot go at the pace we go at without being weakened spiritually.
2. Without adequate time for spiritual refreshment and growth, our inner resources eventually run out — gospel preachers included!
3. Gary R. Collins has written, "Busyness, including busyness with religion and church activities, has been called the 'archenemy of spiritual maturity.' Busy lives have little time for reflection. Never-ending waves of activity keep us from thinking carefully about the important issues in our lives — God, relationships, life purpose, goals, service. Busyness can destroy our relationships. It can stifle spiritual growth and keep us from becoming effective difference makers." Gary R. Collins, *You Can Make a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 49.
4. Not a few of us are "running on empty" right now.
 - a. This is one reason so many, even among the "strongest" of the Lord's people, are falling to sexual temptation, etc.
 - b. We have not taken the time that it takes to build faith, and when the big crisis comes up, we have little to draw on for strength and protection.
5. Overcommitment is one reason so many of us are stressed out.

Stress is when your *heart* says, "Don't do it; your priorities will suffer" — but your *mouth* says, "Why sure, I'd be happy to!"

6. We cannot fail to take the time for personal “maintenance” without serious consequences later on.
7. God intends that we spend significant time studying the Scriptures, praying, and meditating on Him.
8. No matter who we think we are, if we neglect the means that God has given for our spiritual replenishment, we will not be strong spiritually. It is as simple as that.

C. *Our spiritual effectiveness has been hindered.*

1. As a result of being overcommitted, we actually end up having less commitment to what we do.
 - a. Exceptions notwithstanding, it is generally true that we do a better job when we do not try to do too much. The jack-of-all-trades is usually a master of none.
 - b. Our output is so great, the quality of it tends to be no better than mediocre.
 - c. Often, the person who is surest to *keep* commitments is the one who is most careful in *making* them. Cf. Eccl. 5:1-7.
2. Obviously, our *personal evangelism* has suffered from our not having the time to do it.

Elders are discovering that it is nearly impossible to find *any* time for congregational activities and work that does not conflict with a secular activity that some of the members are involved in.

3. Frequent and spontaneous *hospitality* has been a casualty of our overcrowded lifestyles.
4. Because our schedules are so closely booked, we are often unavailable to help when “people needs” arise.
 - a. Such needs for help tend to present themselves unexpectedly and at “inconvenient” times.
 - b. Financially, if we operate right at the limit of what we can do, spending everything we make, then we are rarely able to help others when the opportunity comes up.
 - c. The same thing is true with the budget that governs our *time*. If we operate right at the limit of what we can do — if there is no space in our schedules — we are usually not able to help others when there is a need.
5. Our families have been adversely affected by our “busyness.”
 - a. Nearly all of us are too busy for the good of our families.

Even our children are being kept so busy they cannot be children. We are turning them into little adults with miniature schedules that are as overbooked as our own.

- b. Too often, *parents* — especially *fathers* — are too busy to nurture their *children*.

- (1) Someone has estimated that by the time a child is twelve years old, a father has already spent over ninety percent of the time he will ever spend with the child one-on-one.
 - (2) If true, this means that American fathers are simply fooling themselves if they think that after they get their careers established they will have any significant time left to spend with their children. They may have time to spend, but by then the kids will be unavailable!
 - (3) “A team of researchers wanted to learn how much time middle-class fathers spend playing and interacting with their small children. First, they asked a group of fathers to estimate the time spent with their one-year-old youngsters each day, and received an average reply of fifteen to twenty minutes. To verify these claims, the investigators attached microphones to the shirts of small children for the purpose of recording actual parental verbalization. The results of the study are shocking: The average amount of time spent by these middle-class fathers with their small children was thirty-seven seconds per day! Their direct interaction was limited to 2.7 encounters daily, lasting ten to fifteen seconds each! That, so it seems, represents the contribution of fatherhood for millions of America’s children.” James C. Dobson, *Straight Talk*, rev. ed. (Dallas: Word, 1991), pp. 63,64.
- c. Too often, *wives* — and especially *husbands* — are too busy to nurture their *wives*.
 - d. Perhaps men rationalize spending most of their time on their work by telling themselves that their work is important to a large number of people.
 - e. Yet a man makes a poor choice if he chooses to invest himself in “humanity” rather than his family.

*It is more noble to give yourself completely
to one individual than to labor diligently for the salvation of
the masses.*
— Dag Hammarskjöld

- f. Rather than trying to save the world, most men would do better to work on saving their wives and children.

III. SEEING THE NEED FOR BALANCE

- A. As with very many of the daily difficulties we have, our time-related problems are often problems of *balance*. We pursue one or two priorities at the expense of all others, letting parts of life get out of their proper proportion to the other parts.
- B. To change the metaphor, our failure is a failure of *perspective*. We do not accurately “see” how one set of activities is really related to the others. We can be tragically myopic, or shortsighted, when it comes to what is important in the use of our time.

1. Whether we like it or not, life has always involved a number of different concerns. The complexity of modern life should not blind us to the fact that human beings have always had more than one kind of business to take care of.
 - a. Nearly anybody can juggle one ball! It represents no great feat for a person to excel at a single pursuit — one, such as a man’s career, that he is obsessed with and spends virtually all of his time on.
 - b. In real life, however, we do not have the luxury of tending to just one or two concerns; there are a variety of things that have to be taken care of.
 - c. When we overcommit ourselves in one or two areas of life — however interested in them (and even good at them) we may be — the result is that other important things are bound to suffer.
 - d. The Prodigal Son “wasted his possessions” (Lk. 15:13). He recklessly spent everything he had on the pursuit of pleasure, with apparent disregard for *any other need*, no matter how important.

The essence of *prodigality* (whether in the spending of money or time) is that it spends with reckless disregard for other priorities.

- e. Whatever else it is that we think we have to do, we cannot forget about things like rest, spiritual nourishment and family relationships.
2. Our *goals* should be related well to our *roles*; and we simply cannot afford to focus so exclusively on some of our roles that others go unattended to. See Steven R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989); Steven R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); and Richard N. Bolles, *The Three Boxes of Life and How to Get Out of Them* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1978).
 - a. We have little to be pleased with if we become very busy, highly developed, and extremely effective in one or two of our roles — and become totally inactive and dysfunctional in the others the Lord has given us.
 - b. Often, Jesus’ exhortation to us would likely be something similar to what He said to the Pharisees about the weightier matters of the law: “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Mt. 23:23).
 - c. It is not an *all-or-nothing* question; it is a question of *balance*.

If we have to admit we have been overcommitting ourselves in certain areas of life, the answer is not necessarily to totally abandon those concerns. Very often it is to pull them back into balance with the rest of life.

- C. Becoming practiced at the art of *personal management* is what it is going to take to get control of our commitments.

1. We are stewards of the time entrusted to us.
2. Time, no less than money, has to be managed well to achieve worthwhile spiritual ends.
3. No more than 168 hours a week is available to any of us. The challenge is to make a wise allocation of the time resources that we have.
4. We need to grasp the concept of “redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16).
 - a. Paul urged the importance of a cautious, deliberate approach to daily living: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise” (Eph. 5:15).
 - b. Misusing our time is simply the kind of thing that happens we when fail to look at life seriously and make conscious choices about personal management.

The unexamined life is not worth living.
— Socrates

5. Years ago Charles E. Hummel wrote a little booklet on time management for Christians called *Tyranny of the Urgent*. We do need to learn to distinguish between the *important* and the *urgent*, and to spend more time on the important. See Charles E. Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Meridian, 1991).
 6. Before it is too late, we need to get control of our schedules, our activities, our involvements. We need to learn the ability to say no to *anything that would upset the balance of our priorities*.
 - a. We need to be slower to make promises about what we will do, more careful about entering into commitments that involve the expenditure of our time.
 - b. We need to learn to submit our schedules to the Lord for His approval, just as we seek His approval for everything else that pertains to us.
 - c. “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17).
 7. Much of what we choose to think is necessary is really not all that necessary.
 - a. Most of us could simplify our lives considerably with no loss of quality.
 - b. Things like unexpected hospital confinements prove that the world continues to move along fairly well even when we are unable to do all the things we thought we “had” to do.
 8. We need to learn to *focus* our energies and enthusiasm. Energy is almost always more productive when it is concentrated rather than randomly dispersed.
 9. We need to learn to *budget* our time, and that means imposing some *limits* on how much time we spend on certain things.
 10. Our priorities have to be protected from encroachment.
- D. We must learn to build adequate “margin” into our lives. See Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: How to Create the Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves You Need* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992).

IV. COMING TO TERMS WITH SCRIPTURAL TEACHING

- A. The example of the Lord Himself is instructive.

