


SINS *of the* LAST DAYS

Meditations from 2 Timothy 3:1-5



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION..... 6

CHAPTER 1

LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE 8

CHAPTER 2

HE WHO HAS THE GOLD RULES 14

CHAPTER 3

WHEN SELF IS KING 22

CHAPTER 4

DISHONORING GOD'S NAME 29

CHAPTER 5

WHEN CHILDREN RULE 33

CHAPTER 6

THANKS, BUT NO THANKS 38

CHAPTER 7

WHERE HAS RELIGION GONE?..... 45

CHAPTER 8

IS BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER? 51

CHAPTER 9

FORGIVE AND FORGET? 58

CHAPTER 10

THE DEVIL WITHIN 63

CHAPTER 11

WHO IS IN CONTROL? 69

CHAPTER 12

BRUTAL 76

CHAPTER 13

WHEN BAD GUYS BECOME HEROES 81

CHAPTER 14

JUDASES IN OUR MIDST 85

CHAPTER 15

DAREDEVILS 90

CHAPTER 16

LOVERS OF PLEASURE 94

CHAPTER 17

POWERLESS CHRISTIANS 99

ENDNOTES..... 105

INTRODUCTION

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (2 Timothy 3:1-5 ESV)

Living in Dangerous Times

BUT UNDERSTAND THIS THAT in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2 Timothy 3:1) The Apostle Paul's life was drawing to a close. He was in prison awaiting the final chapter of his fruitful service to his Master. "He had fought the good fight, he had finished the race and he had kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). With death approaching, he was anxious to see his disciple Timothy, perhaps for the last time. The Bible, however, does not tell whether or not Timothy arrived in time to see his spiritual father.

Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy around AD 65 to warn him about certain heretical teachings that were slowly corrupting the young churches at that time. He exhorts Timothy to remain faithful to the Lord, to be zealous of sound doctrine, and to be patient amid the various trials confronting the church. He likewise addresses in this letter some signs of timidity he saw in his young apprentice.

In verse 1, Paul was preparing Timothy and the church for what was to come. “The last days,” also called the apostolic age, refers to the lengthy dispensation between the Lord’s first and second coming. In the Old Testament, the Jews generally understood this phrase to mean “the days of the Messiah.” In short, these days are the days we are living in.

The “coming days,” according to Paul, will be perilous (dangerous and difficult) not because of outward calamities (although we do get them), but due to the wickedness of men. Worldliness will likewise abound, exposing Christians to numerous temptations and making godly living difficult. The wickedness of men, which only worsens as the days go by, would vex the souls of believers.

Paul identifies 19 sins that would afflict men in the last days. He warned Timothy and the church to vigilantly avoid these sins and those who do them. Note that these warnings are directed to Christians. Paul is not teaching the way of salvation here, which we know is by grace alone and cannot be earned by good works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Though Paul wrote this epistle 2,000 years ago, it speaks the same message to 21st century Christians. Sadly, many professing Christians today are living too close to the world. While they perform Christian duties, their hearts are ensnared by the very sins Paul warned Timothy. Our aim here is to echo the alarm Paul sounded out from a Roman prison while awaiting his death. We recognize that we do not come close to Paul’s exemplary life. Our goal is that we will all be forewarned and armed in fighting the prevailing sins of the times, and together be preserved until the day of His coming.

In the following chapters, we first discuss each of the 19 sins and then explore their modern-day manifestations. We then offer biblical guidelines on how to overcome them. But note, we offer no easy recipe to Christian victory. The Christian life is all about fighting the good fight. Our enemies (the Devil, the world, and our sinful self) are fierce and unrelenting. Paul does not sugarcoat the message—there will be times of difficulty—and neither will we. May the Lord grant us victory over these pernicious sins of the last days.

CHAPTER 1

LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE

*For people will be lovers of self.
(2 Timothy 3:2)*

RENAISSANCE ENTERTAINMENT, A COMPANY in Florida, was marketing a special ride called “Ego Trip: A Ride About You” as follows:

This ride, which Renaissance hopes to sell to a theme park or to operate at fairs, will use riders’ names, photos and voices to create a totally personalized experience. As paparazzi snap away and adoring fans call their names, riders will attend their own movie premieres. They’ll visit an art museum where they’ll view paintings of themselves as done by Picasso, Warhol and van Gogh. They’ll attend a political rally where they’ll be urged to run for president and a sporting event where they’ll be praised for their athletic prowess. Finally, they’ll enjoy a ticker-tape parade in their honor. Afterward, ego-stroked riders will proceed to the gift shop—where they can buy all sorts of stuff emblazoned with their images. “What’s everyone’s favorite subject? Themselves,” Renaissance President Jon Binkowski said. “This is taking that to the nth degree.”¹

We live in a world where self is the center of the universe. Love of self is so pervasive that even faithful believers, if they are not vigilant, can easily be infected by this deadly poison of the soul.

Self-love comes first in Paul's list of sins of the last days because it is "the mother of all sins." It breeds other sins, corrupting the heart and exposing it to a host of temptations. The "me first" attitude closes the door to generosity, hospitality, kindness, respect, humility, and all other fruits of the Spirit. A self-loving person will never grow in grace.

Yet not all love of self is wrong. As Christians, our mortal bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we should seek all sensible means to be in the best of health—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The Bible speaks of a love of self that is legitimate.

You shall love your neighbor as **yourself**. (Matthew 22:39)

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife **loves himself**. (Ephesians 5:28)

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeit his life?
(Mark 8:36)

What Paul is condemning in 2 Timothy is the love of self that puts one's interest ahead of God and one's neighbors. Matthew 22:37-38 shows the proper way of loving God and our fellow human beings. "And He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" This passage points out two important principles of love, and they can be expressed in mathematical terms:

- love of self < love for God

(we must love God above all; so love of self must be infinitely less than love for God)

- love of self = love for neighbor

(love for others must be equal to love of self)

The Fall corrupted the true essence of love. It poisoned the human heart and perverted true love into self-love. True to Paul's prediction, modern-day philosophies support this perverted love; they teach that man must first love himself before he can love God and others. They erroneously assume that people lack self-love, when, in fact, the Bible teaches that our very problem is too much self-love! Thus, Paul admonishes: "Do nothing from

rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

Self-love flourishes in the hearts of unbelievers yet its seeds can also grow in the hearts of Christians. For instance, a believer may choose a high-paying job even if it means working on Sundays. A Christian mother may choose career advancement over quality time with her young children. A Christian student, craving for academic recognition, may opt to violate the Sabbath to study for an exam. Love of self is exposed during Sunday mornings when many of us cannot leave the comfort of our beds to be on time for Sunday school or the morning worship.

How would you know if the self is the center of your life? Here are some of the ways you can find out.

Examine your cares and concerns.

What occupies your heart and mind? Do your thoughts and feelings revolve around your daily concerns while you hardly think about your relationship with God? Are you determined to impress your boss but do not care if you neglect your personal devotion to God? Do you value how people think of you, but you do not mind displeasing God when you deliberately disobey His commands? If you answered yes to these questions, then it may be that God is not your first love. It may mean that you have not truly surrendered your life to Christ. You are still drawn to the momentary pleasures of the world. May you repent of this sin and seek God’s forgiveness. May you bow down to the lordship of Christ, for He alone can liberate your heart from the slavery of self-love.

Examine your use of time.

We spend time on what we believe are the necessities of life—working, studying, or managing the home. We also spend time with people, events, or things that we love or enjoy. Where we spend most of our time is a good indicator of what we love.

According to a survey in the United Kingdom, a typical woman spends 20 minutes a day putting on make-up, or a total of about 330 days in her lifetime.² On the other hand, the average American spends 5 hours per day watching TV; the average Filipino, 7 hours per

day. Many are hooked on spectators sports: on average, an American working person, aged 25-54 years old, spend 2.5 hours a day on leisure and sports.³

There is nothing wrong with spending time doing hobbies, with friends, and on other leisure activities. Something is terribly amiss, however, if we can spend hours on these things, but can pass the day without a meaningful communion with God. It means that God is not primary in our hearts. If spiritual duties are not our priority, we should address the situation at once or we court danger for our souls.

Examine your use of resources.

Providing for our needs and our family's is legitimate. However, many have redefined the meaning of needs to include luxuries and excesses. As income increases so does lifestyle. Instead of using money to help others and contribute to the work of the Lord, many are constrained by amortizations for a new car or a new gadget. While the standard of living has risen, it is ironic that giving of tithes and offerings has become a problem.

Where we spend most of our resources reveals what we value most. Women, for instance, spend huge amounts of money to look good. A UK survey reveals that a woman will spend an average of about 9,000 pounds (about PhP 630,000) on make-up alone in her lifetime.⁴ Lured by aggressive marketing, many spend money on cosmetic surgery to trim their figures and beautify their faces. And men are getting hooked on the same sense of vanity as well.

Many spend huge sums for pets but not to help the poor. An article in Yahoo! reports that "in 2012, spending on pets [in the US] hit an all-time high, with Americans shelling out more than USD 53 billion on pets, according to the American Pet Products Association. Of that, nearly USD 13.7 billion went to vet care. In 2011-2012, Americans owned more than 86 million cats and 72 million dogs. Dog owners spent an average of USD 248 on routine vet care and USD 407 on surgical visits. Cat owners ponied up an average of USD 219 for routine care and USD 425 for surgical visits."⁵ When Leona Hemsley, a New York hotel heiress, died in 2007 she left \$12 million worth of inheritance to her dog named Trouble. The will was contested in court, but the dog still got \$2 million. In the dog's life of luxury, it was reported that Carl Lekic, the dog's caretaker, spent \$100,000 annually for her upkeep.

The most-pampered dog died in December 2011.⁶ Hemsley left her fortune to her dog because she said the dog made her happy.

These are but a few examples of how people have departed from the right priority in their lives. If your priorities are mostly directed toward self, we challenge you to seek the Spirit's strength to reorient your life toward the kingdom of God.

How then can we put our priorities in check? We propose two ways.

Cultivate a generous spirit.

Love of self is our natural disposition, yet the grace of God in Christ can make us love others more than ourselves. The essence of love is giving and seeking the good of others. We must be generous with our time, resources, and talent. We must consciously direct our thoughts and energy toward giving and helping others because these are contrary to our sinful nature. We must seize opportunities for giving and helping for these may not pass our way again. Thus, we must be quick to respond to a call for help.

Being gracious can be as simple as giving a glass of water to a perspiring laborer or assisting an elderly person. As we seek to alleviate the needs of others, we will have less time to think of ourselves.

But recognize that doing good often entails sacrifice. Many times we may be inconvenienced. But we should look up to Christ, who made the ultimate sacrifice for our great deliverance from the wrath to come. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (John 3:16) to save an underserving people. God has set for us the ultimate example of how it is to love.

Serve in the kingdom of God.

Another antidote to self-love is to be more engaged in serving God using the time, money, and talent He Himself gives us. When we serve the Lord in any form of ministry, our hearts are drawn to Him, to His work, and to His people. Our minds become infused with the things of God, leaving us little room to think about ourselves. The more we serve, the more we forget ourselves, and the more we learn what true love is.

The earth is blessed with selfless men and women of God who had chosen to spend their

lives serving the Lord. Adoniram Judson is a perfect example. He was the first foreign missionary from the United States to Burma, where he spent 38 years of his life preaching Christ and translating the Bible from English to Burmese. While there, he encountered many heartaches, financial difficulties, harassment, and even imprisonment. Yet he remained faithful in serving God, leading thousands of Burmese to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The rewards of those who give their lives in service to God are evident in their deathbeds. And the futility of a life lived for the self only is glaringly revealed in the dying moments of those who looked out for number one.

When Jonathan Edwards died at 54, his last words were of hope and trust in the goodness of God the Father. He said to his daughter Lucy: "As to my children, you are now to be left fatherless, which I hope will be an inducement to you all to seek a Father who will never fail you." We can only admire Edward's inner peace and trusting faith in God the Father.

CHAPTER 2

HE WHO HAS THE GOLD RULES

*For people will be...lovers of money.
(2 Timothy 3:2)*

LOVE OF MONEY HAS been a nagging concern of many people. This song from the 1970s illustrates how people value money.

Money, Money, Money (Abba)

Money, money, money

Must be funny

In the rich man's world

Money, money, money

Always sunny

In the rich man's world

Aha, aha

All the things I could do

If I had a little money

It's a rich man's world

The Greek word for lovers of money is *philarguros*, which literally means “fond of silver” (money); it can be translated also as “covetous.”

What is money? Money is simply a “medium of exchange.” Some consider it as the greatest intellectual discovery in history, second only to language.

In the Scripture, the medium of exchange consists of silver pieces of a definite weight, called shekels, half-shekels, and quarter-shekels. Coins started to appear in the year 140 BC when Antiochus VII permitted Simon the Maccabee to coin Jewish money. Shekels were then minted bearing the figure of the almond rod and a pot of manna. Uncoined money was first mentioned in the Bible by Abraham (Genesis 13:2; 20:16; 24:35). The use of money was mentioned several times in the story of Joseph and his brothers (e.g., money was found in the sacks of Joseph’s brothers).

But what makes money so special? Most of us would find it hard to imagine a world without money. Money facilitates the production and exchange of goods and services in a society. Many people think that by having lots of money, life can be comfortable, pleasurable, and fulfilling. They are drawn to material things—which can be easily obtained by money. As such, money has become the universal measure of success for many. Some people have allowed themselves to be defined by money; it has become their security—but not their eternal security. The Bible declares, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24b). A man whose heart is captivated with money will find himself tormented with hell fire in the end because he let money unseat God who should be in the center of his heart. Do not be deceived by money for the love of it leads straight to destruction.

When Mammon is King

How can we know if we are lovers of money? Here are a few markers we can use to examine ourselves.

Most of one's time is spent accumulating money.

On the average, people work 40 hours a week. Ideally this means that there is enough time for leisure, family interaction, and spiritual disciplines (e.g., going to church, family worship). But for a lot of people, life revolves around careers and businesses. They have become married to their work, driven by the ambition to make more money. Some couples intentionally forgo having children, viewing them as a hindrance to attaining a life of comfort and financial ease.

One's emotion rises and falls with money.

When our emotion rises and falls with the presence or absence of money, something is terribly amiss with our lives. It is a common observation that many people become irritable and anxious when their wallets are empty. While the Bible commands us to earn a living, the earnings should not be our pre-occupation. Obsession with money is so strong that many people commit suicide when they go bankrupt or when faced with a financial obligation they cannot fulfill. Lancet, a top medical journal, reports that the suicide rate between 2008 and 2010 (during the economic recession) increased four times, averaging 0.51 deaths per 100,000 people a year, compared with the previous recession.¹ When money is primary in one's value system, life ceases to have meaning when money is gone.

One would rather keep one's money than help others.

Poverty is a nagging problem all over the world. About 1.4 billion people live in abject poverty, subsisting in USD 1.25 a day; 80 percent of the world's population earn less than USD 10 a day. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 22,000 children die each day due to poverty, which makes hunger the leading cause of death in the world, killing more than HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.²

The poorest 40 percent of the world accounts for 5 percent of global income, while the richest 20 percent accounts for three-quarters of the world's income.³ Branko Milanovic, lead research economist at the World Bank, reports that 8 percent of the top earners of the world are drawing 50 percent of global income, and approximately 1 percent of the wealthiest people own half of all personal assets. Milanovic says, "these individuals might be considered the current aristocracy, insofar as their economic clout is about equal to that

of all of the remaining 99% of the world's population.”⁴

It is unfortunate and grossly unjust that the rich are getting richer, while the poor are getting poorer. The natural inclination of many of the rich is to spend their money on comfort and luxury, ignoring the needs of the needy around them. This spirit is totally opposite with what the wise man pointed out in Proverbs 22:9: “A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.” It is folly to put one's heart in material possessions for they cannot deliver the soul in the time of death. As a person dies, his or her money dies with him or her. And his or her neglected soul will go straight to eternal misery in hell.

One cannot support God's work but can pamper oneself with material comfort.

Lifestyle is the first to change with increasing income. With money to spend, people change their purchasing habit. For example, they shift to signature items. They now patronize upscale department stores and fancy restaurants. A prestigious address has become the catchword in marketing residential properties because it lures many who aspire to be rich or who want to appear rich.

On the other hand, church giving seems to be getting a paltry share of the churchgoers' incomes. How many churches do we see whose pastors can hardly make ends meet, while some members live in luxury? There is nothing wrong with enjoying the good things in life, especially if one can afford it. But the question is, “Does my giving to the work of the Lord increase, as my income rises?”

