

## 8. SIN AND DYSFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORS

Page

<b>8.</b>	<b><i>SIN AND DYSFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORS</i></b> .....	<b>8-1</b>
<b>8.1</b>	<b>Sin Defined</b> .....	<b>8-5</b>
<b>8.2</b>	<b>Sin as Spiritual Addiction/Slavery</b> .....	<b>8-6</b>
<b>8.3</b>	<b>Types of Sin</b> .....	<b>8-7</b>
8.3.1	Abortion.....	8-7
8.3.2	Adultery.....	8-10
8.3.2.1	Damaging affects of Adultery .....	8-11
8.3.2.2	Techniques for preventing and dealing with adultery.....	8-11
8.3.3	Anger.....	8-12
8.3.3.1	The Causes of Anger .....	8-13
8.3.3.2	Anger in the Home .....	8-14
8.3.3.3	Reactions to Anger .....	8-15
8.3.3.4	Overcoming Anger .....	8-19
8.3.4	Envy.....	8-22
8.3.4.1	Envy Defined.....	8-23
8.3.4.2	Envy in the Church.....	8-23
8.3.4.3	Envy in the World.....	8-24
8.3.4.4	Wanting to be Envied .....	8-25
8.3.4.5	Envy and Women .....	8-26
8.3.4.6	Envy is Destructive.....	8-27
8.3.4.7	Overcoming Envy.....	8-28
8.3.4.8	Wisdom Conquers Envy.....	8-29
8.3.5	Gossip and Slander .....	8-31
8.3.6	Greed.....	8-35
8.3.6.1	Kingdom Perspectives .....	8-37
8.3.6.2	The Eucharistic Lifestyle.....	8-38
8.3.6.3	Greed and International Problems .....	8-39
8.3.6.4	Greed in Unions.....	8-41
8.3.6.5	Greed and Prophecy.....	8-41
8.3.6.6	Overcoming Greed .....	8-43
8.3.6.7	A Warning to Yuppies .....	8-45
8.3.7	Homosexuality.....	8-46
8.3.8	Idolatry .....	8-46
8.3.9	Laziness.....	8-48
8.3.9.1	Laziness in Loving.....	8-49
8.3.9.2	Laziness, Love, and Will .....	8-50
8.3.9.3	Too Lazy to Nurture .....	8-52
8.3.9.4	Too Lazy to Enjoy .....	8-53
8.3.9.5	Too Lazy to Become.....	8-54
8.3.9.6	A Style of Procrastination.....	8-54
8.3.9.7	Getting Rid of Sloth.....	8-56
8.3.10	Lust.....	8-59
8.3.10.1	Lust as illusion.....	8-62
8.3.10.2	Lust as Immaturity .....	8-63
8.3.10.3	Lust as a Denial of Death.....	8-65
8.3.10.4	The Insights of Feminists.....	8-66
8.3.10.5	How to Conquer Lust .....	8-68
8.3.10.6	Alternatives to Lust .....	8-69
8.3.11	Lying .....	8-70
8.3.12	Murder .....	8-71
8.3.13	Pride.....	8-72
8.3.13.1	Pride Infects the Spirit .....	8-74

8.3.13.2	Pride Ruins Relationships.....	8-76
8.3.13.3	Pride Destroys Those We Love.....	8-77
8.3.13.4	Pride Can Destroy A Nation.....	8-78
8.3.13.5	Develop Healthy Humility.....	8-79
8.3.14	Selfishness.....	8-80
8.3.15	Sexual promiscuity/fornication.....	8-81
8.3.16	Unwillingness to submit sexually to our marriage partner.....	8-81
<b>8.4</b>	<b>Dysfunctional Behaviors.....</b>	<b>8-81</b>
8.4.1	Authoritarianism.....	8-82
8.4.2	Chemical addictions.....	8-83
8.4.3	Cyberaddiction.....	8-84
8.4.3.1	Symptoms.....	8-84
8.4.3.2	Treatment.....	8-85
8.4.4	Gambling addiction.....	8-86
8.4.4.1	Symptoms.....	8-86
8.4.4.2	Treatment.....	8-87
8.4.5	Obsessive/compulsive (OCD) disorders.....	8-87
8.4.5.1	Symptoms.....	8-88
8.4.5.2	Treatment.....	8-89
8.4.6	Phobias.....	8-89
8.4.7	Poor communication skills.....	8-90
8.4.8	Pornography addiction.....	8-91
<b>8.5</b>	<b>Common Sinful Excuses to Evade Responsibility for Sin.....</b>	<b>8-92</b>
8.5.1	It's an Obsession.....	8-93
8.5.2	Its an Addiction.....	8-93
8.5.3	It's an Impulse.....	8-93
8.5.4	It's Hormonal.....	8-94
8.5.5	It's a Sickness/disease.....	8-94
8.5.6	It's a Compulsion.....	8-94
8.5.7	It's a Weakness.....	8-95
8.5.8	It's Genetic.....	8-96
8.5.9	It's Environmental.....	8-96
8.5.10	"It's my Upbringing--The Way I Was Raised.".....	8-97
8.5.11	"It's My Personality".....	8-97
8.5.12	"It's My Disposition".....	8-97
8.5.13	"It's Chemical".....	8-97
8.5.14	"It's a Bad Habit".....	8-98
8.5.15	"The Devil Made Me Do It".....	8-98
8.5.16	"It's My _____'s Fault".....	8-98
8.5.17	"That's Just the Way I Am".....	8-99
8.5.18	"I Can't Help It".....	8-99
8.5.19	"I Was Born That Way".....	8-99
8.5.20	"I'm Diagnosed as Having _____.".....	8-99
8.5.21	"It's Not Hurting Anyone.".....	8-100
8.5.22	"Who Are You to Judge?".....	8-100
8.5.23	"Where is Your Love?".....	8-101
8.5.24	"Jesus Accepts Me, Why Can't You?".....	8-101
8.5.25	"Nobody's Perfect".....	8-101
8.5.26	"Don't Play God With Me.".....	8-102
8.5.27	"We're Mutually Consenting Adults".....	8-102
8.5.28	"Everybody Does It".....	8-102
8.5.29	"It's Adult Entertainment.....	8-102
8.5.30	"It's My Body".....	8-103
8.5.31	"It's Not a Sin to Me".....	8-103
<b>8.6</b>	<b>The Solution for Sin.....</b>	<b>8-103</b>
8.6.1	Jesus' Advice on How to Deal With Sin.....	8-103

---

8.6.2	Personal Relationship with God .....	8-104
8.6.3	God's Grace .....	8-104
8.6.4	Sanctification: To be set apart .....	8-106
8.6.5	The Holy Spirit .....	8-107
8.6.5.1	Satan Condemns, the Holy Spirit Convicts.....	8-107
8.6.5.2	Truth Versus Condemnation.....	8-108
8.6.5.3	Jesus' Conviction of Sin.....	8-108
8.6.6	Controlling the Mind .....	8-109
<b>8.7</b>	<b>Diagnosing Sin in Interpersonal Relationships.....</b>	<b>8-110</b>
<b>8.8</b>	<b>Statistics On Sin in the Bible .....</b>	<b>8-112</b>

Sin and dysfunctional behaviors are defined as abnormal or self-defeating behaviors which damage our best interests and our relationships with the people around us. They also invariably hurt other people in some way. This chapter describes what happens to us and our relationships with other people when we don't follow the rest of this Family Constitution and ignore God's glorious plan for the family found in the Bible. It also addresses how to deal with people who are sinning or hurting us. The topic of sin and dysfunctional behaviors appears as a separate chapter because these behaviors adversely impact all of our relationships, including family, husband-wife, parent-child, and employer-employee, and our friendships as well. The most frequent type of damage that results to these relationships from sin and dysfunctional behaviors is isolation of us from the people around us. When we habitually undertake sin and dysfunctional behaviors, the people around us are inclined to want to avoid us because we are just too difficult to deal with or are not available to interact with them routinely. You might say that a person who acts in sinful or dysfunctional ways is "a high maintenance individual." Unfortunately, this isolation further reinforces or encourages the worsening of sinful and dysfunctional behaviors. This is because "*an idle or isolated mind is the devil's workshop*". For instance, if we are an alcoholic and are consequently irrational and verbally abusive most of the time, then our friends and loved ones will naturally want to avoid us. Their avoidance of us will give us more free time and more incentive to undertake even more dysfunctional behaviors to occupy our increased discretionary time. Isolation in this case just conditions us to be more selfish, which is harmful.

The main types of harmful consequences that sin and dysfunctional behaviors can produce include those listed below. Note that these are simply symptoms that there are sin and dysfunctional behaviors in our lives that need to be dealt with. The more serious the problem the more serious the sin or dysfunction is that is causing it. The symptoms are listed in decreasing order of seriousness:

1. Murder (which violates the ten commandments)
2. Divorce
3. Commission of crime, including robbery, theft, embezzlement, kidnapping, assault
4. Frequent or recurring anger over some issue (which destroys our friendships, because the Bible says we should not make friends with an angry man)
5. Arguments or conflicts in relationships
6. Emotional or verbal abuse (which by the way is also a sin or dysfunctional behavior)
7. Problems with communication
8. Discouragement.
9. Depression.
10. Suicidal tendencies.
11. Self mutilation, including:
  - 11.1. Tattooing.
  - 11.2. Body piercing.
  - 11.3. Drug abuse.
  - 11.4. Gluttony.
  - 11.5. Excessive partying.
  - 11.6. Sexual promiscuity leading to venereal disease.

Sin and dysfunctional behaviors are things that we would be best to try diligently to eliminate from daily life in order to live a happier life. However, establishing new habits and techniques for dealing with our problems effectively can be difficult because of the inertia built up by our upbringing as a child. Along these lines, the best book we have ever read is a book by Stephen R. Covey called *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. We highly recommend this book for people who need more

tools for dealing with their problems. The following techniques are a sampling of some of the many techniques we recommend to eliminate sin and the dysfunctional behaviors that cause us to sin and hurt the people around us. They are listed in descending order of importance:

1. Reading the Bible (see John 3:31-32).
2. Prayer to allow the Holy Spirit to influence our lives for positive change.
3. Love and encouragement, not judgment or criticism, from our spouse and other family members who are part of the “family system”.
4. Personal accountability and responsibility to someone we trust who is outside of the relationships that are affected by our behaviors and who won’t personally benefit by eliminating the dysfunctional behaviors. This will help them to view our situation more objectively and unselfishly and prevent them from being dogmatic or pushy with us, which will discourage us from improving. Such a person might be a counselor, a pastor, a close friend, or a distant family member.
5. Journaling to monitor changes in behavior patterns and help us analyze our behaviors to improve them.
6. Frequent social interaction. We need to interact regularly and positively with the people around us as a way to validate our worth and the contribution we can make. This has the affect of improving our self-esteem so we won’t want to adopt self-destructive behaviors.
7. Friendships
8. The problem solving techniques identified in section 3.1.4: Dealing with Personal Problems Effectively.

## 8.1 Sin Defined

Exactly what are we talking about when we say we have committed sin? Most believers understand that there are sins of commission (the comittal act) and sins of omission (the continuous course of not doing the will of God) (James 4:7). That is, we as believers can sin by doing certain acts as we can sin by not doing certain other acts. However, both types of sin can be defined alike. Sin is best understood as:

The Greek term: Hamartia--missing of the mark (occurs 173 times in the New Testament).

- Conscious/concrete wrongdoing--against God
- Lawlessness--against God
- A deed--against God
- An act--against God
- An attitude--against God
- A thought--against God
- State of being--against God
- A condition--against God
- A practice--against God

Sin can also be understood to mean: To commit an injustice, to deal unjustly, to injure, and to live in unrighteousness. Sin is that which defies morals or decency. In 1 John, sin is seen as the opposite of love (1 John 3:1-10). Sin is sometimes seen as unseemly, unspeakable or fraudulent. Sin harms the

order of the world. Sin can also mean the neglect of one's duties towards God. In one sense, to commit sin is to be "godless." When we sin, we effectively turn our backs on God.

## 8.2 Sin as Spiritual Addiction/Slavery

You will note that the majority of behaviors described in this chapter fall under the Christian category of "sin." For most of the sections of this chapter, the Bible classifies the behavior as sinful. Jesus reminded us in John 8:34 that "*Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.*" Slavery is a situation where we are forced or compelled to do a thing. The result is a learned or acquired obsession to do the thing we are a slave to. That is why so many of the behaviors described in this chapter have obsessions or compulsions at their root. In addition to diagnosing the problem, Jesus also prescribed treatment for the problem of sin and obsessions in John 8:31-32: "*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*" If we learn His word (the Bible) and communion with our Father regularly through a personal relationship and prayer, then we will know the truth and be free from the obsession to do sin. The apostle Paul confirmed that God's prescription frees us from being slaves of sin in Romans 8:2: "*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*"

We can become spiritually addicted to sin the same way we can become physically addicted to narcotics or alcohol. By habitually committing sin or habitually consuming alcohol or injecting narcotics into our bodies, we become equally "addicted." In both cases of addiction, it is the identical process. The abusive use of drugs and alcohol produce an addiction to those substances. Likewise, habitual sin produces addiction to that particular sin. The only difference is one form of addition is physical (alcohol or narcotics) and the other is spiritual (sin). However, choosing to habitually commit sin (whatever form it may take) is no less deadly than actual physical addiction. In fact, the addiction to sin is far more deadly. Sin can be the deadly narcotic we inject into our souls that leads to the worst kind of death which is spiritual death. In the 60's and 70's the expression "speed kills" was a popular slogan meant to deter the use of illegal drugs among our young people. Today the church needs a similar slogan----sin kills!