1. Few of us will ever come close to being as busy as the Lord.
 2. But He never once let His priorities get out of balance; He never became so preoccupied with any set of concerns that He forgot about the others.
 3. Most noticeably, the Lord managed His time so as to spend needed hours in communion with His Father in heaven.
 - a. “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mk. 1:35).
 - b. “So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed” (Lk. 5:16).
 - c. “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Lk. 6:12).
- B. In Paul’s instructions to the younger Timothy, it is no coincidence that things like *meditation* were linked to the making of *progress* spiritually. “Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Tim. 4:15).
- C. From a scriptural standpoint, the ideal life for the Christian would be the “quiet and peaceable life” (1 Tim. 2:2).
1. “That you also *aspire to lead a quiet life*, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you” (1 Thess. 4:11).
 2. “Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they *work in quietness* and eat their own bread” (2 Thess. 3:12).
 3. Quietness of lifestyle does not demand absolute inactivity, any more than quietness of spirit demands absolute silence (cf. 1 Pt. 3:4).
 4. Even so, the word “quiet” is not meaningless. At the very least it suggests a way of life that is different from the way most of us are living right now.

It would be a step in the right direction for most of us even to admit that the person who aspires to a simple, quiet life aspires to something honorable and wise.

- D. Jesus’ blessing upon the “pure in heart” (Mt. 5:8) is an expression of His desire not only that we be clean and innocent in our thinking, but that our hearts be free of any distracting concerns, however good in themselves, that would compete with our affection for Him.
1. The opposite of “pure in heart” is “doubleminded.” “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and *purify your hearts, you doubleminded*” (Jas. 4:8).
 2. We would often do well to emulate Paul’s ability to focus on “one thing.” “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” (Phil. 3:13,14).

Conclusion

- A. It is not *impossible* to be very, very busy and stay strong spiritually. An exceptional individual here or there may be balanced and disciplined enough to keep his or her spiritual resources replenished in the midst of a hectic schedule.
- B. But for the great majority of us it is quite *unlikely* that it will happen.
- C. The attempt to do it is, at the very least, extremely *dangerous*.

Few of us ordinary folks, if any, are exceptions to the rule that the rat race is unwinnable. It will kill us long before we figure out a way to "do it all."

- D. The life we ought to aspire to is a "quiet" life — one in which we mind our own business and tend to our own work. "That you also *aspire to lead a quiet life*, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing" (1 Thess. 4:11,12).
- E. In our busy age, we especially need to *Take Time to be Holy*.
- F. With God's help, let's get a better grip on what we are doing with our lives.

What's Hurting Us Right Now: Deadly Weapons the Devil Is Using

CRIPPLED FAMILIES

Introduction

- A. "He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind" (Prov. 11:29).
1. A good deal of the pain in our culture is the consequence of relational breakdown in the family.
 2. How many different problems in American society could you list that are related to the family?
 3. There are so many that even a partial list is very disturbing.
- B. We hear a good deal nowadays about "dysfunctional" families. What are these?
1. A dysfunction is a "disordered or impaired functioning of a bodily system or organ" (*American Heritage Dictionary*).
 2. Comparing the family to a human body, we can say that a dysfunctional family has one or more systems that are not working right: the family is impaired, crippled, or handicapped by one or more problems that keep it from functioning as it was intended to function and providing the benefits it was intended to provide to its members.
- C. "Crippled families" are not just those that are completely dysfunctional; they are those that have even a single system that is impaired.

It is rare today to find a family — even among the Lord's people — that does not have serious problems in at least one area. A normal family is almost an oddity, a curiosity.

- D. What does it say about the times in which we live that when we encounter an "ordinary" family (one that is simply functioning as families were meant to function) the experience is so refreshing to us?

- E. Family problems, of course, are problems in and of themselves; they very frequently involve things that are inherently sinful, and these sins involve a great deal of suffering.
- F. But this is not a study of family problems in general. We want to look at the crippling of our families as a tactic the devil is using to undermine the cause of the Lord's kingdom.
- G. Let's look at how various dysfunctions in our family relationships are hindering both our relationship with God and our work in the church.

I. WHAT SOME OF OUR FAMILY-RELATED PROBLEMS ARE

A. In regard to the husband-wife relationship.

1. *The problem of marital infidelity.*

- a. Is there any more heartbreaking problem among the Lord's people today than the frequency of sexual unfaithfulness to the marriage vow?

Did we not mean what we said when we vowed to our mates that they could trust us?

- b. Do we not honor the *covenant* involved in marriage?
 - (1) "Who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets *the covenant of her God*" (Prov. 2:17).
 - (2) "And this is the second thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with good will from your hands. Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and *your wife by covenant*" (Mal. 2:13,14).
- 2. *The problem of divorce and remarriage.*
 - a. We have a host of problems related to the prevalence of divorce and remarriage itself.
 - (1) The prevalence of unlawful divorce cannot be anything but utterly repugnant to the God who instituted marriage.
 - (2) "'For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence,' says the Lord of hosts. 'Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously'" (Mal. 2:16).
 - b. As if that were not enough, however, we have a number of problems related to divisiveness over scriptural teaching *about* divorce and remarriage.
 - c. Consider just some of the characteristics of the divorce and remarriage problem.
 - (1) It is *widespread*. By now, almost every family and congregation has been touched by the pain of this issue in some way.
 - (2) It is *complex*.
 - (a) Some of the marriage problems people can get themselves tangled up in are hard to unravel.

- (b) Some of the errors that are taught on divorce and remarriage are hard to decipher.
- (3) It is *controversial, divisive*.
 - (a) This is an issue about which sincere brethren of much ability and influence have serious disagreements.
 - (b) Ill feelings and alienation threaten to become more common.
 - (c) Regional differences make the problem worse.
- (4) It is *difficult in regard to fellowship*.
 - (a) What do we do when there is reason to believe that someone in the local congregation is involved in an unscriptural marriage?
 - (b) What do we do when we do not know whether someone who wishes to place membership is scripturally married?
 - (c) What do we do when members within the congregation disagree about fundamental aspects of the divorce and remarriage question?
 - (d) Do we use preachers for gospel meetings who take unscriptural positions on divorce and remarriage?
- (5) It is *difficult in regard to evangelism*. What do we do when we find out someone we are studying the gospel with is unscripturally married?
- (6) It is *emotionally sensitive*. This is not a problem that many people can discuss calmly and reasonably.
- (7) It is *serious*. This is not a trivial matter about which one opinion is as good as another; this subject involves sin and salvation.
- d. All things considered, we are dealing here with a problem that has the makings of a disaster!

If the devil were to try to think up the very worst kind of problem with which to trouble the Lord's people in our age, he would be hard put to devise one that packs a more powerful punch in more different ways than that of divorce and remarriage. Satan is crafty indeed.

- 3. *The problem of married Christians who would not divorce one another but who nevertheless have grown apart emotionally.*
 - a. There are too many actual divorces, certainly — but for every one of those there are many more situations where couples still living in the same house have been emotionally separated for some time.
 - b. So intimately are they to be related to one another, husbands and wives are said to be one flesh: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

The lack of any real intimacy in so many marriages among the Lord's people is a problem of alarming proportions.

4. *The problem of a lack of commitment to the marriage relationship.*
 - a. It goes without saying that there is no longer a firm conviction in our society at large that marriage is for life.
 - b. But even among Christians, unreserved commitment in marriage — the kind that can stand up under stress and overcome difficulties — is more and more rare.
 - c. Concerning vows in general, Solomon said, “So when you talk to God and vow to him that you will do something, don’t delay in doing it, for God has no pleasure in fools. Keep your promise to him. It is far better not to say you’ll do something than to say you will and then not do it” (Eccl. 5:4,5 Taylor).

B. *In regard to the parent-child relationship.*

1. *Having lost confidence in our own ability to rear our children, we have turned ourselves over to supposed childrearing experts.*
 - a. We have allowed ourselves to be told by academicians sitting behind mahogany desks that childrearing is something far beyond the skill of ordinary folks.
 - b. The truth is, childrearing is a quite ordinary, commonsense thing that generations of good parents have been doing for thousands of years — since way before the experts got their graduate degrees.

It is high time we regained our confidence in the accumulated wisdom of tradition — the kind that has always been passed down from grandparents to parents — and started believing that we do have what it takes to raise our children right.

2. *We have lost the true center of gravity of our families: the relationship between the father and mother.*
 - a. Many of our households have become child-centered rather than parent-centered.
 - b. We are producing too many adults who have never learned to think beyond what they thought as infants: that the world revolves around them and their every wish.
 - c. The basic orientation of the home is of children to their parents, and not vice versa. Cf. “My son, keep your father’s command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you; when you sleep, they will keep you; and when you awake, they will speak with you” (Prov.6:20,21).
3. *Too few of us have implemented any definite plan for nurturing and teaching our children in all the areas we are responsible for.*

We should know that whether we have any strategy for our kids, the *devil* has some very definite plans for them!

- a. In too many cases, the financial planning we have done for ourselves is more specific than the spiritual planning we have done for our children.
- b. We are procrastinating and leaving far too much to chance.

II. HOW WE ARE BEING HINDERED INDIVIDUALLY

A. Home is the primary place where we are to “learn” the Bible. When the home is not what it ought to be, this learning cannot take place and disastrous consequences result.

