

Wisdom

And

Instruction

Dealing With The Issues of Life

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Situation Ethics

Lesson One

Memory Verse:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

-John 14:15-

Introduction

Even as little children, we constantly try to shed the burden of rules and regulations set in place by those who have authority over us: parents, teachers, and other authority figures. With training, experience, and maturity, most learn the importance of submission to authority, whether it be with respect to civil authorities, employers, or even less significant authorities, such as neighborhood organizations. Disregarding legitimate authority is a recipe for chaos and destruction. Nevertheless, throughout time, many people never “grow out” of their resistance to authority when it comes to the rules and guidelines set in place by God. In the world there are many philosophies that reject God and His word and rely on human wisdom. These philosophies teach that we cannot live by a set of rules, but rather must let each situation dictate the appropriate action. Eager to be “free” from the “limitations” of God’s word, many people are attracted to such doctrines.

This lesson reviews the many hidden dangers in these philosophies; dangers which seduce and ensnare those who want to feel like they are “good people” but without being burdened by the greater moral standard of God.

What Is Situation Ethics?

Ethics is defined, “A series of rules and laws and principles by which we act and which tell us what to do.’ But ‘situation ethics’ is not geared to rules and regulations. This system of ethics refuses to be circumscribed by rules or laws. It says there is nothing right or wrong. Moral behavior is relative, not absolute. Decisions depend on the situation at hand, rather than law” (Weldon E. Warnock, Situation Ethics. Orig. in Abstain from Every Form of Evil, edited by Mike Willis, pg. 13). It is an “approach to morality that is frankly non-biblical” (Robertson McQuilkin, Biblical ethics, pp. 145). In situation ethics, “The decision as to what is right or wrong, good or bad, is relative to the situation at hand” (146). The criteria of right and wrong is self-love.

The claim of those who advocate situation ethics is this: “Situation ethics has only one norm or principle or law (call it what you will) that is binding and unexceptionable, always good and right regardless of the circumstances. That is ‘love’” (Joseph Fletcher, Situation Ethics, pg. 30). They also claim that, “For the situationist there are no rules—none at all” (ibid. pg. 55). In other words, situationists claim that whatever is loving in any given situation is what we must do, even if we are in direct violation of the commands of God.

Because of this claim to be love-based, it is important to understand the situationists’ concept of love and how it compares with that found in the Bible. They claim that, “Circumstances alter rules and principles” (ibid. pg. 29); “all laws and rules and principles and ideals and norms, are only contingent, only valid if they happen to serve love in any situation...the Christian chooses what he believes to be [emphasis added]the demands of love in the present situation” (pp. 30, 55). They say love is not bound by rules, but God says, “love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10). So situation ethics is a system where there are no fixed standards of right and wrong. Rather, our actions are

righteous in any given situation if they are motivated by love, and love is whatever we believe it to be in that situation. So in effect, right or wrong is whatever we decide it to be and we can define it differently in every situation. All we need to do is rationalize that we are motivated by love.

In short, situation ethics is a means by which men justify themselves, claiming that their sins are not sins at all but actually acts of love, and all the while they leave God utterly and completely out of the equation. Based on this self delusion, if a man thinks it would be good to lie in a given situation, then that is what he should do, even though God condemns lying (Rev. 21:8). If a woman thinks it is good to commit adultery in a given situation, then that is what she should do, even though God condemns adultery (1 Cor. 6:9). If two people of the same gender love each other (romantically), then they should be allowed to marry, even though God condemns homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The Effects of Situation Ethics

Situation ethics removes God's standard while leaving it up to man to decide what is right or wrong. "The situationist wages war against the law, aggressively denouncing the law of God as a standard of life" (McQuilkin, pg. 153). They claim that men have evolved, become enlightened to the point that the laws in the Bible are of no use to us any more. They claim that only the individual has the ability to choose what is right or wrong in his present situation.

Even though God is love, situation ethics removes every thought of God in connection with love. As noted previously, Joseph Fletcher, a leading proponent of situation ethics, stated, "Situation ethics has only one norm or principle or law (call it what you will) that is binding and unexceptionable, always good and right regardless of the circumstances. That is 'love'" (pg. 30). Notwithstanding this claim of being love-based, it is a love for which "there are no rules—none at all" (pg. 55). Therefore, they say they strive to fulfill the law of love, but in fulfilling their law of love they forsake the true source of genuine love—God (1 John 4:16). Situationists say that love is not defined by law, but God says "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10). And again, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Finally, "If you keep My commandments, you abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

Situation ethics exalts human wisdom and nature above God. God created man dependent upon Him for life. "LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). Yet, situation ethics assumes that men have the complete knowledge and wisdom needed to determine what is right and wrong without the aid of God's divine revelation. "You must decide for yourself as you face each decision: what would love do" (McQuilkin, pg. 149). Interestingly, situationists claim that men have outgrown God. Yet of God it is written, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). Who would you rather trust with your soul, men who have sinned from the beginning, or God who created the universe and sent His son to die for our sins?

Situation Ethics and the Bible

Matt. 12:1-8: Jesus and situation ethics. Situationists say that in this passage Jesus used situation ethics to justify the sins of His disciples by justifying the sin of David. They reason as follows: David was allowed to eat the forbidden bread because he was hungry. Therefore, God allows us to sin if by doing so if we think it is in our best interest or the best interest of others and it upholds our standard of love. However, a closer examination of this passage will show that Jesus approved of no such thing. The Pharisees approved of David even though he committed this sin. But Jesus said His disciples were "guiltless" (vs. 5). Jesus showed that the Pharisees were guilty of partiality by approving of David's sin while condemning His disciples even though they were innocent. Jesus

then shows that at times mercy is necessary. But there is a difference between mercy and the doctrine of situation ethics. He shows that there are some specific commands of God that appear to defile the law, but do not because they are righteous in themselves (i.e. removing a donkey from a ditch, performing the service of the priests). It is not a sin to pull a donkey out of a ditch. Therefore, to show mercy to the donkey on the Sabbath was acceptable. However, it is sinful to commit adultery. Therefore, no matter what situation one is placed in, to commit adultery is still sinful. Notice the difference: Jesus said it was acceptable to show mercy by doing righteousness, but the situationist seeks to show mercy by doing a sinful thing (i.e. committing adultery, stealing, etc.).

God warns us against this kind of doctrine. Proponents of situation ethics are guilty of the sins which Paul exposed in Romans 1:18-32. Situationists claim that they have outgrown then need for God's word. Of these men Paul wrote, "Professing to be wise, they became fools" (vs. 22). They say that we must decide for ourselves what is right and wrong without the law. Of such, Paul also said they "became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened" (vs. 21). They say that nothing is truly wrong in and of itself, but all things are right depending on the situation. Concerning this, it says, "who exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (vs. 25). "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness" (vs. 28-29).

In the days of Isaiah the prophet, Israel fell into this same way of thinking. The situationist says that even the vilest of sins is good if the situation calls for it. Of these men Isaiah wrote, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20). They say that they have outgrown God's word; they are wise enough to choose for themselves. Of these men Isaiah wrote, "*Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight*" (Isa. 5:21).

The situationist says that we can forsake the ordinances of God in order to fulfill love. However, God says that the very purpose of the law is to teach us how to show love. "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*' *This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*" (Matt. 22:37-40). And again, "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm" (1 Tim. 1:5-7).

Conclusion

The truth is, when we obey God's law toward one another we are showing the greatest form of love that exists. Love and the law of God are inseparable. The moment we say that we no longer need God's word is the moment we stop loving our neighbors. We must see, therefore, that the purpose of situation ethics is not to show love toward one another, but to destroy God's righteous standard and to make men feel like they are doing right when in fact they are neck deep in sin. When dealing with issues of morality or any other Bible subject we must avoid the line of reasoning known as situation ethics at all costs and strive always to look to God's wisdom and instruction.

Questions

Lesson One

1. What is situation ethics?
2. In what passage does Paul prophecy of this form of doctrine? Explain why this doctrine fits his description.
3. What does situation ethics seek to do with God's law.
4. What is the supposed motivation behind situation ethics; what does it seek to accomplish according to its proponents?
5. Did Jesus support situation ethics in Matt. 12:1-8? Explain.
6. Is the love supposedly sought after by situationists the same as the love of God? Explain.
7. What are some of the effects of situation ethics?
8. List several things that Paul says concerning those who live their lives according to doctrines such as situation ethics:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
9. List two things Isaiah says about these people:
 - a.
 - b.
10. If we truly have love for our neighbors, how will we view God's law? Why?

Secular Humanism

Lesson Two

Memory Verse:

“There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”
-Proverbs 16:25-

Introduction

In the previous lesson we discussed situation ethics, a doctrine by which men seek to make themselves the standard of right and wrong. That doctrine is just one aspect of an entire system which seeks to exalt man as the supreme being and demote God to a figment of man’s imagination. This system is known as humanism. Though many people may not be familiar with this subject, its influence can be seen throughout our society and thus, affects everyone. Therefore, it is important that we consider the nature of Secular Humanism and look to God’s wisdom and instruction to know how to overcome it.

What Is “Secular Humanism?”

The following are quotes from professed humanists in which they define their philosophy. “There is no ‘savior.’ Not Jesus, not L. Ron, not Buddha nor Yahweh nor Zeus nor Jehovah nor any of the other myriad fantasies invented by humanity to avoid accepting reality...Reality is tough, but living a life in fantasy is no solution. The brand of religion you choose makes little difference, since all religion is based on escapist fantasy” (Brent Yaciw. Letter to Editor. St. Petersburg Times 18 Nov. 1991, 9.A). “We believe, however, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so...As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity” (American Humanist Associate. Humanist Manifesto II, www.jcn.com/manifestos.html). “I am convinced that the battle for humankind’s future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith: a religion of humanity that recognizes and respects the spark of what theologians call divinity in every human being...The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new...the rotting corpse of Christianity, together with all its adjacent evils and misery, and the new faith of humanism” (John Dunphy. Humanist Magazine. Jan/Feb, 1983, pg. 26).

Some of the basic tenets of humanism (Mike Willis. Humanism: The Exaltation of Man. Guardian of Truth XVIII: 13, pg. 385). 1) It affirms that the universe is self-existent and denies that it was created. Thus, it affirms the eternity of matter and denies the existence of God and His word of creation. 2) It affirms that man is totally physical, thus denying that man has a spirit or soul. 3) It affirms that religion is the result of social evolution. 4) It denies that God is the ultimate good, thus denying that men do either that which is really (objectively) wrong or that which is really (objectively) right. 5) It affirms that the ultimate end of man’s life is to be found in the here and now. Humanism rejects Heaven; it denies there is a Hell. 6) It holds that man alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, thus, holding that God has nothing whatsoever to do with it.