For example, I sometimes wonder how much mental illness is caused by habitual or addictive sin. How much physical sickness and disease is the result of sin? According to God's Word sin can play a big part in why we suffer both physically and mentally, not to mention spiritually. "Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin." (Psalm 38:3,17). In fact, let us look at the complete list of the effects of sin according to the psalmist (Psalm 38). You may be shocked at this list of causes and effects. The psalmist said the cause was sin. The same psalmist then listed the effects.

Psalm 38:

1. Sin results in the Lord's "rebuke."
2. Sin results in the Lord's "anger."
3. Sin results in the Lord's "discipline."
4. Sin results in "the Lord's arrows have pierced me...."
5. Sin results in "your hand has come down upon me."
6. Sin results in "no health in my body..."
7. Sin results in "my bones have no soundness."
8. Sin results in "my guilt has overwhelmed me."

9. Sin results in "too heavy a burden to bear."
10. Sin results in "my loathsome wounds fester."
11. Sin results in "I am bowed down and brought very low."
12. Sin results in "I go about mourning."
13. Sin results in "my back is filled with searing pain."
14. Sin results in "no health in my body."
15. Sin results in "I am feeble."
16. Sin results in "I am utterly crushed."
17. Sin results in "I groan in anguish."
18. Sin results in sightings, pounding heart, failing strength, dimness of eye.

Then in the New Testament the church is further earned about sin at the Lord's Supper (Communion). Paul wrote, "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 11:27-30). We understand the phrase "have fallen asleep" to mean physical death in this instance.

### 8.3 Types of Sin

One interesting fact about sin is that in Spanish, the word "sin" means "without". We think that the thing that people who sin are "without" is God! Sin happens when there is a deficiency or lack in our lives of Godliness and all the things that make God the loving, good, righteous, omnipotent, and glorious being that He is! Sin was the reason Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden of Eden and why there is death and disease and suffering in the world. The first or "original sin" was disobedience by Eve to God's commandment not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. With that knowledge acquired through sinful disobedience comes an awareness of all the nasty things that go wrong in our lives when we ignore God's commands, as we will cover in great detail in each of the following sections.

#### 8.3.1 Abortion

Abortion is not specifically mentioned in the bible as a sin, but there are indirect references to it in the following scriptures:

*"Though shalt not murder." Exodus 20:13*

*"8 Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die.*

*9. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and the needy."  
[Prov. 31:8-9]*

*"23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*

*24 Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*

*25 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.*

*26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and disk, that the outside of them may be clean also."  
[Matt. 23:23-26]*

Based on the above, we would argue that abortion is murder, and that not only should we as Christians not do it, but based on Prov. 31:8-9, we should open our mouth and rebuke the behavior publicly in accordance with Lev. 19:17, Prov. 24:25, and Prov. 28:23. Another implication of the above is that before we are ever going to convince the world that they shouldn't condone or allow the murder that is abortion, we Christians, the salt and light of the world, need to clean out our own house first and end the practice of abortion within our congregations. Sadly, however, many Christians take the attitude that abortion is not their problem or responsibility. Even more tragic is the fact that one out of every five women who abort in the U.S. identifies herself as a born-again/evangelical Christian.

Here's an example of why abortion is not only wrong and hypocritical, but puts the foundations of our society on a very slippery downward slope indeed:

*"Lets consider the case of two mothers. Both of them are eight months pregnant with healthy babies who would be viable outside of the womb and would survive birth at the time if they were born prematurely.*

*One mother is driving down a two lane road one night and a drunk driver swerves into her lane and hits her head on. She is hospitalized and the baby is killed while it is still inside of her. The mother presses criminal charges against the drunk driver for murder and/or manslaughter. The drunk driver is prosecuted for manslaughter and is sentenced to 10 years in prison.*

*Now lets consider mother number two, who also has an eight month old baby and who decides she doesn't want the baby but refuses to put it up for adoption and give it to a needy and willing couple. Instead, the mother goes to an abortion clinic to have the baby aborted with the blessing and encouragement of the state and of politicians like Al Gore. The doctor then reaches into the mother's womb and pulls out the baby by the legs until his head is the only thing left in the birth canal. The baby's legs and arms are kicking wildly as he tries to get air. Then the doctor (who by the way took the Hippocratic oath to always protect and respect life and not destroy it) inserts a pair of scissors into the bottom read of the baby's skull to open a hole. He pokes a vacuum curette through the hole and sucks the baby's brains out. Then he pulls the rest of the baby's lifeless body out through the birth canal and throws the body out with the trash. This is called a partial birth abortion, which incidentally is legal in some states.*

*In the first instance, the drunk driver was prosecuted for manslaughter because he was responsible for killing a baby against the mother's will. He is condemned by his family and friends for the act, and he serves a prison sentence and has plenty of time to feel the guilt for what he has done, even though he never intended to kill anyone and the death was accidental.*

*In the second instance, the mother premeditated the end of her baby's life, paid someone money (like a hired killer) to terminate the baby's life, and ended that life brutally and in cold blood. There isn't a more violent or inhumane way to end a life than a partial birth abortion. The doctor who killed the baby in the second instance not only wasn't prosecuted criminally for his actions, he actually made money doing it with the full sanction and blessing of the state! Not only that, but the doctor doing the killing never even gave the chance for the baby to demonstrate that it was viable or look it in the eye as it sucked its brains out. That's why he left the head in the birth canal as he sucked the brains out: So he wouldn't have to watch the crying baby as he killed it and instead*



*could increase the chance that it would suffocate before it came out the birth canal. That's murder too. The other reason he did this was because once the baby leaves the womb, then it is protected legally from being killed.*

*The only difference between these two scenarios is that of the mother's wishes. In the first instance, the mother didn't want her baby killed. In the second instance, she did. Are we then supposed to assume that murder or manslaughter is 'OK' as long as mom's do it or want to do it? Incidentally, conception takes two people. Why is not the father's wishes regarded in this matter? Shouldn't the mother at least be required to seek the consent of the father also?"*

After society sanctions abortions as it does now, what is next? Are we going to put society or some politician in charge of deciding whether to end a life because it is not "cost-effective"? Are we going to decide that the state's wishes, like that of pregnant mothers, is more important than the right of liberty and self-determination for our old people? When they are hospitalized and get too expensive, are we going to let doctors decide to exterminate old or indigent patients when they are not covered by insurance and need expensive medical care? Our society is headed for **BIG** trouble if we let this happen, and the trouble starts when we condone abortion.

An interesting consequence of the abortion we have described above is that it causes the birthrate to go down, which means ultimately that we have fewer or no young people to carry the torch into our future. The consequence is a graying population that continues to get older, and who have no younger people to support them or help them. Ironically, these older people are deceived into thinking that the state will take care of them with the Social (In)Security program, which everyone knows is going bankrupt. It used to be that the young within the family unit took care of the old and vice versa. Now that we have subverted and usurped the role of the family with idolatrous social programs like social security and medicare, older adults are leaning more on the government and less on the children they aren't having. They are isolating themselves in their relative affluence and escaping accountability to what used to be their family and replacing it with self-indulgence and idleness and slavery to the government. When these same self-indulgent abortionistic adults get too old to take care of themselves and become wards of the state, and when the state determines that they can't support these older Americans because all the young people they should have had but aborted instead aren't in the workforce to pay their social security and Medicare, then its a foregone conclusion that euthenasia will be the ultimate result later on. Sin begets more sin, as they say, and death multiplies.

Keep in mind, however, that this whole nightmarish scenario all started with sexual promiscuity and a "mistake" that turned later on into a murder to cover up the mistake. We think a much more responsible approach to sexuality for people with a propensity to be both selfish, promiscuous, and murderous, is for these people to have themselves sterilized, because selfish and lustful and murderous people don't make very good parents anyway.

Another thing we would like to point out is that performing abortions earlier in the pregnancy using a drug or pill is just as evil. RU486, the abortion drug, for instance, is nothing but a "human insecticide" being peddled by satanic brokers of death and murder. Paul alludes to this in the following scripture:

*"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."*  
[John 8:44]

Incidentally, the lying starts with the very terminology used to describe the abominable act of abortion. When abortionists describe themselves, they refer to themselves as "Pro Choice". When they describe Christians, they refer to them as "Pro Life", almost implying that if they are opposed by Christians, then those Christians must be anti-choice or coercive or dogmatic. But isn't abortion about the worst kind of coercion of one human being towards the other--murder? Instead, abortionists ought to truthfully refer to themselves as the other part of the duality they use in describing Christians: "Pro Death". But of course, being sinful, the abortionists use their very language as a way to hide from the guilt and condemnation they obviously feel about their sin.

For more information about this subject, refer the to following rather graphic and eye-opening website:

*<http://www.abortionno.com>*

This site has a wealth of information on both sides of the abortion issue.

### 8.3.2 Adultery

Adultery is condemned by God as sin in the Bible as part of the Ten Commandments.

*"You shall not commit adultery." Exodus 20:14*

Adultery can be caused or at least encouraged by any one of the following behaviors or attitudes. Note that the list below is not meant to be all inclusive, but is instead meant to cover the most common causes in descending order of importance:

1. Our marital partner refusing to submit at all sexually or not submitting often enough. If we can't get our needs met sexually from within the relationship and yet we are sworn to be faithful to our spouse, then there are incentives for us to pursue clandestine affairs.
2. Dissatisfaction with the physical features of our current spouse. Perhaps our spouse has gotten fat since we met them, or they may have suffered from an accident or disease that has left them with some kind of physical deformity.
3. Communication or empathy problems with one or both spouses. Spouses who either refuse to communicate or who lack respect and politeness in communicating make us feel defensive or evasive. These types of spouses can cause us to seek companionship form others who appreciate us more.

A man who is being unfaithful to his wife and now wants to leave her for this other woman will tell her four things:

1. We never had a marriage to begin with. We should never have married. In other words, he turns his abandonment into an annulment. It never should have happened. I never loved you. We never had a marriage. What he is really doing is sources of guilt, and there are four sources of guilt that he has to deal with.
2. This may look hard for you now but it is better for you in the long run. For us to live in this kind of conflict isn't good.
3. It's hard for the kids now, but they are going to be better off too, because children should not be raised in an atmosphere where there is no love, and it's better for them.

4. I've prayed about this and God says it's OK. Oh, and what an abomination that is.

When you get to that point, what more can you say. God himself has endorsed this. So he has taken the four sources of guilt and set them aside. And he may believe it himself, but God doesn't believe it. It's a lie and he has deceived himself.

### **8.3.2.1 Damaging affects of Adultery**

Some of the damaging affects of adultery on the family unit can include:

1. Divorce. The Bible authorizes Christians to divorce spouses who have committed adultery. The bad affects of divorce include:
  - 1.1. Children growing up in single parent households without dads around and not having proper role models for developing healthy relationships with the opposite sex.
  - 1.2. Moms having to support children as single-parents with a low income.
  - 1.3. Inadequate supervision of children in the household because of the absence of one of the parents in the household.
2. Excommunication from one's church. The Catholic faith excommunicates members for either adultery or divorce.
3. Infecting one's spouse with damaging or fatal venereal diseases acquired by having sex with other partners, often without their knowledge.
4. Mistrust and suspicion. If we lie or try to conceal affairs, this causes marital conflict and undermines communication in the marriage.

Adultery can very quickly destroy marriages if it is not dealt with firmly but fairly using "tough love". For instance, Dr. James Dobson in his book entitled *Love Must Be Tough*, stated that adultery is a type of sin that is so severe in its consequences to the stability of the family that spouses who are affected by it should use behavior modification techniques and be very dogmatic about incentivizing and motivating their spouse to eliminate this behavior. We concur with these findings.

Not only does adultery destroy marriages, it destroys churches. For instance, when the adulterer is a pastor, often that pastor must resign from the ministry and chaos in the church is the result. Also, the people going to that church become discouraged by the actions of the leader and may stumble in their faith and quit attending church because of this occasion.

The lives of children can similarly be destroyed by adultery after the divorce breaks up. Their self-esteem can be damaged permanently by adultery or divorce. When children see the adulterous parent abandon the family, they sometimes begin to believe that there was something wrong with them and that they weren't worthy of the love of that parent. This leads to despair and self-destructive behaviors that can drive a child into a miserable life of unhappiness. It also undermines their faith in marriage as an institution and makes them reluctant to pursue marriage when they become adults.

### **8.3.2.2 Techniques for preventing and dealing with adultery**

Some of the techniques for preventing or dealing with adulterous behavior include:

1. We can schedule regular weekly days called “Husband’s night” or “Wives night” in which our partner gets whatever they desire sexually for the whole evening. See section 4.7 (Marriage Event Schedule) and section 4.8.5 (Sex and Affection) for further details on this idea.
2. Spouses can ask each other if they are satisfied sexually with their partner. They should focus on being creative and interested sexual partners with their spouse, regardless of their feelings about them.
3. We can try to make ourselves more attractive and dress or behave in ways that our spouse enjoys. However, we should also try to encourage our spouse if they do this and avoid comparing them to others, because this will create anxiety and damage their self-esteem.
4. We can make ourselves always available for and interested in communicating with our spouse. See section 4.8.4 (Communication) on some ideas for enhancing communication.
5. Show empathy, interest, and concern for our spouse at all times. Ask them how they are feeling and try to help them be happier.
6. We should live our lives as Christians as though there is no such thing as a secret. We should seek fellowship and personal relationships with godly members of our same sex who will hold us accountable and help encourage us to take the right path when we are tempted. This means becoming part of a home fellowship, for instance.
7. Each spouse should ask the other spouse weekly and get a response to the following seven questions:
  - 7.1. Have you been with a member of the opposite sex anywhere this week that might be seen as compromising?
  - 7.2. Have any of your financial dealings lacked integrity?
  - 7.3. Have you exposed yourself to any sexually explicit material?
  - 7.4. Have you spent adequate time in bible study and prayer?
  - 7.5. Have you given priority time to your family.
  - 7.6. Have you fulfilled the mandates of your responsibilities?
  - 7.7. Have you just lied to me?