1. “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut. 6:6-9).
2. Whatever Bible instruction the local congregation may provide as a supplement, either for adults or children, this is no substitute for learning the text and the truths of the Bible in the home.
3. It is parents, and especially fathers, who have the responsibility of teaching their children God’s word.
 - a. “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).
 - b. “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).
4. But more than being a place where the factual contents of the Bible are to be learned, the home is the ideal place for the *truth* of these contents to be experienced and learned in real-life situations and relationships.
 - a. Home is where we most often pass beyond “knowing” the truths of the Bible theoretically to *knowing* they are true at the practical level. Cf. “When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Tim. 1:5).

Home is where we most often learn “the truth
of God’s truths.”

- b. Home is where the truths of God’s word are not only taught, but modeled, illustrated, and brought to life. Cf. “But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, *knowing from whom you have learned them*, and that *from childhood* you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14,15).
5. Bible study must not be superficially tacked on from time to time. When the Bible and its principles are not a real part of the everyday life of the family, we miss many of the valuable teaching and learning opportunities presented by the situations that arise daily. Cf. Deut. 6:6-9.

B. Our spirituality as individuals is being damaged in critical ways by our unhealthy family relationships, particularly the deficient husband-wife relationship that exists in so many of our households.

1. There is more to be learned about the Lord and His will in the daily relationship between a husband and a wife than in any other experience in life.
 - a. This is the most intimate relationship possible between human beings. When it is what God intended, there is greater spiritual help here and more to be learned about love, service, etc. than anywhere else in life.
 - b. When this relationship is dysfunctional, however, there is nothing that any more greatly hinders our spiritual health and growth.
 - (1) Our very relationship to the Lord is eroded.
 - (2) “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination” (Prov. 28:9).

It is not just coincidence that the various family relationships are used so often in the Scriptures to illustrate spiritual realities.

2. We are only fooling ourselves if we think we can fail to relate properly to one another in the family and still carry on a vibrant, healthy relationship with the Lord in a totally separate compartment of our life. The Lord will not have it.
 - a. “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt. 5:23,24).
 - b. “Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pt. 3:7).

III. HOW WE ARE BEING HINDERED CONGREGATIONALLY

- A. The character traits and personal skills so essential in congregational work are qualities that are primarily learned in the home. When our homes are not the kind that instill these qualities, the result is a serious hindrance in our collective work.
1. Think how vital to our congregational work the kinds of qualities are that Dorothy Rich calls “megaskills” in her book *MegaSkills*: confidence, motivation, effort, responsibility, initiative, perseverance, caring, teamwork, common sense, problem solving. See Dorothy Rich, *MegaSkills*, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).
 2. Just as an example, take the quality of *commitment*.

Are we raising a generation of people incapable of commitment in *any* of their relationships and work because they never experienced what commitment means in the *homes* in which they were raised?

- a. What are the implications for the congregation (and for society at large) when, as a people, we have not learned commitment by seeing it modeled in our homes?
 - b. In this connection, does not the divorce rate have some alarming implications that reach far beyond the home itself?
 3. The home is usually the place where these skills are acquired, if they are acquired at all.
 4. What if they are not acquired in our homes? Can we calculate the extent to which that hampers our congregational work?
 5. Is it not likely that the devil has said to himself: *“I will attack their families so that they do not develop these essential qualities, and then there will be no way their congregational relationship can function effectively.”*
 6. As the family goes, so goes the congregation.
- B. Our evangelistic efforts are being hampered.
1. In all our various relationships, we are obligated to “adorn the doctrine of God” (Tit. 2:10) by our conduct.
 2. It needs to be obvious to all who know us that our faith has made a positive difference in the quality of our lives.
 3. Unfortunately, our credibility is being eroded by our failure to make our homes living, working examples of the difference that Christianity makes in human relationships.

In many localities the landscape is strewn with the wreckage of families of people who used to be “members of the church.” The impression left in the minds of the public is not easy to overcome.

4. If we can do no better than the world in building good homes, can we expect our evangelistic message to be taken seriously?
5. For this and other reasons, the discipline of unrepentant members guilty of marital unfaithfulness, etc. needs to be swift and decisive. The world is watching to see how seriously we take such sins.

IV. THE SINGLE THING THAT WOULD HELP OUR FAMILIES MOST

- A. If we had husbands and fathers who would *lead* their families, we would be in far less danger than we are.

1. “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3).
2. “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church” (Eph. 5:23).
3. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church” (Eph. 5:25-28). Cf. 1 Pt. 3:7.
4. “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

B. Not all problems can be traced to a failure of leadership, but many can be.

1. There is little question that many of our family difficulties have resulted from an abdication of their family leadership duties by American men.
2. The buck ought to stop here!

With regard to the family, there is no greater problem among the Lord’s people than the widespread failure of men to assume the God-given role as spiritual leaders of their families.

C. The husband and father in a home is the “point man” for his family in a hostile jungle. See Steve Farrar, *Point Man: How a Man Can Lead a Family* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1990).

D. To focus on one important area as an example, think about the father’s role in creating *a positive image of God as Father* in the minds of his children.

1. Right thinking and acting come from true concepts of the character of God Himself. Many of our spiritual problems, if not most of them, come from erroneous concepts of God Himself.
 - a. The purpose for which God has revealed truthful information about Himself is that we might know Him: His character, His mind, His person.
 - b. Jesus Christ reveals God to us.
 - (1) “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (Jn. 1:18).
 - (2) “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being *the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person*, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hb. 1:1-3).
 - c. Our obedience to God’s will is to spring from a genuine love for Him as a personal being. The reason we study about God is to know *Him*.

- d. To have eternal life is to know God. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn. 17:3).
2. God reveals Himself to us in the Bible as our Heavenly *Father*.
3. But how much we understand about the fatherhood of God is greatly influenced by our personal concept of what a “father” is and does, a concept that most of us gained in the homes in which we were raised.
4. While possible, it is very difficult to overcome negative fatherhood images that are rooted in childhood experiences with an earthly father.
5. What kind of concept of “father” will prevail in a society like ours where fathers are so rarely what fathers ought to be — and are often absent from the family altogether?
6. What are the consequences for our individual spirituality and our collective work in the Lord when the true concept of fatherhood is lost?

It would be hard to imagine a greater loss for the Lord's people than the loss of a living example of real fatherhood in our homes.

- E. The man “who troubles his own house will inherit the wind” (Prov. 11:29).
 1. Professional success is not always accompanied by success at home.
 2. Nor can a successful career *compensate* for a man's failure with his family.
- F. A simple, yet powerful, starting point would be for many of us to start spending more *time* with our families.
 1. The “quality time” argument is often nothing more than a copout.
 2. L-O-V-E is spelled T-I-M-E.
- G. Men are instructed to dwell with their wives “with understanding...as being heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pt. 3:7).
- H. The godly man “walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him” (Prov. 20:7).
- I. There is simply no command that, when we obey it, gives us and our families any more spiritual help than the command “Husbands, love your wives” (Eph. 5:25).
- J. There is no worse hindrance to the cause of Christ than when men do not obey this command!

Conclusion

- A. As regards the home and family, our society has sown to the wind — and we are now just beginning to reap the whirlwind.

- B. What about our own homes?
- C. If we have made serious mistakes — or if other members of our family are not what they ought to be — the last thing the Lord would want us to do is despair.
1. This study is not meant to make us any more ashamed of the dysfunctional aspects of our families than we already are.
 2. If we simply give up in the face of failure, we will please no one but the devil.
 3. We can learn from our mistakes, and we can use our experience to help others avoid these problems.
- D. The devil's all-out war on the family is one of his main strategies for hindering us spiritually.

Nothing we can do will change the past. What we *can* do is resolve to take positive steps that will make a difference in the future.

- E. We need to rise up in righteous indignation and resolve that we are simply not going to tolerate the devil's attack on our families any longer!
- F. Godly men need to accept the role of leadership, as husbands and fathers, in building healthy families. "Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pt. 3:7).

What's Hurting Us Right Now: Deadly Weapons the Devil Is Using

OUR SHORTAGE OF PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Introduction

- A. Peter wrote, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and *always be ready to give a defense* to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Pt. 3:15).
- B. Honesty would compel most congregations — and most individuals — to admit to being deficient in the matter of personal evangelism.

In places, a shortage of personal evangelism is so critical that it threatens the very existence of the local church.

- C. To be sure, there are a number of congregations which have a *handful* of members who are genuinely motivated and quite active in trying to reach the lost.
 - 1. This is good as far as it goes, but it tends to make us feel, as a congregation, that “we” are doing better than we actually are.
 - 2. There is a certain euphoria that is produced by having an active nucleus of personal workers — and this euphoria sometimes makes it difficult to face the truth about our collective shortcomings.
- D. Our shortage of personal evangelism is not only an obvious problem in itself; it is also a means by which the devil seeks to hinder the work of the Lord in general.
- E. Our failure to be diligent in rescuing the lost is a failure that causes considerable difficulty for us in other areas. It is a problem that makes other problems worse than they would be otherwise.
- F. For very many of the Lord’s people today, negligence in teaching the gospel to those around us is one of the ways the devil is hurting us most.