In summary, humanism is the demotion of God and the glorification of man as supreme being in creation. The humanist philosophy says that man alone is able to achieve the fullness of his potential and glory and that God only hinders that effort. It is doctrine—a system of faith, of moral standards established by the wisdom of men. It is also an influence—a general attitude or philosophy that permeates our society. “Humanism stresses that this life is all there is—that our existence is extremely brief and ultimately hopeless” (Tom Moody, *Humanism and the Bible*. *Guardian of Truth* XXVIII: 13, pg. 405, July 5, 1984). Thus, it is an enemy force that wages war on the very idea of religion.

The Effects of Humanism in the World Around Us

The influence of humanism does not always present itself in the form of blatant attacks. Certainly, as we have seen, attacks against religion by humanists are bold and dogmatic. “In fact, some organizations, such as the American Humanist Association, are more ‘evangelistic’ than some churches” (Moody, pg. 403). But the fact remains that the biggest influence of humanism does not come from bold attacks, but from everyday decisions, statements, activities, etc. from average people all over our country. The principles of humanism can be seen in the laws that are passed, in the way teachers teach their subjects, in comments that are made on television programs etc.

Every part of our lives is affected by humanism. Even the most basic and seemingly innocent television shows are laced with doctrines of humanism. They contain teachings on evolution, acceptance of homosexuality and other forms of sexual immorality, discouraging the glorification of God and encouraging the glorification of man. “Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process...science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces” (Manifestos, pp. 8, 17). Concerning the effect Humanism is having in public schools, Pratte notes, “It is widely known that the Bible, God, and prayer have been banned from the public schools, mainly as the result of the efforts of the atheistic/humanistic American Civil Liberties Union and Madalyn Murray O’Hair” (David Pratte, *Humanism And The Public Schools*. *Guardian of Truth* XXVIII: 13, pg. 397).

Even the church is being affected by the influence of humanism in the way some Bible teachers are teaching their classes. In his tract titled *Relevance? or Humanism?*, Bob Waldron shows various ways in which the philosophies of humanism have infiltrated our Bible classes. “The humanist says that the Bible is out of date. He says the only way we can get any benefit from its pages is to ‘make it relevant’ Please do not be deceived—this is Satan talking! He is saying that God could not design a book that would fit every generation, that modern man has outgrown the lessons found in the Bible” (pg. 7). How is this affecting our Bible classes? “Workbook after workbook written and used by our brethren tells the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 (John 6:1-14) by emphasizing how ‘nice’ it was for that little boy to ‘share his lunch.’ The rest of the lesson is spent talking about how we ought to share with one another. But that is not the lesson in the Scriptures at all!...Instead, the lesson is that this man [Jesus]...was really the Creator of the universe...” (pg. 7). Many other examples such as this can be cited, but there is not room here.

If we are not careful, humanism can draw us away from the truth of God’s word. It is up to parents, preachers, elders, and Bible class teachers to make sure their eyes are open to the influences of humanism. For many, there really is no awareness of its influence. But if we are made aware and are striving to fight its influence, then we will be successful. “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). If we and our children are not educated on the dangers of humanism, then we may gradually give in to that way of thinking. Then the next time we read where God says something is wrong, we may disagree

because “that person should be able to do whatever makes him or her feel good.” That is what humanism would teach. Therefore we must take care when considering what activities and programs we allow our children to participate in and what materials we allow our children to read. “Test all things” (1 Thess. 5:21). The influence of humanism cannot be avoided, but we can educate ourselves and our children about its philosophies and dangers and learn to overcome them in our own lives. “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the *ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart...But you have not so learned Christ...*” (Eph. 4:17-24).

Overcoming Secular Humanism.

Humanism is anti religious, yet it is by all definitions itself a religion. It is a system or standard that one must accept based upon faith. Faith is the conclusion we come to when we have considered the evidence provided. The conclusion or faith that the evolutionist chooses to accept is that the universe evolved. Man is the result of natural forces and is, therefore, accountable to no one but himself. The conclusion or faith that the Christian chooses to accept is that God created the universe. He has revealed Himself to man and, as His creation, man is accountable to Him (Rom. 1:18-20). The conclusion or faith that the humanist chooses to accept is that there is no God. They choose to believe that man is the supreme being in the universe.

Humanism is a faith. By claiming no true moral standard, humanists as a result establish that as their moral standard. It says there is no absolute truth, but to say “there is no absolute truth,” would be to state an absolute truth. Thus, they accept their own standard of what they want truth to be, whereas in other religious bodies men choose other standards of truth. But Jesus said to the Father, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Humanist advocates seek to sway other people over to their beliefs. In religion this is called evangelism.

Though the term “Humanism” is new, the principles upon which it is based have been around for generations. In Rom 1:21-32 Paul writes of generations past who “did not like to retain God in their knowledge” and “exchanged the truth of God for a lie.” Humanism teaches that there is no absolute truth. But the Bible teaches otherwise. “The fear of the Lord” is “the beginning of wisdom” and “the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). True wisdom is seen in those who acknowledge the reality of God and come to Christ. Jesus alone is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Just because men want to ignore God, it does not mean He is not there. We would not be here without God, for He created us. Neither would we last long, for He sustains us and directs our steps down the right path. “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23). “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 16:25). See also Isa. 29:2.

In spite of his accomplishments, the wisdom of man is nothing compared to the wisdom of God. “*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He catches the wise in their own craftiness; and again, The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.*” Therefore let no one boast in men...” (1 Cor. 3:19-21). “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9).

Conclusion

Humanism as an influence is all around us. Let us learn to keep our eyes open. Let us fill ourselves up with God’s word so that when humanism does start to seep into our lives we can cast it away from us (1 Cor. 10:4-5).

Questions

Lesson Two

True or False:

- _____ 1. Humanism is a good, wholesome principle that seeks to draw men closer to God.
- _____ 2. Humanism affects every part of our lives.
- _____ 3. We don't need to worry about humanism affecting the church.
- _____ 4. If we are not careful, humanism can draw us away from God and His truth.
- _____ 5. Even though humanism is anti-religious, it is in fact a type of faith.
- _____ 6. The wisdom of man is comparable to that of God.

Short Answer:

- 1. What is humanism?
- 2. What is the humanist's view of God and Jesus?
- 3. List three basic tenets of humanism:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
- 4. Where do we see the biggest influence of humanism?
- 5. What areas of our lives are affected by humanism? Explain.
- 6. Is the church affected by humanism? How?
- 7. List three scriptures that condemn the kind of doctrine present by humanism:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

Transforming Vs. Conforming

Lesson Three

Memory Verse:

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

-Romans 12:2-

Introduction

Many people view living in the world has being free from restraint and doing whatever they want. In truth they are not free from anything, but are being controlled by their own lusts and by the pressure to conform to the world's standard. If we choose to conform to the world we are giving up control of our lives to the world. However, God shows us that we can have greater fulfillment by taking control of our lives and seeking His righteous standard. Therefore, we are commanded in Rom. 12:2 to not be conformed to the world, but to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In this lesson we will examine God's wisdom and instruction for overcoming the pressure that the world places on us to conform.

“Be Not Conformed to This World.”

“Conformed” is defined, “to fashion one's self according to” (Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament, pg. 70), “to fashion or shape one thing like another” (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, pg. 229). Ultimately there are two standards by which men walk: the standard of the world and the standard of God. Whichever one we look to in our lives is what we become conformed to; we fashion ourselves to be like that standard. In Rom. 12:2 God commands us to NOT be fashioned according to the world.

The world only seeks to fulfill its own lusts. It thrives on doing what feels good. It tries to find fulfillment in life separate from God (Rom. 1:21ff.). Most of the methods used in the world to find fulfillment are harmful and destructive (drugs, fornication, gambling, etc.). Even the way the world seeks popularity and power is destructive. As it says in James 4:1-3, “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.” We must avoid all of these things, not only because they are destructive, but because they are the reason God is going to judge the world. “Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them” (Col. 3:6-7).

In 1 Sam. 8:5 Israel wanted to have a king to judge them “like all the nations.” But by making this request they rejected God. Though they were eventually given a king, over the next few centuries they grew farther and farther away from God and began turning to the false gods of the other nations. Eventually the kingdom split, the northern half was destroyed, and the southern half was taken into captivity for many years. Conforming to the world was not as good as it seemed.

“Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind.”

Many people conform to the world because they want to be accepted. But as God told Cain, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” (Gen. 4:7). In order to be accepted by the world we will have to do many foolish and harmful things. But with God it is not so. Where the world seeks to tear us down,

God only seeks to build us up and help us to learn and practice the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). True joy can only come from being transformed according to God's standard.

"Transformed" is defined, "change, transfigure" (Strong's, 47), "to change into another form...undergo a complete change..." (Vine's, 1171). It is the word from which we get metamorphosis. The rest of the world is only interested in fulfilling its own lusts and desires, but as we have seen, whatever fulfillment they enjoy is short lived. God, on the other hand, shows us that when we transform our lives to His standard we can have a life free from regrets and have the hope of a reward which will never be taken away (Matt. 6:19-21).

"By the renewing of your mind." This means renew your understanding of what is important and of what is right and wrong. If we want to change our lives we must begin by changing our minds or hearts (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 12:34-35). We do this by looking to God's word. He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Jesus teaches that when we establish our lives upon His words nothing will be able to tear us down (Matt. 7:24-27). But we must be willing to open our minds to the wisdom and instruction of God and put it to use in our lives. Many people do not agree with the ways of the world, but they conform anyway. Why? Because they put more value on worldly things than on godly things. Some of the Jewish leaders believed in Jesus as the Christ, but they would not confess Him because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43). The only way to overcome this is to change the way we think about the world and the things in the world. "Do not love the world or the things in the world" (1 John 2:15). Rather than looking to the world as our standard, we must renew our minds and begin looking to God.

Overcoming

We can either choose to be controlled, or to take control of our lives.

Secure your heart (Prov. 4:23). Know what is the right thing to do and reach for that standard. Build a barrier between you and the world. At the Grand Canyon there is a guardrail around the observation platform so that visitors do not draw too near the edge and fall off. We must create such a barrier for our hearts. Look for those things that are capable of leading us over the edge and avoid them (i.e. not spending too much time alone with a boy/girl, changing the channel when questionable movies are on, avoiding friendship with people with questionable moral character, etc.).

Consider the consequences: Every action has its consequences. When we are tempted or being pressured by peers to conform, we must remember the consequences of living like the world. What will happen to our grades or to our jobs if we choose to do drugs? What will happen to our souls if we make friends with people who do not care about God? How will I care for a child if I choose to have pre-marital sex? Am I willing to give up my salvation?