Time magazine reports that wealthy Americans are spending more on luxuries as their economy recovers. The same trend is seen in China. A Chinese newspaper claims that, “Our country [China] has become a shining beacon of hope for luxury brands as Chinese consumers are driving the growth in many luxury sectors. As the luster of luxury fades in Japan, luxury brands are expanding their presence and retail locations in China. McKinsey & Co estimates that the country's luxury spending will more than double by 2015. If so, we will surpass Japan to become the world's largest market for branded goods.”⁵ Similarly, *Financial Times* featured an article titled, *Africa's wealthy revel in luxury labels*.⁶

A person is willing to sacrifice his or her family to earn more money.

Providing for one's family is an obligation (and hopefully a joy!). Paul says, "if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). It is noble and commendable to be able to provide well for our family.

But amid the rising cost of living, some parents are tempted to earn more and spend less time with their family. Mothers often use "to augment the family's income" as justification to work outside the home and leave the care of the children to people they may hardly know. Putting premium on financial security compromises time with the family, making it vulnerable to domestic problems.

The Root of All Evil

Paul warns that "the love of money is a root of all evils, of which some having lusted after, they were seduced from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:10). Below are some of the sinful fruits of the love of money.

Lying

The resurrection of Jesus was not a product of the imagination of His disciples. Compelling evidence points to its reality, making even the Jewish leaders believe. But His enemies wanted the truth to be suppressed because it would establish that His teachings are true. And so they bribed the soldiers guarding His tomb to declare that the body of Jesus was stolen by His disciples (Matthew 28:12-15). This lie told by the soldiers spread widely, so that some people still believed it at the time that Matthew was writing the gospel bearing his name.

Throughout the ages, we see rampant violation of the ninth commandment ("You shall not bear false witness") to obtain money. Imitation products are passed off as original items to jack up profit. Even essential products like medicines, baby food, vaccines, and milk are corrupted for the sake of profits. In 2008, melamine was found in the products of 22 Chinese dairy companies, resulting in six babies dying and 300,000 others becoming ill. Melamine is used in making plastics, fertilizers, and concrete. When added to food products, it results in a higher apparent protein content but it can cause kidney stones and kidney failure.⁷

Corruption

Corruption is widespread and ingrained in many countries. It pervades across the highest offices and the smallest departments. The World Bank estimates that the annual amount of bribery is about USD 1 trillion dollars globally.⁸

The situation is worse in developing countries. According to Transparency International, Suharto of Indonesia embezzled USD 15-35 billion; Marcos of the Philippines, Mobutu of Zaire, and Abacha of Nigeria may have embezzled up to USD 5 billion each. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), about USD 2 billion dollars, or roughly 13 percent of the Philippines' annual budget, is lost to corruption each year.⁹ At the root of corruption is love of money. When people in power are not contented with their lawful income, they resort to corruption, which is a form of stealing. The economic development of many nations is stunted and poverty remains unabated while a few politicians get rich from taxpayers' money.

Betrayal of one's principles and friends

Judas sold his Master for 30 pieces of silver, the equivalent of 90 days of wages according to some (Mark 14:10-11). For three years, he had heard the teachings of Jesus and had seen His miracles. Yet his love for money made him betray the Lord of Glory. Judas hanged himself, for guilt caught up with him. The same sin of Judas lurks deep and strong in the hearts of men.

For example, in the office, a person may withhold vital information from colleagues so he or she will get the promotion or the sale. While working in the university, I (Rodel) had seen men and women abandon civility for the sake of a few dollars of additional income.

A mercenary religion

One of the most passionate expressions of Jesus' emotion is seen in one of His visits to the temple in Jerusalem (John 2:13-16). He was disgusted that the temple premises were being used for buying and selling merchandise. In His anger, He drove the sellers out with a whip.

Today many people still look at religion as a ticket to comfortable lives. Scandals abound about televangelists who use religion to enrich themselves. Some churchgoers are similarly guilty. They go to church primarily to be blessed, mostly materially, and not really to

worship God. This is an abomination to God. It betrays a heart that is still in bondage to sin.

Oppression and violence

History is replete with men and women who amassed great wealth at the expense of others. James 5:1-4 condemns those who become rich through ill-gotten wealth. “Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (James 5:4).

International Labor Organization (ILO) reported that there are about 20.9 million victims of human trafficking all over the world. Many of them were lured to a lucrative job only to find out that they were trapped into prostitution and forced labor in inhumane condition. A study in Chicago found out that 56% of the victims were children and runaway youths who were mostly padlocked in brothels and factories.¹⁰ Yet this wicked, inhuman business gives massive profit that keeps on growing, from \$44 billion in 2005 and \$150 billion in 2014.¹¹ Yet God is not oblivious to this reality. (James 5:4)

Matthew Henry rightly says: “When covetousness generally prevails, when every man is for what he can get and for keeping what he has, this makes men dangerous to one another, and obliges every man to stand on his guard against his neighbour.”

For the love of money, people will steal and kill. Countless victims of robbery, kidnapping, carjacking, and extortion will always be haunted by their horrifying experience from greedy perpetrators. More devastating still is if the crime results in their death. When apprehended, the perpetrators are paraded by the police, who consequently declare that the case is closed. But the love of money continues to lurk in these perpetrators’ hearts, just waiting for an opportunity to strike again.

Love of Money Ultimately Leads to Punishment

The Bible teems with examples of people ruined by love of money. Achan coveted the spoils of war, consequently he and his family perished (by stoning) (Joshua 7:20-21; 24-25). Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, contracted leprosy (incurable at that time) for a measly two talents of silver (2 Kings 5:23). Ananias and his wife Sapphira coveted the money they promised to give to the church and paid for it with their lives (Acts 5). These are warnings

to us that love of money, if unrepented, will ultimately cast our souls in hell.

Paul says: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

In all ages, men are drawn toward materialism because of its promise of a comfortable life. Yet money never really satisfies. Andrew Carnegie observed that, "millionaires seldom smile." Indeed, as someone wryly observed "men may save money, but money will never save them".

CHAPTER 3

WHEN SELF IS KING

*For people will be...proud, arrogant...
swollen with conceit (2 Timothy 3:2,4)*

THE FOLLOWING STORY IS published in the Web:

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters below. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It was not a technology problem like radar malfunction—or even thick fog. The cause was human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship’s presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first. By the time they came to their senses, it was too late.¹

Pride goes before destruction, indeed.

The dictionary defines pride as a “feeling of pleasurable satisfaction over an act,

possession, quality, or relationship by which one measures one's stature or self-worth.”² Sinful pride is all about arrogance and high-mindedness. It is displayed when we think highly of ourselves because of some achievement or when we think we know better than others.

The word “arrogant” in our text comes from a Greek word that means “showing themselves above their fellows.” On the other hand, the words “swollen with conceit” (or “high-minded” in KJV) is from a Greek word that means “to envelop with smoke”—that is, figuratively to be swelled up with a vain conceit of themselves.

In Romans 12:3, the Apostle Paul rebukes this high regard for self when he tells the reader “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” Sinful pride places oneself above God—essentially self-idolatry. It is dangerous yet subtle because a person can easily spot it in others, yet be unaware of its corrupting presence in oneself. Pride can also be covert, lurking in the heart and eating its way to damnation.

The Bible has various words to describe pride in its various shades. *Vanity*, when there is an inordinate admiration of self, coupled with an excessive desire to be admired by others. *Egotism*, when there is an excessive preoccupation with self. *Conceit*, when there is an exaggerated estimate of one's abilities and attainments.

Self-pity may not pass itself as pride, yet indeed it is. According to John Piper, “self-pity is the response of pride to suffering. It is the voice of pride in the heart of the weak.” He calls it “unapplauded pride.”³ Pride in this case is cloaked with a self-sacrificing attitude. It rears its ugly head when a person is not recognized for a worthy act.

Why is this kind of pride sinful? Because it takes away the credit that rightly belongs to God alone. As created beings, we owe everything to God. But pride makes us believe that who we are and what we have are the results of our own efforts. It robs God of what is due Him. It makes us worship self rather than God.

Not all pride is sinful though. When Paul says, “never boast except in the cross” (Galatians 6:14), he clearly implies that boasting in the Lord is not wrong. Similarly, he instructs that “Whoever wants to boast must boast of what the Lord has done” (1 Corinthians 1:31 GNB). This is pride in the work of God. Clearly then we can be proud

without sinning. We can be proud that we are Christians, we can be proud of the work of the Lord in our church, we can be proud of our vocation—and yet not sin.

How can we tell if we are proud for the right or wrong reasons? Here are a couple of examples:

Righteous pride: *"Praise God! My son got the highest honor in their batch."*

Sinful pride: *"My effort to teach and discipline my son paid-off. He got the highest honor in his batch."*

Righteous pride: *"I am happy for my promotion. I praise the Lord for it, He is good indeed!"*

Sinful pride: *"I am glad my talents and hard work have been recognized with my promotion. I am now ahead of my batch mates."*

Whatever the Color...

Pride in one's wealth

Wealth can be a blessing or a curse, depending on the person who possesses it. When we acknowledge that our material blessings are from the Lord and use them to help others and advance the work of the Lord, we are rightly handling our wealth.

It is difficult for the rich not to flaunt their wealth. No wonder Paul advises to, "charge the rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who offers to us richly all things to enjoy" (1Timothy 6:17). Why would a person spend a fortune on a signature bag or shoes or replace a perfectly working cell phone with the latest model, if not to show off his or her wealth? This is pride rooted in the love of money, which is the root of all evil. C.S. Lewis keenly observes: "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man."

Pride in one's looks

Pride can also be seen in our desire to look good. This is especially true for women. One survey showed that an American woman spends an average of USD 12,000 a year on beauty products and grooming.⁴ This is not surprising considering that she uses an average of 12 personal care and beauty products every day.⁵

Not to be left behind is the Philippines, one of Asia's fastest growing markets for cosmetics and wellness products. The country's cosmetics industry grew annually by an average of 7.7 percent, registering sales of over USD 2 billion in 2008 and in 2009, despite the global recession. This increase was attributed to the high value Filipinos place on their physical appearance and total well-being. Indeed, using beauty products has become a way of life. The report noted an increasing trend as well in male consumers of cosmetics and wellness products.⁶

A few decades ago, men went to barber shops and women to beauty parlors for hair grooming. Now we have state-of-the-art hair salons offering a dizzying array of services such as hair spa, hair relax, rebonding, coloring, etc. The cosmetics industry has grown extraordinarily because of a widening clientele eager to look good.

King Saul, the first king of Israel, was ruined by pride. He started so well but eventually ended up as a tragic failure. Here is how he was described before he was anointed king: "And he had a son named Saul, a young and handsome one. And there was not a man among the sons of Israel more handsome than he, being taller than any of the people from his shoulder and upward" (1 Samuel 9:2). We can only surmise that his good looks was one of the reasons that blinded him to his weaknesses.

Pride in one's education

We live and work amid the beautiful campus of the University of the Philippines Los Baños, considered to have the highest concentration of PhDs in the country. Not surprisingly, the community highly values education. While education per se is desirable, vast learning can inflate one's ego. The city of Corinth is a case in point. The citizens put high value on knowledge and speaking ability. This had so infected the church that Paul had to remind them: "Knowledge puffs up" (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Today, not a few parents are putting excessive pressure on their children to excel in their studies. This is reflected in the proliferation of nursery schools and other educational centers designed to give children an edge in primary education. Parents pay a stiff price to boost their children's chances of entering prestigious schools. For sure, emphasis in education is beneficial to society in general. But Christians must recognize that education is

only a tool to maximize our God-given gifts so we can serve the Lord best. It should not be an instrument to compete or get ahead of others. Parents must not boast of their children's academic accomplishments because they are sowing seed of pride in their young hearts. All is of God. We do not have the right to own what is God-given— worse, to boast about it.

Pride in one's skill

We love to boast of our abilities. Achievers—be they sports superstars, famous painters, award-winning teachers, or employees of the month—are inclined to brag. They often credit their success to their own skills and efforts. Who can forget Muhammad Ali, the boxing icon of our youth who famously said, "I am the greatest!" It is rare to find sports superstars who are humble and self-effacing. Rarer still are those who would thank God for their exceptional talents.

We may not be superstars, but we can also be proud of our skills, whatever it may be. A sales manager may boast of his or her record sales. Similarly, a laborer may look down on a newly hired janitor because he or she is more efficient in cleaning the floor.

Pride in one's social status

Most people pursue positions of prestige and power. There is always a mad scramble to get promoted (even if the salary increase is minimal). To be called "sir" or "ma'am" brings a certain high to some people. People look up to someone who lives in a prestigious address, drives an expensive car, and has a big income.

Even the apostles were not immune to desiring positions of honor. In the Gospel of Matthew we read: "Then the mother of Zebedee's children came to Him with her sons, worshipping and desiring a certain thing from Him. And He said to her, 'What do you desire?' She said to Him, 'Grant that these my two sons may sit in Your kingdom, the one on Your right hand and the other on the left'" (see Matthew 20:20-28 for the whole story). Zebedee's children, of course, were none other than the apostles John and James. Unfortunately, this craving for a position of honor may rear its repulsive head even in the church. Pastors and deacons may feel some swelling in their head as they perform their duties. This is a special temptation to pastors when members tell them how blessed they were by the preaching. May the Lord spare us from being proud of our social status or

achievement whatever it may be. God has given it to us by grace and not because we merit it.

Pride in one's spirituality

Perhaps the worst kind of pride is religious pride. The Pharisees were the best specimen of this sin. In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the Lord Jesus describes the Pharisees as those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (see Luke 18:9-13). Such pride is seen in a legalistic attitude, an overbearing attitude, and a superior attitude to others.

Christians should beware of harboring religious pride. As we grow in knowledge and holiness, we are most vulnerable to the attack of the enemy. Satan may whisper to us how we have grown in the faith. Pretty soon pride could swell in our hearts. The words of Paul should always serve as our warning: "Him that stand take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

There are many other types of pride out there. Pride can manifest itself in so many forms, well beyond what we have identified. People may even brag about their poverty and ignorance!

The End of Pride

It leads to other sins.

Pride is one of the seven deadly sins identified in the book of Proverbs: "There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Pride is deadly because it is the fountain from where all other sins spring. It precedes and supports all sinful attitudes. Pride rejects authority. In the guise of self-righteousness it produces legalism. Pride manifests itself in jealousy, bitterness, vindictiveness, implacability, inordinate ambition, gossip, slander, maligning, and judging others. It breaks relationships, hurting people and making them lonely. As someone once said, "Pride makes

us artificial and humility makes us real."

It was pride that caused Satan to rebel against God when he declared, "I will make myself like the Most High God (Isaiah 14:14b). And when our first parents sinned it was because of pride—they, too, desired to be like God.

It leads to destruction.

King Solomon wisely observed that "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). When we are consumed by our self-righteous deeds and accomplishments, we are ripe for a fall. How many times have we heard of highly favored athletes who lose to lesser opponents because of overconfidence? At times, we have to experience sufferings to prevent the rising of pride in our hearts. Paul testifies: "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited" (2 Corinthians 12:7).

The reason why the proud will not prosper is that God has deliberately turned His face away from them. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). When God is against us, who will be for us? God controls everything, and He can direct people and events to ruin us. Whatever we do and wherever we go, the curse of our pride will follow us. If a proud person does not repent and humble himself before God, he or she will reap the ultimate punishment—a miserable life on earth and eternal damnation in hell.

But a humble spirit pleases the Lord and He is pleased to direct His blessings to him or her. A humble spirit puts a person in his or her right place and God in His lofty position. A humble person acknowledges that God is the Giver of all things that he or she has—talents, material possessions, physical strength, honor, family... everything. Since we do not deserve any good thing (we deserve punishment instead), we must feel deeply indebted to God. We must be eternally grateful for He has delivered us from our sins and miseries.

May we desire and cultivate the grace of humility. In all our accomplishments, may we acknowledge that they are from God. "You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may confirm His covenant that He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

CHAPTER 4

DISHONORING GOD'S NAME

For people will be... abusive.

(2 Timothy 3:2)

WHEN ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL was being built, Sir Christopher Wren, its architect, posted this notice in different parts of the structure: "Whereas, among laborers and others, that ungodly custom of swearing is so frequently heard to the dishonor of God and to the contempt of His authority, and to the end that such impiety may be utterly banished with these works which are intended to the service of God and the honor of religion, it is ordered that profane swearing shall be a sufficient crime to discharge any laborer that comes to the call."¹

Foul language characterizes today's popular culture. Whether in movies, sports, or workplaces, Christians are constantly bombarded with coarse language. Worse, it is no longer condemned but actually accepted.