I. PERSONAL EVANGELISM: THE GREAT NEED OF THE HOUR

A. There is a need for evangelism in general.

1. Without Christ, the world is lost. Paul spoke of those “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).
 - a. “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:1,2).
 - b. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).
 - c. “In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:8,9).

The purpose for which Jesus came was “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10).

2. The *gospel of Christ* is God’s power to save. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).
3. But the gospel cannot save if it does not reach those who are lost. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).
4. Consequently, Jesus commanded His disciples to teach His word to others.
 - a. “Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (Mt. 28:18-20).
 - b. “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk. 16:15,16).
5. Knowing the value of souls, and knowing the destiny of the lost, we ought to be possessed of *a burning passion to reach others with the gospel*.
 - a. “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mt. 16:26).
 - b. “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, *his spirit was provoked within him* when he saw that the city was given over to idols” (Ac. 17:16).
 - c. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:10,11).
6. We acknowledge our duty to the lost in many of the songs we sing.

- a. *Into Our Hands the Gospel Is Given.*
 - b. *Throw Out the Lifeline.*
 - c. *Rescue the Perishing.*
 - d. *You Never Mentioned Him to Me.*
 - e. *Will You Not Tell It Today?*
7. Truly the need for evangelism is great and urgent.
- a. “Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’” (Mt. 9:37,38).
 - b. “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (Jn. 4:35).

B. But there is not only a need for evangelism, there is a need for *personal* evangelism.

1. Personal evangelism has several distinguishing characteristics:
- a. It is *personal* — as distinct from the teaching we may support someone else to do.
 - b. It is *private* — as distinct from public proclamation of the gospel.
 - c. It is *one-on-one* — as distinct from group teaching.
 - d. Strictly speaking, personal evangelism is also *done as an individual* — rather than as part of the collective, organized work of a congregation.

Both public and private teaching have always been needed; neither takes the place of the other. But there is a special need now for us to become actively involved in *personal* evangelism.

2. The duty to “go...and preach” (Mk. 16:15) is an individual one which pertains to every member of Christ’s body. No one person can designate another to obey this command for him.
- a. Other “laborers” besides full-time evangelists are badly needed. “Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’” (Mt. 9:37,38).
 - b. A “silent” Christian, or a Christian “undercover” agent, is a contradiction of terms. “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. *You are the light of the world.* A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:13-16).
- (1) “O Lord, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; everyone mocks me. For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, ‘Violence and plunder!’ because the word of the Lord was made to me a reproach and a derision daily. Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart *like a burning fire shut up in my bones*; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not” (Jer. 20:7-9).

- (2) “Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pt. 2:12).

Our aim should be to “become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine *as lights in the world*” (Phil. 2:15).

- c. Sometimes we are not even as energetic as the Pharisees. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Mt. 23:15).
- d. But every Christian ought to be ready to give an explanation of his faith. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and *always be ready to give a defense* to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Pt. 3:15).
- e. If we would imitate the Lord, we must attend to private as well as public teaching.
- (1) Jesus taught multitudes publicly. Cf. Mt. 5:1,2; 13:1,2.
 - (2) He also taught individuals privately. Cf. Lk. 10:38-42; Jn. 3:1-12; 4:1-26.

The Lord's church needs man-to-man teaching, rather than a zone defense.
— James P. Miller

- f. If we would be like the early church, we must get involved.
- (1) “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Ac. 2:46,47).
 - (2) “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Ac. 5:42).
 - (3) “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Ac. 8:4).
 - (4) “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Ac. 11:19).
 - (5) “And how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house” (Ac. 20:20).
- g. Deep and abiding joy is to be found in personal evangelism. “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess. 2:19,20).
- h. How can we not speak out?

- (1) “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Ac. 4:20).
- (2) “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16).
- 3. The phenomenal growth of some of the cults attests to the effectiveness of one-on-one teaching as a method.
- 4. Christianity spreads as the gospel is taught from person to person. “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

If our efforts are any indication, how many Christians will there be in the next generation?

- 5. Haggai asked the question, “Is the seed still in the barn?” (Hag. 2:19).
 - a. The seed of the gospel will not do anyone any good if it is not sown.
 - b. The bounty of the harvest will be in proportion to the plentifulness of the seed sown. Cf. “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6). Cf. Mt. 13:1-9,18-23.
- 6. We need to adopt the attitude of Isaiah: “Here am I! Send me” (Isa. 6:8).

II. GETTING READY TO GROW

A. Often there are some foundational issues that must be addressed before lasting growth can be a real possibility for a congregation.

- 1. The description in Rev. 3:15-19 of the church in Laodicea is disheartening.
- 2. Suppose a vibrant evangelist who was an effective “personal worker” had moved to Laodicea and soon numerous people were being baptized. In the environment of the congregation at Laodicea, how long would most of those new converts have remained faithful?
- 3. Sometimes the way the Lord’s own people think and act makes it difficult, first, to *interest* unbelievers in the Lord and, second, to *establish in the faith* those who do obey the gospel.

All too few of the lost are rescued anywhere — but perhaps a greater tragedy is the mortality rate of those who *are* rescued.

- 4. What, then, are some of the matters that must be tended to if a congregation is to expect solid, enduring growth through its efforts in personal evangelism?

B. *Individually, our daily walks with God must be intimate.*

- 1. We must live as those who genuinely know the Lord and who enjoy an obvious closeness to Him. Cf. “Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is *your wisdom and your*

understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?’ (Deut.4:6,7).

2. People need to be able to make of us the kind of request the Greeks made of Philip: “Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, ‘*Sir, we wish to see Jesus*’” (Jn. 12:20,21).

Others must see in us the blessings of walking *with* the Lord,
not simply the pride of knowing *about* the Lord.

3. It is hard to share what we do not have. We need to be able to wish for others the close personal relationship with the Lord that we ourselves enjoy.
4. “And Paul said, ‘I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both *almost and altogether such as I am*, except for these chains’” (Ac. 26:29).

C. *Congregationally, we must be involved in one another’s lives.*

1. In studying with prospects, many of whom are lonely and without any substantial relationships, we portray the Lord’s church as a loving family who support one another in the living of life together.
 - a. This is as it should be.
 - (1) Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:34,35).
 - (2) The members of the church in Jerusalem were obviously involved with one another on a daily basis: “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Ac. 2:46,47).
 - (3) Paul wrote, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).
 - b. But does the reality of our congregational life fulfill the claims we make about the closeness of the Lord’s family?
2. In this busy age, the same thing is happening to our spiritual family that is happening in all too many cases to our physical families: we are merely coexisting under the same roof without any real sharing of life together.
3. If we would truly “restore” New Testament Christianity, we must do more than see one another at the church building and show an occasional act of hospitality in our homes. We must become “involved” (which means, literally, “rolled together, intertwined”) with one another.

D. *The assemblies of the church must be edifying to the outsider and to the young in the faith.*

1. To our shame, the services of the Lord's people are not always such as would move an unbeliever or a new convert in God's direction.
 - a. To the Christians in Corinth, Paul wrote, "Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse" (1 Cor. 11:17). Cf. 1 Cor. 14:15-17,23-26.
 - b. It is a sad commentary when we feel a bit reluctant to bring to services our best prospects for study — or when we have to apologize to new converts for what they see and hear when the church meets.
 - c. Something is wrong anytime we impart anything other than spiritual refreshment and strength to our visitors and new converts.
2. In our assemblies, unbelievers ought to experience courtesy, warmth, and genuine interest in spiritual things: real love for God and man.
3. If we are serious about church growth, we are going to have to be more "visitor conscious" when we assemble, i.e. more mindful of the presence of visitors and more deliberate in our efforts to make the assembly what it needs to be for their sake.

E. *We must be prepared to nurture babes in Christ.*

1. In the spiritual family as in our physical families, the reality of having "babies" is often strikingly different from our idealized visions beforehand. New converts often bring with them a host of "problems."

Have we "counted the cost" of making and establishing new converts to the Lord in the real world?

2. In addition to the hard work of really grounding any babe in Christ, there is an additional consideration: those who are most receptive to the gospel often are not from our own socio-economic group and bring with them problems we may be uncomfortable dealing with. Cf. Mt. 9:9-13.
3. One reason we have not grown more than we have is that we have limited our evangelism to well-scrubbed individuals who we think would "fit right in" with little work on our part.
4. Until we are prepared to have Paul's attitude it is unlikely that we would enjoy what it would be like if new converts did fill our pews: "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (1 Thess. 2:7,8).

F. *We must learn to work in the strength of the Lord and to His glory.*

1. If we leave the Lord out of His own work, we do not deserve to grow. We must learn truly to speak and act as "stewards."
 - a. "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).
 - b. "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through

Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pt. 4:11).

2. Before becoming useful and effective in reaching the lost, we may have to cleanse ourselves of certain things that hinder us. “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21).
3. We, like the apostles, need to be *made* into fishers of men. “And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’” (Mt. 4:19).
4. There is work to be done setting our house in order for the work of personal evangelism. “Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:15,16).