Lay aside every weight. Sometimes what prevent us from being transformed are things that already exist in our lives. But we are told in Heb. 12:1 to lay aside these weights so that we can run the race before us. In order to overcome the world we must be willing to cast off the things of the world.

Be Strong. Doing the right thing can be hard, especially with so many people in the world trying to pull us over to their side. But we must determine to be strong. As Paul said, "stand fast in the Lord" (Phil. 4:1). Sometimes even our own desires can cause us to conform. But we must have the determination to do what is right. We must hold on tight to the truth and to God's righteous standard and not give up. It is our means of survival and we must be willing to hold on at all costs.

Do you find yourself being conformed to the world, striving please others instead of God? Consider your life, where you are going, where you will end up. If you want to control the outcome then do not be conformed to the world, but renew your mind and be transformed.

Questions

Lesson Three

True or False:

- _____ 1. When we are conformed to the world we are able to have true freedom.
- _____ 2. The world only seeks to fulfill its own desires.
- _____ 3. Most of the methods used in the world to find fulfillment are good and wholesome.
- _____ 4. By asking for a king “like all the nations” Israel made things much better for themselves.
- _____ 5. In order to overcome the world we must be willing lay aside things in our lives that hold us back.
- _____ 6. In order to be in control of our lives we have to be strong and determined.

Short Answer

(Provide Scripture to support your answers where possible)

- 1. What does it mean to be conformed to the world?
- 2. How do people in the world seek fulfillment in their lives? What does this do to a person’s relationship with God?
- 3. What is the main cause for much of the chaos that is in the world?
- 4. Why did Israel want a king? What did this do to their relationship with God? What was the eventual outcome of this attitude?
- 5. What does it mean to be transformed?
- 6. Where must our transformation begin? Explain.
- 7. List four things we can do to help us avoid conforming to the world:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Bad Company

Corrupts Good Morals

Lesson Four

Memory Verse:

“Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.”
-1 Corinthians 15:33-
(NAS)

Introduction

That all men need companionship is a fact of life. It is also true that the companions that we choose will greatly affect our character and quality of life. Therefore, people of all ages need to gain the wisdom to detect individuals who could be a dangerous influence. We need to be wise. Many people around us may act friendly, but God gives us wisdom and instruction to help us avoid the pitfalls that come with evil companionship.

The Importance of Good Friends

Our companions affect our relationship with God. Many people, especially young people, read or hear lessons such as this one, but do not give them a second thought. If we care anything for our salvation then we will take a good, hard look at God’s instruction concerning our companions. If we choose companions that are of the world, living according to the ways of the world, then we are in grave danger. “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself any enemy of God” (James 4:4). Therefore, God has much to say about who we choose as friends. He warns us of those whom we must avoid, and instructs us concerning the character of those whom we should befriend.

Avoiding Bad Company

THE ANGRY PERSON: Prov. 22:24-25 “Do not associate with a man given to anger...” Association with people who are habitually angry can be very dangerous, especially when we start admiring such an angry man because it appears that his anger enables him to get his way! His anger will affect our own attitude, it will affect other people’s opinion of us, and it will affect our salvation.

THE GOSSIP: Prov. 11:13 “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets.” Even adults have a difficult time resisting the urge to listen to juicy bits of gossip; we also seem to thrive on such, probably because for the moment it makes us feel superior to others. We have a difficult enough time trying not to spread tales or gossip about what other people have or have not been doing. We don’t need to make matters worse by befriendng those who do nothing but gossip. In the scriptures we are commanded to not keep company with busybodies (2 Thess. 3:11, 14).

THE FAIR-WEATHER FRIEND: Prov. 14:20 “The poor is hated even by his neighbor, but those who love the rich are many.” This desire to have all the “right” friends can start early in life. However, it is nothing more than seeking to manipulate people for our own personal advantage (Prov. 19:4; 18:23-24; 19:6, 7). “People will run after the rich, hoping to gain something; but they will avoid the poor, fearing that the poor might be trying to gain something from them” (Gaebelin pg. 1031). There are many fair-weather friends who will flock to us when times are good and will immediately abandon

us when times are not so good. We need to discern when people are simply trying to use us or when people only like us for what we give them. Such friends will only use us and drag us down.

THE UNGODLY, SINNERS, SCOFFERS (Ps. 1:1-3): In Ps. 1:1 we are told that the one who avoids these kinds of people is “blessed.” The ungodly are those who do not care about righteousness, those that do wrong, who practice, even enjoy doing that which is sinful. “Wicked, ungodly, guilty” (Vine’s). Sinners are those who “live a lifestyle or act in a way that deviates from that which God has marked out” (Vine’s). Scoffers are those who hold good things in derision, who speak evil of that which is good, and who speak evil of other people. Though they do not know it, many young people who slander their parents are sitting in the seat of scoffers. To be a companion to those who have these characteristics is to make ourselves one of them. If our companions speak evil of the things of God and hold true righteousness in contempt, then how do we suppose they are going to help us do right? Those who practice such things “are like the chaff that the wind drives away,” and “shall not stand in the judgment.” But if we seek companionship with the righteous and strive to be righteous then, as it says in Psalm 1, we shall “be like [trees] planted by the rivers of water that bring forth fruit in [their] season...”

What Kind of Companions We Should Seek

We can know whether our companions are good or bad by the things they encourage us to do. For example, if we are embarrassed to do good when our friends are around, then those friends are not the right kind of friends. Are we too embarrassed to invite them to the services of the church? Young people, are you embarrassed to show honor to your parents when they are around? In Gal. 2:11-16, Peter stopped doing the right thing when certain men came to Antioch from Jerusalem. He was in sin, and so are we when our friends prevent us from doing good.

God instructs us to seek friends that have the kind of character that we are striving to attain ourselves. According to Prov. 13:20, if we seek wisdom then we must seek companionship with those who are wise. But if we seek companionship with fools then we will be a fool. In Rom. 12:16 we are instructed to associate with the humble. Do your friends encourage behavior that is irresponsible, immature, or contrary to what the will of God? Then perhaps you have the wrong kind of friends. True friends are those who seek good, wholesome goals along with you, help you when you face temptation, rebuke you when you are in sin, and lift you up when you are in need of strength (Prov. 18:24; Prov. 27:6).

Many people will not insist on doing what is right because they are afraid that they will lose their friends or their popularity (John 12:42-43). But if we are to avoid evil companionship then this is exactly what we must be doing. If we insist on doing what is right and our friends mock us, embarrass us, or try to persuade us to do otherwise, then we need to reconsider their value as companions. The psalmist wrote, “I am a companion of all who fear You [God], and of those who keep Your precepts” (Ps. 119:63). Are you able to say this about yourself? Jesus shows us that the spiritual family which is faithful to God is more valuable even than our fleshly families, “But He answered and said to *the one who told Him, ‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’ And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother’*” (Matt. 12:48-50).

Conclusion

God created us with a need for companionship. Like everything else, He has instructed in how to choose the right kind of companionship. Do not despise your own soul. Rather, seek a better life and a stronger faith by finding companions who fear the Lord.

Questions

Lesson Four

True or False:

- _____ 1. The kind of friends a person chooses really has no affect on his life.
- _____ 2. God has much to say about the kind of friends we choose.
- _____ 3. It is natural and acceptable if we are embarrassed to do good around our friends.
- _____ 4. It is better to loose a friend by doing the right things than to gain a friend by doing the wrong thing.
- _____ 5. Those who obey God can become closer to us than blood relatives.

Short Answer:

- 1. Why should we avoid bad company?
- 2. List four kinds of people that we should avoid keeping company with and give verses that describe their character:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
- 3. What will happen to us if we keep company with those who have the characteristics listed above?
- 4. How can we know whether our companions are good or bad for us?
- 5. How can we test the motives of our companions?
- 6. How does our company affect our relationship with God?

Honor Your Parents

Lesson Five

Memory Verse:

“Children, obey your parents in *the Lord*, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise.”

-Ephesians 6:1-2-

Introduction

In today’s world children are rarely taught to respect and honor their parents. They are often seen arguing with, even insulting their parents in public. Such blatant disrespect for parents has been a problem in the world for generations, but it would seem that in recent years it has only gotten worse. But God teaches us in 2 Tim. 3:1-4 that not honoring parents is just as serious as blasphemy and slander. Therefore, in this lesson we are going to learn the principles of honor, the consequences of not showing honor to our parents, and the benefits and blessings enjoyed by those who fulfill the command to “Honor your father and your mother.”

Honor Father and Mother

This is one of the very first things children must be taught. Honor is defined, “Value. Fix a valuation upon, by implication, to revere” (Strong’s). Thus, to honor our parents means to place them in high esteem, to value them and, as a result, show them respect through obedience. Therefore, Paul combines this command with “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). Children must be taught how to honor their mother and father. They must learn to value the guidance provided by the parents as well as physical blessings that they provide. Children need to develop an attitude of appreciation for the sacrifices that parents make in order to give their children the life that they have.

Because of what this command entails, it is much easier to learn when we are younger rather than older. When children are young they are most willing to receive correction and instruction from their parents. When their parents raise their children with nurturing, training, and admonition the children will continue to hold them in high esteem and value their guidance. But if this attitude is not encouraged when children are young then gradually they move apart from their parents. Guidelines become viewed more as annoyances, eventually the children want nothing to do with their parents. We cannot stress enough the need for parents to teach their children about honor when they are very young. This is included in principles brought out in Prov. 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

This is not to say, however, that such honor cannot be learned when children are older. Regardless of a child’s age or past experience, it is the child’s duty before God to show honor to his/her parents. Even though the child may not hold his/her parents in high esteem now, with a little humility and self-control he/she can soon learn the value of having parents in his/her life. “Honoring one’s parents is a command that remains constant throughout a child’s life and into adulthood. In the early years, however, children demonstrate honor by obedience. As a child matures, his obedience out of duty evolves to a devotion out of submission” (Ezzo, *Growing Kids God’s Way*, pg. 147). When we learn to honor our parents while under their supervision, we will be prepared to show them honor as we become more independent (Prov. 22:6).

How do we Honor our Father and Mother?

Honor requires a combination of thought, words, and actions. The Jews honored God with their lips, but Jesus said, “But their hearts are far from Me” (Matt. 15:8-9). In spite of their lip service, these people did not honor God in their hearts and they were not following His law as He had instructed. What we say about someone ought to be a reflection of what is in our hearts. Young people need to learn the value of listening to their parents’ instructions: i.e., why it is good keep the room clean, not do drugs, not hangout with mischievous people, helping other people, etc. Though children may not always understand the reasoning of

their parents, with patience and self-control they will soon come to find out that it is better to honor their parents rather than rebel.