### 8.3.3 Anger<sup>1</sup>

*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty. And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*  
[Prov. 16:32]

Anger is the one deadly sin we all try to justify. We like to think that there are some circumstances in which anger is permissible. We even go so far as to make anger a defensible reaction to certain situations.

A man comes home unexpectedly and surprises his wife in bed with another man. In a fit of anger, he rushes to the bureau, pulls out a gun and shoots them both. In such circumstances, we sympathize with murder and call the killing of two people an excusable “crime of passion.”

A fourteen-year-old girl is raped and traumatized for life. The assailant is tried and the judge prescribes a suspended sentence. As the rapist leaves the courthouse, he is accosted and stabbed to death by the angry mother of the violated child. We react to the news of this stabbing with a sense that justice has been done. “After all,” we say, “who wouldn’t want to do what she did?”

<sup>1</sup> Portions excerpted from Seven Deadly Sins, Anthony Campolo, Victor Books, 1987, ISBN 0-89693-533-7, pp. 54-73.

We all know that Jesus said, “Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matt. 5:22,KJV). But how many of us know that the phrase “without a cause,” was added by the medieval scholar Erasmus? The Revised Standard Version and the New International Version of the Bible do not include the phrase. Erasmus was so desirous of justifying certain forms of anger that he was willing to change the words of Jesus in order to make his case. Jesus is harder on anger than Erasmus was, or, for that matter, than most of us might be. Jesus put anger in the same category as murder. If that seems harsh, just consider the consequences of anger in the lives of people and in the history of the world. Anger causes murder, provokes torture, leads to wars and a host of other cruel and diabolical crimes too ugly to mention. Anger stimulates spiteful actions that go far beyond retributive justice and usually result in the suffering of innocent people. It knows no limits as it leads to vengeance.

### **8.3.3.1      The Causes of Anger**

Anger is an emotional response to being unjustly humiliated. It involves a loss of self-esteem. The angry person feels outraged at what has been done to him/her and seeks to punish the perpetrator of the injustice. Vengeance, rather than justice, is sought. The angry person is carried away by the emotion and usually behaves in ways which can only be considered excessive.

A recent news story in the Philadelphia area told of a man who killed a driver who cut in front of him on the expressway. The murderer explained that traffic had slowed as it was funneled into a single lane. He claimed that he had waited in line for more than a quarter of an hour until he could begin to enter into the flow of traffic. Just as he was about to do so, another car passed him on the shoulder of the highway and cut in front of his automobile. As though that were not enough, the driver laughed and made an obscene gesture at him. It was too much for him to handle, and when traffic later stopped because of congestion, he removed the gun from his glove compartment, got out of his car, walked up to the side of the car of the man who had taunted him and shot him to death. The injustice of what had happened was bad enough, but being laughed at and taunted was more humiliation than he could tolerate.

When I was ten years old, my sister took me to a rodeo show at the Philadelphia Convention Hall. I loved the show, and to add to my joy, my sister bought me a felt cowboy hat from a vendor who assured this would be bronco that the hats he was selling were straight from Texas.

The next day I proudly wore my hat so that all the kids in the neighborhood could admire it. Unexpectedly, an older boy who was almost twice my size grabbed my precious hat from my head and ran off with it. Hysterically I chased him, pleading with him to give me back what was mine. Suddenly, he stopped, turned on me, pushed me to the ground and held me down by sitting on my chest.

Then, for no reason except to be mean, he tore my hat in half. As I lay there helpless and in tears, I experienced an unforgettable surge of rage. The adrenalin that the anger generated gave me almost superhuman strength. I pushed my enemy off me, leaped on his back as he tried to escape, and began to scratch his face. He fell to the ground, and his head accidentally hit the curb. He was unconscious, but I did not care. With wild viciousness, I started to kick him, and if two men had not rushed to stop me, I might have kicked him to death. My anger came not simply from the injustice that had been dealt to me, but from humiliation and loss of self-esteem.

### 8.3.3.2 Anger in the Home

The family provides the context for most expressions of anger. This is true for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that in the home we feel less restraint from society. The family seems to be a separate world, distinct from the rest of our lives. We sense that we can express ourselves with our families without losing their affection and support. Most of us seem to think that it's okay to do things at home which we would never do outside.

Those most likely to exhibit outrageous behavior in the home are teenage children. I have been amazed to observe how young people treat their parents. They not only fail to honor them, but often humiliate them in unthinkable ways.

The problem is frequently most severe with the parent of the same sex as the teenager. Usually mothers (because they are often the most available) have incredibly painful times with their daughters. There are daughters who lash out at their mothers with derogatory names. They seem to feel that being a mother means enduring this kind of verbal abuse. Somehow they feel that their children have a right to emotional catharsis at the expense of their mothers. Seldom do they give any thought to the anguish which their mothers endure as they listen to the children's rantings. Fathers are more likely to be victims of such deplorable behavior from their sons. Young people seldom understand the anger that their parents experience when they are humiliated by those whom they love and for whom they have been willing to sacrifice so much of themselves.

Sometimes, after Christian young people have been off to a church camp or religious weekend retreat, they come home talking "the language of Zion" and, with pious platitudes give testimonies of how their lives have been changed by God. However, none of this has any significance unless it changes the way they act at home. Those who have had genuine conversion experiences will give evidence of their new life in Christ by how they relate to their parents.

As I travel across America and talk to people, I realize how much pent-up anger there is in parents who have been humiliated and dealt with unjustly by their children. Everywhere I go, I sense in parents a repressed rage at children who talk to them in denigrating ways. Such parents feel most helpless when their children are too old to be punished, and so the anger builds up more.

But children are not offenders in the home. Many children are victims of parental offenses and develop deep feelings of anger toward their parents because they feel humiliated by the unjust treatment. The child who is punished publicly often holds a grudge against the parent. Even when punishment is deserved, it should not be carried out where others can watch. To be paddled privately for some wrongdoing might be tolerable, but to be paddled in public seems an unforgivable humiliation.

It is important to remember that anger stems primarily from loss of self-esteem. The Bible gives clear instructions to parents: "do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Surely this prohibits parents from punishing their children in such a way as to cause them unjustifiable embarrassment. Public punishment can have dire consequences, in that the accompanying loss of self-esteem may generate anger that leads to unimaginable evil deeds.

In a society in which divorce is increasingly common, children are often caught in the angry conflicts of their parents. The causes and process of divorce usually generate anger because divorce often holds

a person up to public humiliation. To discover that one's spouse has "cheated" in a marriage is extremely painful; but when that adultery becomes public, the sense of disgrace is even more emotionally devastating. It is a horrible thing to have one's friends and relatives know that his/her spouse prefers another partner. The hurt is intense and the humiliation is often overwhelming. It is not surprising that in such circumstances a person can experience uncontrollable anger.

The divorce process itself is so structured that even those who seek to end a marriage amicably tend to develop deep feelings of anger toward each other. Divorce lawyers may resort to unfair tactics and try to depict the mates of their clients in the worst possible light. Frequently, to gain some advantage in a settlement, a lawyer will bring up ugly behavior from the past which will make the other party seem thoroughly perverted or evil. The humiliation endured in the courtroom can cause abiding anger to seethe in consciousness of the partner who has been so exposed. Unfortunately, the children can end up as the victims of this anger, if their parents use them to get back at each other.

I know of one case in which a parent deliberately violated the visitation rights of his former wife. He refused to have the child ready to be picked up on days when she was entitled to have the child, knowing he could upset her by making her wait half an hour when she came to his house. His anger motivated his meanness and his meanness made his wife increasingly angry. The child who loved both of her parents was torn apart emotionally by their anger toward each other.

### **8.3.3.3 Reactions to Anger**

I know a man whose motto is: "Don't get mad, get even." Anger stimulates a seemingly uncontrollable urge to strike back at the person who has humiliated you or unscrupulously wronged you. Anger generates fantasies of ways to make the offender suffer and repent. Anger stimulates a longing to see the evildoer writhe in psychological, if not physical, agony for the crimes committed.

Edgar Allen Poe's classic tale, "The Cask of Amontillado," tells the story of an Italian nobleman named Montresor who, with infinite patience, premeditated the murder of his friend Fortunato, whose treatment of him he interpreted as injurious and insulting. Montresor anticipated the prospect of revenge with great pleasure and with such control that Fortunato was unaware of his intent until he faced death. In Poe's story, as in the true incident which inspired it, the crime went undiscovered and unpunished. Vengeance was complete, but at what cost to the avenger?

In the somewhat violent high school subculture in which I spent my teenage years, there was a big tough guy who daily extorted money from younger students. It was not enough for him that he took money from boys who could never stand up to his bullying—but, at times, he would tell his victims to beg him to take their money. He got immense pleasure from forcing boys to do this in the presence of their girlfriends and then laughing at their humiliation.

One day at lunchtime, he picked on a boy whose brother was a 225-pound, six feet five-inch center on the basketball team. Halfway through his extortion act, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned and was greeted by a solid punch to the stomach. In the face of the threat posed by his attacker, the tyrant became a sniveling coward begging not to be hit again. The crowd in the lunchroom roared with approval as the bully was told to get on his knees and beg for mercy. Not only did he do that, but he was forced to go to every other boy in the lunchroom and kiss his shoes. After that, the bully transferred to another school. His public humiliation was more than he could bear. The rest of us were glad that he had gotten a taste of his own medicine. We felt he had it coming.

When Rudolf Eichman, the Nazi war criminal, was captured and put on public display in a cage, we sensed something ugly in the treatment; but we could easily understand the desire of the victims of Aushwitz to seek vengeance on the architect of the Jewish Holocaust.

Most examples of getting even are not so dramatic. I know of a secretary who was severely and, from her point of view, unjustly criticized for the way she did some of her work. Her coworkers all knew that the boss was displeased with her and she sensed that most of them agreed with his opinion. For several days she tried to go to work as though the criticism did not affect her, but it was to no avail. She was continually coming upon colleagues who seemed to suspend their conversation until after she was gone. Several times coworkers referred to the criticisms of the boss in their dealings with her. Eventually, she came to the point where she could no longer endure being put down, and decided to quit. Those in the office were not aware of the fact that essential papers and documents were filed according to a complex system that only she understood. When she left, the office systems were paralyzed because nobody could find anything. They tried to contact her, but she made herself unavailable. With great glee, she relished the confusion of those who had hurt her. Down deep inside she felt the satisfaction of having gotten even.

“‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19), but few of us are willing to accept that arrangement. After a ten-year-old boy has been pushed into the mud by a nasty classmate, he was told that it was unnecessary to try to get even because God punished evildoers. He responded, “Okay, I’ll give God till Saturday.”

For a variety of reasons, getting even is not a healthy response to anger. First of all, it cheapens and diminishes us. I had a friend who was a doctor in a Third World country ruled by an evil dictator. The ruler wanted to build a new clinic for my friend so that the sick in the village might have a decent place for medical care. My friend was so full of anger against the dictator that he refused to accept the offer. He told me that there was no way he was going to help that evil man look good in the eyes of the townspeople, after all the rotten things he had done. He gave a speech in the village market boldly declaring that his refusal to accept the gift from the nation’s president was his way to “spitting in his face.” My friend failed in his effort to get even. Instead his refusal generated feelings of disgust and disillusionment among the villagers. Their once-respected doctor they now saw as petty and mean, willing to deny them a much-needed medical facility just to satisfy his anger and pride. The attempt at vengeance cheapened my friend and diminished him in the eyes of those he wanted to serve.

One of my reasons for opposing capital punishment is that it diminishes the humanity of those who demand it. When we murder a murderer, we become something less than God intends us to be. Furthermore, vengeance seldom provides us with a sense that justice has been done.

Recently a man who had raped, robbed, and murdered a sixteen-year-old girl was put to death in the electric chair. The dead girl’s father demanded and got the right to be present for the execution. When the ordeal was over, the father was interviewed by a reporter and simply said, “I wanted him to suffer more for what he did. Dying isn’t enough!”

Our acts of vengeance are never enough. The death of a perverted man is not sufficient recompense for the death of a lovely young girl. There is seldom equity in the simple exchange of the life of the murderer for the life of the innocent. Vengeance leaves those who seek it with a sense of having been cheated. It brings a hollow victory. To those who cry, “An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth,” one can offer the response that Gandhi once gave: “Following that philosophy will leave the world filled with blind toothless people.”



God specifically commanded Moses to instruct the people of Israel on the subject of vengeance: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him.. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:17-18).

There is increasing evidence that the vengeful themselves end up suffering for their desire to get even. Studies exploring the linkage between psychological and physiological conditions are discovering that obsession with vengeance may be a cause of such a diverse array of ailments as arthritis, asthma, and heart disease. The emotions that vengeful people experience often create a chemical imbalance in their bodies that can have dire consequences. I do not mean to suggest that these ailments are always traceable to vengeful emotions; but there is little question among some researchers that vengeful feelings are deleterious to health. As a matter of fact, an entire book has been written about this subject entitled *Anger Kills*, by Redford Williams, M.D., and Virginia Williams, Ph.D., Harper Perennial, 1993, ISBN 0-06-097623-3.