III. SOWING THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

A. Our work in the Lord is the work of *sowing the seed* of the kingdom.

1. Problems arise in any endeavor when we forget what our work is.
2. In the Lord, our work is *presenting* the gospel to as many people as possible.
3. Even more accurately, our work is *attempting to present the gospel* to as many as possible.
4. All the Lord has ever asked us to do is “plant” and “water.” It is His part of the work to “give the increase.”
 - a. “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6,7).
 - b. The Lord can be counted on to do His work!

When we assume responsibility for the Lord’s part of the work — a thing that we have no control over — we are bound to become discouraged.

B. Our work would remain the same even if God told us before we started that no one would listen to us.

1. In fact, there have been times when God did send His servants to preach and told them in advance that the message would be rejected.
 - a. To Moses, God said, “But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand” (Exo. 3:19).
 - b. To Jeremiah, God said, “Therefore you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not obey you. You shall also call to them, but they will not answer you” (Jer. 7:27). Cf. Ezek. 2:1-7; 3:4-9; 33:30-33.
2. Our work is like that of the “watchman.” Cf. Ezek. 33:1-9.
3. We are expected to keep on telling others of the Lord until there is no one left to tell. Cf. “Then I said, ‘Lord, how long?’ And He answered: ‘Until the cities are laid waste and without

inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate, the Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land” (Isa. 6:11,12).

4. We are to be those who cannot do otherwise than tell others about Christ.
 - a. “Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart *like a burning fire shut up in my bones*; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not” (Jer. 20:9).
 - b. “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Ac. 4:20).
 5. Our work is to present the gospel to as many people as possible — regardless of the response — and to keep on doing it until the Lord comes back.
- C. The effectiveness of our work is to be measured not in terms of positive response to the gospel, but in terms of *how much seed has been sown*.
1. If we care to set goals in our personal evangelism, we need to be sure these goals relate to the work that is ours to do and are worded in terms of the amount of seed sown.
 2. For example, an appropriate goal might be to ask, before the year is over, at least ten persons if they will study the Bible.

We would not measure the effectiveness of the Post Office
by how many people respond favorably to their mail.
The mailman is merely a messenger!

3. It would be good for a congregation to determine that every person in the community is going to hear from it in some way at least once every year or two.
 - a. Of the church in Thessalonica Paul could say: “For from you *the word of the Lord has sounded forth*, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything” (1 Thess. 1:8).
 - b. We can at least confront those around us with the gospel often enough that they know we are in the neighborhood!
- D. God will bless our efforts.
1. If we keep focused on what it is the Lord wants us to do, He will bless what we do.
 - a. After all, our “sufficiency” is from God: “And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor. 3:4,5).
 - b. If we are willing to sow “bountifully,” God is able to make us have an “abundance” for every good work. Cf. 2 Cor. 9:6-11.
 2. We need to be conscious that we are participating in the *Lord’s* work.
 - a. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding *in the work of the Lord*, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).
 - b. “For *it is God who works in you* both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).
 3. We need to be praying that God will open doors of opportunity for us to do His work.

- a. “For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:9).
- b. “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains” (Col. 4:2-4).
- c. “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith” (2 Thess. 3:1,2).

E. Much of our discouragement in evangelism is simply unnecessary.

1. Admittedly, it is hard not to be discouraged by our own seeming inability to teach the gospel effectively. It is hard not to be defeated by the apparent rejection of the gospel by almost everyone we meet.
2. But some, if not most, of this discouragement is unnecessary.
3. Once we recognize the work the Lord has given *us* to do, we will see that He has never asked us to do anything that we *cannot* do.

We cannot determine what others will do with the gospel, but we can see that they are presented with the choice.

4. God would say to us the same kind of thing He said to Jeremiah: “Prepare yourself and arise, and speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before their faces, lest I dismay you before them” (Jer. 1:17).

IV. WHAT CAN WE DO?

A. When it comes to personal evangelism, “*What can we do?*” is a question that has many good answers.

1. It is a much-debated mystery *why* the average Christian is not more active in personal evangelism.
 - a. Is it because we lack *desire* (motivation) or is it because we lack *know-how* (training)?
 - b. This may be like asking “Which comes first: the chicken or the egg?”
 - c. A lack of motivation inhibits our training and a lack of training inhibits our motivation.
 - d. At least this much is clear: many of us are not confident that we can do very much.
2. We are honestly willing to help, but our question is: “What can I do?”
3. This is a question that can be *answered*.
 - a. If an unawareness of what we can do is the thing that is really holding us back, that is a problem that can easily be fixed.
 - b. The fact is, there is a considerable variety of things that relate to personal evangelism, most of which can be done by almost all of us right now.
4. The things that we can do fall into three basic areas.

B. *Praying about personal evangelism.*

1. If we neglect prayer we risk rendering our work a complete failure.
 - a. “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Him; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” (Lk. 6:12,13).
 - b. “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manean who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Ac. 13:1-3).
2. It may be that we have so few opportunities to teach others because we spend so little time in prayer about it. Cf. Col. 4:2-6.
3. Praying is something everybody can do right now, without any further training.
4. If a person were to commit two or three hours a week to “merely” praying about the subject of personal evangelism — and not quit doing it — great things would result. “Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore *pray the Lord of the harvest* to send out laborers into His harvest’” (Mt. 9:37,38).
5. “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas. 5:16).
6. Praying about the spread of the gospel is not just something for people who “can’t do anything else”; it ought to occupy a significant amount of the time of even the most seasoned personal evangelist.

C. *Preparing to do personal evangelism.*

1. In our fast-paced culture, we often underestimate the need for preparation, but preparation is essential in any important work.
2. Of the thirty-three years that Jesus lived, the work He came to do took only about three years. The remaining ninety-one percent of His life was taken up in preparation. “Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age” (Lk. 3:23).

Preparation to teach, including prayer and study, is not wasteful “downtime.” It is a vital part of teaching.

3. Jesus said that He would *make* His apostles into “fishers of men” (Mt. 4:19). See A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, reprint of 1894 edition).
4. When we ask “What can I do?” we may be overlooking the fact that time spent equipping ourselves for the work is a vital part of what it takes to win souls to the Lord.
 - a. “Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:15,16).
 - b. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).
 - c. “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21).

D. *Doing personal evangelism.*

1. Eventually, we must get down to the business of actually communicating the gospel to those who are lost — and this is where most of us balk.
2. But even here, there are more things to be considered than we might think. The work of personal evangelism encompasses numerous activities, directly or indirectly, all of which are important in their own way.
3. Having prayed and prepared, we simply need to adopt attitude of Isaiah: “Here am I! Send me” (Isa. 6:8).

This advice contains more than a little wisdom: *Have your tools ready. The Lord will find you work.*

4. We need to be able say what Paul could say: “As much as in me, I am ready to preach the gospel” (Rom. 1:15).

E. The key to being active is committing the time.

1. If we will commit a definite amount of time each week to personal evangelism, all that remains is to *fill up* that amount of time with activities relating to personal evangelism.
 - a. In selecting activities, we can — and should — take some from each of the three areas of praying, preparing, and doing.
 - b. At first, more of our time will be spent on praying and preparing, but as we mature in the work, the proportions will change. We will find ourselves spending more time actually teaching others about the gospel, although we will never outgrow the need for prayer and preparation.
2. The key is *committing a definite amount of time* each week to the work.
3. When we have done that, the question of what to do with that time can be answered in numerous ways.
4. There are *very many things nearly all of us can do* to help out in the great work of rescuing souls for the Lord.

There Is Much To Do

*There is much to do, there's work on ev'ry hand,
Hark! the cry for help comes ringing through the land;
Jesus calls for reapers, I must active be,
What wilt Thou, O Master? Here am I, send me.*

— M. W. Spencer

V. A PLAN FOR GETTING INVOLVED IN PERSONAL EVANGELISM

A. A commitment of time.

1. There is a great deal to be said for *purposing* to do things that need to be done. Cf. 2 Cor. 9:5-8.
2. If you really wish to get serious about becoming active in personal evangelism, the first thing to do is make an honest commitment of time each week to that work.
 - a. We all have 168 hours every week, most of which we spend eating and sleeping.

Is *two hours a week* (1.2% of our time) too much to devote to rescuing souls from being lost?

- b. If all else fails, we can sacrifice some other activity to make time for this work.
 - c. On one occasion, recorded in Jn. 4:31-34, Jesus did without lunch while He talked to a woman about her soul.
3. Whether you prefer to make the commitment in terms of hours a week, evenings a week, or whatever, the critical thing is to promise the Lord that you will spend that amount of time doing *something* related to personal evangelism — and then move heaven and earth to keep that promise.

Unforeseen things can come up. But if it is not something that would keep you from going to work, it is likely nothing more than an excuse if it keeps you from the commitment you have made to personal evangelism.