While under the care of our parents, honoring them is accomplished through simple obedience. In Eph. 4:1-2 Paul showed that obedience and showing honor to parents were the same. Parents have a big part to play in teaching their children how to be obedient. It is not enough to simply tell them what to do and expect absolute adherence. Obedience is learned, therefore it must be taught by the parents. It is their responsibility to show the benefits of obedience. Training requires time, effort and much sacrifice. “There will be many times when your child will reject or strongly oppose your reasonable instructions. What should you do? Teach him to obey according to the character of true obedience—immediately, completely, without challenge, and without complaint” (Ezzo, pg. 147-148). This task is a difficult one, but not impossible. Teaching obedience should be just as important as teaching children to stay out of the fire. If it is not learned, then great damage will be done.

When we have grown and are no longer under our parents, this command is still binding, though it may be fulfilled in a slightly different way. The honor that we developed as children is culminated in our caring for our parents when they are older. For example, children are to show honor to their widows (mothers) according to 1 Tim. 5:3, 4. This kind of honor is fulfilled by the caring for their physical needs. Notice what it says, “let them repay their parents...” For what? For all the sacrifices they made to make sure we can make it in this world. “...for this is good and acceptable before God.”

Consequences of Being Stubborn and Rebellious

There are few things more disgusting than a child seen rebelling against his parents in public or at any time. Sadly, however, honoring parents is not very popular in the world. But God shows us that such rebellion is not without its consequences. Young people may feel as if they are fighting for their freedom by rebelling against and disrespecting their parents, but they will soon learn that there is more of bondage than freedom down that path. In the Old Testament, rebellious children were to be stoned (Deut. 21:18-21). This is not to say we should stone children today if they are rebellious. But it does illustrate God’s great disdain for stubbornness and rebellion. Children need to see this point!

Today there is only hardship, turmoil, and trouble for children who will not obey their parents. If they do not learn respect for authority when they are young, then they will not respect authority when they are older. This has caused many problems for many young people. Such turmoil is described in Prov. 5:7-14.

There are eternal consequences as well. If a child has disdain for his/her parents, it is an abomination to the Lord (2 Tim. 3:1ff). God is our ultimate authority and He is the one that gave authority to parents. If we do not respect that, then why should we think we should receive the blessings of the Lord? But the scriptures say, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them” (Eph. 5:6-7).

Conclusion

Obedience is not over-rated. Children, do you want freedom? Do you want to be treated like adults? The only way to achieve these things is to heed the instructions of your parents in the Lord. Their guidance is the key to unlocking the freedom that can be enjoyed. But if you feel that rebelling is the only way, then know this, you are locking your own door and throwing the key away. Trust the Lord, honor your father and mother “that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:3).

Questions

Lesson Five

True or False:

- _____ 1. Most children today honor their parents.
- _____ 2. Honoring their parents is something that children need to be taught.
- _____ 3. A child honors his/her parents by simply saying good things about them.
- _____ 4. The command to honor our parents is binding even when we are no longer under our parents' care.
- _____ 5. The consequences of not honoring our parents are harmless and really don't matter.

Short Answer:

- 1. What does the word "honor" mean?
- 2. When is the best time to teach children how to honor their parents?
- 3. How do children show honor to their parents while under their supervision? Give a scripture to support your answer.
- 4. How do children show honor to their parents when they have grown and are no longer living with their parents? Give a scripture to support your answer.
- 5. What happened to stubborn and rebellious children under the Law of Moses? Give a scripture. What can we learn from this?
- 6. What sort of consequences, both immediate and eternal, happen to children who do not honor their parents?
- 7. What are the benefits of honoring our parents?

What It Means To “Seek First”

Lesson Six

Memory Verse:

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”
-Matthew 6:33-

Introduction

One of the most difficult things for people to learn is how to put “first things first.” Many people have priorities in their life, but their priorities are often misplaced. Jesus teaches us about priorities in the Sermon on the Mount. He helps us to learn what must come first in our lives so that our efforts to serve Him do not become misguided or misdirected. In this lesson we are going to consider God’s wisdom and instruction for sorting out our priorities.

What it Means to “Seek First.”

Jesus instructed His disciples to “count the cost” of being His disciple (Luke 14:28). This means estimating the value of following Him (the value of the kingdom) compared with the value of living in the world. As with anything in this life, that which costs more will be given preeminence or top priority. Everything else plays “second fiddle” to the thing with the most value. When Jesus said “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” He was saying that we must give the kingdom top priority in our lives. The kingdom of God must hold the highest value so that nothing else can get in the way of our attaining it. We must lay up our treasure in heaven. Make it the most valuable thing in our lives (Matt. 6:19-21). To seek first means to cast off everything that hinders our attaining what we seek. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and *sells all that he has* and buys that field” (Matt. 13:44). “Yet indeed I also *count all things loss* for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

God Must Be First

God is a jealous God (Ex. 20:2-5). He created us (Gen. 1-2). He loved us and gave His Son for us so that we might be with Him (John 3:16). We see then the great value we hold in His sight. Therefore, like a husband is jealous for His bride, so God is jealous for His people. He has given us all things first, so we must put Him first in our lives. He desires our love (Mark 12:30) and He desires our obedience and faithfulness (Eccl. 12:13). Jesus shows us how to put God first. In Matt. 4:2-4, though Jesus was hungry, He put the Father before His own physical needs. When tested by Satan Jesus said, “It is written” and then showed true loyalty to God. When Jesus knew that His time of suffering was near, He said to the Father, “nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Therefore, whatever we desire, we will choose to do God’s will over our own.

We must put God first. According to James 4:4-8, we are not to seek friendship with the world. To do so would be to make us enemies of God. We must set our affections (our desires, our hopes, our longings) on things above. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2). This means that we long for and take joy in the things that are from God and not in vain worldly things. Bible study must take preeminence over television. Assembling with the saints must take preeminence over the Super Bowl, jobs, friends, even family. Loving, helping, serving others must take preeminence over selfish ambitions.

Jesus Must Be First

As the Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world, Jesus has the preeminence (Col. 1:16-18). He has been glorified by the Father (Acts 2:32-36). Therefore the Father said of Him, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him” (Luke 9:35; c.f. 2 Pet. 1:17). If we put God first, then we must put Jesus first also, for they are one (John 10:30; 17:21). To be a disciple or follower of Christ requires that we give Him and His teachings top priority in our lives. If we truly want to be His disciples then we must put Him before the cares of this world (Luke 9:57-62). This means that whatever pressing issues we face in this life, obedience to Christ is even more pressing. As His disciples we must be willing to set aside our own wants and desires if we are to follow Him as we ought to. For in following Him we will face persecution and trials. If we do not put Him before our own desires, then we will never remain faithful (Luke 9:23-26).

Since Jesus died for us, we must give our lives to Him. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). As He purchased us with His own blood (Acts 20:28), we belong to Him and are meant for His service. We cannot allow worldly desires and worldly activities to prevent us from obeying His commandments. If we do, then the world becomes our master (Gal. 1:10).

If God And Christ Are First, Then Their Kingdom Will Be First

Combine all that we have learned. What we seek is “The kingdom of God,” and Christ is its King (1 Tim. 6:15). Therefore, if we value God and Christ, then their kingdom will be our highest goal. For if our lives belong to God then His heavenly kingdom will be our home, not this earth. If the kingdom is our home then we will live like people who belong to that kingdom and not like people who belong to the kingdoms of the world.

Seeking first the kingdom and doing the will of God are the same. The kingdom is the prize and the will of God is the path. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, *but he who does the will of My Father* in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Therefore Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God *and His righteousness.*” We cannot attain the kingdom without the righteousness of God. Many of the Jews tried to establish their own righteousness, not following all the commands of God, and they were prevented from entering the kingdom because of it (Rom. 10:2-3). To simply feel righteous is not enough. We cannot enter the kingdom by simply being a good person. We must be devoted to attaining the righteousness of God in all faithfulness, loyalty, and submission. Regardless of what we think is good or important, God’s righteousness must be first.

Those who seek first the things of this world constantly worry about attaining physical things and fulfilling their physical needs. But for those who are seeking first the kingdom of God, they are assured that God will provide for all of those needs. Therefore, there is no reason to fret or be anxious about our food, our jobs, our clothing, etc., for we know that the Lord will provide. Therefore, Jesus said that we must not worry about those physical things. God knows we need them. If we seek first the kingdom, then God will supply our needs (Matt. 6:31-33). Abraham taught us the value of seeking God’s kingdom first when he was willing to offer up Isaac, his only son, according to the command of the Lord. He was willing to do it because he had great trust that the Lord would provide (Gen. 22:8; Heb. 11:17-19). Likewise, if we are seeking first the kingdom, then God will provide for all of our physical needs as well as “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3).

Conclusion

To begin seeking the kingdom one must first become a disciple of Christ. As His disciples, we can follow in His footsteps and learn how to put first things first. In so doing we will have greater blessings than we could ever imagine in this life.

Questions

Lesson Six

True or False:

- _____ 1. As long as we say we love God, our priorities do not matter.
- _____ 2. Putting God first means doing His will, even if it means sacrificing our own desires.
- _____ 3. We can put God first, but we do not necessarily have to put Jesus first.
- _____ 4. If we seek first God's kingdom then He will care for our physical needs.
- _____ 5. Abraham teaches us how to seek God's kingdom first.

Short Answer:

- 1. Define "seek first":
- 2. If we seek something first, what must we do with everything that hinders us from attaining it?
- 3. In Luke 22:42, what did Jesus say that shows us how to put God first? How do we fulfill this today?
- 4. How do we set our minds on things above? What sort of things does this include?
- 5. In Gal. 2:20, what was Paul's conclusion seeing that Jesus died for him?
- 6. How does putting God and Christ first help us to put the kingdom first?
- 7. How does Abraham teach us the value of seeking first the kingdom?

Dating

Lesson Seven

Memory Verse:

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

- Romans 13:14-

Introduction

Dating has become a popular pastime in today's society. Some view it as a game, while others view it as a means to meet their future spouse. Regardless of one's intentions, dating can be a source of great joy or terrible heartache. This has left many parents and children wondering as to how to approach this subject. How do we go about developing relationships while protecting ourselves and our children from the immorality that is in the world? In the Scriptures, God does not deal with dating specifically, but He does provide wisdom and instruction on matters of morality and propriety which are directly related to dating. Parents and children alike need to learn these principles and thereby protect themselves from the heartache and turmoil that comes with following the practices of the world.

Dating in Today's World

As many already know, dating is a form of courtship. It is a practice where two people spend time getting to know one another better. This in itself is not bad. In the world, however, dating has become more than a way to get to know someone. For many, it is a social activity; a way to have fun. The kind of fun varies from person to person. It can range from dinner and a movie to downright fornication. In the end, dating in the world is often more about pleasure than about relationships.