Some people who cannot get even handle their anger by suppressing it. This is the coping mechanism often used by religious people who try to pretend that they have forgotten all about the evildoers and are not going to let themselves be bothered by such people. We religious types often pretend that we are bigger than we really are, and we try to convince others that we have risen above becoming angry when we are publicly wronged. It may be all right to convince others, but we should never deceive ourselves. Usually we are angered and we do want vengeance, but we pretend that things are otherwise. We suppress our anger and keep secret our ugly urge for revenge. In time we think we have forgotten all about what once angered us, but we should know better. We should know that nothing is ever really forgotten. Nothing is put out of our minds completely. We should know that what we suppress from our consciousness is only driven into the “underground” of our subconscious where it will haunt us without hindrance.

Psychologists tell us that the most likely consequence of suppressing anger is depression, and we know that there is a lot of depression around. When we suppress anger, we really unconsciously run it in on ourselves and inner resentments eat away at our psyche, destroying our joy. When anger is turned inward via suppression, we end up hating ourselves and wanting ourselves to experience unhappiness and pain. Ironically, we get what we want and depression grows.

I am not suggesting that all depression results from suppressed anger, but I believe much of it does. This is especially true when the depression seems unfounded. When people tell me that they can find no reason for their depression, I ask them to search for suppressed anger.

As a boy, I was haunted by the phrase in 1 Corinthians that tells us that we may get sick or die if we celebrate Holy Communion without first confessing and getting rid of the sin in our hearts. “Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why so many of you are weak and ill, and some have died” (1 Cor. 11:28-30).

Depth psychology concurs with the awesome truths of the Scriptures. How much depression is caused and how many suicides result when people come to Christ without having dealt with emotions that are too deep to put into words?

However, we must not be overawed by modern psychology, nor be too ready to accept the scientific prescriptions of its would-be healers of troubled souls. Psychiatrists and psychologists are often

wrong. Sometimes their advice is poor. This is certainly true of much of what they say about handling anger. Often the “professionals” suggest that we get rid of our anger by expressing it. They advise us to experience the catharsis that comes from “working out” our anger and frustration. The angry child is given a teddy bear and told to punch it as though it were the parent who has made the child angry. The employee is told to play golf and hit the ball as though it were the boss. The wife is told to tell her husband off and not keep her emotions bottled up inside.

Certainly it is better to punch a teddy bear than a mother, hit a golf ball than a boss, and to scream at one’s husband than to hate one’s self; but there are dangers in expressing anger.

Expressing an emotion often causes us to feel the emotion even more intensely. Those who do loving acts usually feel love all the more. Those who do kind things usually end up feeling kind. And those who express anger usually end up feeling more angry. It may be healthier to express anger than to suppress it, but expressing anger usually intensifies it.

George Herbert Mead, one of America’s foremost sociologists, discovered that what we say and do influences how we feel, as much as how we feel influences what we do. Feelings and actions reinforce each other. There is, according to Mead, interaction between them. We all should know this from experience. Who has not told someone off in a fit of anger, only to find that the expression of anger caused him or her to tremble with even greater rage when all was said and done?

What Mead pronounced in theory, and most of us have learned from experience, was profoundly stated a long time ago by the Apostle James:

*For we all make MISTAKES, and if any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also. If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!*  
[James 3:2-5]

James wants us to recognize that what we say in anger can determine our destiny. There are consequences to what we say and to in the expression of anger, and we should weigh these consequences before we take the simplistic advice of those psychotherapists who tell us to do so for our health.

I can think of no more evil way to handle anger than to displace it—in other words, to take out our anger on the innocent. The newspapers these days report regularly on wife-abuse. In case after case, it becomes apparent that the victims of these beatings suffer because of displaced anger.

Men who have been humiliated at work, whose anger stems from their own limitations, and who hate themselves because they have failed to live up to expectations, express their pent-up aggression on those close to them. Usually these innocent and defenseless victims are their wives. And for every story that makes the papers, there are hosts of unreported cases. Angry men, who are unable to strike out at those they believe have wronged them, are dangerous to be around.

Wives are not the only victims of such displaced anger. Sometimes it is taken out on the elderly who are in no position to defend themselves. Often the victims of displaced anger are children, as hospital records clearly indicate. And surprisingly, there seems to be increasing incidence of husband-abuse.

Even if wives do not hit their husbands, many of them find other ways of taking their anger out on them. Wives displace their pent-up anger by lashing out at their husbands verbally.

I knew a woman who always seemed to be scolding her husband and calling him denigrating names. I was amazed as I watched her afflict him with a seemingly endless flow of verbal barbs. One day when I was with him, I asked why he put up with such painful treatment. He responded by telling me that several years before their son had died of cancer and that, as a result of that tragedy, his wife was angry with God. He went on to say, “She can’t take out her anger on God, so I guess she has to take it out on me instead.” He seemed to understand very well why his wife treated him so cruelly.

#### **8.3.3.4 Overcoming Anger**

There are constructive and healthy ways of handling anger. Perhaps the following prescriptions will provide some helpful guidance in establishing a Christian approach to overcoming this deadly emotional condition.

First of all, when anger overtakes us, we should take time to reflect. Specifically, we should reflect on the grace which God has shown to us when we have done things that would justify His anger toward us. In one of His parables, Jesus encourages us to take this route of reflection.

*Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, “Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of the pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred dinari; and seizing him by the throat he said, “Pay what you owe.” So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?”*

[Matt. 18:23-33]

When we think we have a right to be angry, Jesus reminds us that God, who has every right to be angry with us, is willing to remove our wrongs from the record. It is petty of us to make others pay for their wrongdoing when the Heavenly Father has forgiven and forgotten our offenses.

God does not vent His wrath toward us even though we deserve it. Instead He handles His wrath by having it borne by His Son. The Scriptures teach us that the obedience of Jesus manifested in His willingness to obey His Father’s will even to death on the cross served to allay God’s anger toward us. Jesus represented us in His obedient submission to the Father’s will, and because of that, God’s anger toward us is no more. That is the meaning behind Paul’s words:

*“Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins”*

[Rom. 3:23-25]

An expiation is a gift that overcomes the wrath of someone who is offended. No other gift offered up on behalf of those of us who should have incurred the just anger of God can match what Jesus gave, as He offered Himself up for us all. In light of the love which took Jesus to the cross, there is little justification for our bearing grudges toward those who have angered us.

Someone once told the story of a mountaineer from West Virginia who fell in love with the beautiful daughter of the town preacher. The gruff and tough man one evening looked deeply into the eyes of the preacher's daughter and said, "I love you." It took more courage for him to say those simple words than he had ever had to muster for anything else he had ever done. Minutes passed in silence and then the preacher's daughter said, "I love you too."

The tough mountaineer said nothing except, "Good night." Then he went home, got ready for bed and prayed, "God, I ain't got nothin' against nobody."

When a person is loved, there seems to be little room for anger in his life. Love drives anger out of one's mind and heart, for life is too wonderful to allow anger to creep in and spoil it.

If each of us would reflect on the good news that God loves us, and would be open to His love, we could be transformed into people who "ain't got nothin' against nobody." The first step to overcoming anger is to reflect on what Jesus has done for us and how much He loves us.

Secondly, we must learn that the Bible teaches us that there is justice in God's economy. There is no need for us to seek revenge for wrongs done against us. There is a God who sets things right. Nobody gets away with sin forever.

Even if we did not have the Bible's revelation about our afterlife, we would know it existed—cosmic justice demands it. There must be a place and time, beyond space and time as we know them, where the unrepentant who have hurt people will be made to pay for what they have done. The Bible assures us that there is such a place. Mean people do not get away with their meanness. Corrupt people do not get away with their evil. Oppressors do not get away with what they do to the weak and helpless. Tyrants and petty thieves pay for what they do. In the words of Friedrich Van Logauz:

*Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;  
Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.*

To those who are oppressed, the Apostle James writes, "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:7-9).

There is no need for us to seethe in anger and seek revenge; in the end, justice will come from God. However, the final Christian resolution to anger comes from deciding to imitate the style of Jesus and doing good for those who have made us angry. What we do influences how we feel, and that means that our feelings can be changed by what we decide to do. In short, there are things we can do to overcome anger. There are ways that anger can be dealt with creatively and biblically. However, when all those ways are analyzed, they can be summed up in one statement: Do good to those who hurt you, or spitefully use you, or do all manner of evil against you.

Victor Frankl, the famous psychoanalyst, was imprisoned in one of Hitler's concentration camps. He was stripped of all his dignity, abused, and tortured. He was starved and forced into slave labor. There

were many in the concentration camp who did not survive, not because they were put into gas chambers, but because they found that survival was intolerable. They were the ones who were eaten up with rage against their oppressors. The humiliation meted out on them by their Nazi dominators could not be resisted, and the overwhelming injustice was too much for them to endure. Therefore, they chose to die. Nobody overtly killed them; they gave up living.

Victor Frankl had another answer which was as old as the Sermon on the Mount. He decided to do good for those who wronged him. His decision was in line with what Jesus asked His followers to do:

*And if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.*

*You have heard it said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"  
[Matt. 5:40-44]*

When his captors asked him to scrub latrines with a toothbrush, he would do it twice. He did it once because he had to and the second time because he willed to. He turned the situation in which he was being humiliated into one in which he willingly served others. By redefining the situation in a positive way, he learned that he could overcome his hatred and anger toward his oppressors.

It is unlikely that we will be placed in circumstances as evil as those experienced by Victor Frankl, But his way of dealing with rage is applicable in all situations. Do for those who make you angry more than they ask of you. Do good for them and serve them.

In my mid-twenties, I served as the pastor of a church. Looking back on those years, I realize that my inexperience and lack of maturity sometimes led me to do things that unnecessarily offended some of my parishioners. On the other hand, there were some people in that church who were not kind to me. One particular woman seemed determined to have me ousted from my job. She did everything she could to make my life miserable. I could count on some weekly act of meanness from her. For quite a while, I felt myself growing increasingly angry with her. What she was doing to me seemed so unfair and cruel. Her treatment of me seemed so un-Christian. Almost everyone to whom I told my story agreed that I was justified in my feelings toward her, that the ways in which she tried to humiliate me in the eyes of the congregation were evil. Only my wife did not defend my attitude.

My wife is one of those rare people who always has compassion for wrongdoers, because she is convinced that their actions are expressions of their own unhappiness. Peggy persuaded me to be nice to my tormentor and to seek ways to make her feel good. I did my best. I took her to special denominational meetings, gave her public recognition for any positive thing she did for the church, and sent her postcards when I was on trips. I'm not sure how much all of these kindnesses changed her feelings about me, but I do know that the more I did for that lady, the more I liked her. I learned what Jesus taught—the more I serve a person with whom I justifiably could be angry, the less angry I feel.

I know of a woman whose husband had been unfaithful to her. What made the matter worse was that the sexual affair had been carried on with her best friend. My friend had been betrayed by the two people in the world she trusted most. The whole sordid affair had been placed right under her nose, but she loved both her husband and her friend so much that she had failed to notice what was happening. It wasn't until her friend's husband followed the adulterous couple to a motel, and then told her the story, that she realized how she had been deceived. At first, she was filled with rage and

let her repentant husband and friend experience something of the fury she felt. Later she went for counseling and asked her Christian psychologist what she should do. He wisely advised her to overcome evil with good.

Following that advice, my friend went out of her way to be kind to those who had betrayed her. She went so far as to have several talks with her friend's husband and was able to persuade him to give his marriage a second chance. As she worked for the good of her unfaithful friend, her bitterness subsided and her love for her friend was rekindled. She found it harder to overcome her bitterness toward her husband, but eventually, by following the same formula, she was able to conquer her anger, and work with her husband toward building mutual trust and love.

The last illustration of how this method of handling anger can work in the desperate situations of life comes from the story of one of the ugliest murders in the history of the City of Philadelphia. In April of 1958, a twenty-six-year-old Korean graduate student who was studying political science at the University of Pennsylvania went out to mail a letter. Before he could get back to his apartment, he was accosted by a gang of violent teenagers looking for money to go to a dance. They robbed and killed him. This young man had been a model son and an exemplary Christian.

Those who committed the crime were the most contemptible of people. They seemed to sneer at the authorities who accused them, and they appeared arrogant as they were brought to trial. The widowed mother of their victim had every right to be filled with anger against these haughty criminals, but she was not. The members of her church in Korea took up an offering to provide funds for her to come to the United States so that she could help those who had committed the crime that had hurt her so deeply.

When the young hoods who murdered her son were tried and found guilty, she got down on her knees before the judge to plead that their lives be spared. What she did brought the first positive response from the murderers. They began to weep and express their sorrow. Tears came to the eyes of the policemen who had the young criminals in chains. And Philadelphia witnessed something of the extent to which the love of God can be lived out in a believer. I am not sure what went on in the mind and heart of that dear Christian woman, but I am almost certain that what she did for those who had killed her son made it impossible for her to be angry with them.

Anger is self-defeating, it is self-destructive, and it is contrary to the will of God. Anger motivates us to do things which are inconsistent with Christian values. "The anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).

### 8.3.4 Envy<sup>2</sup>

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."  
[Exodus 20:17]*

The play *Amadeus* was praised by the critics. The movie made from the play won an Academy Award. Both the play and the movie brilliantly carried us into the subjective consciousness of a good man who was destroyed by envy. Antonio Salieri, court musician to the King of Austria in Vienna, encountered the teenage musical genius, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Young Mozart was obviously blessed with

<sup>2</sup> Portions excerpted from *Seven Deadly Sins*, Anthony Campolo, Victor Books, 1987, ISBN 0-89693-533-7, pp. 91-107.

talents which set him apart from his contemporaries. His virtuosity on the harpsichord was dazzling. His music was complex, moving, exciting, and reflected his total mastery of virtually all forms of composition. It was clear that God had endowed him with extraordinary gifts. Nevertheless Mozart was immature, vulgar, obscene and lascivious.