Paul used the Greek adjective *blasphēmos*, which has been variously translated as

“insulting” (GNB), “abusive” (ESV/NIV), and “revilers” (NASB). The noun “blasphemy” usually refers to speech defamatory of God. The verb form *blasphemeop* was used by Jesus’ enemies while He was hanging on the cross: “And those who passed by blasphemed Him, shaking their heads, and saying, ‘You who are destroying the temple and building it in three days, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross’” (Mathew 27:39-40). Similarly, Paul used the verb while speaking of the unbelieving Jews: “For the name of God is blasphemed among the nations because of you” (Romans 2:24).

A blasphemer is one whose life is characterized by speaking evil of God and sacred things. Blasphemy is a sin forbidden in the third commandment. “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). In a real sense, blasphemy is one of the worst manifestations of taking the name of the Lord in vain because it speaks evil of God and the things of God.

Not Colorful Language

Blasphemy has many forms. Let us discuss three of these below.

Cursing

Cursing in itself is already abhorrent. But cursing using the name of God is a thousand times abominable. Profanity is a form of cursing that uses God’s name in an abusive, vulgar, and irreverent manner. How deplorable that the defiling of the name of God—or Jesus Christ—is almost universal. Movies and television shows normally lace their scripts with profanities because doing so sells. Since the late 1960s when movies have become more liberal, the use of obscenity (indecent language) and profanity (irreverent use of God’s name) has become rampant. They are used to express fear, frustration, and other emotions. Worse, some movies distort the truth about God, undermine His Word (the Bible), and pass on heresy as truth.

One of the most (in)famous movies (and books) in recent times is *The da Vinci Code*. It asserts the following blasphemous things:

- The New Testament is not the “true” account of the life of Jesus. Rather, the Gnostic Gospels tell the “true” story.

- Jesus was not fully God and fully man, as taught in Scripture and affirmed by the early church creeds. He was merely a man who was declared divine by an emperor's decree hundreds of years after the fact.
- Jesus married Mary Magdalene and fathered children, founding a royal bloodline that exists to this day.

Complaining against the providence of God

The ragtag nation of Israel had been traveling for more than 30 days in the Sinai desert. Their food supplies were running low and there seemed to be no end in sight to their journey. In this difficult time, we read of the following incident: "And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:2; underscoring ours). A few verses later we read: "Moses said, 'When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD' " (Exodus 16:8; underscoring ours). When the Jews complained against their circumstances and their leaders, they were actually grumbling against Jehovah. In another incident they grumbled against Moses and Aaron. This time the Lord punished them severely by killing 14,700 of them in the plague (Numbers 16: 41-49).

We, too, are often guilty of grumbling and complaining about unpleasant things happening to us. We love ourselves so much that anything that brings discomfort annoys us. It is so easy to complain about the heavy rain or the searing heat of the sun, or the coldness of the morning. We blame the weather for everything. But if we think about it, we are actually complaining against God who created and controls nature.

We can also grumble about our situation in life, like when we are facing problems one after the other. Yet we must resist the temptation to blame God even in the most difficult circumstances, because God has a good purpose in giving them. Let us not forget that we are formerly fallen creatures destined to eternal damnation in hell. We do not have any right to receive good things. Yet God in His mercy saved us and provides for everything we need. It is being ungrateful when we grumble about the passing discomfort in the light of

eternal blessings that await us in Christ.

Speaking evil of the work of God

False teachers can be compared to the Pied Piper of Hamelin. According to Peter, “many will follow their pernicious ways, and because of them the way of truth will be evil spoken of” (blasphemed) (2 Peter 2:2). In our day, we see increasing attacks in the media against Christianity. In other parts of the world, Christians are under constant threat and have to meet clandestinely. Christians are called weaklings and fanatics. The work of God is belittled. To speak evil of God’s work is a form of blasphemy.

Our speech reveals who we truly are. Unbelievers are exposed by a lack of respect for the things of God. Such were the two former companions of Paul who did not keep a good conscience: “among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1Timothy 1:20).

God does not take lightly the violation of His third commandment. He will not hold guiltless those who violate it. How fearful it will be to fall into the hands of the living God. May we always be careful that we do not desecrate the things of God.

CHAPTER 5

WHEN CHILDREN RULE

*For people will be ... disobedient to their parents.
(2 Timothy 3:2)*

MARK TWAIN ONCE QUIPPED, “When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years!”

Sin has tainted the relationship between children and parents. Today, one of the biggest headaches of parents is their relationship with their children and vice-versa. The media regularly report about family squabbles, especially of the rich and famous.

The Greek word for “parents” is used in the plural only. It is a word picture of a father or mother holding a child in his or her knees to feed, to care, to comfort. It is the height of ingratitude to disrespect our parents. All parents know how much effort (and tears!) it takes to raise children. No wonder God commanded us to “honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). To disobey one’s parents is to violate the fifth commandment.

Giving Honor to Whom It is Due

Children should obey their parents when they are still under their care.

Children do not belong to their parents; they belong to God. Parents are merely stewards.

The Lord has not left parents clueless as to how they should raise “His children.” He gave the fifth commandment as standard. Parents who are devotedly training their children to obey God and their parents are equipping them to obey all forms of authority. Children who are taught the value of obedience will have delight in submitting to God’s authority all their lives. Life will not be harsh for them. It is for their good, and for that of the family and society in general.

Nowadays, we commonly see children disrespecting their parents. They do not just disobey orders; often times, they rudely answer back to their parents even in public. Many children act like little tyrants who openly shame their parents.

Sadly, this is partly due to the failure of parents to honor the mandate that the Lord has given them (as we will discuss more below). A lot of couples enter marriage and parenthood without prior understanding of their roles as parents. Parenting thus becomes a trial and error affair.

Children should support their parents when they can no longer provide for themselves.

Old people peddling goods or pushing a cartload of junk to earn a living are a common and pathetic sight in our country. Often times, the reason is that their children fail to support them, or worse, these aging parents continue to provide for their grown children and grandchildren.

Jesus condemns those who mistreat their parents by not supporting them as they should (Mark 7:1-13). Children must recognize what their parents have done for them and repay them. This payback can be in the form of regular visits, provision of an allowance, and ensuring that they are well-taken care of.

Even if parents can fend for themselves, they long to see their children regularly. Because most are focused on their careers, few adult children find time to visit their parents. This should not be the case. God holds the children, not government, as responsible for the care of their parents in old age.

Children should continue to respect their parents even after they have established their own families.

The children's love and respect for their parents should continue even when they are already raising their own family. Of course, our primary responsibility is to our own family. For example, a husband should give importance to the opinion of his wife more than his parents as long as it is legitimate. Many problems arise when adult children, especially married ones, cannot fully break away from the authority of their parents. Nevertheless, parents should still be given the love and respect they deserve.

Curses and Blessings

Disobedient children were punished severely in ancient Israel.

Disobeying and disrespecting parents were dealt with severely in the Old Testament:

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear. (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

The Lord knows rebellion spreads like cancer, thus, this awful punishment. The family is the basic unit of society. A society will not survive for long if there is no discipline in the home. Disorder in the home will later spill out to society. Parents are God's viceroys as far as their children are concerned. To rebel against one's parents is to rebel against God.

Of course, we are not advocating stoning disobedient children! The point we are making is that disobedience to parents is a serious matter with God. If you, dear reader, are a teenager who has been habitually disobeying and disrespecting your parents, we plead with you to repent and seek the forgiveness of God and your parents. Or maybe you are an adult who disrespects your parents because of some real or imagined hurt in the past. May you seek to reconcile with them and give them the honor that God expects you to render to them.

Blessings are promised to those who obey.

To the obedient, God has promised that they will have long life, as can be seen in the fifth commandment (see also Ephesians 6:1-3). Of course, this is not an absolute promise of long life. It simply means that the obedient will be far from trouble and, thus, will generally live longer. They will also enjoy good relationship with others since obedient children generally grow up to be well-mannered persons.

But the life of the rebellious will be filled with sorrow. Quite often, children who were disobedient when young grow up rebellious and full of vices. They are prone to violence, drug abuse, alcoholism, and gambling. Danger, accident, and serious illnesses accompany these kinds of activities. There is a high likelihood that those who engage in such activities will die early.

What About Parents?

Parents share a responsibility in the matter. In many cases, disobedient children are the unwanted fruit of some failure in parenting.

Provoking disobedience

Paul warns parents: "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). Rebellious children should not blame their parents for failing to discipline them because they are responsible for their behavior. Yet parents will have to give an account to God on how they raised their children.

Children follow the example of authority figures in their lives. Parents who habitually defy authorities, such as government officials, church leaders, or school officials, are showing their children that it is all right to do the same. Children can also sense tension between their parents. When the two authority figures they love are always fighting, they tend to reject them both and sadly also their professed faith.

Showing favoritism also provokes children in more ways than one. Jacob's favored treatment of his son Joseph did not miss the eyes of his 10 older sons. This caused them to hate Joseph, leading them to sell him to slave traders to get rid of him. The brothers' cover-up story of Joseph being slain by wild animals devastated Jacob. For decades, all of them harbored guilt and suffered pain, largely spawned by Jacob's unequal treatment of his sons.

Failure to discipline

The Bible has clear instructions on our obligation as parents. We are to mold our children after the teaching of Scriptures. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

We must first of all teach our children to fear God. We must inculcate in their young minds that God is a God of love who provides and cares for them. It displeases God when they disobey. We must teach our children to love, respect, and be considerate of others. Mind you, this is not easy. It requires painstaking effort to teach them the laws of God.

Children are afflicted with a corrupt heart, which we must tame through discipline. For discipline to be effective, a child has to be under the watchful care of parents so that every act of disobedience is dealt with right away. We must discipline consistently and lovingly, and make clear to our children why they are being disciplined. Failure to discipline our children is to hate them because their natural tendency is to do evil. When we let them do their own way, that is a sure path to destruction.

Children naturally look up to their parents as role models. It is important then for parents to exhibit qualities worthy to be emulated. Children have minds like a radar; they can spot our best and worst behaviors. Forbidding them from doing something that we do leaves them confused on what is acceptable or not.

One study shows that when both parents attend church regularly, 72 percent of the children remain faithful. When only the father attends regularly, 55 percent remain faithful. When only Mom attends regularly, 15 percent remain faithful. When neither parent attends regularly, only 6 percent remain faithful in church attendance.¹ We can see that good qualities are reinforced when both parents are doing the same thing.

In this day and age when children seem to be getting the upper hand, Christian families must show the world the Biblical model of parent-child relationship.

CHAPTER 6

THANKS, BUT NO THANKS

For people will be ... ungrateful. (2 Timothy 3:2)

THERE IS THIS STORY of a man in Budapest, who goes to a rabbi and complains, "Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?" The rabbi answers, "Take your goat into the room with you." The man is incredulous, but the rabbi insists. "Do as I say and come back in a week." A week later the man comes back looking more distraught than before. "We cannot stand it," he tells the rabbi. "The goat is filthy." The rabbi then tells him, "Go home and let the goat out. And come back in a week." A radiant man returns to the rabbi a week later, exclaiming, "Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there's no goat—only the nine of us."¹

We tend to see the glass as half empty rather than half full. Because of that predisposition, we hardly notice the good that God gives. Instead, what God hears from us are incessant complaints over what we do not have.

To be thankful is to be aware of God's goodness and to appreciate it. To be thankful is an inner disposition expressed outwardly in words of thanksgiving and appreciation.

Christians, of all people, should always be thankful. The Bible abounds with verses urging us to be thankful. In fact, there are about 140 references to thanksgiving in the

Scriptures. Here are a couple of examples:

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

(1Thessalonians 5:18)

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving. (Psalm 50:14a)

The very Son of God, Jesus was Himself thankful.

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. (Matthew 11: 25-26)

The story is told of a man who found the barn where Satan stores the seeds he sows in the human heart: envy, greed, anger, hatred, lust, and so on. The man soon noticed that Satan had more seeds of discouragement than of any other kind. He learned that those seeds could be made to grow almost anywhere. When Satan was questioned, he reluctantly admitted that there was one place in which he could not get them to grow. "And where is that?" asked the man. Satan replied sadly, "In the heart of a thankful man."²

Being unthankful is one of the characteristics of unbelievers. "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21).

Ungratefulness is both inward and outward. An unthankful person has no heartfelt appreciation of the blessings he or she receives. No wonder, such a person rarely utters words of thanks either to God or man. We commonly experience not receiving words of appreciation for favors we do to others.

"Thank you" applies to things small and great, like when a father gives his son his daily allowance or a brand new car as a graduation gift. "Thank you" is a powerful phrase. We forfeit its power to provide joy in other people's heart when we do not use it as often as possible.

The Bible tells us that we should be thankful to God first of all and next to our fellowmen. The great apostle Paul exhibited that kind of spirit: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks

but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well" (Romans 16:3,4).

Often, just a word of thanks is sufficient response to someone who did us a favor, big or small.

A Thankful Samaritan, But Sadly Just One

Leprosy was a terrifying disease in biblical times. Aside from the stigma it brought, it had no cure as well. Contracting the disease was almost worse than dying. Lepers were ostracized from the rest of society and even their families. They were left on their own to suffer and watch their bodies slowly disintegrate.

One day, as Jesus was walking with His disciples, 10 lepers pleaded to be healed. Jesus told them to show themselves to the priest. As they went, lo and behold, they were all cured! You would think they would all come back to Jesus and shower Him with thanksgiving and praises. What did actually happen?

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:15-18)

The Old Testament gives us another example in the life of Joseph. While in prison, he interpreted the dreams of the king's former cupbearer—that he would be set free in three days and would return to his former job. The only request Joseph made was for him to mention his case to the king. Joseph's words came true, but alas: "the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him" (Genesis 40:23).

Not Much Has Changed

Today, not much has changed. Not many people acknowledge God's gifts with gratitude. Success in this life is often attributed to one's effort. We often hear about self-made men and women. Rarely do we see people praying before eating, recognizing that God provides our daily bread. Atheists totally ignore God and deny the very Being who gave them life.

Many are guilty of ungratefulness not only to God but to their fellowmen as well. In 1860, a ship went aground on the shore of Lake Michigan. Edward Spencer returned again and

again into the frigid waters to rescue 17 passengers. In the process, his health was permanently damaged. Some years later at his funeral, it was noted that not one of the people he rescued ever thanked him.²

The *New York Times* on 27 November 2002 published an article titled *New Thanksgiving Tradition: Ingratitude*. This reflects the growing attitude of many today. People think they deserve more so they do not appreciate the good things they receive from others.

Such callousness is appalling! How can people be so unthankful? Yet, many times Christians are no different. We receive God's manifold blessings day in and day out, yet we can count in our fingers the number of times we have thanked Him. We even fail to thank Him for answered prayers. We also receive kindness from others, yet we forget to acknowledge them.

On the other hand, people can be thankful for the wrong reasons. For example, the Filipino custom of *utang na loob* (loosely, debt of gratitude) means that a favor done must be returned in one way or another, or else it remains a debt. While this can be an expression of thankfulness it can also be abused. For instance, the one who owes a debt of gratitude could be compelled to participate in shady deals or hire a person's relative even if not qualified just to pay back a favor done to him. It is wise to remember that, "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Dissecting Ingratitude

It returns evil for good.

We are not on neutral ground when we are ungrateful. We might think we are not harming anyone nor committing any sin if we simply keep quiet and not acknowledge the good done to us. The Bible says that to be unthankful is in itself evil, and the wrath of God could descend on us as a consequence.

The story of David and Nabal comes to mind. Hunted by King Saul, David and his men hid in the wilderness of Carmel. While there, they were protecting Nabal's servants and his 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats from marauders and thieves. During a sheep-shearing festival, David sent his men to Nabal to ask some share of the food because they were famished. The request was reasonable considering the year-long benefits Nabal got from David. But Nabal

did not recognize the help provided by David and his men; instead, he derided them. “And Nabal answered David's servants, ‘Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?’” (1Samuel 25:10-11).

The Bible described Nabal as “harsh and badly behaved” and “cruel and evil in his dealings” (MKJV version). Perhaps largely because of that blatant act of unthankfulness, God severely dealt with him—he suddenly died soon after.

To be unthankful is to disregard or belittle the favor done to us by others. We may be far from the likes of Nabal but, surely, there have been numerous occasions in our lives when we failed to acknowledge the good others had done to us.