Dating relationships are often viewed as easy to get rid of; no strings attached. Two people can enjoy one another physically till one feels the need to move on and then they leave. Those in the world who do view dating as a means to find a mate often see it as an opportunity to “try the other person on for size” (to see if they are good enough in bed). Many view dating as a time to have fun, to experience new things, even to satisfy fleshly lusts without the commitment of marriage.

You will notice the words used to describe the world's view of dating: game, fun, pleasure, etc. The kind of fun and pleasure referred to are things that God reserves specifically for the marriage relationship. In spite of what goes on in the world, dating is not the time to enjoy such things. Two people who are dating have no right to “try one another on for size.” Such is fornication and is condemned by God (Gal. 5:19-21). In the Scriptures, God teaches that the close intimacy between a man and a woman are reserved for marriage because in marriage a person's body belongs to their mate (1 Cor. 7:2-4). As a form or courtship, the purpose for dating is to allow a person to find someone whom they would be willing to marry. For this reason a person must consider very carefully their intentions when they begin dating. Since dating is a relationship that involves commitment and since its purpose is to find a worthy mate, it is foolish for anyone to begin dating unless they are seriously thinking about looking for a mate.

This conclusion may be hard for many people to accept. After all, in the world even sixth and seventh graders date. That's just what people do. Though this is true, it is not right. More and more we are finding that middle school kids are participating in oral sex too, but just because people are doing it does not make it right. Dating is a serious commitment and therefore needs to be taken seriously by those who participate in it. This requires a sense of maturity, responsibility, and respect for other people. If a young person is not old enough to have these characteristics, his/she is not old enough to date. Throughout the remainder of this lesson we will be covering the type of conduct God expects.

God's Instructions for Dating

With Hollywood and all of the literature that is available for teens, young people are taught that when they are “in love” with someone they should feel free to express that love through intimacy, sex, “making out,” and other activities that are commonly associated with dating. The world, however, has seriously confused the definitions of love and lust. When a person is caught up in lust, according to the scriptural definition, the world would call it love. Where God would tell us not to give in to lust but to keep our bodies with purity, the world would tell us that we need to be free to express our love. Therefore young people are taught that when they have lust for someone they should seek an intimate relationship with them—to give in to the lusts of their flesh.

Any romantic relationships (especially those that lead to marriage) begin with infatuation. Infatuation is what causes a young man's heart to beat and his palms to sweat when he is talking to a pretty girl. Though this is a form of love, it is not what some might call “true love.” It is an emotion, a feeling. Infatuation can lead to lust if it is not kept in check. Instead of listening to the world we need to go to God's word to see how He says we ought to conduct ourselves. He teaches us that true love is a sacrificial love (John 15:13). When we truly love another person then our concern is for their best interest. Such love does not express itself through sex (“If you love me you'll do it.”). Rather, it puts the other person's soul before selfish, fleshly desires. For that reason, true love refrains from sex as well as the intimate behaviors that lead up to sex before marriage.

PROPRIETY, PURITY, AND LASCIVIOUSNESS: When dating, it seems that even some Christians throw godly principles of propriety (that which is proper) out the window. They begin to think that it is acceptable to behave in a sensual and lascivious manner simply because they are infatuated.

Lasciviousness (lewdness, sensuality) is defined, “Unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence” (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). “Excess, licentiousness, absence of restraint, indecency, wantonness” (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). When young people are making out, petting, dancing, and the like, they are being lascivious. They lust for the other person and they unbridle that lust; they let it loose. It is indecent, and it is condemned by God. Marriage is the only license for this kind of behavior. Regardless of what the world says, simply being in a romantic relationship does not give a person the right to behave in such a manner.

We are told in 1 Tim. 5:22 to keep ourselves pure. To be pure is to be uncontaminated, unspoiled, clean. This applies to our words, our thoughts, and our actions. The more intimate a relationship becomes while dating the more difficult it is to keep one's self pure. The temptation to kiss a little here and touch a little there only gets stronger and stronger the closer two people become. Therefore, people who are dating need to make some mature decisions concerning limitations for themselves and the people they are dating in order to keep a level of purity in their relationship. Parents too have a big part to play in this aspect.

MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH (Rom. 13:14): The best way to keep one's self pure is to avoid situations where one is tempted to behave in an impure manner. This is what Paul meant in Rom. 13:14 by, “and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” One can accomplish this by considering the type of activities he/she participates in while on a date. One needs to seriously consider the kinds of situations he/she enters into (i.e. not too much time alone, at home watching a movie in the dark, etc.). Many young people feel that they cannot truly work on their relationships unless they have a lot of time alone with the other person. On the contrary, we can learn a lot more about people by observing them in public than when we are alone with them. We can get to know personalities, likes, dislikes, how they treat other people, etc. by observing their behavior in public. If a person wants to talk about things that they would rather not say while at a restaurant or while walking through the mall, then perhaps that is not a subject people who are dating should delve in to.

If you are dating, you need to be on your guard. If the other person is trying to pressure you into spending more time alone, then perhaps they have other things on their agenda besides getting to know you. The same can be said of you if your own lusts are causing you to desire time alone. Sometimes we can think of many excuses to be alone with another person, but it is best to not give provision for the flesh. Don't put yourself in situations where you will have to fight your lusts and theirs just to keep yourself pure.

GUARD YOUR HEART (Prov. 4:23): Guarding our hearts involves more than avoiding the heartache which often comes with dating. It involves avoiding sin. Once we enter into one sinful practice the next sinful thing is just around the corner. The person who is enjoying long, drawn-out kisses by the eighth grade will be making out by the ninth grade, touching and groping by the tenth, and committing fornication by the eleventh (if not sooner). This same pattern is true for any age group, unless we guard our hearts from such moral decline. By putting God and His righteousness first, by considering the value of our souls, and by avoiding things that may cause us to lose our souls, we will be guarding not only our own hearts, but other people's as well.

Pursuing Things that Last

We have learned what not to do, but what should we do while dating?

LOOK BEYOND PERSONAL APPEARANCES: Just because you are infatuated with a person, don't be fooled into thinking you truly love that person. Physically a person may seem attractive. They may seem pleasant as an acquaintance or short-term friend. But with time infatuation begins to fade, allowing room for reality to kick in. Perhaps some of the more unattractive features become clearer. How do they treat other people whom they are not trying to impress? What is their attitude toward God? Toward parents?

LOOK FOR GODLY CHARACTERISTICS: Look for characteristics that you will be interested in with a long-term relationship: their relationship with God, how they treat others, personal discipline, manner of speech, etc. As infatuation begins to level out a little, a person begins to reason better. By looking at the above characteristics you will begin to know the person better. If the person simply does not have the same goals or ideals as you then there is minimal heartache. If you begin to see characteristics that you have been looking for then true love will begin to develop as you begin to deeply care for that person and vice versa. Remember, it is difficult to accomplish this when one allows his physical relationship to get out of control. "Do not be unequally yoked" (2 Cor. 6:14). If you want a joyful and meaningful relationship, it is extremely difficult to find one when you become "yoked" to a person who does not share the same faith as you. Heed God's instructions. Look for a person who has the same love for God and who will help build up your faith.

CONSIDER THE SOUL: When dating, yours is not the only soul at stake. "We are our brother's/sister's keeper" (Dunagan). Always remember that your behavior when dating affects more than yourself. A relationship takes two people. Are you being the kind of influence you need to be? Are you stressing the importance of godly principle? Women like to be attractive, but make sure you are not causing the men to lust after you (Matt. 5:28). Men, make sure that you are not putting yourself in a situation to take advantage of the lady. Be in control. Make good decisions.

Conclusion

The world makes it difficult for us to really know what is right and wrong. Things that God says are wrong often don't seem that bad because we are used to seeing them in the world. But they can cause much harm, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. When we apply godly principles, dating can be a joyful experience and we can avoid many of the pitfalls that come with following after the world.

Questions

Lesson Seven

True or False:

- _____ 1. The world's approach to dating is mature, honorable, and godly.
- _____ 2. As a form of courtship, dating is not for enjoying the intimate behaviors which God has reserved for marriage.
- _____ 3. Lascivious behavior isn't all that bad.
- _____ 4. When dating, a person needs to be willing to look beyond personal appearances.
- _____ 5. Spiritual principles don't apply when it comes to dating.

Short Answer:

- 1. Describe the way the world approaches dating. What do they think it is for? Have you found this to be true in your experience? Explain.
- 2. How does a godly person approach dating? What does he/she think it is for?
- 3. What is the difference between infatuation and mature love?
- 4. Define the following terms:
 - a. Propriety:
 - b. Purity:
 - c. Lasciviousness:
- 5. What are things that people often do while dating that fit into the category of lasciviousness?
- 6. How might a person keep a sense of propriety while on a date? What about purity?
- 7. List several things that a person should keep in mind while dating.

Touching: How Far is Too Far?

Lesson Eight

Memory Verse:

“but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct”
-1 Peter 1:15-

Introduction

In the previous lesson we discussed several principles on dating that may need some clarification. We learned that unmarried people in romantic relationships should avoid behaviors that are too intimate; behaviors that are indecent for people who are not married. That leaves us with one big question: how far is too far? That is to say, how much intimacy constitutes too much? Where do we draw the line between what is decent and indecent? Needless to say, there are many standards out there. They vary from community to community, family to family, and person to person. But we will seek God’s wisdom and instruction on the matter.

Sex In Its Proper Context

Sex is not bad. God created man and woman and He created in them the desires for sexual fulfillment. It was meant to be enjoyed by two people who have come together in marriage and have been made “one flesh” by God. In such a relationship one person’s body belongs to the other, thus they have the right to such intimacy (1 Cor. 7:2-4). When placed in its proper context, it can be a beautiful thing. However, like anything else, sex can be a very ugly thing when taken out of its proper context. All sex outside of marriage is wickedness—it is fornication. God speaks very clearly and very harshly about fornication which includes all sexual contact outside of the marriage (otherwise called sexual immorality). The marriage bed is to be honored by all, but the adulterer and sexually immoral will be judged by God (Heb. 13:4). “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you” (Eph. 5:3). “*Flee sexual immorality...he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body*” (1 Cor. 6:18). “*But the...sexually immoral...shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone*” (Rev. 21:8).

Temptation Starts Somewhere

We can clearly see that sexual intercourse outside of the marriage is wrong. But what about other forms of sexual or sensual contact? Satan tempts us every way he can. He is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8), which means that he is looking for any means that he can find to tempt us into sin. Like a frog that will not jump out of the pot when it is heated up slowly, Satan introduces sin a little at a time, slowly turning up the heat. As we get comfortable with those sins he turns up the temperature a little more by introducing a new level of sin. In the Scriptures we are made aware of Satan’s devices so that we can be on the alert and overcome them (2 Cor. 2:11). Young people do not start out committing fornication. It all begins with the holding of hands, then the peck on the cheek, then the lips, then a little longer, then the stroking, then finally, fornication. The further we go today the more comfortable we become and the further we will go the next time. We have established that sexual intercourse is wrong. It also needs to be understood that there are sensual behaviors leading up to sex that are also sinful outside of the marriage, regardless of whether or not they actually lead up to sex.