B. A notebook.

1. An inexpensive notebook is needed to keep track of every “prospect” that is within your realm of influence.
2. Entries in this notebook should include names, addresses, phone numbers, dates, and whatever other personal information needs to be remembered to help in teaching various individuals.
3. The names in this notebook will range from very good contacts to those that are only remote possibilities. But one thing this notebook will always do is give you immediately the names of your two or three *best* contacts at any given time.
4. The notebook also furnishes the names of people you need to spend time praying about on a regular basis.

C. A worksheet.

1. A piece of paper is needed each week to write down (in ink!) how much time you have committed to personal evangelism and, at the end of the week, how much time you actually spent. See an example on p. 70.

2. On the sheet it is also helpful to list everything you can think of that you *could* do to fill up the amount of time you have committed.

On most weeks you will run out of time before you run out of things you have listed that you *can* do!

D. *A person to account to.*

1. You need somebody who will agree to hold you to your commitment.
2. Each week, you tell this person how much time you have committed to personal evangelism, and then at the end of the week, he or she asks you what you did with the time.
3. The ideal arrangement is simply to have someone with whom you have agreed to exchange worksheets. You check up on them, and they check up on you.
4. Your spouse is not the best person to account to. He or she will let you off too easily!

E. *Some Bible lessons you can teach.*

1. Each Christian needs to have a brief *introductory lesson* he or she is able to teach on short notice to anyone who will listen. This lesson serves at least two purposes:
 - a. It allows us to have something to teach in situations where we may never have another chance to say anything to a particular person about his soul. Our basic lesson can be such that, after having taught it to a person, we can feel confident that we have exposed him to the gospel.
 - b. In addition, a basic lesson gives us a means of finding out whether a person is interested in further study.
2. Each Christian also needs to have a *series of lessons* that he or she is able to teach when a more detailed study seems to be appropriate.

VI. THREE MISTAKES IN TRYING TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE FOR GOOD

A. One thing that helps in any endeavor is the willingness to learn from our mistakes.

1. The Lord's work consists of *influencing* people in God's direction.
 - a. "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:13-16).
 - b. "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ" (Col. 1:28).
2. Influence comes down to a matter of *communication*, whether verbal or non-verbal.
3. Sometimes we are guilty of neglecting the commonsense principles of influence that people in the world use effectively. Cf. "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light" (Lk. 16:8).

4. To be specific, there are three mistakes we often make — mistakes that could be very instructive if we would learn from them.

B. *We attempt to build/rebuild relationships without changing our own attitude and conduct.*

1. Most significant change starts with *self*. An “inside out” approach to influencing others is best.
2. Yet we neglect to take seriously the Lord’s warning about removing the beam in our own eye before we work on the speck in someone else’s. Cf. Mt. 7:3-5.

We are often too busy confessing the other person’s sins to do anything about our own.

3. If our own *character* is not what it ought to be, our *words* will have little positive effect on others. As Emerson put it, “What you are shouts so loudly in my ears I cannot hear what you say.”
4. We must model the conduct we wish to encourage in others.
 - a. “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me, *I have shown you* in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak” (Ac. 20:33-35).
 - b. “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).
5. We must be an example of what believers ought to be. “These things command and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but *be an example to the believers* in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:11,12).

C. *We advise before we understand.*

1. In general, we have to earn the right to be heard by showing ourselves to be genuinely concerned about the other person.
2. *Sympathy* has to do with feeling what others feel; *empathy* has to do with understanding the situation of others. “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:1,2).

People don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care.

3. Understanding needs to go before being understood; it ought to be a higher priority. “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4).
4. Too often, we do not really listen to others in order to truly understand them. While we seem to be listening, we are merely planning our reply, our rebuttal.

5. One thing that made Jesus the Master Teacher was His perfect understanding and compassion for His hearers. “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Mt. 9:36).

D. *We assume that good example and relationship are sufficient.*

1. *Character and compassion* are not enough to communicate the truth of the gospel. It takes *words*.
 - a. “And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved’” (Ac. 11:13,14).
 - b. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).
 - c. “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13).
2. The gospel is of no benefit if it is not made “manifest.”
 - a. Paul asked his brethren to pray for him: “And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:19,20).
 - b. “Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Col. 4:3,4).

Unfortunately, we are sometimes not as clear as we think we are. We assume the other person will read our mind and get the point without the need to make it explicit, to come right out and say it.

3. In our efforts to communicate the gospel, we must strive to *balance courage and consideration*.
 - a. We must be courteous as well as candid. “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6).
 - b. Granting the need for tact, however, we must still *communicate*. We cannot afford to sacrifice *clarity* for courtesy.
 4. We must personally be what we ought to be and we must seek to understand others, but ultimately we must “warn” and “teach.” “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ” (Col. 1:28).
- E. If we are to be effective, we are going to have avoid these mistakes and learn to teach in all three of the ways that teaching can be done.
1. The Greeks were correct in their belief that there are three basic forms of teaching.
 - a. *Ethos* (our character — what we are — influences others)
 - b. *Pathos* (our understanding and concern influence others).
 - c. *Logos* (our language — what we say — influences others).

2. These three things build upon one another and are related in a natural, organic way. Each thing requires those that precede it. See Steven R. Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (New York: Summit Books, 1992), pp. 57-66.
3. All three of the mistakes above are attempted shortcuts; they are misguided efforts in which we try to have one without the others.
4. But ultimately these shortcuts prove to be unsuccessful.
 - a. *Logos* is empty without *ethos*.
 - b. *Logos* is powerless without *pathos*.
 - c. Neither *ethos* nor *pathos* are sufficient without *logos*.
5. We need to strive for a full, mature ability to influence others for good.
 - a. “These things command and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:11,12).
 - b. “Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:15,16).

VII. POPPING THE QUESTION

- A. In the matter of personal evangelism, we are often reluctant to do the one thing that most needs to be done: come right out and ask people to study with us.
 1. One of the most interesting things about the apostle Paul is how easily and naturally he found people to talk to about the gospel, even in unfamiliar surroundings. In whatever circumstances he was, Paul seems to have spoken about the gospel with confidence.
 - a. “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there” (Ac. 17:16,17).
 - b. “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (Ac. 28:30,31).
 2. Unfortunately, we are sometimes more reluctant.

We may engage in broad discussions of religious topics now and then, and we may even invite others to services of the church. But we do not very often *ask people if they will study the Bible with us!*

- B. The “waiting game” is popular.
 1. We tend to think that we must “build a relationship” with people before we can speak to them about the gospel.
 2. “Serendipity evangelism” is what some call this approach.
 3. We sometimes rationalize our commitment to questionable activities by saying that we are making “contacts” to study with.

4. Yet as time goes by, we find that we have asked very few, if any, of these contacts to actually sit down with us and study the Bible.

Whether or not we are consciously following the approach of serendipity evangelism, we seem to have trouble *popping the question*. We delay asking people point-blank for a home study.

C. But later is not always better.

1. Granted it is not always possible — or even expedient — to ask a new acquaintance if he would like to study the Bible.
2. What wisdom is always urging us to look for is the *optimum moment*: the time at which, all things considered, there is the best possible chance of meeting with a positive response.

The point is that very often the optimum moment to ask about a Bible study comes *earlier*, rather than later, in our association with people.

3. If we plan, at some point, to ask those we come in contact with to study with us, we need to see that most of them will appreciate frankness and candor about that early in the relationship. They will not like to find out later that we have been “maneuvering” to ask them a question.
 - a. We ourselves are uncomfortable with hidden agendas; we would rather know what those around us are up to.
 - b. Most of those we meet will respect honest “plain speaking” about what it is we want, and we can be straightforward about this without being discourteous.
4. Perhaps my experience is unique, but I have found the quicker I get to the point with a new acquaintance, the *easier* it is.
 - a. Human nature is such that the farther we go into a relationship with somebody, the less likely we are to ask them for a Bible study, ever.
 - b. The more involved the relationship, the more reluctant we are to jeopardize it by bringing up the touchy subject of religion.
5. We may wait so long that, when we finally do ask, the person questions how genuine we are. If Bible study is so urgent, why did we not bring it up sooner?
 - a. Waiting often leaves the impression that we believe people are spiritually safe in their present condition.
 - b. Waiting certainly risks the possibility of some unexpected misfortune ending a person’s opportunity to obey the gospel — or our opportunity to teach.
6. Is there not much to be said for going ahead and promptly asking folks if they will study with us?
7. Even if the answer is no, we may still develop a relationship and be in an even better position to teach them later.

8. But if that does not happen, our conscience will know that we have asked the question that really needed to be asked.
- D. Obviously, wisdom may indicate a different timetable in different circumstances — but eventually we must *ask* people to study the Bible.
1. Whether we build a relationship with folks or not, sooner or later we are going to have to “pop the question” and simply ask them if we can study the Bible.
 - a. Admittedly, popping the question is never completely easy.
 - b. A man may dread asking a woman to marry him, and he may stumble awkwardly when he finally does it. *But get around to it he will, because he loves her!*

When we need to ask someone to study God’s word, delaying the inevitable while we tell ourselves we are “building a relationship” only makes us more miserable.