If we will be judged for our unthankfulness toward others, how much more severe would be our punishment if we are not grateful to God who gave our lives and sustains our very existence. All that we have—possessions, family, job, honor, etc.—are from the Lord. God sustains this planet so we have air to breath, water to drink, and food to eat. Our country is blessed with relative peace unlike others, which are ravaged by war and other forms of conflict. Yet how many times have we behaved like the Israelites who, after being redeemed from 430 years of slavery, murmured continually against God and their leaders?

As Christians, we should be doubly thankful because we have a deeper knowledge of God’s love and mercy. We must be known for our grateful spirit.

It is a sign of pride.

An ungrateful spirit reflects a heart full of pride. It is feeling and being independent from God and man. It is a spirit that says, “I did it my way.” It is to ascribe all our achievements to ourselves. How shameful it is not to acknowledge the Giver and Sustainer of all things. Matthew Henry puts it well: “call a man ungrateful, and you can call him by no worse name.”

It shows a lack of appreciation for God’s mercies and salvation.

No one can be more blessed than the followers of Christ. By the electing love of God we have been ransomed from our sins. Christ took on Himself our punishment on the cross,

though we are former enemies of God. Instead of eternal misery, what awaits us is eternal glory in the new heaven and earth where we will be with God forever. And while here on earth, the Holy Spirit directs us to holy living and comforts us in our various struggles and trials. Christ is preparing a place for us in heaven and making intercessions for us with the Father.

Realizing such immense blessings, Paul could do nothing but exclaim: "I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service" (1 Timothy 1:12).

We can understand if unbelievers do not thank God at all because they do not see themselves as sinners saved from eternal punishment. They may have knowledge of what Christ did on the cross, but they do not see their need for Christ. In their eyes, as long as they have not committed major sins, they are fine. No wonder there is little thanksgiving in their hearts to Jesus as Savior.

But believers have no excuse at all. We are recipients of God's great work of salvation.

All God's people should be singing unending songs of thanksgiving and praises for the unmerited favor bestowed on them by God. Shame on us if our hearts do not overflow with gratefulness to our God who gives us everything we need in this life and the next !

It manifests lack of faith.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks." The reason Paul gives is that "it is the will of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Many of us are not so thankful because we fail to see things in the light of God's perspective. When overwhelmed by trials of all sorts, we may easily sulk in self-pity for we cannot see blessings beyond the dark clouds of despair. On the other hand, when we fully trust God, our joy and thankful spirit remain unspoiled by the storms of life. Our faith makes us look far beyond what is seen. We rest in the wise counsel of God and are therefore thankful in all circumstances, believing that "all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28).

In 1636, amid the darkness of the Thirty Years' War, a German pastor, Martin Rinkart, is said to have buried 5,000 of his parishioners in one year, an average of 15 a day. His parish was ravaged by war, death, and economic disaster. In the heart of that darkness, with the

cries of fear outside his window, he sat down and wrote this table grace for his children:

*Now thank we all our God
With heart and hands and voices;
Who wondrous things had done,
In whom His world rejoices.
Who, from our mother's arms,
Hath led us on our way
With countless gifts of love
And still is ours today.³*

May the Lord give us the same spirit of thankfulness!

CHAPTER 7

WHERE HAS RELIGION GONE?

For people shall be... unholy. (2 Timothy 3:2)

ON 10 AUGUST 2005, Noelle Knox published an article in *USA Today* titled *Religion takes a back seat in Western Europe*. Here is part of what she wrote:

"I don't go to church, and I don't know one person who does," says Brian Kenny, 39, who is studying psychotherapy and counseling at Dublin Business School. "Fifteen years ago, I didn't know one person who didn't." Every major religion except Islam is declining in Western Europe, according to the Center for the Study on Global Christianity at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass. The drop is most evident in France, Sweden and the Netherlands, where church attendance is less than 10% in some areas. The forces driving the decline include Europe's turbulent history, an increasing separation between the church and government—and perhaps... most of all, the continent's unprecedented affluence. But Kenny, the Dublin student, says he's merely typical of his generation. "I'm very spiritual," he says. "I speak to an energy force I call God, and I get answers," he says. "If you can get a spiritual connection without going to church, why go to church?"

The Greek word for unholy, *anosios*, can be translated as "impious, wicked, or irreligious, shown in lack of interest in works of piety or religion." Our modern world is becoming averse to religion. Of course, religion cannot save—only Christ can. Yet, religious devotion

anchored in the Bible reflects the quality of our relationship to God.

What is religion? Says one website, "The English word 'religion' in use since the 13th century [is] loaned from Anglo-French *religiun* (11th century), ultimately from the Latin *religio*, (which means) "reverence for God or the gods, careful pondering of divine things, piety."¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "the belief in a superhuman controlling power, especially in a personal God or gods entitled to obedience and worship."² The Christian religion is centered on the life and teachings of Jesus as presented in the Old and New Testaments.

In practical terms, a religious person is one who is faithful to his or her system of belief. In today's world, however, more and more people are abandoning their religious convictions. Many young people view religion as unfashionable. What has contributed to this sorry state of affairs?

The Rise of Science and Post-Modernism

There are a host of reasons that explain the decline of religion today. We will discuss two of them here.

Hooked on science and technology

In the old days, when people wanted a bountiful harvest, they turn to God in prayer. The advent of science and technology has shifted the focus from what God can do to what man can do.

In the 1960s, India was threatened with mass famine. Later that decade, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) released the rice variety, IR8, which yields 10 times more than the traditional rice varieties. IR8 became a huge success throughout Asia, and was dubbed the "Miracle Rice." Famine in India, once accepted as inevitable, has not returned since then. With such stories, men began to see science as the savior of society's ills and problems.

In the past, when someone desires material things, he or she seeks God's blessing. Now some of the richest men and women (many of whom are agnostics or outright atheists) get their manna from computer technology. Recently, *Forbes* magazine released its list of the

world's mega-rich. The list includes Mark Zuckerberg, 23, Facebook CEO, as the youngest ever self-made billionaire.³ Zuckerberg was worth USD 1.5 billion just four years after launching the social-networking site Facebook. Note the words “self-made billionaire.” No longer is God acknowledged as the source of material blessings.

There is nothing wrong with science if used for God's glory. Many scientists in the past believed in God and in divine creation, among them, Joseph Lister (father of antiseptic surgery), Isaac Newton (calculus), Charles Babbage (computer science), and Louis Pasteur (bacteriology). For many today, however, science and technology has become the be-all.

Rise of pluralism and post-modernism

In the pre-modern period, man sought truth from God and His revelation (in the Bible and nature). In the modern world, man deduced truth via human reasoning and science. In our post-modern world today, objective truth has virtually vanished. Knowledge is according to the one who constructs it. Thus, everyone's viewpoint is equally valid. Pluralism and relativism are natural children of the postmodern critique. Any claim to an objective truth is considered arrogance and intolerance. Christianity is rejected not because it has been tested and found untrue but simply because it claims to be true.

For example, to a post-modern, choosing one's sexual orientation or religion is just like choosing what cake to eat. To say that one should be a heterosexual Christian and not a homosexual Buddhist is akin to telling someone he or she must eat carrot cake because the speaker happens to like carrot cakes!⁴

The Economist in its 1 March 2006 issue captured the mood when it wrote the following:

Americans have less and less brand loyalty when it comes to God. More than one in four adults (28%) have swapped the religious tradition in which they were raised for another (e.g. Catholicism to Protestantism or Judaism to “no religion”). Add changes within religious traditions to the mix (e.g. from one type of Protestantism to another) and 44% of Americans belong to a religious tradition other than the one in which they were raised... Why is America witnessing so much religious churning? The biggest reason is that it has a competitive religious marketplace. Churches compete for new members with

the same enthusiasm that companies compete for customers. There are a huge variety of religious products on offer. America is also witnessing a striking rise in the number of people who claim to have no affiliation. Only 7% of Americans say that they were “unaffiliated” as children. But today 16% are unaffiliated, making them the fastest-growing “religious” group.

The ease by which people shifts religious affiliation could simply indicate the declining significance of “doctrines.” If objective truth is nowhere to be found, then what is the point of searching for it through religion? Of course, ultimately the declining interest in religious things is rooted in the sinfulness of man. Man has made an idol of self and human knowledge.

Some would say that the lack of interest in religion, especially in the West, is partly due to lukewarm and formal religion even among evangelicals. This should challenge Christians to show what true religion is.

Symptoms

How would we know if we lack religious commitment? We present below three marks of a person who treats religion lightly.

Too much focus on the things of this world

A man whose life revolves around the things of this world and hardly thinks of God is sadly living for the temporal. If we look around us, the typical ambitions of people are to have their own house, drive their own car, buy this and that, and send their children to college. It is, of course, right to provide a comfortable life to one’s family, as we discussed earlier. The Bible declares, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).

What is wrong is when we are concerned only with the temporal. The Bible says that the things of this world are temporal but the things of God are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18). It warns us that we should not love the world, for “he who loves the world hates the Father.” Paul says also, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).

What are the dominant factors in your everyday decisions? Your answer will determine whether you are living for the temporal or for the eternal.

Lack of respect for the Lord's day

Sunday is special to many but for all the wrong reasons—it has become the day for fun and pleasure. People schedule outings and get-togethers on Sundays. Important sports events happen on Sundays (e.g., boxing bouts, Super Bowl, tennis finals, final round of golf). Housework and hobbies also usually get scheduled on Sundays. Thus, Sunday has become the best day for businesses. It would be unthinkable to close shops when sales are brisk because people are in a buying mode.

It is told that one time David Pryce-Jones, a British journalist, went to Hereford Cathedral in the UK to show a pair of foreign guests around. They stumbled on a service in progress. “Not a single worshipper, apart from the vicar, was present in that great nave,” writes Pryce-Jones.⁵ However, on any Sunday, you can be sure that football stadiums around the UK are bursting with fans watching their favorite teams kick a ball!

Many evangelical churches are sadly loosening up on their respect for the Lord's day. We have heard of churches in the US adjusting their worship service schedule to accommodate the Super Bowl. Not a few Christians head to the beach or to the mall after attending the morning worship.

Lack of personal religion

It is quite common for people to participate in public worship to maintain a veneer of respectability. For example, some semblance of religious devotion is important to politicians because it will help them gain votes from conservative people. For others, attending church services salves their conscience.

However, in private, more and more people are strangers to a living relationship with God. They are satisfied with a few utterances of prayer, perhaps short memorized ones. For some, doing the sign of the cross is a multipurpose prayer used before eating, when visiting the dead, or in doing other religious duties. The younger generation is increasingly drawn away from God. Their parents are too busy to engage in family worship, much less teach them about personal religion.

If you see in yourself any of the marks we described above, take heed and examine your heart. You may have no relationship at all with the God who will judge the living and the dead.

May the Lord raise a new generation of people whose religion is genuine, people who desires communion with the true and majestic God.

CHAPTER 8

IS BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER?

For people will be... heartless. (2Timothy 3:3)

LAST YEAR, FORBES MAGAZINE, ran an article titled *Billionaire Family Feuds: The High Stakes of Dysfunction and Dissent*. It tells stories of ultra rich families fighting over their wealth. Here is an example:

Lawyers for South Korea's richest person, and best known businessman, Samsung's Lee Kun-Hee, went to court to defend three lawsuits brought against him by his brother, a sister and another relative. His older brother, Lee Maeng-Hee, and older sister, Lee Sook-Hee, are apparently claiming that their late father, Lee Byung-Chull, gave Kun-Hee reportedly \$3.8 billion worth of assets that they didn't know about until last year. Kun-Hee has run the powerful *chaebol* since 1987. The siblings reportedly now want their brother to hand over a chunk of Samsung Life and Samsung Electronics shares.¹

The word "heartless" has been translated as "without natural affection" (KJV) and "unkind" (GNB). The word "natural affection" refers to love or affection for our fellowmen, especially those related to us, whether Christians or not. Every human heart feels a natural affection, which is part of the common grace of God.

Examples of these include the love that exists between parents and children, husband and wife, and among relatives, friends, neighbors, or officemates. The Bible abounds with

examples:

- The love of Hagar for Ishmael, even if she was probably not a real believer (Genesis 21: 9-19)
- The love of brothers for sisters (even if expressed in a wrong way that cannot be justified) (Genesis 34:1-2; 13-16; 24-25)
- The love of Esther and Mordecai for fellow Israelites (Esther 3: 8-9; 4:1; 15-17)
- The love of Abigail for her husband Nabal, even if he was unrighteous (1 Samuel 25: 14-35)

Paul warns that in the last days, these natural bonds would be loosened. Human beings would have less affection for one another.

The Ties That Don't Bind

Parents and children

For many parents these days, career, money, and the chance to realize their children's "potential" have become primary preoccupations; the welfare of their children is but secondary.

Consider the rise of parents working abroad. According to estimates, about 10 million Filipinos live and work abroad. More than 3 million Filipinos are in the US alone; 1 million more are in Saudi Arabia. Our people have become our biggest export! Overseas Filipino workers (OFW) provide the lifeblood of our economy, remitting a record USD 21 billion in 2012, nearly double the amount just five years earlier. While the OFW phenomenon has been good for our economy, it has devastating effects on families and ultimately the society.

Numerous children live with just one parent; when both parents work abroad, their children are left to the care of relatives or house helpers. Years of separation between husbands and wives and their children have led to dysfunctional families. Marital infidelity and juvenile delinquency have become commonplace in our society. *Business World* (22 February 2006), in a report titled *Teenagers bear social cost of OFW parents*, revealed that

13-16 year-old adolescents are the most vulnerable to the social costs of having at least one parent working in a foreign country. As a result, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse abound.

Lack of proper guidance of growing children partly explains increasing juvenile delinquency. The basic unit of society is the family. If the family is dysfunctional, it will eventually lead to societal problems such as juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, immorality, and a host of problems that will hinder development and growth of a country. For instance there is an increasing number of teenage pregnancy in the Philippines. A population survey in 2004 showed that almost one in every 10 babies is born to mothers 15-19 years of age. To confound the problem, 46% percent of these pregnant teenagers, chose to abort their babies; and even if they keep them, 2 of every 5 teenage pregnancies will still be unwanted ones.²

Of course, working abroad is not necessarily wrong nor does it show lack of love for one's family. Most parents who go abroad usually do so to give their families a more comfortable life. In exchange, they suffer a life of boredom and homesickness. Worse, many have been maltreated by their employers.

The point is, when deliberating on leaving the family to work abroad, consider first the importance of keeping the family unit intact. Make working abroad as the last option, not the first option. Do not look only at the financial benefit of working abroad, but consider the cost of leaving one's family as well.

For instance, suppose a mother earns PhP 15,000 a month as a teacher in the Philippines. She is considering to work in Dubai for PhP 40,000 a month. Financially, the latter salary is obviously higher than the former. But if she tries to estimate the equivalent monetary value of the intangible things in her life, she may come up with something like this on a monthly basis.

<i>Time with husband</i>	<i>PhP 5,000</i>
<i>Time with three children</i>	<i>10,000</i>
<i>Time with relatives</i>	<i>2,000</i>

<i>Time in the church</i>	<i>4,000</i>
<i>Time with friends</i>	<i>2,000</i>
<i>No worries about children left at home</i>	<i>4,000</i>
<i>No worries about husband's infidelity</i>	<i>4,000</i>
<i>Not being homesick</i>	<i>3,000</i>
 <i>The pleasure of living in one's country</i>	 <i>2,000</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>PhP 36,000</i>

While she may be earning merely PhP 15,000 in the Philippines, the benefits of her presence at home, if given monetary value, are actually much bigger than her salary abroad. Obviously such calculations are very subjective and arbitrary. The cost of the intangibles above could actually be way more. But such calculation illustrates the necessity of counting all the costs and benefits associated with working abroad.

Second, consider also the rising number of mothers working outside the home.

The increasing number of mothers in the workplace could be another manifestation of the weakening of maternal love. The International Labor Organization (ILO) reported in March 2008 that more women are working than ever before. The number of employed women globally grew by almost 200 million over the last decade. We are not against women working per se. The Proverbs 31 woman has numerous engagements (which will shame even a modern day executive!). Extreme poverty may compel a mother to work outside the home to augment the husband's income. However, we believe that outside work should be a last resort for mothers.

We do not write this theoretically. I (Haydee) have spent my entire married life based at home. Several times I had been tempted to pursue a career outside the home. But looking back, I will never exchange the time I spent with our now adult children for a successful career elsewhere. What I have not received from a career outside the home, the Lord has compensated in countless ways.