Make No Provision for the Flesh

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:14). Whether a young person is a Christian or not, the fact still remains that they are God’s creation, and therefore must strive to live their lives the way He has instructed. We are able to look to Christ for our example. Christians can put on Christ because they have been purchased by His blood. If you are not yet a Christian, you can still imitate

Christ's behavior and thereby save yourself much hardship. Christ left no provision for the flesh. He did not sin while He was on this earth. We can follow in His example and learn to remove those things that seem to draw us into sin. For people outside of marriage that means setting some guidelines for yourselves so as to not become physically intimate and thereby enter into sexual immorality. Don't even give yourselves the opportunity to sin in that manner. We need to be like Joseph in Gen. 39:7-13. When tempted by Potiphar's, wife he didn't stick around. He said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" and then he fled from the house. He left no provision for the flesh, but fled from that situation. We need to do the same.

When it comes to a physical, romantic relationship we need to be willing to draw some boundary lines. There were a few terms that were mentioned in the previous lesson that need to be expounded upon at this point. Lasciviousness: "Lewd; lecherous, licentious" (American Heritage Dictionary-AHD). "Absence of restraint, indecency, wantonness, lack of self-restraint" (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). "Wanton (acts or) manners, a filthy word, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females" (Thayer's Lexicon, p. 79). "Follow the inclination to sensuality...indecent conduct" (Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon). Licentiousness: "Lacking moral discipline or sexual restraint; lewd" (AHD).

Making the application: "When you touch the body of another person (other than your husband or wife) in such a way as to excite sexual desires, you are guilty of the sins of lasciviousness and licentiousness. Notice particularly the use of the phrase, 'unchaste handling.' This is a reference to touching the body of another person in a sensual way." (David Moyer, Guardian of Truth XXXIII:5, pp. 144-146, March 2, 1989). This is a subject that parents need to sit down and discuss with their children. Having gone through the dating experience, parents know what kinds of touching "excites sexual desires." It may be that parents did things that they later found to be "going too far." Young people have a sense of right and wrong, but sometimes are not immediately aware they've done something wrong until it's too late. But if the parents discuss it with them and set some boundaries before the fact, then they will be ready.

Does kissing excite sexual desires? If not, then why do young people do it? Does the eighth grade boy kiss his girlfriend because he truly loves her and wants to express his deep care for her? Or is there another reason—one which is defined by the above terms? What about stroking, hugging, or sitting on laps? We see these things happening with many young people today, but are they really appropriate for people who are not married? Here again we must ask, what is the purpose? When a girl sits on a boy's lap, is the first thing that pops into your mind, "Oh, how chaste and discrete they are being"? Certainly not! There is a reason unmarried people (especially young people) behave like that, and it's not because they want to show each other how much they deeply care for one another. These are behaviors that are sensual in nature and are therefore only suitable for two married people who belong to each other.

Paul said in Gal. 5:19, "The works of the flesh are *evident*." They are evident because we can recognize when something is lascivious, unchaste, or sensual. We may have been around it long enough or listened to the world telling us that it is acceptable long enough to not recognize it immediately. But when we stop and think about what is really going on in the hearts of young people who behave in a sensual manner, we can see that such things are inappropriate according to God's word. "...those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:17). When a person is in a romantic relationship they need to be very careful to make no provisions for the flesh. One thing will lead to another. Kissing, hugging, or stroking may not lead to sex before marriage in every case, but the temptations are there, the desires are there, and the fact remains that those behaviors are sensual and lascivious.

Conclusion

God shows us how to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. But in order to do so we need to be willing to listen to Him and receive His instructions with meekness (James 1:21).

Questions

Lesson Eight

True or False:

- _____ 1. Sex is a horrible thing and every one should avoid it at all costs.
- _____ 2. Sex outside of the marriage is wickedness and should be avoided at all costs.
- _____ 3. When people who are not married are “touching” and “petting” one another it is cute and innocent.
- _____ 4. If we are willing to open our eyes to the works of the flesh they will be clearly evident.

Short Answer:

- 1. Is sex a bad thing? Explain.
- 2. What is sex called when it is practiced outside of the marriage?
- 3. Are sexual sins limited to intercourse?
- 4. Sometimes, even people who know premarital sex is wrong still do it. How does Satan get those people to compromise their morals in such a way?
- 5. What does it mean to “make no provision for the flesh”?
- 6. Define the following words:
 - a. Lasciviousness:
 - b. Licentiousness:
- 7. What can you do to keep from being tempted by these things?

When No One Is Watching

Lesson Nine

Memory Verse:

“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’”

-1 Samuel 16:7-

Introduction

Most people know that it is important to do the right thing, especially when we are around other people. But what about when no one else is watching? Is it important to do the right thing when we are alone? The obvious answer to this question is yes. But actually motivating ourselves to do the right thing when people are not watching can be very difficult. In the Scriptures, God provides wisdom and instruction to help us understand why this is so important. He also teaches us how to overcome temptation in such situations.

The “Secret” Things of the Heart

Many people make the mistake of thinking that when they are alone no one else knows what they are doing. However, the Scriptures teach us that God does not judge us based upon what other people see, but upon what is in our hearts. No amount of secrecy can hide what is in our hearts from God. The prophet Jonah thought he could escape the presence of God by traveling to a distant land (Jonah 1). But even when he was at the bottom of the sea in the belly of the great fish God was still able to hear his prayer. God is not limited by physical barriers or by what other people can see. Rather, He sees all. He will bring us into judgment for the secret things of our hearts (Rom. 2:16). Likewise, we will be rewarded when the secret things of our hearts are good (Matt. 12:35-37). In 1 Sam. 16:7, God reminded Samuel that, “the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Whatever we think in our hearts and whatever we do in secret, God knows it and we will be held accountable for those things.

Whether a person is good or bad is not determined by other people’s opinion, but by the things that proceed from his/her heart in any given situation. Our true character is determined by what we do when no one else is watching. If we practice sinful things and try to deceive others about what we have done, then that is our true nature. Matt. 12:35: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.” See also Matt. 15:19.

“Is it Right or Wrong?” Vs. “Can I Get Away With It?”

The world would have us believe that what we do is only wrong if we get caught; that if there are no consequences, then there is nothing wrong with it. However, this kind of thinking is pure foolishness. Everything we do has consequences—even when we think we won’t get caught. The Bible teaches, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” (Gal. 6:7-8). Where it says “Do not be deceived,” it is talking about people who are deceived into thinking they can do evil and get away with it. Where it says, “God is not mocked” it means that we cannot fool God by doing evil without Him noticing it. Where it says, “for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap,” it means that whatever we do, no matter who is watching, we will reap the consequences of our actions. We may be able to fool others, but we cannot mock God by fooling Him. Since He knows our hearts, He knows our true character. We cannot hide that from Him. Therefore, we must remember that we will always get caught when we are doing evil things. There is no avoiding it.

Ananias and Sapphira thought that they could deceive God in Acts 5. “And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part *and laid it at the apostles’ feet.*” They sold their property and held back a portion of the proceeds, but were telling people that they were giving away all of the proceeds. Other people who did not know their secrets may have seen their gift as very generous. But God was not mocked. He knew their true character. Thus Peter said, “Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:4). We must avoid making the same mistake as Ananias and Sapphira.

Therefore, our decision to do something must not be based on whether or not we will get caught, but rather, is it right or wrong.

Tools for Overcoming Temptation

Many people understand that God knows their hearts. Nevertheless, it is difficult to remember that fact when temptation comes and no one else is around. And since we do not always face the consequences immediately, it sometimes seems as if God does not really see. But He does, and the consequences always catch up to us eventually. Fortunately, God shows us how to overcome temptation. He gives us tools to use in order to help us learn to do the right thing always.

CHOOSE WHO YOU WILL SERVE

The best way to establish a good character and to avoid sin when no one is watching is to firmly establish in our minds that God is our Master. If we determine to serve God before temptation comes then we will not have such a terrible time resisting it when we are alone. In Ps. 119:10-11 the Psalmist understood this as he wrote, “With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”

Joseph, while in Potiphar’s house, had determined to serve God. His determination helped him to avoid committing adultery when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him. In Gen. 39:9, because Joseph had determined before hand to serve the Lord, he was able to say when tested, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” We must be willing to say the same thing. Whether we are alone with our friends and they are doing sinful things, or whether we are by ourselves and we are tempted, if our loyalty is with God then we will not be drawn away. “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8).

EXERCISE YOUR SENSES

In Heb. 5:12-14 we are told that with practice we will be able to see more clearly the difference between right and wrong. When it comes to private sin, by better understanding the evil nature of sin we are less likely to be tempted by it. Some people who have worked at a certain fast food restaurant will no longer eat there after seeing how the food is prepared. Seeing its true nature disgusts them. As we exercise our senses this same thing can happen with our opinion of sin. When we learn to acknowledge the foul nature of sin, our disdain for it will help us to avoid it.

APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

As we learn to see sin for what it really is, we must also learn to see the value of true righteousness. People often commit private sins because it feels good. When we sin, whether we are alone or not, there is always a sense of guilt that accompanies it. Thus, if we do not wish to be found out, there is the pressure of having to fabricate the deception to avoid getting caught. Therefore, whatever pleasure we experience through sin is always short lived. However, the joy of doing the right thing is never ending. When we do good things we do not need to cover up our actions. There are always good benefits from doing good deeds. Doing good brings no guilt, but always gives us the joy of knowing that God is pleased. When we learn to appreciate the joy of doing the right thing always, then doing sinful things will simply lose their appeal (Prov. 16:8; Prov. 28:6; Matt. 6:19-21).

Questions

Lesson Nine

True or False:

- _____ 1. When we are alone we are safe to do whatever we want because no one else can see.
- _____ 2. God knows our hearts.
- _____ 3. God is limited by physical barriers so that if we are in a secluded place He cannot see what we are doing.
- _____ 4. We can do whatever we want as long as we don't get caught.
- _____ 5. Actions always have their consequences, whether done in public or in private.
- _____ 6. Ananias and Sapphira sinned by lying to God.

Short Answer:

- 1. Does God judge us the same way men do? Explain.
- 2. What determines the true character of a person?
- 3. Is there ever a situation where we won't get caught for doing something bad? Explain.
- 4. Explain the following statements found in Gal. 6:7-8:
 - a. "Do not be deceived":
 - b. "God is not mocked":
 - c. "...whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.":
- 5. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? What can we learn from their sin?
- 6. List three tools that can help us overcome temptation when no one is watching and explain how they can help.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

What We Wear: Modesty

Lesson Ten

Memory Verse:

“In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing.”