Salieri, on the other hand, had dedicated himself to serving God, promising to write music that would glorify the Heavenly Father. From his youth he had dreamed of composing music that would lift the hearts of people heavenward. Salieri was committed to serving God and asked only that God might permit him to create the kind of music that would reflect His glory. However, God had not endowed Salieri with such gifts. Salieri was able to write pleasant tunes, but not masterpieces. He could compose music which would entertain its hearers, but never immortalize its composer. Despite his immense popularity, Salieri knew that his was a mediocre talent and that his uninspired work would soon be forgotten. Because he envied Mozart's gifts, he violated the commandment against covetousness and became obsessed with envy which led him to plot Mozart's destruction. This obsession eventually drove him to insanity. In the climactic monologue of the play, Salieri curses God for denying him the kind of talent which He granted to Mozart. In this play we see a brilliant illustration of how envy can alienate a person from God.

#### **8.3.4.1      Envy Defined**

*Envy is a desire to have what another person has.* It is not simply a longing to have the same kind of thing the other person has; the envious person wants to strip another of something in order to possess it completely and solely.

I know of an athlete who for years was the darling of his fans. When his name was announced, the crowds in the stands would go wild with cheering. He stood apart from the other members of the team, not only for his athletic ability, but also because of his personal style. He was the epitome of graciousness. People referred to him as "classy" and the adjective aptly described him.

Then one season a rookie showed up at training camp. There was something almost charismatic about this young man which immediately attracted the attention of the press. He played with a flair and demonstrated an awesome talent which little by little gained the attention of the crowds. Soon the cries of adulation for him began to rival those given to the veteran player.

Now the older man is slowing down and only occasionally shows flashes of his former greatness. The presence of the newcomer presents a great challenge to the tired veteran. The can gracefully move out of the limelight giving way to the new idol; he can become a mentor to the younger player, teaching him the lifestyle which could earn him the respect of the community. Or, the veteran can allow himself to be eaten up with envy and lose his "class." He can become irritated by the "hot-dogging" antics of the younger man and make disparaging remarks to the press about the rookie which would reveal pettiness and bitterness. The final chapter of this sports drama is still waiting to be lived out. The veteran's admirers are hoping for the best.

#### **8.3.4.2      Envy in the Church**

Envy expresses itself in all walks of life. Its presence is evident even within church vocations. Too often preachers, missionaries and church and denominational leaders, supposedly committed to presenting Christ, allow themselves to be consumed by envy.

In a rural community in New Jersey, there are three struggling churches. One of these churches secured a new dynamic pastor whose gifts for preaching far exceeded the gifts of the other two pastors in town. The new man immediately attracted the attention and the admiration of the community. It seemed that everybody was buzzing about how good his sermons were. This new preacher drew large crowds for his Sunday services and his congregation soon included new members who used to belong to the other two churches.

As the obvious superiority of the new preacher became increasingly evident, so did the envy of the other two pastors. It was not long before that envy was translated into malicious behavior. The two rival preachers took every opportunity to compare his style of ministry with their own, making it clear that they deemed their less flamboyant ways to be truer expressions of Christianity. They claimed that the large crowds the new preacher attracted could be attributed to the fact that he preached what people wanted to hear instead of the Gospel. That was only the beginning of their evil. When they heard of some unfounded rumors about possible sexual indiscretions by their rival, they fed those rumors with innuendos and knowing glances.

Envy often leads people to lie, because the envious are capable of using almost any means possible to destroy their rivals. While in this case the two envious preachers did not lie, they did feed the rumors which were floating around town. It was not long before the reputation of the new preacher was called into question. As the stories spread, this young man became increasingly tenuous in his sermons and the fire which had characterized his delivery was gone. Because of the envy of his colleagues, he was eventually discredited and he found it impossible to continue his ministry in that community. The envy of those two men not only destroyed the ministry of an effective pastor, but eventually they made themselves appear so petty and mean in the eyes of the townspeople that their own ministries were significantly damaged.

#### **8.3.4.3 Envy in the World**

The television fare of any season offers numerous opportunities to view a variety of beauty pageants. From Miss America to Miss Universe, we can see paraded before us on our television screens a seemingly endless array of women vying with each other for coveted crowns. When the winners of such contests are announced, the other contestants generally gather around the designated beauty queens and smother them with kisses. The losers pretend to be happy for the winners as they smile for the audience and the cameras, but there are hint in their demeanor that many of these losers would just as soon see the winners drop dead. Often their body language reveals an envy which they are doing their utmost to conceal.

Recently, a shocking story of the horrible consequences which can result from envy appeared in the national press. The story covered the murder of an attractive teenager from a California high school. The all-American girl had tried out for the cheerleading team and had won a place among that elite group which to many exemplifies what it means to be an adorable teenager. The cheerleaders in her particular school were elected by the student body. To win a position on the team was tantamount to being designated as among the cutest and most popular girls on the campus.



Unfortunately, such contests inevitably leave behind a string of losers. Among the losers of this election was a girl whose envy had no limits. This rejected teenager had lost out to a rival of long standing who time and time again had won the recognition she craved. Her envy got the best of her. Eventually she murdered her competitor, and was able to take her position on the cheerleading team. When the tragic truth was finally discovered, emotional shock waves ran through the school and the community. The incident clearly demonstrated the extremes to which a young person could go in pursuit of glamour and popularity.

Jewish folklore has many stories which depict the ugliness of envy. One of the most intriguing is about a certain store owner who was visited by an angel. The angel offered the man a wish that would give him anything he desired. However, there was one condition--his rival, whom he envied intensely, would receive double what the wish granted. Without hesitation, the envious man wished to be blind in one eye.

The Bible abounds with examples of envy and its dire consequences. The slaying of Abel by Cain resulted from Cain envying the favor which Abel gained in the eyes of God. The plans of Saul to kill David resulted from Saul's envy of David's popularity. According to the biblical tradition, envy is what caused the fall of Satan. The Bible gives ample evidence of the fact that envy is the cause of some of our greatest sins.

#### **8.3.4.4 Wanting to be Envied**

Most people enjoy being envied and work hard to encourage others to envy them. This desire to encourage envy is clearly apparent among children. Most of us can recall examples from our childhood which illustrate this tendency. Few things tempted me to lie more than the desire to be envied. When other kids who lived in my neighborhood returned to school after a summer filled with great vacations and exciting trips, I felt some kind of urge to make up stories about what I did during the summer. My invented tales made their true reports seem pale by comparison and I, who envied them for their good fortune, would end up having them envy me. Every youngster knows that it is more fun to be the one envied than to be the envier.

My son has a best friend. Their relationship goes all the way back to the early days of their childhood. It was fascinating to watch the two boys interact over the years. They seemed to spend much of their time doing their best to elicit each other's envy. If my son had some special toy, he gained great satisfaction from making his friend envious by convincing him that there was no toy in his collection which was comparable. In response, my son dreamed of possessing things which would make his friend envious. At times this competitive relationship created bad feelings between them and resulted in months of alienation. I am convinced that if it had not been for their conversions to Christ, these two boys never would have maintained the relationship which blossomed into the great friendship they share today. It was the transformation of their thinking and their subsequent commitment to a biblically prescribed lifestyle that saved them from destroying their friendship.

The psychological fulfillment which comes from being envied is sought not only by children. A great deal of adult behavior is generated by the desire for this same kind of gratification. Thorstein Veblen, one of America's most brilliant economic theorists, claims that the spending habits of people are highly influenced by the psychic enjoyment which comes from getting others to long for what they possess. It is Veblen's contention that it is possible to get people to buy products that are not particularly superior in quality, by publicizing widely that the products are *very* expensive. This practice which Veblen

calls *conspicuous consumption*, motivates people to buy expensive automobiles because the buyers know that most other people in the society know that these cars are very expensive. Veblen claims that people buy costly items not necessarily because they are better in quality, but because their possession displays to others how rich the owners are. The fact that expensive possessions stimulate the envy of those who do not have them gives great satisfaction to those who do have them.

Veblen believes that this principle of envy extends even to marriage. He claims that some people, usually men, choose their mates more to be the envy of their peers than as partners who will share their love. There are some who turn away from loving relationships because their prospective partners will not elicit the envy of others. I know of one man who was engaged to a fine woman but refused to marry her because he knew that his friends would not be impressed by her appearance. She shared his interests and was a stimulating conversationalist. They had similar values and held the same Christian convictions. Nevertheless, he married another woman who had striking beauty, but few of the sterling qualities of his former fiancée. He lost out on an opportunity that would have brought him significant happiness because it was more important to him to have a wife who would make him the envy of others than one who would make him happy.

Some men, according to Veblen, encourage their wives to spend large amounts of money on clothes and home furnishings. It takes so much time to earn money that these men don't have time to acquire the things which will conspicuously display their wealth. Consequently, they use their wives to buy those items which will cause others to envy their success. Their wives may not view themselves as being used and they may even think that their husband's generosity is an expression of love. However, what lies behind such subtle exploitation is the desire to be envied.

#### **8.3.4.5 Envy and Women**

In our sexist culture, women are often manipulated into the painful position of envying each other. The values of our society make it difficult for women who are older or less attractive not to envy those who are young, slim, and beautiful. Our culture conditioning frequently makes them feel that they have lost much of their worth simply because they lack the stereotypical requisites for attractiveness.

The status of married women is still often determined by their husbands. Some marry men with prestige in order to be the envy of others. Those who fail to marry well often envy those who do. Women can cause their husbands pain by comparing them unfavorably with the husbands of their friends. Such comparisons can generate bitterness and pain in the wives as well, if they nurture their belief that they deserved better than they got.

Frequently women who enjoy being envied by their friends unwittingly alienate them by bragging about all the wonderful things they possess and by providing incredible reports of how well their children are doing. Those who have to listen to these often exaggerated talks may feel that they are being indirectly criticized. Such attempts to generate envy often produce nothing more than irritation and resentment.

The desire to be the envy of others by surpassing them in possessions often leads to overspending and consequently to marital conflict. It is not surprising that disagreement over money is the most often cited cause for divorce.

Robert and Helen Lynds conducted what many sociologists consider to be the classic study of Middle America when they analyzed the behavior of people in Muncie, Indiana. The Lynds found that the working people of Muncie purchased a host of household gadgets and appliances to gain status in the community. They were willing to work extra hours and forgo precious time of shared family life to buy these things. Often women took jobs, even though they preferred to be home with their children, because they wanted to have money to buy those things which would make them the envy of others. Thus, envy contributed to the weakening of family life in Muncie.

#### **8.3.4.6 Envy is Destructive**

There is little doubt in the minds of those who observe human interaction closely that envy is a major cause of unhappiness and self-contempt. Those who envy are never happy with what they have. They hate themselves for not being the persons they envy and despise themselves for not possessing what the envied possess.

Malcolm X, the murdered leader of the black people of Harlem during the 1960's, wrote of how his envy of white people almost destroyed him psychologically. In a social system which had made things so difficult for him and his black brothers and sisters, he envied the advantages enjoyed by whites. He so much wanted to be white and have what whites had that he went to great lengths to reject his own identity. Malcolm X explained how he purchased special skin creams which promised to lighten the color of the skin. He described his willingness to burn his scalp with a hot hair-straightening iron that would remove the kinkiness of natural black hair and make it more like the hair of the envied whites. His envy led him to hate white people for having what he wanted. His autobiography tells the story of how he was able to work through his destructive envy and overcome his hatred of himself and of white people.

Malcolm X makes it clear that the freedom of black people will not be secured simply by gaining the political and economic opportunities enjoyed by whites. Black people, he argues, must stop envying white people and stop trying to *be* white. He wanted black people to be able to say with conviction "Black is beautiful." Only when black people are free from envying white people and all that goes with whiteness, and start to glory in what they themselves are, will freedom from the tyranny of white ever be possible.

The man who covets another man's wife becomes discontented with his own. The student who envies another student's grades underestimates his own abilities. The woman who envies another woman's sexy appearance becomes a supporter of a cultural system which diminishes her own value and encourages her own unhappiness.

Envy diminishes people's enjoyment of life because they cannot be content with what they possess. In the story of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15), the older brother envies the love which his father bestows on his wayward younger brother. Because his envy makes him bitter, he loses out on the opportunity to enjoy a happy celebration, and fails to appreciate all that his father has and feels for him.

There was a married couple in one of the churches I served who had a lovely son. The boy was both gentle and kind. In so many ways he was Christlike in demeanor. However, this young man lacked both the intelligence and talents to become a professional person. His parents wanted him to be a doctor or a lawyer, but he was destined to be a manual worker. Instead of enjoying a wonderful son who was a blessing wherever he went, they envied their friends who had children in more prestigious

vocations. The young man was able to rise above the negative attitude of his parents and live a happy life, but they lost out on the opportunity to enjoy and be proud of a very special son. These parents went through life feeling cheated, instead of appreciating the wonderful gift which God had given them.

### 8.3.4.7 Overcoming Envy

The Bible tells us the solution to Envy in Hebrews 13:5-6:

*"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

*So we may boldly say:  
"The Lord is my helper;  
I will not fear.  
What can man do to me?"*

The first thing to bear in mind, in your effort to overcome envy, is that God wills the very best for you. I am not suggesting that what God wants is always realized. If such were the case, there would be no sin in the world. But if you are to rid yourself of resentment against God, it is crucial that you grasp the wonderful truth that God has meant for you to serve an infinitely important role in His kingdom, and with that He has willed for you to have the gifts and opportunities to live out that role. In short, whatever you *think* you lack is not God's fault. He willed the best for you because His love for you knows no limits. There may have been evil factors and personal sin interfering with the *initial* will of God. What you have done, or what others have done, may have thwarted His will so that the good things He willed for you have not materialized; but remember, God is a good God who wills for you all of those gifts and attributes essential for you to live your life in the fullness of joy. The abundance of His Grace and the joy of knowing him is further explained in section 2.5.3: God's Memorandum to Us.