Husbands and wives

Marital unfaithfulness has plagued humanity since time immemorial. But in recent times, it has ballooned to epic proportions. An article in *The Washington Post* reports that 25-75 percent of all American males and 15-60 percent of women have had extramarital affairs. A 1999 Internet survey conducted by Layton-Tholl, a psychologist, revealed that roughly half of all men and women, including those who are victims of deception, have committed infidelity.³

The social media have made committing infidelity as easy as buying items on eBay. AshleyMadison.com is a site that connects married individuals. Their slogan says it all: "Life is short, have an affair." Another disturbing statistics is that 44 percent of husbands and 57 percent of wives revealed that they experienced becoming emotionally involved with another though there was no physical contact. This is marital cheating as well. According to the author, Max Ehrenfreund, in this kind of marital cheating, the emotional attention that rightly belongs to the legitimate partner is given to another, which in turn breeds loss of self-esteem, anger, and depression in the offended partner.

Infidelity has been around for ages. But the present times provide a climate conducive to it. It is now easy to connect with old flames through the social media. Infidelity takes various forms, and all of them indicate a betrayal of trust, which leads to devastating pain and the erosion of a stable marriage.⁴

Friends forever?

Loyalty to one's friends is a virtue. Three cords are not easily broken, according to Ecclesiastes 4:12. The increasing focus on self-fulfillment, however, could fray the bonds of friendship.

In an excerpt from the book *When Friendship Hurts*, ABC News tells of the story of Marjorie (not her real name), a 23-year-old single female working as a teacher's assistant.

Marjorie explains: "My best friend told my boss that she feared for her life after we got into an argument and I wrote her a nasty note, even though we had been friends for six years and she knew I would never hurt her. Because she went to my boss, I was fired after working there for a year and a half. She [my best friend] even went to the police but was

told that nothing in the note was threatening. The reason for all of this had to do with the fact that she was highly competitive and felt this was a way of winning.” Unfortunately Marjorie's experience is more typical than you'd think.⁵

So Why Should We Bother?

We are commanded to love one another.

The Bible commands that we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39). This command should make us sensitive to our neighbor's needs and to strive to address them. Our love should not be superficial. Our faith must be operationalized in the way we show our love for one another.

We can express our love in many ways. It can be through acts of kindness like offering help when needed. We can show it by being thoughtful. Remembering occasions special to a person sends the message that we care. Hospitality or inviting people to our house is not merely opening up our homes to them. It is actually sharing ourselves and what we have with them. It is an extension of friendship. Have you noticed that when somebody invites you for dinner, you become closer to the person?

Empathy or sharing the grief or joy of another is another way of loving others. Sometimes it is easy to empathize with those burdened with problems, but not easy to share their joy. Being genuinely happy with another's successes is a manifestation of true love for that person.

Jesus sets an example

The Lord Jesus showed a striking example of loving one's parents. While on the cross, in the brink of death and drinking the cup of God's wrath, He still showed affection to Mary, His earthly mother. He asked the apostle John to take care of her after His death (John 19:25-27). What forgetfulness of self, what filial love!

We must imitate Christ's love for His mother amid society's rising indifference toward responsibility to parents. This will be especially true in the future as more and more senior citizens compose the population. The population of senior citizens in the Philippines is expected to balloon to 23.63 million by 2050, according to the latest report released by the

United Nations Population Fund Agency (UNFPA). The report, titled *Ageing in the Twenty-first Century: A Celebration and a Challenge*, says this means that from the latest estimate of 5.91 million Filipinos aged 60 and above, the population of the older *Pinoy* generation will increase by 17.72 million in 38 years.⁶

In spite of the demands of career and family, a loving son or daughter can surely find ways to show care and love to his or her aging parents. This is the payback period. This is the time to recompense for the sacrifices our parents have done for us. Remember, time is not always on our side.

Love gives order to our society.

Love is one of the instruments God uses to sustain His creation. The cliché “love makes the world go round” is true after all. Order in society is only possible if people have love in their hearts. Then there would be sharing, forgiving, kindness, honesty. Such is an ideal society. But the reality is that lack of love prevails in our society. Still, each one of us can be an instrument of love. In I Corinthians 13, love is considered as a “cure-all” for society’s ills. An act of kindness spreads gladness and has a multiplier effect. A single dose of love can avert evil intentions. Imagine what would happen if the evil in the hearts of workers, employers, politicians, and neighbors are not tempered by a right amount of love? It would be “every man for himself,” resulting in chaos. But God in His kindness gave men natural affection for others, and it is its working that makes this world habitable. Let us pray that God will be pleased to preserve the world through mutual affection.

CHAPTER 9

FORGIVE AND FORGET?

For people will be... unappeasable. (2 Tim 3:3)

FORGIVENESS IS NOT EASY, as the following story illustrates.

Before I became a doctor, I worked as a nurse's aide at a small community hospital. There was a frail, elderly woman who lost her sight to cataracts. I took care of her for weeks, but she was suffering from dementia and couldn't really remember me from one day to the next. She was cute and harmless; mostly she would lay in bed staring at the ceiling, occasionally muttering nonsense. One day, she happened to sit up abruptly while I was in there and screamed. I ran over to her and asked her what was wrong. She said, "Trevor... I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. Please forgive me." over and over. I had no idea what to do, but she was hysterical. I sat next to her, took her hand, and said, "I know. I forgive you." She lay back in bed and seemed content. I left in the afternoon and she died that night.¹

To forgive is a selfless act. It seeks the interest of others more than self. It forgets the harm done and clears the offender of his or her accountability. It therefore liberates the person who has offended us.

Unforgiveness is a product of a proud spirit. The Greek word for "unforgiving" literally means "implacable or impossible to appease." It describes someone who cannot be persuaded to enter into a covenant. It has been translated also as "unyielding" (MKJV), "unappeasable" (ESV), "irreconcilable" (NASB), "merciless" (GNB), and "truce-breakers"

(KJV).

Why are the proud less likely to forgive? It is because their love is centered on themselves and they cannot spare that love to seek the interest of others through forgiveness. Relationships break down when men and women focused on their ego and become easily offended. The mood of the times is captured by the book, *Angry Men: Managing Anger in an Unforgiving World*. Our world is becoming more and more unforgiving.

For sure, to forgive is one of the hardest things to do in life. Christians who have been forgiven by God are commanded to forgive those who sin against them. We should therefore examine ourselves for any signs of an implacable spirit.

Symptoms

Anger and resentment

When people sin against us, do we habitually react with anger and resentment? Do we dwell in self-pity and blame others for our misery? Of course, Christians can react with righteous anger at sin. However, we are talking here about self-centered anger, the kind resulting from not getting what we want.

Suppose a student lent her notebook to a classmate, with the latter promising to return it well ahead of time for an upcoming exam. The classmate did not return the notebook on time, so that the lender failed the exam. Admittedly, a wrong was committed and we can empathize at how easy it is to react with self-absorbed anger. How great is the temptation for this student to resent the person who wronged her.

The temptation to be unforgiving is much more severe in cases where heinous crimes have been committed against our loved ones. Recently, in the university campus where we reside, a beautiful and promising student was robbed and killed. Her body was dumped in the university farm. She was a Christian, a daughter of a pastor. No one can surely fathom the grief of her parents. Yet in a TV interview, her parents said they have forgiven the killers. Amazing! Being Christians, we can see the work of the Spirit in their lives.

What about us? If we were in the parents' place, will we have the same forgiving spirit?

May the Lord grant us the grace to be forgiving.

A vindictive spirit

When we are wronged, our immediate reaction is to get even. As one bumper sticker says, "I don't get mad, I get even!" We read such sayings with some amusement. But the underlying principle is deadly. It is to repay evil for evil. Worse, we take the place of God when we get even because vengeance is the Lord's: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Romans 12:19).

Let us take a case in the office. Suppose you are leading a team preparing a proposal for a client. The work was divided among staff members and everyone agreed to submit the assigned contribution on a designated date. Everybody met the deadline, except Philip. As a result, you failed to submit the proposal on time and the company lost a chance to make a handsome profit. Worse, your reputation in the company was tarnished. How would you feel about Philip?

Anger and the desire to get even are natural reactions. However, as a Christian, you hear a still small voice whispering to you that while you were dead in trespasses and sins you found forgiveness from God. This thought calms your anger and nudges you to relate normally with Philip.

Retaliation can take many forms. Silent treatment is one: ignoring the offending person to show one's ill feelings and make him feel guilty. Another way is through unhealthy humor, bordering on biting sarcasm, ridicule, stinging quips, and sharp put-downs. In this cynical age, all of us can fall into patterns of insult and derision. The worst form, however, is taking pleasure in the problems and troubles of the person who offended us.

Nursing anger and resentment toward those who wronged us leads us to scheme for ways to get even. If this is your habitual reaction when offended, you need to examine yourself. Perhaps you have not really surrendered your life to Jesus. May the Lord grant you grace to repent and to trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Why Should We Forgive?

It is commanded.

Jesus and the apostles knew it would be hard to forgive. That is why we have been given so many commands and exhortations to enforce this rule.

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. (Matthew 18: 21-22)

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

If you are a Christian, not forgiving is blatant disobedience of the clear commands of God. It is to forget that we were vile, wretched and poor, yet were forgiven by our merciful God through the redeeming love of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus told of a parable of a servant whose great debts were cancelled when he sought the mercy of his king (see Matthew 18:23-35). Yet when this servant was asked by a fellow servant to forgive him his debt of a much smaller amount, he had this fellow servant thrown in jail until he had paid his loan to the last penny. On hearing this, the king was enraged and delivered the unforgiving servant to the tormentors. The parable ends with a warning—that the Lord will also do the same thing to us if we do not forgive our brothers from our hearts (Matthew 18: 35).

A story is told that when a certain General Oglethorpe said, "I never forgive," John Wesley replied, "Then, sir, I hope that you never sin." All of us are not immune to committing sins and failures. We are guilty of sinning every day. Yet every time we sincerely come to God for forgiveness, He accepts us. It is arrogance and shameful that we ask God for forgiveness and yet are not willing to forgive others.

It is to be like God and the Lord Jesus.

When we forgive, we are reflecting the image of our God who forgives sinners when they come in repentance and faith in Jesus. When we forgive, we are imitating the Son who, when He was in great pain on the cross, gasping for breath, ridiculed by His enemies and

treated like a worst criminal, still uttered words of forgiveness: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

To be forgiving is to have the same spirit as the Son; this validates our citizenship in God’s kingdom. To be unforgiving is to manifest the qualities of God’s enemy—Satan. An impostor will be revealed by a lack of likeness to his professed Father.

It brings physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.

According to mayoclinic.org, a person who does not forgive is actually hurting himself or herself. A forgiving person, on the other hand, reaps physical and emotional benefits. Accordingly, forgiveness leads to healthier relationships, greater spiritual and psychological well-being, less anxiety, stress and hostility, lower blood pressure, fewer symptoms of depression, and lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse.² Unwillingness to forgive brings strain even in the best relationships. Consequently, it leads to isolation and compounds one’s bitterness. It produces cyclical fits of emotions that start from self-pity and leads to depression. As the cycle goes on the unforgiving person becomes even more fault-finding, unforgiving, and depressed. We have heard of children and parents who have not talked for years because of some real or imagined offense by one or both parties.

Thomas Fuller said, “He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which they must pass themselves, for every person has the need to be forgiven.” A forgiving person is wise for he or she restores relationships. It is always good to heed this African proverb: “He who forgives ends the quarrel”.

CHAPTER 10

THE DEVIL WITHIN

For people will be... slanderous. (2 Timothy 3:3)

THE GREEK WORD USED for slanderous is scary: *diabolos*. It has been translated in the Bible as “false accuser, devil, slanderer.” It is used to refer to one who brings a charge against another (e.g., John 8:10, Acts 3:30,35; Acts 5:16,18). Slander is the sin of not protecting the good name of others. It is to be a devil to another!

Symptoms

Speaking evil of others

The English word “slander” comes from the Latin word *scandalum*. Slander is an accusation maliciously uttered, with the intention of damaging the reputation of another. In other words, it is a false charge. Christ experienced all this.

The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me." (John 8:48-49)

The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.' " (John 8:52)

There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" (John 10:19-20)

The great apostle Paul suffered the same thing.

[Tertullus speaking about Paul] For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. (Acts 24:5-6)

[Paul speaking] ...through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true... (2 Corinthians 6:8)

In the Old Testament, Joseph was falsely accused of sexual molestation by Potiphar's wife and was imprisoned because of it (Genesis 39:14-18).

As Christians, we must not be quick to accuse someone with little or no evidence at all. Similarly, we must not be gullible in believing every accusation we hear. For example, if someone “shares” an accusation against an officemate, it is wise to hear the other side of the story before making any judgment. This is especially true for those in positions of leadership. Some people have the tendency to slander others just to gain the boss’ favor. Even in the church, pastors must investigate the veracity of an accusation against a member before acting on them.

Slandering and backbiting are considered marks of unbelievers (Romans 1:29-30). If you are a habitual slanderer, you must realize that your soul is in danger. May you seek God’s forgiveness and strength to overcome this sin.

Rumor-mongering

Spreading rumors is slander in another form. A rumor is a falsehood or truth circulated insidiously and with a hostile purpose.

During the recent elections in the USA, the following rumors were circulated about then candidate Barack Obama: “Illinois senator Barack Obama is a ‘radical Muslim’ who ‘will not recite the Pledge of Allegiance;’ Barack Obama was sworn into office on the Quran; Barack Obama has been endorsed for President of the U.S. by the Ku Klux Klan; Barack Obama's presidential campaign is being funded by Hugo Chávez; Photograph shows Barack Obama holding a telephone upside down; The Book of Revelation describes the anti-Christ as someone with characteristics matching those of Barack Obama.”¹ These rumors were

obviously false, yet they surely cost President Obama not a few votes.

His enemies harshly maligned the Lord Jesus. "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (Matthew 11:19). The sinless Christ must have been grieved to be accused of all sorts of misdemeanor by sinful men.

During Israel's captivity in Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar erected a statue of himself and required all his subjects to worship it. Three young Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who were officers of the empire refused to do so. Such defiance of a royal order was bound to be noticed, especially with all the political intrigues swirling within the palace (very much like today!). "Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews" (Daniel 3:8). The Septuagint version translated "maliciously accused" as *diaballō*, or "slander." The accusation could have circulated first as rumors.

Slander is a terrible sin such that warnings, condemnations, and complaints in reference to this sin are very frequent in the Old and New Testament:

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:16)

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered. (Proverbs 11:13)

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips. (Romans 1:29)

Being a false witness

It is estimated that 130,000 to 260,000 American inmates did not commit the crime they have been convicted of. What a waste of life in cold and lonely prison cells brought about by testimonies of false witnesses!

To bear false witness is a form of slander uttered in a court of justice. The Bible is replete with examples. A famous one is the land grabbing case by the power couple King Ahab and Queen Jezebel against the lowly Naboth (1 Kings 21: 9-14). King Ahab was enchanted by Naboth's vineyard and offered to buy it. But Naboth would not sell the land because it was a

family legacy. Queen Jezebel hatched a diabolical plan to dispossess Naboth.

And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him [Naboth]. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. (1 Kings 21:13)

In the New Testament, the trial of the Lord Jesus is one striking example. His enemies wanted Him dead. But being under the rule of Rome, the Jews did not have the power to enforce capital punishment. They knew that they have to convince the Roman courts that Jesus was guilty of an offense worthy of death. Following the example of the vicious Jezebel's, here is what they did:

For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. (Mark 14:56-59)

These days, false advertising can be considered one form of bearing false witness. A news item from the USA reports, "Makers of the herbal supplement Airborne have agreed to pay \$23.3 million in a class-action lawsuit over false advertising. The spread of Airborne has been something of a national phenomenon, with hopeful consumers reaching for the product that said, "It's the one designed by a school teacher." ...Airborne entered the market claiming that its formula—a result of research by second-grade teacher Victoria Knight-McDowell—could ward off colds. Airborne later backed off, reworking its campaign to say the supplement "boosts your immune system."²

What will be the end of a false witness? The Bible is very clear: "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and a breather of lies shall not escape" (Proverbs 19:5).

Being silent even if we know something

A person is guilty of bearing false witness when he or she knows the truth and does not stand up for it. During Jesus' trial, no one came forward to testify in His favor though many were aware that the charges were fabricated. The situation was quite different in the time of Moses. The Jews were about to enter the promise land. In obedience to God, Moses sent

12 men to explore the land of Canaan (Numbers 13). On their return, 10 of the spies gave an ominous report. They said, "We are not able to go up against the people [of Canaan], for they are stronger than we are" (Numbers 13:31). However, two of the spies boldly proclaimed the truth.