-1 Timothy 2:9-

Introduction

Few things speak more about the character of a person than the way he/she dresses. How we present ourselves reveals our values, how much we care about the image we portray, our moral standard, and our respect for those around us. The world does not concern itself with God’s values concerning clothing, but in the Scriptures God shows us that what we wear is a serious matter. Therefore, we need to consider God’s wisdom and instruction concerning what we should wear.

God is Concerned about What we Wear

Our behavior manifests the condition of our heart (Prov. 4:23). Some have erroneously said, “Since God looks at the heart, He does not care how we dress” (see 1 Sam. 16:7). On the contrary, God teaches us that how we dress directly reflects what is in our hearts (Prov. 4:23). Clothing can reveal sorrow (2 Sam. 3:31). Clothing can identify a person with a specific group, such as a gang or culture (Zeph. 1:8). Men and women have their own distinctive apparel (Deut. 22:5). Clothing can also cause one to appear as a widow or even a harlot (Gen. 38:14-15). Indeed, God has said much about clothing. He also shows us that He cares very much about what we wear: “...women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation” (1 Tim. 2:9).

God looks at our hearts, but He expects us to behave in such a way that is worthy of a godly heart. 1 Timothy 2:9-10: “...in like manner also, that the *women adorn themselves* in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, *which is proper for women professing godliness*, with good works” (emph. mine DP). “In like manner” is in connection to the “holy” conduct of men mentioned in 1 Tim. 2:8. Women are to adorn themselves in a holy manner. “Modest apparel” means orderly, well arranged, and decent. It can be applied to not wearing too much as well as not wearing too little. “Propriety” means proper or shamefacedness. This also means to have a sense of shame. A person who is improperly exposed on account of their clothing (or lack thereof) should be ashamed. “Moderation” is to be sober, moderate, or self-controlled. It causes a person to hold their passions in check. It also means to be of sound judgment. Our clothing requires judgment that is controlled and conforms to the righteousness of God rather than our own selfish ambitions. “Professing godliness” suggests that clothing is a matter of godliness just as much as what we say and how we act. If we do not have a godly heart then we will reject God’s instruction on this matter.

Titus 2:1, 4-5: As a matter of sound doctrine, younger women are commanded to learn how to be: “Discrete”: This means to be safe, of sound mind, self-controlled, moderate. This describes a person who does not desire to draw attention to herself with her clothing or otherwise. “Chaste”: This means to be clean or pure. How we dress can prove us to be unclean. If we have a pure heart then

we will have pure motives in choosing our clothing and we will change if our standard does not meet up with God's. "That the word of God may not be blasphemed": Our dress, among other things, can cause the word of God to be blasphemed if it does not conform to God's righteous standard. What does your clothing say?

1 Peter 3:1-4: Addressing wives, Peter commands that they: Not let their adornment be merely outward: The world desires to be seen by their outward beauty. But in the kingdom of God outward beauty is worthless if the heart is not right. Notice: "...let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (vs. 4). What does your clothing say about your spirit? Is it a gentle spirit, with godly standards or is it a haughty spirit that seeks the attention of other people?

Teaching on Godly Principles of Modesty is Sorely Needed Today!

Parents and children need to step back from the world and to turn their eyes to God's word. There are some Christians who condemn the world for its immodesty, but they themselves wear clothing that would be condemned in the Bible. We may think that we are being modest, but we must take care! For there are some whose consciences have been "seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:2). That is to say, they have become blind to their own sins. They no longer have the shamefacedness that God expects of His people (1 Tim. 2:9). If we are not careful, we may fall into this same trap.

Throughout the Bible God stresses the importance of being properly clothed. In Genesis 3:7-11 Adam and Eve saw that they were naked after they had sinned and they were ashamed, so they sewed fig leaves into aprons to cover themselves. It was shameful for their nakedness to be seen. In spite of their attempt to cover themselves, God still saw the need to make them garments out of animal skin to cover them (Gen. 3:21). Approximately two-thousand years later, God's standard had not changed as we see from His description of the priestly garments (Ex. 20:26; 28:42-43). Though we cannot use these passages as authority for a specific doctrine, we can learn from it that even after several generations God still wanted His people to be properly clothed. "Nakedness" is defined in Ex. 28:42: "...cover their nakedness; they shall reach from their waist to their thighs." Centuries after Moses delivered the law, God showed that it was still shameful for one's nakedness to be exposed in Isa. 47:3. Note: the only way to avoid such shame was to be properly clothed. Even in the New Testament, around four thousand years after God made clothes for Adam and Eve, His standard had not changed: "...that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed" (Rev. 3:18).

Be impressed that no matter how much man's ideas of proper clothing change, God's standard has not changed in the least from the beginning until now! "Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth" (Psalm 119:142).

Nakedness is not a matter of culture or custom, it is a matter of principle which God has established since the beginning. It is true that as cultures change so do clothing styles and fashions. Certainly, Christians should take this into consideration. God does not expect us to wear robes as they did in biblical times. However, style does not affect God's standard. People may wear different styles of clothing while continuing to cover their nakedness. God expects His people to live in such a way that exemplifies His righteousness in all that they do, including the way they dress. If we fail in this, then it is just as bad as using profane language, spreading error, or committing sexual immorality. It is clear that the world's idea of proper clothing does not begin to approach God's.

Men, even some who are in the church, have forsaken God's righteous standard concerning modest apparel. God required that the thigh be covered so that nakedness was not seen. In the world today,

clothing is considered modest even when the upper thigh can be seen! Tight clothing has become popular so that, no matter the length, every feature of the body can be clearly seen. Modesty applies to more than just covering the skin! Women wear low cut shirts, revealing a part of the body that God says should be reserved for husbands only. See-through clothing has also become popular. There may be fabric over the body, but what use is that when one can see everything through the fabric?

Establishing some Guidelines

HOW SHORT IS TOO SHORT?: To ask the question, “How short can I go?” is a dangerous game. It is like saying, “How much can I drink before I get drunk?” God teaches us to flee from sexual immorality, not to nudge up as close as we can before crossing the line (1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22). If one has to worry about others being able to see too much, whether standing, sitting or otherwise, chances are it is not as modest as it should be. When something is of a godly character, the Christian should not have to worry about it or be ashamed of it (1 Pet. 3:16; Rom. 6:21-22). A helpful practice that is used in many Christian households is that the women ask the men in the house (or another Christian whom they can trust) if what they are wearing is too revealing, and vice versa.

NOT CONFUSED BY “FALSE GODS”: Popularity: just because clothing is popular does not make it acceptable. There are cultures in Africa and South America where it is popular to wear nothing but body ornaments. We must seek the approval of God, not men! Comfort or convenience: Sometimes people wear inappropriate clothing simply because it is comfortable. However, if we are going to please God we must seek His righteousness above all else, even above our own comfort (Matt. 5:6; 6:33). Jesus did this for us! Be aware that our comforts might cause others to stumble (sin). Concerning this, Paul wrote, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Cor. 6:12). “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Cor. 8:13). Let us apply this principle to our clothing as well. “I don’t care what others think. I’ll wear short shorts and tight clothes if I want”: Jesus warns that if we do not listen to Him we will be judged (John 12:48). We must uphold God’s righteousness regardless of our own fleshly desires (Phil. 2:3). Even if we do not want to conform to God’s righteous standard for our own sakes, then let us consider the souls of those around us (1 Cor. 8:13). “But it’s so cute”: if we are godly at heart then righteousness will take preeminence over cuteness. Remember, women should adorn themselves, but in a way that is proper for one professing godliness (1 Tim. 2:10). It is shameful for our nakedness to be seen, no matter what the purpose. If we have the shamefacedness God expects, then we will acknowledge this! Let us put God’s standard first in our lives so that we may continue to be as shining lights in a world that is sinking further and further into darkness.

Conclusion

Our clothing is important to God and it needs to be important to us. What we wear says a lot about our character. What do your clothes say about you?

Questions

Lesson Ten

True or False:

- _____ 1. God looks at the heart so what we wear does not matter.
- _____ 2. How we dress ourselves is a reflection of our attitude.
- _____ 3. If how Christians dress and act is not appropriate, it can cause God to be blasphemed.
- _____ 4. We can show our nakedness while still wearing clothes.
- _____ 5. If something looks cute or attractive it is acceptable to wear it even though it is not very modest.

Short Answer:

- 1. Look up the definition of “modesty” in a dictionary.
- 2. In your own words, define the following terms:
 - a. Modest apparel:
 - b. Propriety:
 - c. Moderation:
 - d. Discrete:
 - e. Chaste:
- 3. What does it mean for a person’s conscience to be “seared with a hot iron”? How may this apply to a person’s idea of modesty?
- 4. According to the Scriptures, can a person have clothes on and still show their “nakedness”? If no, then explain. If yes, then describe what kinds of clothing people wear in public today that can show a person’s nakedness.
- 5. Clothing styles change from culture to culture and generation to generation. But does God’s standard of modesty change?

Entertainment

Hear no Evil, See no Evil, Speak no evil

Lesson Eleven

Memory Verse:

“The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness.”

-Luke 11:34-

Introduction

We live in a culture that places entertainment on a very high pedestal. Though entertainment in itself is not bad, because of the character of the world much of the entertainment available to us is very bad. In this lesson we are going to consider our responsibility toward entertainment that involves the eyes and the ears. For the things that we see, and the things that we hear, can greatly affect our moral character. We need to have God’s wisdom and instruction to know what is and what is not acceptable entertainment.

We are Influenced by what we See and Hear

“The lamp of the body is the eye” (Luke 11:34-36). This passage applies to the things that we put in front of our eyes: TV, magazines, internet, pornography, even video games. The eye is the lamp of the body because, like a person carrying a flashlight through a dark forest, where our eyes are looking is where we will walk. If we set our eyes on evil things, then that is the direction we will walk. The content of our entertainment has the ability to affect our character. The more time we spend watching filthy movies, reading materialistic magazines, and looking at unwholesome material on the internet, the worse the affect on our minds and hearts.

“Having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2). Studies have proven it, history has shown it, and most importantly, God said that the more evil material we put in front of us, the less it bothers us. The more we practice sin or listen to and watch sinful things, the more our consciences become seared. Like a cook that can pick up hot pans with his bare hands after years of cooking, we get to the point that we can listen to music with swearing, or watch movies with excess violence and nudity, and we don’t even notice it. Many Christians have said with pride that they can watch movies with immoral content because, they say, “I don’t even notice it, so it doesn’t bother me.” Sadly, many people think that this is a good thing when it is not! If sinful material does not bother us, then that is the first sign that our consciences have been seared. The last time you watched a movie with cussing in it, did you cringe when you heard the filthy word? Did you even notice that there were filthy words in the movie?