2. With home studies it may be as James says it is with the Lord’s blessings generally: “You do not have because you do not ask” (Jas. 4:2).
 - a. As an apostle, Paul said, “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).
 - b. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).
3. If we will pray about it, God will help us to speak plainly as we ought.
 - a. “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word” (Ac. 4:29).
 - b. “And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:19,20).
 - c. “Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Col. 4:3,4).
4. What if we committed ourselves to ask just one person each week for a Bible study?
5. That would be fifty-two requests a year — and that would generate more studies than we ourselves could handle!

E. *Opportunities* to ask for a Bible study are frequent.

1. Most of us get (and waste!) far more opportunities to ask for Bible studies than we think.
2. When religious subjects come up in conversation with others, some kind of door is usually open. But rather than go through the door and ask for a study, our courage fails us.
3. At times we actually run from subjects and statements that provide some of our best opportunities.
4. For example, we tend to “duck” or change the subject when stereotypes, misconceptions, and prejudices about us come up. Some of these are:

- a. *I know someone who is a member of the Church of Christ, and he is a real hypocrite.*
 - b. *You are fundamentalists, members of the radical religious fringe.*
 - c. *You are a cult.*
 - d. *You people think you are the only ones going to heaven.*
 - e. *You are the ones who don't have "music" in your church.*
 - f. *You believe in water salvation.*
5. Sometimes, we go ahead and discuss the subject then and there — perhaps exhausting it — and fail to take the opportunity to ask for an actual sit-down study of the Bible.
 6. At other times, we merely invite the person to visit the services of the church, rather than ask for a home study.
 - a. The services of the church are primarily for the edification of those who are already Christians, and only secondarily or incidentally for the evangelization of those who are not.
 - b. Consider 1 Cor. 14:1-40; Hb. 10:24,25; etc.
 7. But general religious discussions, inviting people to services, etc. will not by themselves get the job done.

Joshua and the children of Israel did "march around" Jericho
for a few days — but not indefinitely!

8. Sometimes even in our congregational efforts we fail to get to the heart of the matter quickly enough.
9. For example, several congregations using telecomputers have found they get equally good results if they just go ahead and ask people if they would be interested in a home study, rather than a correspondence course or some other intermediate step.

F. Ways to ask for a Bible study are plentiful.

1. What is it about asking people to study the Bible that fills us with such fear and trembling?
 - a. We may claim to be too bashful and shy to do it.
 - b. Yet we demonstrate when we talk enthusiastically about other things that this is nothing more than an excuse when the subject happens to be religion.
 - c. In any case, there is no need for us to be bashful about the gospel.
 - (1) "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ *with all confidence*, no one forbidding him" (Ac. 28:30,31).
 - (2) "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).
 - (3) "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).
2. Depending on the opportunity, there are various ways we can ask people to study.
 - a. We might ask the person what they think a Christian is, and then zero in on the fact that there happen to be many different ideas about that in the religious world, that the question can only be settled by an appeal to scriptural authority, etc.
 - b. We might ask the person if they have ever wondered how the present divided state of "Christendom" got to be the way it is, what can be done about it, etc.

- c. We might ask them what they have heard about the “Church of Christ,” whether they know anything about us, etc., and then ask whether they would give us a chance to show how some of the commonly held ideas about us are not accurate.

Perhaps best of all, we might inquire into a person’s own religious background and say something like this: *“If I could show you from the New Testament how you could be closer to genuine Christianity than you are, would you be interested?”*

3. The main thing is to place the challenge on *ourselves*.
 - a. We must accept the burden of proof, the responsibility to show people from the Scriptures that we have some things worth thinking about.
 - b. If we cannot persuade people *from the Scriptures* to obey the gospel — if our case is not strong enough to stand on its own — then they should not, in fact, be interested in what we have to say.
4. When all is said and done, asking people to study the Bible is like many other skills in that there are tips that can help us, but basically we learn how to do it by *doing* it.
 - a. If we keep at it long enough, we will gradually develop an effective way that is right for us.
 - b. In the process of finding out what works for us, we can be encouraged by knowing that most people will make allowances for our mistakes of method as long as they know we are *acting with love and integrity*.

Honest sincerity on our part will compensate for many blunders in the communication process.

- c. We need not be afraid of the word *no* or be discouraged by it. It takes hearing a certain number of *no*’s to get to a *yes*.
 - d. We need to respect other people’s answer — even when it is no — just as we want them to respect our question.
 - e. There is no need for fear or discourtesy on either side.
5. Most folks appreciate plain talk. We can be straightforward and candid without being discourteous. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Eph. 4:29).

G. Love will find a way!

1. We need to develop the habit of speaking *early* and *honestly* with people about spiritual matters. “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech

always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:5,6).

We need to have more courage to ask people if we can study the Bible with them. However long it takes us to build up to it, we must eventually pop the question.

2. As to the specifics, there are things we can learn from the experience of others.
3. But in the end, *love will find a way*.
 - a. Paul said that he had not withheld the gospel from the Ephesians: “[You know]...how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house” (Ac. 20:20).
 - b. “Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Ac. 20:26,27).
4. It is in *actions*, such as sharing the gospel, that we demonstrate whether we truly do love our fellow man. “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn. 3:18).

Conclusion

- A. If we imagine we can thrive spiritually without sharing the gospel with those around us, we are fooling no one but ourselves.

Evangelism is as necessary to our own survival as it is to the salvation of others' souls.

- B. When we sit down and become lethargic in the matter of evangelism, the devil is able to insinuate all kinds of evil things into our midst. If he can keep us inactive in this area, he will have robbed us of many of the blessings of our faith and kept us from being effective in many of the other things the Lord wants us to do.
- C. Too many of us are failing to be personal evangelists, and that failure is costing us dearly.
- D. Our shortage of personal evangelism is one of our worst problems. *We will either correct it, or we will be destroyed by it!*
- E. There is no safe middle ground.
- F. Satan would like nothing better than for us to be distracted and discouraged in regard to God's work of rescuing the lost.
- G. If he can keep us from that work the devil need do nothing else to hinder us spiritually.

- H. We simply cannot allow the devil to have his way. We must forge ahead knowing that “God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8).
- I. Through our great God, we must abound in the work of communicating the gospel to mankind.

Rescue the Perishing

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.*

*Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.*

*Rescue the perishing, duty demands it,
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide;
Back to the narrow way patiently win them,
Tell the poor wand'rer a Savior has died.*

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.*

— Fanny J. Crosby

What's Hurting Us Right Now: Deadly Weapons the Devil Is Using

Postscript: GETTING INDIGNANT ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON

Introduction

- A. Paul wrote, "See then that you *walk circumspectly*, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because *the days are evil*. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15-17).
- B. It comes as no surprise to hear that there are problems to be faced by the Christian. The challenge is to be accurately informed as to what the most significant problems are.
- C. In the preceding lessons we have tried to focus on some of these hindrances.

What's Hurting Us Right Now

- # Materialism
- # Our Fascination with Fun
- # Overcrowded Lifestyles
- # Crippled Families
- # Our Shortage of Personal Evangelism

- D. We conclude these studies by asking what our *attitude* should be toward these critical matters. Are we to be:
 - 1. Discouraged?
 - 2. Fearful?
 - 3. Flippant?

E. What outlook would God want us to have toward the challenges that confront us as His people?

I. THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE THREAT POSED BY SATAN

A. The attitude we need to have is, first of all, one that takes seriously what we are up against.

1. We are involved in nothing less than a war — one of truly cosmic proportions. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

God’s enemy is our enemy — and he is intent on our destruction.

2. Peter wrote, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pt. 5:8).

B. Satan is not without intelligence and shrewdness in pursuing his malignant intent against us.

1. “Now the serpent was more *cunning* than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden”?’” (Gen. 3:1).
2. “Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him *until an opportune time*” (Lk. 4:13).
3. “Lest Satan should *take advantage of us*; for we are not ignorant of *his devices*” (2 Cor. 2:11).
4. “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve *by his craftiness*, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3).

C. In the warfare between good and evil, we will be casualties if we are preoccupied with problems other than the ones where the devil is hitting us hardest.

We must discipline ourselves to fight hardest at those points *where we are sustaining the greatest damage.*

D. We need to be *wide-awake, alert, and careful* about the business at hand.

1. It is necessary that we govern our minds and take a serious approach to life’s challenges. “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pt. 1:13).
 - a. “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15,16).

- b. “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:16).
2. While being harmless as doves, we also need to be wise as serpents. “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Mt. 10:16).

II. GOD AS THE SOVEREIGN RULER OF HIS CREATION

- A. We do need to recognize the extent of the damage Satan has done to our world.
 1. We live “in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Phil. 2:15).
 2. Satan has wreaked so much havoc in this world — so much of it is under his sway and it is so much his present dominion — that he is described as “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 14:30).
 - a. “Of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (Jn. 16:11).
 - b. “Whose minds the god of this age has blinded” (2 Cor. 4:4).
- B. But Satan’s dominion is a *usurped* dominion.
 1. It is as if our world is presently “enemy-occupied territory,” held under the influence of an occupying army that has no right to the realm.
 2. The devil’s encroachment will not last indefinitely.
 - a. “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire *prepared for the devil and his angels*’” (Mt. 25:41).
 - b. “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world *will be cast out*” (Jn. 12:31).
 - c. “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be *reserved for judgment*” (2 Pt. 2:4).
 3. When the devil gives us grief about our past, we would do well to remind him of his future!
- C. God has overcome Satan, He is on His throne, and this world has never been anything but His.