And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." (Numbers 14:6-9)

The people did not listen to Joshua and Caleb, however. Consequently, the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years and none of them entered Canaan. Only two men from those who came out of Egypt eventually entered the promise land—Joshua and Caleb. As for the 10 spies who told of the false report, they all died in the plague (Numbers 14:37).

There are times when we need to speak out. Maybe you are aware of some anomalies going on in your office. God calls you to witness for the truth. This is not easy to do. May God give us the courage to know when we need to open our mouths for the truth.

Motives

It is against the ninth commandment.

Slander is a direct violation of the ninth commandment: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16). The Bible sternly warns against evil-speaking.

A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish.
(Proverbs 19:9)

A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire. A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends. (Proverbs 16:27-28)

The ninth commandment establishes the need to guard our neighbor's good name, which is a manifestation of our love for them. If we are not careful in protecting the reputation of

others, know that we have become violators of this commandment.

It is to be like the devil.

Satan is the “accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12:10). Part of his demolition job is to accuse Christians of disloyalty and sin before God’s tribunal (Job 1:6; Zechariah 3:1). He brings false charges against Christians, so as to weaken their influence. To slander others, to speak and spread lies is to be like Satan since he is the father of lies. In contrast, Christians are to be like Christ. All truth lies in Him (John 14:6).

CHAPTER 11

WHO IS IN CONTROL?

For people will be...without self-control. (2 Timothy 3:3)

A STORY IS TOLD about US President Lyndon Johnson, who was a bit overweight during his term of office. “One day his wife challenged him with this blunt assertion: “You can't run the country if you can't run yourself.” Respecting Mrs. Johnson's wise observation, the President pursued the battle against the bulge and lost 23 pounds.”¹

One of the weaknesses of our generation is lack of self-control. Paul used the Greek word *akratēs*, which literally means “powerless.” Paul is saying that our age is marked by men who are unable to govern themselves and their appetites. For example, lack of self-control in eating has become a global problem, resulting in an increasing number of obese persons, particularly in developed nations. A *HealthDay Reporter* article says uncontrolled eating is fueled by, among others, too much emphasis on food. The rise of culinary arts is phenomenal. Chefs are glorified, and cooking shows of all shades have multiplied.

Paul was not immune to the struggles of the flesh. He was human like us and subject to the same temptations of the flesh. There were probably many times when he felt he had done enough and could take things easy. He probably struggled to get up from bed after a late night of preaching (which sometimes ended past midnight!). Surely there were times he was tempted to gorge on food and drink. Knowing his propensity to lose control, he testifies: “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I

myself should be disqualified" (1Corinthians 9:27).

Paul used a violent word to describe how he kept his passions in check. The Greek word for "discipline" in this verse literally means to "bruise the face under the eyes," so that it becomes black and blue. Of course, this is not a literal bruising of the body to gain God's favor. Paul implies that he persistently fought to suppress his sinful nature. He tried to "keep it under control." If the great apostle wrestled for self-control, how much more should we lesser mortals?

Manifestations

In leisure and recreation

Time is perhaps the most precious commodity on earth. Sadly, people treat it as if it has an infinite supply. Time has monetary value, so that when it is wasted, it is like flushing money down the drain. An inordinate amount of free time or leisure time is often spent in unprofitable activities like watching TV, playing computer games, chatting, or texting.

According to the University of Michigan Health System, TV viewing among American children is at an eight-year high. On average, children aged 2-5 spend 32 hours a week watching television, DVDs, DVR and videos and using a game console. Children aged 6-11 spend about 28 hours a week in front of the TV.²

According to a UC Berkeley study, on average, Americans spend almost 3 hours a day watching TV and movies, or nine times the number of minutes spent on all leisure-time physical activities combined.³

The sports industry has become one of the biggest industries in the world; it is called an open-cut gold mine. Its annual output value worldwide was estimated at USD 400 billion, and growing at an annual rate of 20 percent. The United States accounts for more than half (USD 210 billion) of this annual output value, which is twice the revenue of the US automobile-manufacturing industry and accounting for 2 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).⁴

In addition, the Internet and the rise of smart phones have revolutionized what people do with their time, especially the youth.

If you are a Christian, chances are you have also felt the urge to indulge in these activities as well. In moderation they may be helpful, but if it eats up a lion's share of our time, this is a sign that we are getting enslaved by these activities. We need to be reminded of Paul's admonition: "making the best use of the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16).

If this is your area of weakness, may you confess your sin before God. Maybe you are a young Christian trapped in the bondage of media addiction. May you remember your Creator while young and serve Him while you are strong. Maybe you are a mother who cannot resist watching your favorite *telenovelas*. Realize that such habit not only deprives you of precious time to serve the Lord, but it also makes you give a bad example to your children. Or maybe you are a father whose passion is watching sports on TV. May the Lord convict you when you are devoting excessive amounts of time to this activity.

In eating and drinking

We all want economic development. Yet one of the undesirable side effects of rising income level is overconsumption of food and alcohol. The wise king Solomon warns us: "Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags" (Proverbs 23:20-21).

WebMD in an article titled *Obesity Epidemic "Astronomical"* reports that the prognosis for the USA is bad and getting worse as obesity takes its toll on the health of adults and children alike. It cites a study by an epidemiologist showing a startling 31 percent of adults in the US are obese while 15 percent of children and teenagers aged 6-19 are overweight. The proportion of obese people in the US has been growing steadily in the past few decades.⁵

In the Philippines, we also see signs of food overconsumption. According to Dr. Hildegardes C. Dineros, main proponent of Asian Bariatrics, about 500,000 Filipinos suffer from clinically significant obesity, some of them quite young.⁶ One good indicator then of your self-discipline is your weight! But even if you are not overtly obese, you may be guilty of overindulging in food during parties. We must be on guard during these occasions lest such kind of eating becomes a habit.

Here is one more thought: consider that a gluttonous Christian is conveying a bad

testimony to the world around him. You may be preaching “do not love the world,” yet by the way you eat, you may be giving the impression that food is an exception to the rule.

Lack of self-control is manifested also in alcohol abuse. Let us be clear on this: the Bible does not condemn drinking alcoholic drinks per se. The first recorded miracle of the Lord Jesus was to turn water into wine and the Lord’s Supper is celebrated with wine. However, the Bible is clear that drunkenness is wrong. Paul makes this clear: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

Filipinos were the number one alcohol drinkers in Asia in 1995, consuming a total of 146,000 bottles of liquor that year! The production of beer and other liquors is one of the most profitable industries in the country. In fact, the country's biggest beer company ranked number nine in the Philippine's Top Corporations of 1999 with a total sale of USD 766 million.⁷ No one can tell how many families have been ruined by alcohol addiction. Maybe you are a teenager excited to experiment with alcohol. The pressure of your friends is getting hard to resist and you have been going out with them in drinking sessions. You tell yourself that a little will not hurt and you trust in your ability to control your intake. May you see the danger you are in. We doubt if alcoholics intended to be so the first time they drank a bottle. Most of them likely thought that they are in control. But before they knew it, they have become alcohol’s slaves, not its master. Do not be part of the growing statistics of those whose lives have been ruined by the bottle.

Lack of control can be seen also in illegal drug abuse. Drugs is a worse master than alcohol. We have read stories of lives ruined by drugs: a promising young man or woman whose career was abruptly halted by drug addiction, or of killings perpetrated by drug-induced lunacy. If you, dear reader, are gripped by drugs, may you come to God for deliverance. May you see that it is only by surrendering your life to Jesus as your Lord and Savior that you obtain complete freedom and happiness.

In sexual immorality

The Bible explicitly teaches that sex is for married couples only. Sadly, our society has been challenging this mandate by rampant promiscuity and immorality, not only between man and woman, but also between the same sex. Adultery and fornication have become so

common that they have lost their stigma. Immorality is on the rise, fueled by peoples' lack of decency and sense of propriety. In Manila, the skyline is blighted by scantily clad men and women selling everything from condos to canned tuna. Homosexuality is already accepted in society. In the US, same sex marriage has already been legalized. This is unthinkable ten years ago. Those who oppose it are in danger of being sued. This has made it hard for Christians to take a firm stand on their beliefs.

With this kind of environment, the Christian is tempted to conform. Hence, self-control is a vital weapon to keep one's purity. For example, we can exercise self-control by avoiding websites that show pornographic images or by resisting the flirtations of an officemate or classmate.

Christian women should be examples of modesty. Men are easily provoked to lust by what they see. Clothes that reveal the cleavage, thighs, and shape of the body are sure-fire magnets to the lustful eyes of men, causing them to sin. If they sin, women become an accessory to their sin. (You may want to listen to the sermon of Pastor Albert Martin about *Ten Magnets to Men's Eyes* regarding Christian Modesty)

The purpose of clothing is primarily for covering. In Genesis 3:21, God clothed Adam and Eve with sheep skin to cover their nakedness. Yet the fashion of the times does the opposite, literally exposing the body for all to see. Many women deliberately expose their skin in the name of fashion. Short shorts, butt hugging skirts and pants, low neckline and bare backs clothes commonly describe women's dressing nowadays.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, they realized they were naked and made themselves a covering out of fig leaves. But God made an appropriate clothing for them out of sheep's skin. God therefore is the Author of man's clothing such that the way we dress must be dictated by what the Bible says about it. In the Old Testament, the Lord has warned the Israelites that "He would expose their nakedness." The moral decadence in our society trifle on God's desire for modesty and blatantly expose their nakedness and are not shamed at all.

In gambling

Gambling is addicting. Ironically, many governments around the world promote it. The

Philippines has a government agency that caters solely to gambling activities, euphemized as “gaming.” Various forms of lottery exist, from big-time to small time, having all kinds of gamers, from the high-level to the poorest of the poor.

The Internet has become the new frontier of gambling. The online gambling industry is estimated to have risen from USD 2.2 billion in 2000 to USD 15.2 billion in 2006.⁸ Unknown to ordinary citizens, numerous Internet gambling firms operate in the Philippines, catering to people around the globe.

We have to realize that gambling is a form of stealing. If one wins big time, note that he or she did not work for it. Gambling breeds laziness because it encourages reliance on luck rather than hard work to advance in life.

Incentives

Self-control is commanded.

The Bible abounds with commands and encouragements to pursue holiness and starve our sinful nature.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 6:1-2)

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. (2 Peter 1:5-7)

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. (1 Peter 4:7)

As Christians, we are duty-bound to obey God’s commands. More than mechanical obedience, however, our heart longs for deliverance from our sinful nature.

Self-control is a sign of true conversion.

Since self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 2:23), it should be evident then in all Christians, albeit at varying degrees. If a person claiming to be a Christian does not manifest this fruit, something is seriously wrong with his or her profession. All true saints

persevere in the faith. If you see yourself under the bondage of your appetites, examine yourself whether you have truly surrendered your life to God.

By the Spirit's empowerment, Christians have the ability to control self.

Unlike unbelievers, Christians are not hopeless. Christ has delivered us from the slavery of sin and we have the power of the Holy Spirit to quench all sin, particularly lack of self-control. We cannot say that we cannot control ourselves. There is no excuse. But this is also our encouragement during times when we fall into self-indulgence. We can exercise self-control in small things.

We can start by refusing to have another serving of the sumptuous main course before us, if we are already full. We can say no to the noontime show that parades scantily dressed dancers. We can force ourselves out of bed so we do not miss our time of prayer and meditation. Self-control in small things can train us to have self-control in bigger things. By the indwelling Spirit, the Christian can conquer all sins.

CHAPTER 12

BRUTAL

For people will be... brutal. (2 Timothy 3:3)

WE LIVE IN A violent world. On 16 April 2007, a man shot and killed 32 people and wounded 17 others in what became known as the Virginia Tech massacre in the USA. On 22 July 2011, Anders Behring Breivik of Norway bombed government buildings in Oslo, killing eight people. Not satisfied, he proceeded to the island of Utøya where he systematically shot and killed 69 people, mostly teenagers. And who can forget the carnage of 9/11. Three thousand unsuspecting employees and passersby getting ready for the day's work were killed instantly when a jet plane crashed into the Twin Towers. In Maguindanao, Philippines, 52 supporters and journalists accompanying the wife of a candidate for governor were ambushed and killed in cold blood by political rivals. Stories of gruesome acts of violence are endless.

The word “brutal” (*anēmeros* in Greek) means “savage.” Brutal persons have hearts of beasts. They desire blood and have no pity. They are cruel, barbarous, and fierce. When men lack self-control as discussed in the previous chapter, they are likely to be violent as well.

Violence Is Not New

In the Scriptures, Genesis 4:1-16 records the first act of violence. Cain killed his brother

Abel, angry that God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice but rejected his. This was probably driven by jealousy, as the Hebrew word used to describe his anger suggests.

Joseph was another victim of violence triggered by jealousy also of his 10 brothers (Genesis 37). He was living a charmed life being the favorite son of his father Jacob. Unknown to him, his brothers were harboring a deep hatred against him. When Jacob asked Joseph to look for his brothers who were pasturing their sheep, the jealous brothers hastily crafted a plan to kill him. They stripped Joseph of his favorite clothes (a gift from his father), threw him in a pit nearly killing him, and eventually sold him as a slave. In the New Testament, we read of Herod the Great (Matthew 2:12-18), who felt threatened when informed by the wise men that they were looking for the new born "king of the Jews" (v.2). When Herod told the men to come back and tell him where the Child was, his intention was to kill Him. But having been warned by an angel, the wise men did not return to Herod. This made Herod order a murderous rampage, considered as one of the blackest stains in history. "Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men" (Matthew 2:16).

Yet, no violent act was as evil as what the Jewish leaders did to Jesus. Driven by intense jealousy (again!), the religious leaders conspired to crucify Jesus. They drove the mob to demand from Pilate that Jesus be the one crucified instead of the convicted murderer (Matthew 27:20-23). Pilate, who wanted to please the crowd, relented (albeit reluctantly because he knew Jesus was innocent) and turned Jesus over to the Roman soldiers. They did to Jesus what they do to hardened criminals. They beat Him, slapped Him, mocked Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, and eventually nailed Him to the cross to die a slow and painful death.

For Christians, it is always good to remember that no disciple is above his or her Master. In the book of Acts we read of the persecutions of the saints. Stephen was stoned to death. James was beheaded. Paul was beaten and whipped many times, eventually ending in a prison in Rome (and later beheaded). To suffer is part of following Jesus. Even now, millions of Christians are experiencing persecution for the sake of the Lord.

Living in the Age of Ultimate Fighters

Advances in education and science have not restrained the brutality of men. Technologies and advances in science have only made strategies and weaponry more sophisticated and their users harder to detect.

About 160 million people died in wars during the 20th century, about one-third of these from World War II. From 1958 to 1961, Mao's "Great Leap Forward" killed 38 million. In Africa, the Sudanese civil war during 1983-2002 killed 2 million people. More recently, the war in Iraq has already claimed 461,000 deaths.¹

Those who died left behind grieving wives, children, and parents. Many who did not die in battle suffer from physical injuries and emotional trauma. Shattered dreams and an uncertain future face those who once were living in peace.

The economic cost for the US of the war in Iraq, according to the "Cost of War" project in Brown University, is a whopping USD 2 trillion.² Such resources could have been put to better use if men were not prone to violence.

Culture of violence

Man's depravity is displayed in a culture that glorifies violence. It is unimaginable that people get attracted to violence. But numerous movies and television programs in order to sell must have violent elements. A *Seattle Times* article (25 May 2007), titled *How films reflect, create the cruelty of our culture*, underscored the role of films in creating this culture of violence. It says, "You can't find the culprit with a microscope; you can't fight it with a vaccine. But we are living in a mean season—in our movies, in our music, in our television shows, in our politics—and it shows no signs of ebbing."³

Computer games are another culprit. It is not difficult to imagine the kind of mayhem they simulate with titles like *Hitman*, *God of War*, *Gears of War*, *Shadows of the Damned*, *Never Dead*. These games target young and old people alike. The player, hooked on the game, is subconsciously drawn to the aggressive hero, who is typically the most violent.

What is the impact of violent computer games especially on children? According to a review paper by Dr. Craig Anderson in the American Psychological Association website,

“studies provide converging evidence that exposure to media violence is a significant risk factor for aggressive and violent behavior.”⁴ His review also found that violent video games are significantly associated with increased aggressive behavior, thoughts, and affect;* increased physiological arousal; and decreased pro-social (helping) behavior. What you see is what you become.

Parents should be aware of the kind of computer and video games their children play. A seemingly harmless game can stir up a violent spirit in a child’s heart.

Why is Brutality a Sin?