We must keep ourselves from the influence of sin (Rom. 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:33). This begins with removing evil forms of entertainment from our hearts, because when we take pleasure in those things we are in sin. “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).

The Sin of Taking Pleasure in Sinful Things

“For as he thinks in his hearts, so he is” (Prov. 23:7). No longer being bothered by sinful material is only the beginning of the influence this material can have on us. Many Christians who watch movies with swearing do not use those words in their own speech, yet they still find such movies entertaining—they still enjoy them. Many people do not talk like the musicians they listen to or dress and act like the people in the movies that they watch, but the fact that they enjoy those movies in spite of their wicked content

shows that in their hearts there is some acceptance for what is being portrayed. Most will not admit it, but when we take joy in sinful things (whether real or fiction), we are showing approval of those things. We may not imitate it, but the fact that we are entertained by such material shows that we approve of it, and that is in itself sinful. "...who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same *but also approve of those who practice them*" (Rom. 1:32).

"Friendship with the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4). When James speaks of "friendship with the world" he is speaking of those who behave like, partake of, and take pleasure in the things that originate from the world—loving the things of the world. However, if we truly love the Lord will have nothing to do with such worldly activities, for it is written, "You who love the Lord, hate evil!" (Ps. 97:10). "Do not love the world *or the things in the world*. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15-16). Our desire should be that of the Psalmist, "Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things, and revive me in your way" (Ps. 119:37).

Applying Godliness to our Choice of Entertainment

"Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22). If the content in an item of entertainment is evil, abstain from it ("hold one's self off" from it—Strong's). How do we know whether or not it is evil? In the previous verse Paul said to "test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Most movies have ratings (PG, PG13, R). The most recent movies have the reason for the rating given (violence, nudity, etc.). There are even websites one can that list exactly what kind of content is in movies (screenit.com). We must test material that we might consider for entertainment. If it is not up to par with God's moral standard, then we should not go near it. We must strive to abstain from every form (appearance) of evil. Parents have the greatest influence (either by words or example) as to what their children consider to be acceptable. Therefore, they must consider what kind of example they are setting for their children.

We need to develop a sense of shame toward evil things (Jer. 8:12). In Job 31:1, Job defended his private character by saying, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?" We need to make such a covenant with our own eyes, and with our ears, and with our mouths. While we cannot always control the environment around us (other people speaking crudely, playing crude music, etc.) we can make a commitment to not willingly partake in worldly entertainment. If we are at a movie and there is cussing or nudity, make a covenant to leave the theater. If there is an album that sounds good but has crude lyrics, make a covenant not to purchase that album.

"Flee from youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness" (1 Tim. 6:11). When Paul preached the gospel in Acts 19, many of those who believed had been sorcerers and magicians. But when they turned to the Lord it says that they, "brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver" (Acts 19:19). Even at great expense, these people cast off their sorcery material because it was contrary to Christ. Should we not also be willing to give up material that is worldly and therefore contrary to God? Young people may have the hardest time with this because they especially are seeking the approval of their peers. But part of fleeing youthful lusts has to do with determining who we will put first in our lives: God versus friends. Pursue those things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Phil. 4:8). Let those things be your entertainment, so that your lamp and your heart will be good.

Conclusion

What we find entertaining is a sign of our true character. Therefore, the best decision we can make is to follow the instruction in Prov. 4:23-27: "*Keep your heart with all diligence...let your eyes look strait ahead...ponder the path of your feet...remove your foot from evil.*"

Questions

Lesson Eleven

True or False:

- _____ 1. The lamp of the body is the eye.
- _____ 2. The entertainment we choose has no affect on our character.
- _____ 3. It doesn't matter if we are entertained by evil things as long as we don't participate in them.
- _____ 4. Friendship with the world is enmity with God.
- _____ 5. We should strive to abstain from every form of evil.

Short Answer:

- 1. Are we affected by the kind of entertainment we enjoy?
- 2. What did Jesus mean by, "The lamp of the body is the eye"?
- 3. What did Paul mean by "having their conscience seared with a hot iron"? How can our entertainment have this kind of affect on us?
- 4. If we are entertained by sinful things (filthy movies, violent video games, etc.), are we in sin even though we do not actually practice those things? Explain.
- 5. What does it mean to have "friendship with the world"? How does this affect our relationship with God?
- 6. List five things we can do to protect ourselves from evil forms of entertainment, and explain how to apply them (points A, B, C, D, E of section III.).
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

What Will Your Example Be?

Lesson Twelve

Memory Verse:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”
-Matthew 5:16-

Introduction

Many people are under the impression that what they do and how they act only affects their own lives. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Whether we are outgoing or shy, bold or meek, hard working or lazy, we are being observed by the people around us. That means that we are an example to someone somewhere. Therefore, a question that every person must answer for themselves is, what kind of example am I setting for others?

The Power of Example

We may not think that our actions affect other people, or if they do, we may not think that the affect is very great. The truth is that the example we set, whether intentional or not, can have a very powerful affect on others. People who do not seem to be leaders end up leading multitudes. Look at Cain for example. He is well known for offering an unacceptable sacrifice to the Lord (Gen. 4:3-5) and for killing his brother (vs. 8). One would think it unlikely that people would follow his example, but they do. In Jude 11, Jude pronounces woe upon those who “have gone the way of Cain.” Cain chose to offer worship to God in a way that was unacceptable, and many people do the same thing today.

Sometimes our attitude has the biggest affect on people. Our attitude is the way we think or feel about something. Our attitude is expressed through our behavior, mannerisms, and actions and, therefore, affects the people around us. If we have a bad attitude then that is the example we will set. In Gal. 2:11-13 when Peter was in Antioch he associated with both Jews and Gentiles alike. But when his Jewish brethren arrived from Jerusalem, he played the hypocrite by no longer associating with his Gentile brethren. His attitude was that of pride, hypocrisy, and wanting to please men, and his actions reflected that attitude. Paul tells us in Gal. 2:13, “and the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him.” Peter’s attitude affected all of the Jews in that church. His example was very powerful in causing all of those men to sin.

Good examples are just as powerful. One person in a large crowd who has the courage to stand up for what is right can give courage to others to join him/her in that stand. The ultimate example of this is Jesus, of whom it is written, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: *Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth*” (1 Pet. 2:21-22).

People in the world often look to Christians as a standard of right and wrong. If a Christian is in sin, then his/her example is telling the world that such behavior is acceptable. The way older members of a congregation act affects the way newer Christians are going to act, for good or for evil. Older children have a tremendous influence on younger children concerning what they do for fun, or what they think is cool or un-cool. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, brethren in church, we all set some kind of example. Our examples can be very powerful; therefore, we must be aware of our actions. We must think about what we say, what we do, and how we act, because ours is not the only soul at stake.

Judged According to our Example

Jesus gave a stern warning in Matt. 18:6 saying, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” If this passage frightens you, it should. God does not think highly on people who lead others astray. Most understand that Jesus is referring to false teachers; those who intentionally lead people astray through error, lies, and deceit.

But we must also realize that this also applies to people who lead others astray by their examples. In Matt. 23:2-3, Jesus told the Jews in His day, *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.”* Notice that the people were to do as the Pharisees instructed (concerning the law), but not follow their examples. Even though the Pharisees taught the law, they did not follow the law. Through their examples they caused others to become hypocrites. Jesus referred to them as “blind leaders of the blind” for they caused others to follow them in their destructive ways (Matt. 15:14).

Do you want to have the judgment of God upon you? Do you want to have woe pronounced upon you? Of course not! But when we set a bad example and thereby lead other people away from God, we fall into the same category as the scribes and Pharisees. When we have a bad attitude toward God, toward the Bible, or toward the church, we are following the same Pattern as the Pharisees by influencing others to turn from God through our example. We must understand that we will be brought into account for the kind of example we set. Each person is judged according to his/her own actions (Rom. 5:6), but when we lead others astray by our example, it only makes matters worse.

What Will Your Example Be?

In 2 Tim. 2:20-23, Paul wrote, *“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.”* The point is that we choose whether we are going to be used in the Lord’s service in an honorable way or in a dishonorable way. Those who live in disobedience are dishonored when the Lord makes an example of them concerning what men must NOT do (1 Cor. 10:6). Those who are vessels for honor are obedient to the Lord and, therefore, bring honor to God and to themselves as God uses them as good examples (Heb. 11).

Notice that we must choose the kind of vessels we will be. *“Therefore if anyone cleanses himself...”* It is the same with our example. We must choose how we are going to influence other people, whether for good or for bad. We have already seen the dangers of being a bad example. But when we strive to be a good example we bring honor upon God and upon ourselves. When we walk according to God’s rule, we are able to influence others in the right way. We can say as Paul did, *“Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ”* (1 Cor. 11:1).

Concerning the example of God’s People, Jesus taught, *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matt. 5:16). This passage teaches us several things about our examples: 1) In order for us to set a good example, our works must be according to the will of God. Only when we are living the way God instructs us can we cause others to glorify Him. 2) Our example must not be as a light that flickers on and off. It must be as the light of a city or the light in a room that stays on all the time and is not covered up (vs. 14, 15). Every action sets an example. If our light is to be constant then we must do what is right when we are with others and when we are alone; when we are serving God and when we are being entertained; when we are happy and when we are angry—we must always strive to do the right thing, and so let our light shine before men.

Looking for Good Examples

For young people, it is difficult to be a good example all the time because of the great many influences pulling them the other way. Just as we provide an example for others, we too are influenced by those around us. But just as we choose the example we set, we can also choose who will be our example. In Prov. 13:20 it says, *“He who walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed.”* Do you want to be a good example? Then look for others who are good examples that they may influence you. Young people, do not foolishly scoff at older people or those who devote themselves to the Lord. For by their examples they can help save your soul, if you are willing to be influenced by them. What will your example be?

Questions

Lesson Twelve

True or False:

- _____ 1. It doesn't matter what kind of example we set.
- _____ 2. Our attitude can influence other people.
- _____ 3. Peter was a good example while in Antioch.
- _____ 4. The kind of example we set will have an affect on our eternal salvation.
- _____ 5. We have no way of controlling how we influence other people.
- _____ 6. In order for me to be a good example, I need to look for others to be good examples for me.

Short Answer:

- 1. In your own words, describe the kind of power examples have on people.
- 2. How did Peter's example influence the Christians in Antioch?
- 3. How does our example affect God's judgment of us?
- 4. What kind of example did the Pharisees set?
- 5. What does it mean to be a vessel for honor? For dishonor?
- 6. How do we determine the kind of example we set for others?
- 7. What does it mean to let our lights shine?
- 8. How can we use other people to teach us how to be a good example?