This Is My Father’s World

*O let me ne’er forget that, though the wrong
seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.*

— Maltbie D. Babcock

1. The outcome of the struggle between good and evil does not depend on the faithfulness of any single Christian or congregation.
2. If we fail to fight valiantly, we ourselves will be lost — but the Lord will win His victories without us. The Lord will accomplish His purposes. “Then Mordecai told them to answer Esther: ‘Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’” (Esth. 4:13,14).

3. There can be no doubt about the survival of God's kingdom. "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom *which shall never be destroyed*; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and *it shall stand forever*" (Dan. 2:44).

D. God has granted His Son all authority.

"Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth'"
(Mt. 28:18).

E. Jesus Christ is the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Rev. 19:16), the absolute Sovereign over all creation.

1. Our Savior has victoriously triumphed over evil; the courage we can have is grounded in His having overcome our enemy. "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might *destroy him who had the power of death*, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hb. 2:14,15).
2. The deciding battle has already been fought, the outcome of the struggle has been decided. For us, the only thing yet in doubt is which side we will have placed ourselves on when the final end comes.

F. God is fully able to deliver us from the evil one. "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Mt. 6:13).

1. "To open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me" (Ac. 26:18).
2. "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (Rom. 16:20).

G. We cannot take the claims of Christ seriously without being endowed with confidence in His power.

1. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (Jn. 14:27).
2. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33).
3. "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 Jn. 4:4).
4. "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith" (1 Jn. 5:4).

H. Whatever our difficulties may be, God is "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20).

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"
(Phil. 4:13).

- I. Our God is indeed a "mighty fortress." We may rest our complete confidence in Him with no fear whatever that He will let us down.
- J. Paul could say, "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

III. OUR NEED FOR RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

- A. In light of these things that we know about *God*, what really should be our attitude toward the *problems* with which Satan tries to hinder us in the Lord's work?
- B. I believe it is of utmost importance that we begin to develop the mentality of *triumphant overcomers* through Christ.
 - 1. We need to quit thinking of ourselves as "just getting by." In Christ we are overwhelming conquerors. Cf. Rom. 8:35-39; Rev. 21:1-7.
 - 2. Our weaknesses are no obstacle to what God can do through us. God's strength is made perfect in weakness. "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9,10).

We need to be empowered with the confidence that through the Lord we *can make a difference for good* in our families, congregations, and communities.

- 3. When we abound in the Lord's work our effort is *not in vain*. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).
- C. We need to adopt the viewpoint of the warrior, the soldier. *True militancy* is needed in our struggle.
 - 1. Our duty and privilege is to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3).
 - 2. Our summons is to "wage the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18), to fight "the good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7).
 - 3. We are commanded to put on "the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:10-20).

It is time to answer the Lord's *call to arms*.

D. In waging the good warfare, of course, it is important to *keep clear who the enemy is*.

1. Often we treat those in sin as if *they* were our enemies.
2. Sometimes we even focus our indignation, anger, and militancy against one another in the Lord's body. "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Gal. 5:15).
3. We need to learn to distinguish the enemy from *victims* of the enemy. "And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and *escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will*" (2 Tim. 2:24-26).
 - a. "So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, *whom Satan has bound* — think of it — for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" (Lk. 13:16).
 - b. "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were *oppressed by the devil*, for God was with Him" (Ac. 10:38).
4. Victims of the enemy need to be *rescued*, not despised.
 - a. "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:19,20).
 - b. "And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh" (Jd. 22,23).

E. As the "soldiers of Christ," there is nothing we need any more than *courage*.

It is important for us to "watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

1. God told Joshua, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9). Cf. vv.1-9.
 2. Fighting *for* God, we need to have the same attitude that the Philistines tried to have fighting *against* God: "Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!" (1 Sam. 4:9).
- F. The courage that we can have is based on *what the Lord has done and will do for us*: we are not merely to be strong, but to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10).
1. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).

2. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).
3. Cowardice in the spiritual realm is more than a slightly bad habit — it will damn our souls.
 - a. “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mk. 8:38).
 - b. “But the *cowardly*, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8).

If we will remain faithful, the Lord will overcome whatever threatens us: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

G. We are not merely helpless victims who must submit to the devil’s tactics. We can go on the *offensive* and *defeat* our enemy.

1. Satan cannot separate us from God against our will.
2. Jesus said of His disciples, “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (Jn. 10:29).
 - a. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).
 - b. “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (1 Jn. 5:18-21).
2. We must determine not to “give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:27).
 - a. “Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6,7).
 - b. “Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1 Tim. 5:14).
3. The devil can successfully be *resisted*.
 - a. “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7).
 - b. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Pt. 5:8,9).

“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Gen. 4:7).

4. We can, in the name of God, order Satan out of our way.
 - a. Jesus did not take a passive stance with the devil: “But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For you are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men’” (Mt. 16:23).
 - b. “And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve”” (Lk. 4:8).

H. We need to be consumed with *righteous indignation* against the devil for what he has done.

1. If we have any sense of zeal for the Lord’s honor, how can we simply stand by and let the devil work his mischief? Cf. Num. 25:7-11.
2. Should we not take what the devil is doing as a *personal insult*?
3. In most places the devil has had it all his way for way too long.
4. We can resolve that his work will not go unopposed where we live one day longer.
5. Having determined that we are simply not going to take it any more, God will help us.

We can put the devil on notice to keep his filthy fingers off of those we know and love. We can let him know that he will not take a single soul within our reach without a fight from us.

IV. THREE REQUIREMENTS FOR SURVIVING WHAT SATAN IS DOING

A. *We must care deeply about what is going on.*

1. We cannot afford to be *complacent*. It would be dangerous merely to assume that everything is going well in our own congregation. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).
2. We cannot afford to be *apathetic* or *indifferent* about what is happening.
3. We are being hurt spiritually in ways that seem to escape our notice.
4. It is time to wake up and repent of our unconcern.

B. *We must make up our minds whose side we are on.*

1. The Lord will not fight our battles if we compromise our convictions and accommodate ourselves to the enemy. Cf. Josh. 23:4-13.

We cannot *defeat* sin while *dabbling* with it; we cannot *conquer* evil while *compromising* with it.

2. The Lord's help is available only to those who are *wholeheartedly* on His side, those who have truly consecrated themselves to Him.
 - a. "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth*" (Jn. 17:14-17).
 - b. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are *kept by the power of God through faith* for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pt. 1:3-5).
3. There is a clear-cut choice that must be made about where our loyalties are going to be.

"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4).

4. If we expect to overcome our spiritual difficulties, we must genuinely sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pt. 3:15).

C. *We must be steadfast — we must simply refuse to give up.*

1. In the end, it will not be enough to have had the right attitude for awhile and then quit.
2. Christ is "a Son over His own house, whose house we are *if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end*" (Hb. 3:6).
3. We must keep on keeping on.
4. "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:9).
 - a. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18).
 - b. "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hb. 12:1,2).

Conclusion

- A. At the end of these studies, perhaps this quotation is appropriate: "I fully realize that I have not succeeded in solving all of the issues. Indeed, I know I have not solved any of them completely. And the solutions I have suggested only lead to more problems (some of which we weren't aware

were even issues when we began). To sum it all up, in some ways I know we are as confused as ever, but I believe that we are confused on a much higher level and about far more important things!” Sandra D. Wilson, *Hurt People Hurt People* (Nashville: Nelson, 1993), p. 221.

- B. Our intent has been for these studies to be *sobering*. “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:11,12).
1. Jesus did not pray that His disciples be taken out of the world, but that they be protected from the work of Satan in the world. “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (Jn. 17:15).
 2. Great adversity is often attended by great opportunity. Cf. “For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:9).
- C. ***There is hope — but only in the Lord, and only for those whose eyes are open wide enough to what is happening to arm themselves with the Lord’s might.***

Sin’s disasters can be avoided only by those who are willing to be warned.

- D. If we will radically and unreservedly place ourselves on His side, our God will bless us with every strength and sustenance we need to overcome in His name.
- E. We need to conduct ourselves like children of the King. Cf. Rev. 19:11-16.
- F. God is waiting to do His work through us. Cf. 2 Cor. 9:6-11.
- G. ***Soldiers of Christ, arise!***

AFTERWORD

These are exciting times to be alive. To be a Christian — one who serves the Lord with real commitment — is to experience each day as an immensely interesting adventure.

My prayer for you is that you will enter into this adventure radically and faithfully, that you will deeply taste the experience of belonging to the King in our day.

If you have any comment, question, or criticism regarding these studies, I would be happy to hear from you.

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