It is a violation of the fifth commandment.

Taking away the life of another through malice and revenge clearly violates the fifth commandment: “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). All things that could lead to the taking away of life are also forbidden. This means that men should do all they can to preserve the lives of others.

It is against the spirit of meekness.

According to the Lord Jesus, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). This means Christians should not be proud, easily provoked, or angered. A violent temper does not characterize a follower of the Lamb.

It is against the example of Christ.

Christians are to be like Christ. When He was on earth, Christ showed meekness and gentleness, even to His enemies: “who when He was reviled did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but gave Himself up to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

His heart was all compassion.

Then Jesus called His disciples and said, I have compassion on the crowd because they continue with Me for three days now and have nothing to eat. (Matthew 15:32)

But seeing the crowds, He was moved with compassion on them, because they were tired and scattered like sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

Christian, may you resist the culture of violence so pervasive today. May your life be a

testimony to what it is like to be peacemaker.

CHAPTER 13

WHEN BAD GUYS BECOME HEROES

For people will be... not loving good. (2 Timothy 3:3)

THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD (1 Jun 2008) published this disturbing piece: “The hit television show *Underbelly* has turned the gangsters it is based on into cult stars—but community leaders say the glorification of crime has gone too far. “Gangster chic” means killer. Carl Williams is overwhelmed with mail in his cell at Barwon Prison in Victoria and has the maximum 5000 friends signed to his Facebook page. NSW shadow police minister Mike Gallacher said: “Carl Williams has been portrayed as a likeable dope, when the reality is this guy is a dangerous, ruthless killer. These people were involved in a drug trade that has ruined countless lives.”

The Greek word *philagathos* is the opposite of *philagathos* (“fond of good,” that is, “a promoter of virtue”). It means hostile to virtue. It has been translated “not loving good” (ESV) and “despisers of those that are good” (KJV). Ideally, we expect people to love what is good. But in these last days the opposite is happening. People are becoming haters of what is good—good men and good works. Their life choices and attitude toward the people and things of God show this hostility.

Remember Lot’s Wife?

The Bible abounds with characters who showed their love for what is not good. One of

these is Lot's wife. When Lot's family was fleeing from God's wrath in Sodom and Gomorrah, an angel warned them not to look back. But Lot's wife, having loved the pleasures of the twin cities, took a backward glance and, in the blink of an eye, she turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19). Instead of being thankful for having been given the chance to escape destruction, her love for what is not good possessed her at that crucial juncture. What happened to Lot's wife serves as a warning for us all not to cherish the things of this world (Luke 17:32).

Another case is that of King Rehoboam. He had just inherited the kingdom from his father King Solomon. The people of Northern Israel asked him to lighten the load his father had imposed on them. The elders counseled him to grant the request of the people, and be assured of their support. Men of his own age, however, advised him to rule with sternness rather than kindness. Loving what is not good, he chose the unwise counsel of his peers. He told the people, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:14). How badly had he miscalculated the temper of the people. They rejected him and installed Jeroboam as their king, precipitating the division of Israel into two smaller kingdoms. Rehoboam's choice revealed his heart and caused his downfall.

In the New Testament, a young rich man came to Jesus one day seeking eternal life. He was a leader in his synagogue. Jesus acknowledged his accomplishments but detected a covetous heart. Thus, Jesus called on him to sell all his possessions and follow Him. This saddened the young man and he "went away grieved, for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:22). He chose his riches instead of a life of peace in Jesus.

Finally, earlier we have seen the case of the soldiers who guarded Jesus' tomb right after His crucifixion. Jesus' body went missing on the third day. The religious cabal who plotted Jesus' death was in a quandary lest the people would believe that, indeed, Jesus rose from the dead. They thought of a brilliant ploy—why not bribe the tomb guards to say that Jesus' disciples stole his body? In spite of what they had witnessed (that no one stole it), the guards agreed to tell the lie for money. "And taking the silver, they did as they were taught. And this saying has spread among the Jews until today" (Matthew 28:15).

Signs of the Times: Bad is Good

Shallow Spirituality

Religion has become a simple badge of respectability for many. People go to church to appease their conscience. After fulfilling their religious duties, they go back to their sinful ways. Some churches even reschedule worship services to Saturday so that Sunday will be free for recreational activities. If there are important sports events on Sundays, expect half the pews to be empty.

Academic institutions have been leading not just in scholarly works but sadly also in departing from God. A 2005 study in the US showed that academics in the natural and social sciences at elite research universities are less religious than many of those in the general public. No wonder more and more university students are abandoning religion. It is interesting to note that famous scientists like Copernicus, Bacon, Galileo, Newton, Mendel, and Einstein were all believers of God. Even as they advanced science, they recognized that there is God who created this world. Einstein stated this famous saying: "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."¹

Media's glorification of the "bad boy" and "bad girl"

Movies and television programs mirror the hearts of people. In these shows, con artists, bank robbers, and philandering men are often depicted as heroes. The movie *Catch Me If You Can*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, tells of a man named Frank Abagnale, who ripped off millions of dollars by posing as different characters. In recent times, there has been a push to accept the gay lifestyle as normal. A 2014 survey by GLAAD, a media advocate, reports that 32 out of 813 characters seen on prime-time network scripted series are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The increased participation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders (LGBTs) in media has promoted their social and political acceptance. This has influenced the legalization of same-sex marriages in 30 states in the US.²

Pursuit of materialism

Our society has been brainwashed into thinking that material things are what matters in life. This is what advertisements tell us. They shape our minds into thinking that life is good when we have all the comforts the world can offer. Parents are willing allies as well.

Unconsciously, they are planting the seed of materialism in the lives of their children when they pamper them with the latest toys and allowing them to follow the latest fashion. Some mothers would dress up their nine-year old daughters with high-heeled sandals and dresses more appropriate for ladies. Even babies are dressed up like fashion icons. Moreover, when money talk becomes the pressing topic of family conversations, it conveys to the children that money is an all-important part of life.

Even the body is not spared. One blogger described it this way: "Weight training, diet centers, breast reduction, breast enhancement, cosmetic surgery, permanent eye make-up, liposuction, collagen injections—these are some examples of people turning themselves into human consumer goods more suited for the "marketplace" than living in a healthy balanced society."³

In the pursuit of the things of this world, people sacrifice family life and spiritual life. Friendships are destroyed while principles are laid aside. There is no love for what is good.

Over and against the moral decay around us, Christians must be the salt and light of the world. We must heed the words of Paul: "But flee youthful lusts, and follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

CHAPTER 14

JUDASES IN OUR MIDST

Men will be... treacherous.(2 Timothy 3:4)

PAUL USED THE GREEK word *prodotēs* for “treacherous,” a word that occurs only three times in the New Testament. It denotes surrender to the enemy. The KJV translates it as “traitor”—someone who betrays his or her country. A related term is “double-crosser” or a person who says one thing but does another. Its opposite is a loyal or faithful person. Paul warns that in these last days, people will be traitors to God and their fellowmen. King Solomon, anticipating our times, says, “Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but a faithful man who can find?” (Proverbs 20:6). Faithful men are rare indeed.

Judas and Peter

The most shocking example of betrayal in the Bible is our Lord Jesus’ betrayal by His very own disciple, Judas Iscariot (Luke 6:16). Judas took advantage of his intimate relation with Jesus as one of the Twelve. Having made a pact with the religious leaders, he sold Jesus for a measly 30 pieces of silver. He then led the band of priests and soldiers to where Jesus was, kissing Jesus to pinpoint Him to the arresting party. It was the height of hypocrisy, exposing a heart full of greed and delusion. How could he betray the Lord Jesus whom he knew as innocent in exchange for the price of a slave?

Peter’s denial of Christ is another sad act of disloyalty (Luke 22: 55-62). For three years, he saw the kindness and goodness of Christ to them and a multitude of other people. He

witnessed the greatest miracles and experienced the Lord's patience in teaching them about the kingdom of God. Jesus was pure, and blameless. Yet at the moment of Jesus' greatest suffering, when He most needed comfort from His disciples, Peter was nowhere to be found. Worse, he even denied knowing Him, not once but three times.

Modern-Day Judases

Disavowing the marriage vow

We can see the moral degeneration of the times by how our society regards marriage. Marriage is no longer a sacred commitment and covenant. "Till death do us part" has become passé, because people marry for convenience and for self-satisfaction. If the marriage does not live up to expectations, couples break up. In defiance of God's will for marriage, most have accepted divorce as a normal part of life. In the US, research shows that 40-50 percent of first marriages and 60 percent of second marriages end in divorce.¹

Divorce happens to the most high-profile personalities and to couples living in abject poverty. The daily news often banner the latest power couple splitting up, or that this or that actor has filed for divorce for the nth time, or that a married diva is having an affair with her music director.

The number one reason for failed marriages is lack of commitment by both partners, according to a study. Dr. Scott Stanley of University of Denver defines commitment as "having a long-term view of the marriage that helps us not get overwhelmed by the problems and challenges day by day. We keep our eyes focused on the valued prize—a healthy, stable marriage—and work to get there."²

It is a common thinking that "love sustains marriage." Thus, when relationships grow sour, getting out of the marriage seems logical. But the Bible teaches that God is the Author of marriage and He meant it to be forever. It is not love that sustains marriage but it is marriage that sustains love. When love grows cold, it is marriage that will motivate them to bring back love in the marriage bond.

Judases in suits

In 2005, the Harvard Business School published an article titled *Rethinking Company*

Loyalty. Lauren Keller Johnson, the author, says: “The very nature of the relationship between employers and employees has undergone a fundamental shift: Today, workers not only don't expect to work for decades on end for the same company, but they don't want to. They are largely disillusioned with the very idea of loyalty to organizations.”³

This has become today's trend. Rarely do we hear these days of an employee in a private company staying on for 20 years or more. Instead of being loyal to one's employer, the tendency is to look for another job with better benefits, higher salary, and greater chance of advancement. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in having the desire to improve one's status in life. However, a quick turnover of employees suggests that employees are more concerned with themselves than their company.

On the other hand, firms are also known for their lack of loyalty to their employees. Many choose to lay off workers or to hire on contractual basis to lower the cost of operations.

Lack of loyalty is prevalent in professional sports. Loyalty to one's team has been replaced by loyalty to the dollar. According to a sports columnist, “Loyalty is no longer the craze in professional sports. I relish the players like Cal Ripken, Dan Marino, and David Robinson who played their entire careers in one club. It's looking like fewer and fewer people will be those kinds of ballplayers.”⁴

Church loyalty?

One blog article got it right: “Starbucks customers in the US are more loyal than church members. Southern Baptists, for example, cannot account for well over 8 million members of their churches and that ten million who claim to be “born-again Christians” do not come to church regularly, according to Barna Research Group.”⁵

Eric Landry writes in his blog that evangelical churches today are facing a more formidable enemy. It is not postmodernism, but the indifference of their own members. Members give more priority to non-church activities, especially if their children are involved. Sporting events are oftentimes held during Sundays. Thus it is now common to have churches scheduling their services on Saturdays so that Sundays can be free. The Sabbath day is being redefined in many churches.

Landry says that many people want Sunday worship service to be a soothing balm for their souls, easing their fears and problems. Michael Horton calls this “hospital for the souls.” When churchgoers can’t find the comfort they are looking for, they would look for another church that could give them what they want. For these people, coming to church is not to worship the One True God, but for the self to get what it wants. Loyalty to the church is based on whether the church can continuously satisfy the needs of a person. Thus even the most petty problem can be a cause for a member to leave and look for another church. Church hopping has become the trend of the times.⁶

A Call to Loyalty

Christians ought to be loyal or faithful to God first of all. Faithfulness is seen in our delight to do His will in all that we do. It is seen in the performance of our spiritual duties, like our daily meditation and prayer, family devotion, and regular attendance to church services and ministries assigned to us.

Faithfulness to others is God’s mandate to Christians as well. Joseph’s loyalty to Potiphar is noteworthy. At a young age, he was made the overseer of Potiphar’s household. Potiphar’s wife, attracted by his good looks and godly character, tried to seduce him. Joseph’s reaction shows his faithfulness to his God and to Potiphar.

But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:8-9)

We can show loyalty to other people in many practical ways. Keeping promises, keeping appointments, returning borrowed things on time and in good condition, are some of the ways we demonstrate faithfulness.

To be loyal, however, can be costly and many people do not want to pay the price. It is hard to keep an appointment when we have to miss something we like to do. It is hard to keep the marriage vow if the partner is making one’s life miserable. Politicians do not deliver the goods when they are already in power, wanting the goods for themselves. Our

desire to be loyal is aborted by many obstacles and few people would want to hurdle these hindrances just to be true to their words. This is the reason why faithful people are hard to find.

But our God remains faithful in spite of our unfaithfulness. He is always true to His promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Every believer in Christ can attest to God's faithfulness in their lives. This should motivate us to be faithful to God first of all and to other people as well.

CHAPTER 15

DAREDEVILS

Men will be... reckless. (2 Tim 3:4b)

THE WORD “RECKLESS” CAME from the Greek word *propetes*, meaning “falling forward.” It refers to being rash, daring, bold, or impudent. It also describes a careless concern for danger or possible consequences.

Lynching Mobs and Reckless Vows

The word *propetēs* was used in the New Testament during the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19: 23-41). Paul’s work of evangelism in Ephesus delivered scores of people from the evil of idol worship. At that time, Ephesus was famous for the temple of Diana (aka Artemis), and silversmiths were earning a living by making her images. Since the teachings of Paul were ruining their business, one of them started a riot and grabbed two of Paul’s fellow workers. The soberness of the town clerk stopped the lynching mob when he wisely challenged them to “be quiet and to do nothing *rashly*” (Act 19:36).

In the Old Testament, Judges 11:30-40 tells the story of Jephthah, who carelessly took an oath that if he would defeat the Ammonites, the first one who would come out of his door to meet him would be sacrificed to Jehovah. Sadly, it was his daughter who excitedly welcomed him. Many biblical commentators in the Middle Ages, including Josephus, suggested that Jephthah’s daughter was indeed offered as a burnt offering. But after the Middle Ages, some Biblical scholars rejected this view. They affirmed that Jephthah

redeemed his daughter's life by making a payment so he can be released from his "difficult vow," as the Mosaic Law provided. His daughter then lived the remainder of her life in exclusive service to the Lord. Whatever the case may be, Jephthah's vow was reckless and showed lack of trust in God's ability to bring victory.

Modern-Day Jephthahs

Recklessness persists in the modern times. Teenagers dare each other to jump off a cliff, race down Main Street, drive their cars to the limit, jump into a freezing lake in the middle of winter. Young people gamble with their health and lives to prove something. Some want to be accepted by friends, others want to prove that they can do something remarkable, but too often underestimate the dangers involved.

This dangerous risk-taking is often encouraged by what is seen on TV and movies. It takes on a whole new category in sports and outdoor activity. Called extreme sports, this is mostly associated with adrenaline rush because the participants are often bordering on death or major physical injury. Bouldering for instance is a type of rock climbing without the use of rope, disregarding safety. Base jumping involves jumping on high antennae, bridge or cliff with the use of a parachute. In spite of the high risk involved, many are hooked and are developing more extreme activities.¹

People can be reckless in their spending habits. Plastic has become the currency of our times. It promises convenience and freedom to buy at will. It capitalizes on our weakness to buy impulsively that oftentimes we end up buying things we do not really need or items we cannot afford. Since we do not pay in cash, we can have this feeling that we are not really spending. We then get surprised when the bill arrives; when we cannot pay in full and on time, we have to pay the stiff interest rates.

Similarly, because of the attraction of easy money, many have succumbed to the promise of huge returns on investment, only to fall prey to scam artists. A recent pyramid scam in southern Philippines swindled 15,000 investors of hard-earned money, amounting to PhP 12 billion.

Reckless Words

The Bible says, "Reckless words pierce like a sword" (Proverbs 12:18). Words could hurt more than physical injury. A person can recover from physical injuries, but wounded emotions are hard to heal. How many husbands and wives have separated because of hurtful words they hurled at each other? How many children have become embittered because of insulting words from their parents? How many employees have resigned because of the derogatory remarks of their bosses? Businesses have been dissolved because of bitter exchanges between partners. Friends have parted because of unguarded comments.

Oftentimes people who utter hurting words out of anger regret what they said. If only they thought of the consequences of their words, they would not have said them. One newspaper quote says it well: "Speak when you are angry—and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret."

Antidotes

Cultivate prudence.