The good news of the Gospel is that God cannot be stopped. The good that He willed for each of us from before the foundation of the earth *will* come to pass in God's eternal kingdom. The blockage of His intentions is only apparent and temporary. Eventually the good that He wills for us will be realized. Regardless of the frustrations and barriers we encounter, we have this wonderful assurance: "And we know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Part of that fulfillment is during our earthly lives, and part of it is in heaven.

Instead of being resentful and envying those for whom things seem to have turned out better, we are called to trust God and to believe that in the midst of our present circumstances, He will find a way of providing opportunities for each of us to experience joyful service and total fulfillment regardless of the difficult conditions or deprivations which we have had to endure.

In his book, *The Will of God*, Leslie Wetherhead says that we should all be searching for the possibilities which exist in our lives. He tells us that if we do, we can discover the significant and sometimes amazing opportunities for good which He has waiting for us in even the worst of situations.

I know of no better contemporary example of this than Joni Eareckson Tada. This incredible, vivacious young woman became a quadriplegic as the result of a diving accident. A life of sports, travel, and fun seemed to be over. The promise of a professional career and a happy marriage

appeared to be gone. She was confined to a wheelchair for life instead of being free to live the happy life which she had anticipated for herself.

As Joni tells her story, she explains how easy it would have been for her to envy others who were able-bodied, and how envy could have made her into a bitter person. It is a wonder that envy and resentment did not distort her personality. Instead, by the grace of God, Joni discovered some truths that changed her life.

First of all, she came to recognize that what had happened was not something that God wanted to happen. She realized that God did not want her to suffer and to be crippled for life. She came to see that Satan wanted to use her tragic accident to cause her to hate God, but she determined not to let Satan have his way. She affirmed the biblical message that God is good and wills only good for His children. Once she realized that God did not will her accident, and that He suffered with her as she had to live with its consequences, she found it easier to love God and worship Him.

Secondly, Joni discovered that in the midst of the difficult circumstances in which she found herself, God could give her meaning and joy. She discovered that *because* of the horrible thing which had happened to her, she was equipped to minister to other handicapped persons in a way that is impossible for those who are not disabled. Even though God did not will her to be crippled, He could work in the midst of her adversity to produce something of infinite importance.

Seeing how God could use her because of her condition became a source of joy; and her testimony, now heard around the world, has influenced countless persons.

Joni is still a young woman. The end of her story remains to be told. Her struggle to overcome frustration and envy will continue for a lifetime, but I have confidence in her ability to conquer those feelings, because I know that she is nurturing her relationship with God.

She lives in the hope that someday, all the good things which God willed for her from before her birth will come to pass. That is what heaven is for and Joni knows it. She is able to use as a weapon against envy the knowledge that eventually she will lack for nothing that is good. She knows that someday she will walk again, even if that someday is in heaven.

#### **8.3.4.8 Wisdom Conquers Envy**

I heard of an Oriental man who visited America. This guest in our country had come to study pieces of Chinese art which by one means or another had been taken out of his country and brought to ours. He loved art as only a true connoisseur can. Each artifact, vase, statue, and painting that he saw evoked his deep appreciation.

One day this gentleman was invited to the home of one of the richest art collectors in America to see all of the magnificent examples of Chinese art in the collection. At one point during the visit, the American collector took from his safe a crystal ball which had belonged to one of the emperors of the Ming Dynasty. When this breathtaking piece of art was shown to the oriental visitor, his response was, "Thank you for keeping this for me. I am indebted to you for all you have done to make it possible for me to enjoy this crystal ball." When the American asked what his guest meant by this statement, the man from China answered, "Is it not true that the beauty of this crystal ball is just as available for me to

enjoy as it is for you? Yet I did not have to bear the expense of purchasing it or the cost of keeping it safe."

"That is true," answered the American collector, "But you do not have the joy of owning it."

"Why should I envy you for owning it if it can offer you no more beauty than it offers me? Furthermore, you do not own it. It was in the hands of someone else before you were born and it will be in the hands of still another after you are dead. It is for you to take care of this beautiful thing while you are still alive and to share its beauty with any who asked to see it. Is it not true that if I should come again, you would show it to me and allow me to enjoy its beauty again? Then why should I envy you for having this crystal ball?"

The wisdom and logic of the visitor's argument are clear and indisputable. It is this kind of wisdom which is an effective antidote for envy.

In the Taoist literature of ancient China is a story that demonstrates how foolish envy really is. It seems that there was a wise man who had many wonderful horses. There was one horse which was so strong, fast, and beautiful that it elicited the envy of the man's neighbor. However, one day this horse escaped from the barn and ran away into the hills. The neighbor's envy changed to pity, but the wise man said "Who knows if I should be pitied or if I should be envied because of this?"

The next day the horse returned to the wise man leading a herd of fifty equally beautiful wild horses with him. The neighbor once again was filled with envy and once again the wise man said, "Who knows if I should be envied or if I should be pitied because of this?" Shortly after he said this, his only son tried to ride one of the wild horses, fell off it and broke his right leg. The neighbor's envy once again turned to pity, but the wise man responded by saying, "Who knows if I should be pitied for if I should be envied because of this?"

The next day the general of the emperor's army came to draft the man's son for an exceedingly dangerous mission, but since the son's leg was broken, he could not be recruited for this mission which promised certain death. The neighbor, whose own son was taken in the place of the injured young man, envied the wise man; and once again the wise man said, "Who knows if I should be envied or pitied because of this?"

The story goes on and on with similar twists that shift the neighbor's feelings from envy to pity and then back to envy again. But the wisdom of this man makes it clear that things are not always what they seem to be, and that what we desire is as likely to bring us pain and trouble as satisfaction and good fortune.

How many times have we seen people destroyed by the very traits we admire and perhaps covet? How often do we encounter people who are too attractive for their own good or so talented that they never learn the discipline of hard work and persistence? How often do we see people destroyed by the riches that made them the envy of others?

The great American poet Edwin Arlington Robinson brilliantly illustrates the futility of envy in the brief dramatic poem "Richard Cory."

*Whenever Richard Cory went down town,  
We people on the pavement looked at him;  
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,*

*Clean favored, and imperially slim.*

*And he was always quietly arrayed,  
And he was always human when he talked;  
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,  
"Good morning," and he glittered when he walked.*

*And he was rich--yes, richer than a king--  
And admirably schooled in every grace;  
In fine, we thought that he was everything  
To make us wish that we were in his place.*

*So on we worked, and waited for the light,  
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;  
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,  
Went home and put a bullet through his head.*

Richard Cory, handsome, wealthy and gracious, a man who was envied by all who knew him, was also a troubled and lonely man whose pain could not be relieved by his money. Those things that people envied him for were hollow and without substance.

We all need wisdom to handle what we have and to view properly what other have. God is the giver of such wisdom. "But if ye have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth" (James 3:14).

Last, but by no means least, giving thanks for what we already possess can deliver us from envy of those who have what we yearn for. Giving thanks is wonderful therapy for envy. My wife uses this remedy with great success and I attribute her optimism and contentment to her ability to see the positive aspects of her circumstances, whatever they may be. If we miss an airplane and have to wait two hours for the next one, she looks upon the two-hour wait as a gift from God so that the two of us can have this uninterrupted time to visit with each other. If I go out in the morning and find that my car battery is dead, she tells me how lucky I am that I did not have this trouble when I was out on some deserted highway. If my coat gets ripped, she welcomes the opportunity to buy a new one.

She always considers herself to be a most fortunate person and she lets it be known that she would not want to be anyone else or have any other children than her own; and strange as it seems to me, she considers it her good fortune to have me for a husband. Now I ask you, how can I not love a woman like that?

When I asked her if she ever felt that the grass was greener on the other side of the fence, she answered, "If you think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, it is probably because you are not properly caring for the grass on your own side." If each of us would care for and appreciate the possibilities in what we have, we would cease to envy what others have.

The Apostle Paul said that love does not envy anyone. Loving those whom God has given us to love, enjoying what God has given us to enjoy, and taking advantage of the opportunities God has provided can be a reliable remedy for envy. This word to the wise should be sufficient.

### **8.3.5 Gossip and Slander**

Gossip can be one of the most damaging behaviors to human relationships that we can do. Webster's Collegiate dictionary provides the following definition for "gossip":

*"gossip: 1c: a person who habitually reveals personal or sensational facts 2 a: rumor or report of an intimate nature b: a chatty talk."*

There are several reasons why people tend to gossip and criticize others in public or behind their back:

1. Criticism boosts our own self-image. Pointing out someone else's failure and tearing him down makes us seem a little bit better, at least in our own eyes. It adds to our own pride, ego, and self-image.
2. Criticism is simply enjoyed. There is a tendency in human nature to take pleasure in hearing and sharing bad news and shortcomings about others.
3. Criticism makes us feel that our own lives (morality and behavior) are better than the person who failed.
4. Criticism helps us justify the decisions we have made and the things we have done throughout our lives. We rationalize our decisions and acts by pointing out the failure of others.
5. Criticism points out to our friends how strong we are. Criticism gives good feelings because our right beliefs and strong lives are proven again. Proven how? By our brother's failure.
6. Criticism is an outlet for hurt and revenge. We feel he deserves it. Subconsciously, if not consciously, we think, "He hurt me so he deserves to hurt, too." So we criticize the person who failed.

There is a strong tendency:

- For the good person to denigrate and criticize the bad person.
- For the gifted person to denigrate and criticize the less gifted.
- For the wealthy person to denigrate and criticize the poor.
- For the energetic person to denigrate and criticize the less energetic.

"Speaking evil" (katalaleite) means to criticize, judge, backbite, gossip, censor, condemn, and grumble against another person. It means to talk about and to tear down another person; to share the things about another person that cut and hurt him and that lower his image and reputation in the eyes of others. The word usually means to talk about a person behind his back, when he is not present.

Below is what God's word has to say about gossip:

*"Whoso privily [secretly] slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer."  
[Psalm 101:5]*

*"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?  
[Matt. 7:3]*

*"He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips."  
[Prov. 20:19]*

*"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice"  
[Eph. 4:31]*



*"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge."  
[James 4:11]*

*"And besides they [widows] learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies saying things which they ought not."  
[1 Tim. 5:13]*

From this, God's word teaches us that it is sinful to gossip and we should avoid people who gossip. Along these lines, some people confuse gossip with slander, however. We would like to remind readers that gossip is about revealing secrets, whether they are true or not. Slander, on the other hand, involves communicating about someone else in a way that defames or denigrates them with false information. Slandering someone in effect consists of bearing false witness against them as prohibited by the ten commandments:

*"Do not bear false witness against thy neighbor."  
[Exodus 20:16 (The Ten Commandments)]*

On the other hand, if you are speaking the truth in love to or about someone (like parents do with their children all the time as part of the regular discipline process, for instance) and the truth defames them, then you aren't slandering them and you have a valid legal defense in a court of law for a charge of slander. The Bible confirms that it is our duty as friends to reveal the truth to or about someone in order to help them and in fulfillment Jesus' command in Matt. 5:43 to "love thy neighbor" (remembering that 1 Cor. 13:6 says "love rejoices in truth"). This is exemplified below, for instance:

*"Faithful are the wounds of a friend [when our friends speak the truth about us], but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."  
[Prov. 27:6]*

Nevertheless, we should avoid revealing truthful personal information about individuals that would defame them because that is gossip. The only exception to that rule is defined by the Apostle Paul in Rom. 14:13:

*"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."  
[Rom. 14:13]*

He says here that we are justified in judging the behavior of others if they are putting a stumbling block in their neighbor's way. Eliminating that stumbling block is a duty and an obligation of Jesus' command in Matt. 5:43 to "love thye neighbor." Therefore, we are justified in speaking the truth in love and correcting someone who is sinning in such a situation if they meet all the following three criteria:

1. They have committed sin that we personally have witnessed or that they have admitted to us.
2. This sin has caused or is causing others around them to stumble and/or be hurt.
3. You have approached them and privately rebuked, exhorted, or admonished them and they have been unrepentant and stubborn about continuing in their sin.

At that point you have no choice but to confront others in authority to try to get the person who is sinning to abandon their sin so they don't continue harming others. This process is revealed by Jesus Himself in Matthew 18:16:

*"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax-collector."*

You will note above that in following Jesus' command in how to deal with sin in by rebuking others, we had to tell others about sensational and personal things in a way that looks like gossip but technically isn't. Why? Because we have first-hand, eye-witness evidence that the sin occurred either directly from observing the individual or by their own admission, rather than relying on a third-parties' testimony. In short, we are acting on truthful information about a person that we have first-hand knowledge of.

Another element that ensures that a discipline or rebuke of this kind doesn't appear as gossip is to ensure that we don't benefit personally from the rebuke or intervention, but instead are trying to help or defend others from being hurt as an objective of the rebuke or reproach. That is why Paul said above (in Rom. 14:13) that we are justified in judging the behavior of others if it harms our neighbor. Gossip, on the other hand, is most often done for selfish reasons that benefit us personally more than they benefit or protect "our neighbor" or others.