The book of Proverbs exalts prudence as a virtue to be desired (Proverbs 1:4; 8:5). Prudence means "to exercise caution and discretion regarding one's own interests, and one's personal resources." It involves two major principles. First is to listen to counsel. Experience is the best teacher. Thus, people who have experienced the same problems are in the best position to give advice on how to overcome them. Parents are good counselors because experience has made them wiser in the ways of life. As Proverbs 15: 5 says, "He who despises his father's instruction is called a fool."

Second is to learn to be cautious. We must anticipate problems and plan ahead to avoid them. Proverbs 22:3 says, "A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished."

To be reckless is to tempt God.

Even Christians fall prey to the idea that if they are doing what is approved by God nothing will harm them even if they ignore common sense. For instance, a Christian may drive at break-neck speed to avoid being late to church. Thinking that since it is God's will to be in church on time, speeding is justifiable. While it is true that God controls all things, throwing

caution to the wind is to disobey the command, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:7). Not being careful or deliberately putting yourself in a dangerous situation is to tempt God. God does not promise to protect us in such situations, and quite often you will have to deal with the painful consequences.

Not All Risk-Taking is Bad

Prudence does not exclude calculated, intelligent risk-taking because certain risks are necessary in living a life of faith. For example, starting a mission work is always venturing into the unknown. Trials can come along the way and success is not always guaranteed. Yet God is pleased when we rely on Him in such situations. We should not spend our lives in fear of what might happen. It will paralyze us and make us unprofitable. As the famous quote from Hudson Taylor goes, “Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God.” God promises to protect us if we take necessary precautions and if we are right in the center of His will.

CHAPTER 16

LOVERS OF PLEASURE

Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim 3:4)

THIS VERSE CATEGORIZES TWO kinds of people: lovers of pleasure and lovers of God.

The Greek word *philedonos*, used only once in the New Testament, has been translated as “fond of or lover of pleasure.” A related Greek word *hedone* means “pleasure or desires for pleasure” or even lust. Paul describes our pre-conversion life in this manner: “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures (*hedone*), living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

Hedonism, according to the Webster dictionary, is “the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life because it believes that pleasure is the only thing that is good for a person.” Actions are evaluated based on how much pleasure and how little pain (i.e., suffering) they produce. Since pain is unavoidable in life, a hedonist strives to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

On the other hand, the Greek word *philotheos* means “fond of God or lover of God.” Love of God, however, is destroyed by love of pleasure. We must avoid loving worldly pleasures at all cost because it will draw us away from God. Not all pleasures are wrong, though. God wants His people to be happy. He even provides us legitimate pleasures such as church fellowships, hobbies, sports activities, family gatherings, etc.

While we should avoid at all cost sinful pleasures like pornography, illegal drug use, gluttony, we must be aware that legitimate pleasures can become sinful. This occurs when they weaken our spiritual lives and draw us away from God. Eating, going out with friends, watching movies, or engaging in sports are good in themselves, but inordinate or uncontrolled indulgence in these things can sap our spiritual energy. Paul rightly says, "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful, but not all things build up" (1Corinthians 10:23).

Sodom and Gomorrah

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were not only living in pleasure but were engaging in all kinds of sexual immorality and perversion. The men of the city even wanted to sexually abuse the visitors of Lot, who happened to be the destroying angels from God. As a punishment, the Lord rained sulfur and fire on these cities. Lot, his wife and daughters were told to run and escape the punishment and to not look back. But Lot's wife disobeyed the command. In an instant, she turned into a pillar of salt. What happened to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah should serve as a warning to those who are living a pleasure-seeking and perverted lifestyle. They may not experience the fiery storm here on earth but hell fire awaits them if they do not repent.

The Epicureans

In Athens Paul met a group of philosophers called Epicureans (Act 17:18). These men were followers of Epicurus, a Greek thinker who died in Athens in 270 BC. Epicurus renounced religion and practiced "refined hedonism." This is a subtle form of hedonism, where the primary objective is the "attainment of pleasure and avoidance of pain." Contrary to common belief, the Epicureans sought pleasure by moderation. They believed that seeking maximum pleasure can only lead to intoxication and pain later on. Thus, optimum pleasure is the way to peace and pleasure.

Paul mentions another group men in Philippi who were also lovers of pleasure. Theirs was the kind of satisfaction derived from food. Paul describes them as persons "whose god is their belly" (Philippians 3:18-19). Many people today are like them.

Modern-Day Hedonists

“Do what feels good” is the mantra of many people today. They may not be aware of it, but they are the modern-day hedonists. They are not necessarily people who do nothing but eat, drink, and play. They could be ordinary people whose main goal is to retire in peace and comfort and enjoy the outdoors.

Perhaps its most visible manifestation today is the rise of the recreation industry. Take the case of sports. Millions closely follow and root for their favorite sports teams with the same zeal as religious fanatics. A baseball fan puts it graphically: “Opening day is a holy day for us who worship in baseball parks.”¹ As we wrote this, the football world was agog at the prospect of one British player being bought by a Spanish team for Eu 100 million, a world-record fee if it materializes. The highest earning athlete, golfer Tiger Woods, raked in USD 78 million in one year from mid-2012 to mid-2013, according to Forbes magazine.²

ESPN estimated the impact of US outdoor recreation to the economy to be USD 730 billion in 2006. In Canada the economic impact of gambling tops USD 15 billion.³ Gambling has become so large that it is now the biggest revenue generator and employer in the entertainment field, with more than 135,000 people working directly in the gaming industry.

A study, titled *Video Games in the 21st Century: Economic Contributions of the US Entertainment Software Industry*, details the impact of computer and video game companies on America's economy. It found that the entertainment software industry's annual growth rate exceeded 17 percent from 2003 to 2006. Over the same period, the entire US economy grew at a rate of less than 4 percent. In 2006, the entertainment software industry's value added USD 3.8 billion to the GDP of the US.

Clearly, the world is chasing pleasure one after another.

Laziness is another form of pleasure-seeking, which is condemned in Proverbs 21:25-26: “What the sluggard desires will kill him, for his hands refuse to work. All day long he craves greedily....” The sluggard desires a life of ease and luxury. But he or she adds sin to sin by not even working for it.

Why Shun Hedonism?

First, we need to realize that a hedonistic lifestyle ultimately brings pain and sorrow. The Bible abounds with examples of indulgence that led to poverty. "He who loves pleasure shall be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil shall not be rich" (Proverbs 21:17). A local government official once shared with me (Rodel) how his father squandered the family fortune, including his college fund, because of gambling addiction. His father's hedonistic lifestyle inflicted much pain and loss to those he loved.

James 4:3 plainly explains: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures [*hedone*] that wage war in your members?... You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures [*hedone*]." Many marriages had been broken and innocent children had suffered due to a spouse's overindulgence to what is pleasurable such as alcoholism and gambling.

Second, we must consider that a life of pleasure is damaging to the soul. "And those which fell among thorns are the ones who, when they have heard, go forth and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures [*hedone*] of life, and do not bear to maturity" (Luke 8:14). The Lord Jesus warns us of the "choking" effect of riches and pleasures in the parable of the sower. In the university campus where we live, we have observed through the years that young Christian students can be diligent in their involvement in the campus ministry. But soon after their graduation, their commitment tends to shift toward their careers and other secular concerns. Concern for their spiritual lives becomes secondary. Worse, countless others totally abandon their professed faith and live as the world does. Paul warns that "she who lives in self-pleasure has died while living" (1Timothy 5:6).

Third, we must recognize that pursuit of worldly pleasure is futile. Mick Jagger, a rock mega-star, repeatedly echoed this reality in his song *I Can't Get No Satisfaction*. King Solomon, after relentlessly searching for all things pleasurable, concludes that it is all "running after the wind." "I decided to enjoy myself and find out what happiness is. But I found that this is useless, too. I discovered that laughter is foolish, that pleasure does you no good" (Ecclesiastes 2:1-2).

On the other hand, happiness that is centered on the glory of Christ gives true and lasting

pleasure. Moses was born surrounded by the affluence of Egypt. He was destined for a life of ease and pleasure as prince of Egypt. But Moses chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time” (Hebrews 11:25-26). He opted to be with the people of God in the wilderness than live a life of pleasure in the palace. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Lord of glory, left the joy in heaven to suffer on the cross to save His people from their sins. We read in the Bible that “though He was rich, yet He became poor” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ did not please Himself (Romans 15:1-3). He came to earth not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45).

Christian, examine your life. Are you enslaved by some kind of pleasure? Realize that Christ left His glorious abode, suffered, and died on the cross so He can save us from our sins. As unworthy but redeemed sinner, how can you live a life centered on yourself?

CHAPTER 17

POWERLESS CHRISTIANS

“...having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”

(2 Timothy 3:5)

FOR MANY CHRISTIANS TODAY, Christianity has been watered down to a mere form or appearance. They are Christians in name but not in their lives. They have outward piety, their mouth drip of religiosity, they may be regular churchgoers, yet they can still be strangers to the true saving faith. The transforming power of the Holy Spirit is not seen in their lives because they have not truly surrendered their lives to Christ.

The Greek word for power (*dunamis*) is where we got the word “dynamite.” Those who are truly converted have that blast of power in their hearts to crush the old sinful nature and to live for the Lord.

Michael Horton calls this trend of piety devoid of power as “Christless Christianity.” He explains that while people take the name Christian, the label has been emptied of its biblical content. They have removed the historical and biblical Jesus from their brand of Christianity. No wonder, there is no real love for God, no devotion to Christ as Lord, and the fruit of the Spirit is absent in their daily lives.

Priests in Sheep’s Clothing

Eli the high priest had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were priests themselves in the temple of God (1 Samuel 1:3). As priests, they were tasked with the sacred duty of offering sacrifices and to be examples of holy living for the people of God. Yet their lives were the exact opposite. They coveted the meat being sacrificed and forced people to give them their chosen portions even before the meat was sacrificed—a violation of God’s order (1 Samuel 2: 12-17). Worse, they were fornicating with the women serving in the temple (1 Samuel 2:22). Their wickedness earned them the title “sons of worthlessness” (1 Samuel 2:12). They probably thought they could get away with their evil deeds, even as their father had been tolerating their excesses. But the Lord punished them severely. When the Philistines attacked the Israelites, they were utterly routed, the ark of God was captured, and Hophni and Phinehas were both killed (1 Samuel 4:11).

In the New Testament, Christ was particularly outraged with the religious leaders and rebuked them harshly. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:27-28). Christ’s pronouncement against the Pharisees was quite shocking because they presented themselves as paragons of religious morality. Not only did they possess superior knowledge of the Scriptures, they were also the spiritual authorities. Alas, their religion was only a veneer hiding their true sinful nature, their covetousness and pride. Yes, they have the appearance of godliness but devoid of its power.

In Acts, Luke tells of seven brothers who attempted to mimic Paul’s power to heal and cast out demons (Acts 19:13-17). They were the sons of Sceva and were wandering around town supposedly casting out demons. When they saw Paul doing this in the mighty name of Jesus, they thought there was magic in simply saying the name Jesus. So they tried to drive out evil spirits in His name. “But the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:15-16). Yes, you read that right—they fled naked and wounded (not just physically but their pride surely suffered a beating!).

The Nominal Christian Phenomenon

Many believe that the greatest crisis facing Christianity today is the nominal Christian phenomenon. The word “nominal” means “in name only.” It indicates a position devoid of power or attributes befitting that position. The Lausanne Movement defines a nominal Protestant Christian as “one who, within the Protestant tradition, would call himself a Christian, or be so regarded by others, but who has no authentic commitment to Christ based on personal faith.” It identified five types of nominal Christians:

- One who attends church regularly and worships devoutly, but who has no genuine personal relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- One who attends church regularly but for cultural reasons only. For example, a woman may be attending church simply because she was raised up in several generations of Baptists.
- One who attends church only for major church festivals (Christmas, Easter, etc.) and ceremonies (weddings, baptisms, funerals).
- One who hardly ever attends church but maintains a church relationship for reasons of security, emotional or family ties, or tradition.
- One who has no relationship to any specific church and who never attends one, yet considers himself or herself a believer in God (in a Protestant traditional sense).

According to Operation World 2000, there are 1.2 billion (60% of the Christian community) nominal or non-practicing Christians in the world. Think about that number—it is as big as the entire population of China, the most populous country in the world. Think about the difference they can make if even just half of them become true believers in Christ. But worst of all, their souls are in real danger, and they know it not. They think they have secured a place in heaven yet are deceived by false hope. These people, according to one author, are “laughing their way to hell.” That is why Christ sternly warns: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:22-23).

The Bible clearly says that believers in Christ are to be known by their works. "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit" (Matthew 12:33). This is the reason why Paul warns about people who "profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work" (Titus 1:16).

The Root of the Matter

What explains the nominal Christian phenomenon? Why do many people say they are Christians yet their lives say otherwise? Three major developments in the last decades account for the watering down of Christianity, resulting in a lack of commitment by many professing Christians.

The first is the prevailing philosophy of this age. As we discussed earlier, pluralism dominates the current thinking. It denies absolute truth and accepts all rational alternatives as equally valid. Commitment to any belief, opinion, or worldview is considered unacceptable. Thus in religion, every form of belief about God can lead to God, just like climbing a mountain, where all trails lead to the peak.

Consequently, tolerance for other beliefs and perspectives has been redefined. Before, people respected competing ideas. In other words, we can agree to disagree. Now tolerance is equated with having no firm conviction at all. Insisting that one's faith or belief is the correct one is viewed as intolerance.

The second is societal changes. Industrialization and urbanization have led to the breakdown of traditional communities, bringing about radical changes in people's thinking and behavior. Progress has introduced a wide array of choices, not only of goods and services but of ideas as well. In the absence of strong biblical moorings, people have become receptive to humanistic teachings and philosophies. The high rate of mobility due to employment and migration to other countries has led also to a breakdown of old loyalties and affiliations.

The third is ecclesiastical. Our generation has witnessed the invention of the so-called "carnal Christian." A believer is one who has surrendered his or her life to Jesus as Lord and Savior. This means that he or she looks up to Christ as Priest, Lord, and King. As Priest,

because Christ mediates between the sinner and God. As Lord, because Christ should be pre-eminent in his or her life. And as King, because he or she should be subject to Christ's rule and teachings.

True faith is accompanied by repentance or a total turnabout from sin and full commitment to Christ and His teachings. With the rise of shallow evangelicalism, Christ as Savior is emphasized, but His Lordship and Kingship are ignored. Many claim they are Christians but still live a worldly life. To justify this kind of life, a third category of Christians was invented, called "carnal Christians." By definition, these are people who have accepted Jesus as Savior but not as their Lord and King.

There are no carnal Christians found in the Bible. Christ should be accepted both as Savior and Lord (He is not divided). We cannot accept one fact of His Person and reject another. The "carnal Christian" is precisely a Christian by name alone. Just like Hophni and Phinehas, condemnation awaits them if they do not repent.

Nominal Christians harm not only themselves but the entire evangelical Christianity. According to the European Baptist Federation, nominal Christians are one of the greatest impediments to evangelism, especially in Muslim countries. Most foreign workers coming from Christian nations are regarded as Christians by the local people. Their lifestyle and immoral acts, however, make Muslims see themselves as ethically superior to these so-called Christians. As such, the Muslims do not see any reason why they should pay attention to the Christian message.¹

Have you accepted Christ as Savior but are not fully yielding to His Lordship? It is only by completely surrendering to Christ that you will experience the full meaning of conversion, where there is joy and peace in the Lord. If you are the person described above, may you truly surrender your life to Him as your Lord and Savior because a more severe judgment awaits nominal Christians. The Lord Jesus rebuked them sharply: "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). As Charles H. Spurgeon observed: "Many give a 'notional assent' to the gospel. If I were to mention any doctrine, they would say, 'Yes, that is true—I believe that.' But their 'heart' does not believe—they do not believe the gospel in

the core of their nature, for if they did, it would have an 'effect' upon them. A man may say, 'I believe my house is on fire,' but if he goes to bed and falls to sleep, it does not look as if he believed it, for when a man's house is on fire he tries to escape."

IN CLOSING

Paul warns that "evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). This warning was written 2,000 years ago. Since then, our society has gone from bad to worse. Yet we know that our God is sovereign. Amid the sinfulness of men, He can send a mighty revival as He did during the Reformation and many times since then. Let us all unite in praying for the outpouring of the Spirit in our midst. May we see His glory shine among the nations. May the name of Jesus Christ be lifted up in the hearts of many. May we witness that in our lifetime. Amen!

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* A person's affect is *the expression of emotion or feelings displayed to others through facial expressions, hand gestures, voice tone, and other emotional signs such as laughter or tears.*

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