Another important appropriate scripture on the subject of gossip is James 4:11:

*Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.*

Note that the brother has sinned. He has broken the law of God, he has failed and his failure is known. It is public knowledge and he is being judged and criticized for his failure. He is being talked about. What he has done is being buzzed and gossiped about, and it is hurting and cutting him and damaging him more and more in the eyes of the world. Now, if we are forbidden to speak evil of a person [bear false witness against, share private information that does not involve sins that were repented for, or slander them] who is really guilty of sin, how much more are we forbidden to speak against a person just because we dislike or disagree with him? Note what the Scripture says: this is evil speaking. Bearing false witness about or sharing confidential personal information about a person to defame them is evil. It is just as much an evil as the failure of the other person. Therefore, the person who judges and does not satisfy the law himself is as guilty as the sinner because both have violated God's law. Hypocrites are sinners too!

The exhortation is strong: Christian believers are not to speak evil of one another. The reason is clear: we are brothers, brothers of Christ and of one another. All of us are of the family of God. However, note that we didn't say that we should treat the heathen the same as brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore:

1. We are to be loving, caring, and looking after each other, not destroying each other.
2. We are to be supporting, encouraging, and building up one another, not tearing down one another.

3. When one of us falls and gets into trouble, we are to be reaching out and helping him up, not pushing him farther down.

### 8.3.6 Greed<sup>3</sup>

Jesus identifies greed as a sin in Matt. 6:19-34 (NKJV):

*19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

*21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

*22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.*

*23 "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

*24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*

*25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*

*26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*

*27 "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*

*28 "So why do you worry about clothing. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

*30 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

*31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'*

*32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

*33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

*34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

Jesus was trying to tell us in this passage that greed is a type of materialistic lust that originates from the eye, which he characterized as the "lamp of the body." For instance, wouldn't it look good to be driving around in a nice new car? Within the context of this scripture, wealth would appear to be defined as money saved to meet needs that are beyond today. This is a very difficult expectation for people to meet in today's materialistic society and a very high calling. Jesus appeared to know that much anxiety results from people worrying too much about materialistic things including the future, retirement, cars, houses, etc, and he says we shouldn't do it, because it leads us to hoard things and benefit ourselves often at the expense of people around us.

Our society has built its economy on the production of things that people are conditioned to want, but not really need. Many of the consumer goods we spend so much to buy did not even exist a generation ago. We buy these things because we have been manipulated into wanting them through advertising and peer pressure.

<sup>3</sup> Portions excerpted from Seven Deadly Sins, Anthony Campolo, Victor Books, 1987, ISBN 0-89693-533-7, pp. 128-148.

We are willing to work two jobs in order to satisfy these artificially created wants. We are willing to take time from our families so that we can buy those things which we are assured will express our love to our loved ones more than our mere presence ever could. We are willing to reject biblical principles of living in order to buy the consumer goods which the media prescribes as essential for the “good life.” And when there are threats to the affluent lifestyle that has become synonymous with America, we stand ready to fight and, if need be, to die to protect it.

If our greedy consumption of oil is challenged by the OPEC nations, we do whatever is necessary in order to keep the oil flowing into our tanks. If totalitarian dictatorships or oppressive racist regimes promote policies which help us sustain our overly consumptive way of life, we support those dictatorships and tolerate those racist regimes. Our greedy materialistic way of life drives us to compromise principles of justice, yield on the canons of morality, and even to lose our souls.

Needs are fixed and limited, but artificially generated wants know no limits. Just when we get what we think we want, we see some new and “better” things. God has provided enough to satisfy all our needs, but not enough to satisfy all our artificially created wants. Of the getting of things, there will be no end.

Greed motivates people to buy things just for the sake of having them. It gives the possessors a deluded sense of superiority. Somehow we think that we are better than other people if we have more things than they do. In our materialistic society, children get sucked into this delusion from their earliest days. At Christmastime, they are taught that the better a person is, the more that person gets. Therefore, each child tries to point out how many more things he/she received from Santa than were delivered to the homes of playmates.

When I was a child, late on Christmas Day my sisters and I would run to the homes of our friends to play the game of “What did you get?” We would pretend that our presents were bigger and better than theirs, because we were convinced that the better children got the best things. And if we believed that we did not get better things than anyone else, we felt sad and envious, irregardless of how many gifts were under our tree.

We failed to realize that we could never have enough, because there would always be someone else out there with more. It did not occur to us that we would never be content until we had more than everyone else. Greed can never be satisfied. The more the greedy get, the more they want; and the more they want, the more discontented they are with what they have.

Some people do not outgrow the greediness they learn in childhood. Greed can linger on in disguised form, concealed by politeness, but eating away like a cancer at the joy of life. There is more truth than humor to the T-shirt message I saw, “Life is a game. Whosoever has the most things at the end wins.” There are those in our churches who attempt to teach that the accumulation of things does not bring happiness, but such efforts are generally ineffective. It requires a miraculous conversion experience for most people to escape the belief that getting things is what life is all about.

When the affluent lifestyle of Americans is attacked these days, there is usually an immediate reaction interpreting the attack as a call for people to live lives of improverishment. Yet there is little doubt in my mind that those who have felt a call to sell what they have and give to the poor have adopted a lifestyle that is very much in accord with the teachings of Scripture, if it is carried out for the right motives.

St. Francis of Assisi is still esteemed as one of the great figures in Christian history and is a worthy model for all of us, Protestant and Catholic alike. A valid Christian lifestyle of this modern age is exemplified in Mother Theresa. There is more to the simple lifestyle of this modern day saint than the good works that have come from her self-giving. She has learned what I have not yet succeeded in learning: “You will never know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you’ve got.” Those who become poor as they respond to the needs of others are blessed in ways that those who live more greedy lives will never know. Those who choose poverty for the sake of others are blessed by Jesus and promised that they will be the inheritors of the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20).

The most haunting passage of Scripture for me is 1 John 3:17. There the Apostle John asks: “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (KJV) I do not like to think about that simple question, but when I do, I find myself doubting my claims that I am on my way to becoming sanctified Christian. I wonder how it is possible to hold on to the things that I want, but do not need, when other persons created by God are in desperate need. I ask myself how much I really love Jesus when I, like the rich young ruler, hold on to “great possessions,” while so many languish in their poverty.

I have no easy responses to questions like these. I try to assure myself that I am saved by *grace*, not by good works (Eph. 2:8), but then I wonder if I have cheapened grace, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once suggested, by refusing it the opportunity to lead me into a Christlike lifestyle in regard to the poor.

### 8.3.6.1 Kingdom Perspectives

Among the ancient Jews there was a hope for shalom. This word was used not only as part of the greeting and parting expressions which marked the encounters of Jewish friends; it also carried the image of the kind of world in which they longed for all people to live. The word *shalom*, commonly translated “peace,” meant something far more than “peace of mind” to the people of Israel. It conveyed the image of living in a caring community in which there would be no greed and all people would care for one another even as God cares. To the Jews, *shalom* was what we Christians call the kingdom of God—a society in which everyone has enough of everything needed for joyful living.

There were symbols of shalom in the life of Israel that condemned the greediness lurking in the hearts of the ungodly. One of its clearest expressions is found in the story of the Exodus. When the Jews escaped from Egypt and wandered in the wilderness, God saw to it that they had enough to eat. Manna was sent from heaven so that each of the Children of Israel might have enough food for the day. Moses warned against greediness and told the Jews that if they took more than they needed, the surplus would decay and be filled with worms. Those who did not follow the directives of God found that things were just as Moses had predicted (Ex. 16). In shalom there is enough for everyone, but surplus for no one. That which is surplus rots.

The New Testament gives us a similar kind of warning. In the Gospel of Luke, we read:

*And He spake a parable unto them, saying,*

*“The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself saying, ‘What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?’ And he said, ‘This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, thou has goods laid up for many years; take thing ease, eat, drink and be merry.’”*

*“But God said unto him, ‘Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?’”*  
*“So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*  
 [Luke 12:16-21, KJV]

Jesus establishes clearly that the greedy accumulation of things is an attempt by persons to evade dependency on God. The one who greedily hoards possessions in order to establish security for the future lacks the faith that Jesus expects of those who follow Him. Our security, according to Jesus, is in our relationship to God in whose hands lies our future. Because of the uncertainty of life, it is ridiculous to be greedy hoarders of things. The will of God is that each of us should have enough and then be willing to offer up our surplus to others in the name of God. There is no room for greed in the shalom of the ancient Jews or in the kingdom envisioned by modern Christians.

In the ideal society set forth in the Bible, all persons are to “fit in” with others and with the natural environment. There is harmony in all things. No one enjoys abundance at the expense of others. No one lives in a way that threatens the ecological balance. In everything that any person does, there is consideration for all others. In the Peaceable Kingdom which is to come at the second coming of Christ, each will live in an appropriate manner, consuming enough, but never more than is just in relationship to others.

### 8.3.6.2 The Eucharistic Lifestyle

John Taylor, the Bishop of Winchester, England, in his book, *Enough Is Enough*, calls Christians to “eucharistic living.” He shows the dimensions of the lifestyle prescribed by the Mosaic Law, which gives insights on how we should live. Taylor points out that once a year, at Passover, all Jewish families brought one-tenth of all that they possessed (not simply one-tenth of their annual income) to Jerusalem to be offered up to God.

These gifts were not to be used for maintaining outreach programs or to sustain the local religious establishment. This vast accumulation of wealth was not designated for what we might call “some worthy cause.” Instead, this incredible collection was used for a party. That’s right! A Party! All the people of Israel were expected to travel to Jerusalem and participate in a gigantic blowout party at which one-tenth of all the assets of the nation’s population would be spent on a banquet of celebration. There was singing and dancing. Every person from every corner of Israel was invited, and none would be turned away. The village idiot, the tax collector, those of questionable reputation, the poor, the rich, the educated, and the uncouth bums—they were all to be there. The music would play into the nights as the party went on for days.

No wonder the Children of Israel said, “I was glad when they said unto me, ‘Let us go unto the house of the Lord.’” In ancient Israel, God was worshipped in celebration. That is important for us to remember in our contemporary situation. The kingdom of God is more like a party than a soup kitchen. It is good for us to read the instructions of Moses on the way that our God requires that we enjoy Him:

*Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year.*

*And thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of the herds and of thy flocks; that though mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always. And if*

*the way be too long for thee, so that though art not able to carry it; if the place be too far from thee, which the Lord thy God shall choose to set His name there, when the Lord thy God hath blessed thee; Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose: And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul desireth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household.*

*And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee  
[Deut. 14-22-27, KJV]*

Knowing that our God loves celebrations, I am delivered from a dour lifestyle in which I am made to feel guilty whenever I have a good time. I can enjoy a trip to the beach with friends, scream with excitement at a basketball game, and eat a good meal without going through a period of self-condemnation for having spent what could have been used to feed the poor. Our God loves a party, and those who refuse to party in His name lose out on a foretaste of glory that is to be when His kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

The important lesson to be learned from all of this is that there are limitations on partying. Moses teaches us that one-tenth of our income in any given year must be set aside for partying, and the other nine-tenths are to be used in service for others in the name of the Lord. There's nothing wrong with spending a dollar or two on a roller coaster ride (our God enjoys sharing a good time with us) as long as we keep our spending on pleasure under control.

As we respond to the needs of the poor, we must remember that admonition of Jesus:

*Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly  
[Matt. 6:16-18, KJV]*

Sacrifices are to be made for the poor, but our lifestyles should give evidence that we are happy, party-going disciples of the One who invites us to a banquet. There is nothing wrong with dressing up as long as we limit what we spend.

Unfortunately, most of us have turned the Lord's formula around. We spend nine-tenths of what we possess on the party and things we want for ourselves and, if we are tithers, the remaining tenth on service for His kingdom. God wants His people to enjoy life, but He wants us to enjoy life in a manner that does not require the suffering of others. He does not want any of us to adopt a lifestyle that leads to the disproportionate consumption of the good things that God meant for all of His children to enjoy.

### **8.3.6.3 Greed and International Problems**

In today's world, greed is not a sin which merely influences our personal relationships; it also is responsible for many of the pressing international problems which seem to defy solution. Those of us confined to spaceship earth are being thrust into an uncertain future, threatened by such ugly specters as a nuclear holocaust, a third World War, the starvation of half a billion people, and political totalitarianism. As we think about such possibilities, we must stop and consider the observations of the

Apostle James, who tells us that wars and conflicts of all sorts come from the greed of people trying to get what they do not need, but desperately want (see James 4:1-3). The resources of the earth are limited and, if certain people demand more than their just share of things, the consequences will be horrendous.

Lately a number of Christian authors have written on the question, "Is capitalism Christian?" The attempts to answer this question have been scholarly and well developed, but some of these writers fail to perceive that the question is wrong. What we should be asking is, "How can we make capitalism Christian? Every principality and power in our world, as well as every individual, is in a fallen state and is in need of restoration to the state that God intended. Capitalism can be made to glorify God if those who are part of such an economic system are willing to free it from elements of greed. Contemporary proponents of capitalism readily admit that greed is a part of this economic system in its present form. In the book *Essays in Persuasion*, Maynard Keynes, one of the foremost theorists of modern day capitalism, states:

*For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight*  
[W.W. Norton Co., Inc. 1963, p. 372]

Such statements are hard to reconcile with the ethics of the Bible. It is the task of those of us who see the possibilities for human freedom and social progress inherent in capitalism to redeem it from the potential for greed which is also inherent within it. At a time in human history when capitalism offers more hope for good than the available alternatives, it becomes a matter of urgency that this economic system be brought under the judgment of God so that it can be purged and made to be as good as it can be.

We must not think that the abuses of capitalism are confined to the robber barons of bygone days. The greed that motivated those tyrants of business and industry who lived at the turn of the century lies in the hearts of all of us. There are those today who would destructively exploit the environment and bring suffering to others in order to gratify their craving for financial gain.

A case in point can be found in a recent plan for a project to be developed in the heart of Brazil. The Amazon jungle, according to some experts, is producing through photosynthesis approximately 20 percent of all the world's oxygen. A billionaire has purchased 500,000 acres of the Amazon in order to turn its trees into wood pulp. With a pulp plant manufactured in Japan and towed 15,000 miles to a tributary of the Amazon River, he expects to produce 750 metric tons of pulp every day. This would be enough pulp to produce sufficient toilet paper daily to go around the world sixteen times. We have to question whether the private enterprise of one individual can justify endangering the well-being of everyone on the planet. The significance of this project become particularly noteworthy when a study of the recent drought in Africa reveals that it may be the result of ecological imbalances which have occurred recently in the Amazon River systems. Evidently the destruction of the jungle has disturbed the processes which create rain, and the prevailing winds no longer have rain clouds to carry to the African continent.

In a case closer to home, we have witnessed the greed of some to exploit our dependency on fossil fuels. According to a study conducted by a Pulitzer Prize winning writer for the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, a few oil companies deliberately functioned as an oligopoly and manipulated the price of oil upward more than 150 percent. There are those who argue that the oil companies should get whatever the



market will allow, in spite of the fact that such price manipulations have left poor people without heating fuel and many of the inner-city elderly in real danger of freezing to death. I say that Christians must save the capitalistic system from such evil practices or else capitalism will be destroyed. Even as the Prophet Jeremiah condemned his king for building a palace at the expense of the poor (Jer. 22:13-17), so we must be ready to stand against those greedy people whose business practices exploit the poor in our time. We need scholars who will show us how to keep capitalism from destroying us. Saint Thomas Aquinas once taught, “A contract is fair when both parties gain equally.” The time has come for the church to spell out for those in business the nature of fair contractual relationships according to biblical principles.

#### **8.3.6.4 Greed in Unions**

Greed expresses itself not only among the entrepreneurs who create the businesses and industries which generate jobs, but also among the workers who are employed in these jobs. There was a time when workers were controlled and manipulated unfairly by their bosses. They worked incredibly long hours, under subhuman conditions for unbelievably low wages. Their children and wives were forced to work to supplement the family income which, in most cases, was close to the subsistence level. Conditions for the labor force became so unbearable that workers were willing to take risks and make sacrifices to change the social arrangements which had reduced them to exploited victims. Out of these desperate conditions the labor movement was born. Inspired by a vision of more than just economic order, the workers in industries and businesses across the nation organized into unions that were able to achieve great benefits for their workers through collective bargaining. Largely as a result of the union movement, the American workers have become the highest paid in the world.

Today the future of those in the labor force is threatened not by the exploitive employers but by their own greed. Certainly, there are a variety of reasons for the collapse of many American industries, not the least of which is poor management. At times, they seem almost to will their own destruction as they strike for wages that are so unreasonable that employers are forced to take their operations out of the country to a place where labor is cheaper. It is time for us to recognize that our capitalistic system is in danger, not only because of the greed of industrialists, but because of the greed of workers who demand more and more pay for less and less work.

Christians need a new philosophy of money. In *The London Times*, one of the leading churchmen of England wrote:

*The demand for “fairness” in prices and incomes suggests some convictions that there are, or should be, some moral considerations in the distribution of the rewards of industry and the market price should not be the sole criterion. We should ask, what is “fair?” What does a man deserve?*

The greediness of workers is evident in the fact that unions no longer advocate shorter work days because they know that if their members had more time off, they would probably take second jobs and thereby reduce the number of jobs available for the unemployed. Furthermore, these union members who have gained so much for themselves through collective bargaining show all too little sympathy and provide all too little support for the Latino farm workers who have become an oppressed underclass in our affluent society. The Old Testament prophets would have as much to say to the union members of America as they would have to say to the tycoons who exploit the poor.

#### **8.3.6.5 Greed and Prophecy**

The Book of Revelation tells us that the kingdom of evil stands in opposition to the kingdom of God. John labeled this diabolical social order “Babylon.” In Revelation 13-18, we read of the sins of Babylon that bring about its ultimate destruction. Babylon, says the Scripture, is the great whore that seduces people (Rev. 17:1-5). It is a beastly creature which demands worship (13:4). And it is a city which greedily consumes the resources of the world (18:7-13).

When I was a teenager, I loved to go to church and hear prophecy sermons that decoded the secret symbols of the vision of John. The Gospels were okay, but I felt that the deep stuff of the Book of Revelation lay waiting to be discovered by “brilliant” minds. The Bible teachers who led these prophecy conferences always seemed able to explain world events from this most mysterious book of the Bible. Babylon, they said, was the Soviet Union. They seemed able to correlate the behavior of the leading nation of the Marxist movement with the descriptions of the Great Whore outlined in Revelation 4-18. It was interesting to learn from my father that, during the 1930s, similar preachers considered Germany to be Babylon. Furthermore, I have since learned that certain evangelical preachers in Latin America consider the United States to be that evil nation.

In the last few years, I have come to believe that Babylon may refer to any society. For me, Babylon represents any socio-economic system that is not under the lordship of Christ. If Christians are living in Russia, then Russia is their Babylon. For Christians living in Britain, Britain is their Babylon. For Mexicans, Mexico is Babylon and for those of us who are Americans, the United States is Babylon. The kingdom of God is represented by the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2) which God sends from heaven to take the place of the old dying order.

Once I began to apply the Scripture to my own situation, it seemed to be alive with meaning. I saw my own affluent society as the seductive whore drawing Christians away from God by offering them an array of worldly delights (Rev. 17-18). Who of us can deny that we sense the seduction of our culture which in a host of subtle, and not so subtle, ways lures us into striving greedily after its pleasures.

Our society, furthermore, like the Babylon of prophecy, requires that we worship her. Nationalism, here as elsewhere in the world, is easily transformed into a religion, and patriotism is at times unconsciously enthroned into worship of the state. Satan enjoys perverting that which is good and using it for his purposes, so it is no surprise that emotions like patriotism, which can bring out the best in us, can be twisted in such a way that we become jingoistic, ethnocentric national chauvinists.

Lastly and most importantly, I recognize that our society like the Babylon of the Bible, encourages wasteful overconsumption which will eventually seal its doom.

*And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning. Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, “Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come.”*

*And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more; the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk and scarlet, and all thine wood, and all manner of vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odors, and ointments and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from*

*thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all*  
 [Rev. 18:9-14, KJV]

I believe that unless Americans are able to find in Christ deliverance from our greedy and wasteful lifestyle, our nation is doomed to suffer the fate of Babylon. Our greed which has resulted in untold suffering among the poor peoples of the world, is known to God, and He will respond to our evil ways on the day when He judges the nations (Matt. 25:32).

Consider the fact that one of the reasons there is hunger in the world is that we have been seduced by our society to develop tastes and appetites that require the exploitation of farmland. If all the land in Latin America presently used to grow sugar, coffee, and tobacco (all of which poison our bodies and destroy our health) were used to grow food for indigenous populations, empty stomachs would be filled and dying children would be saved. Most of the food grown in Third World countries is exported to richer countries. It is heartbreaking to learn that most of the cattle butchered in Latin America end up as hamburgers in the fast-food restaurants of the United States, while many of the people who watched those cattle get fattened for the slaughter suffer from malnutrition. The anchovy fisheries of Peru, with one-sixth of the world's fish production, export most of their catch to feed the pets of North Americans. In the United States, we spend \$5 billion a year to feed 48 million dogs and 28 million cats. Please understand that I love animals and have a well-fed cat in my home, but I wonder what our Lord's judgment will be on a society in which 80 percent of its dogs are deemed overweight while the poor of the world starve to death.

The excesses of our society make for frightening statistics. We buy what we do not need and throw away what we no longer want. We junk 7 million cars each year, 70,000 of which are abandoned on the streets of New York City. We throw away 52 billion aluminum cans and 24 billion bottles. One of the most serious problems of modern America is the disposal of the waste materials that result from our greedy lifestyles. All of this greed and waste become intolerable in the face of the following facts:

- One billion people go to sleep hungry each night.
- 40,000 people die of starvation each day.
- Out of every 100 babies born in the world, 40 will risk permanent physical and/or mental damage because of malnutrition, and only 3 out of the 100 will get the education and skills they need to perform creative work.
- More than 100,000 children go blind every year due to lack of vitamin A in their diets.

The greed of the American population is one major factor contributing to these tragedies. The time has come to repent and to abandon the ways of Babylon. The time has come to heed the Book of Revelation, which says:

*"Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven and God hath remembered her iniquities"*  
 [Rev. 18:4-5, KJV]

### **8.3.6.6 Overcoming Greed**

There is one primary way to overcome greed, and that is to discover the joy that comes from self-giving. The nature of sin is that it blinds us to the truth that we have been designed in the image of a

giving God (John 3:16), and that we therefore fulfill the purpose of our Creator by giving away what we are and have to others. When we are called upon to sacrifice, it is not only that others might benefit from our self-giving, but that we ourselves might know the joy that God wills for us to have. If we do not experience a sense of wondrous fulfillment in our giving, then the Lord would rather that we reconsider what we do and why we do it (2 Cor. 9:7).

God is quite able to meet the needs of the poor without us if He so chooses, but instead He has created a world that allows all of us to realize the greatest happiness that life can afford. This happiness comes from giving what He has placed in our hands to meet the needs of those who are in desperate straits.

I know of a family that made a commitment to support several poor children in Haiti. A little more than \$100 dollars a month was sufficient to feed, clothe, and educate five orphan children who otherwise would have had no hope. In order for the family to carry out its commitment, there were sacrifices to be made. The children had to forego some of the things that many of their friends took for granted. They rode secondhand bicycles and sometimes their Christmas presents did not compare favorably with what their friends got. The family nevertheless, stayed with their commitment for almost a decade.

One day the father of this family came home with some exciting news. His company was sending him to Haiti for a week to take care of some business matters. Because his way would be paid by his company, he would be able to take his family along, provided they traveled in the most economical way possible. The family was thrilled with the possibility of meeting the five children whom they had supported for such a long time.

The second day they were in Haiti, the family hired a jeep and drove out to the village where their young friends lived. The children, who were now teenagers, had been told of the visit and looked forward eagerly to the day when they would meet those who had done so much for them. The American family traveled for hours, but their tiredness did not detract from the joy they experienced when they arrived at their destination.

The five young people whom they had supported stood waiting in front of their school. They had been there since the early morning to meet their American friends. As soon as the jeep stopped in front of the school, the five Haitian teenagers ran to it with happy excitement. The two American children bounced out of the jeep and into their arms and there followed a quarter-hour of glorious hugging. Despite the language barrier, these young people communicated their affection for each other. At the end of that special day there was an unplanned ceremony in which the Haitian children gave to their American friends Christmas tree ornaments they themselves had made out of twigs and sisal. After a long and affectionate good-bye, the Americans got back into their jeep to return to Port-au-Prince.

On the way to the capital city, the two children sat in pensive silence. Their silence seemed so strange and puzzling that their father asked what was wrong. "Oh, nothing's wrong," answered his daughter. "I was just thinking that there is nothing we could have done with our money over the last ten years that would have made us happier than we are right now."

There are many good Christians organizations that can help to establish relationships with children in poor countries who are in need of support. One of the best is Compassion International, a highly evangelical relief organization. For \$21 a month, Compassion International can arrange for the support of a child whose life otherwise would be lived out in desperation. Twenty-one dollars a month is

approximately seventy cents a day--the cost of a cup of coffee. The address of Compassion International is 3955 Cragwood Drive, P.O. Box 7000, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80933.

In 1979, a rich man was asked to deliver a commencement address to his old elementary school in Harlem, New York City. In the course of his remarks, he spontaneously made a fantastic offer to the boys and girls of the graduating class. He offered to pay the tuition of any of the children who wanted to go to college. The children responded to the offer with enthusiasm and this rich man delivered on his promise, and then some. He not only provided the necessary funds, but he also made a commitment of his time to these children. As the years went by, he counseled and tutored them. His visits and encouragement were crucial in getting these children through high school. His loving support and financial assistance have carried most of them into college.

The story of this generous millionaire would be incomplete without stating the fact that this man had more genuine joy from what he gave to these young people than he ever could have derived from either greedily hoarding his wealth or spending it on his own pleasures. Greediness promises much, but delivers little in the way of joy. On the other hand, those who are lovingly self-giving discover the real joy that money and things can give if they are graciously shared with others. This may seem a bit simplistic, but it is nevertheless, the truth. Greed is defeated in the face of the hilarious joy that comes from Christlike giving.

### **8.3.6.7 A Warning to Yuppies**

*Yuppies* is the name ascribed to the generation of young people who are taking their places in the modern business world, the Young, Urban Professionals. A study made by *Fortune* magazine revealed some disturbing things about this group of Americans. These young people are intensely committed to living what they consider to be the "good life." When questioned about what they considered that to be, they responded that the "good life" is a lifestyle in which a person can enjoy good things. Their goals included making enough money to buy gourmet foods, own expensive cars (preferably BMWs), live in pleasant surroundings, and vacation in exotic places. In order to reach these goals, they are willing to make necessary trade-offs in their personal lives. They will forego marriage until they can be sure it will not interfere with their money-making careers. None of those interviewed intend to have children because they see children as an inconvenience and an interference with their career goals. These Yuppies feel no loyalties or obligations except to themselves. They view their employers as means to an end, their jobs as stepping stones to better positions, and the families into which they were born as persons who "act like something is owed to them." In young adults, greediness has become a way of life. Unfortunately, our churches are preparing teenagers to take their places in this self-serving system, teaching that this is what decent American Christian young people ought to do.

It is a good thing that Yuppies aren't too high on marriage. There is little doubt that greedy persons make poor marital partners. They seem to be interested only in what they get out of the marriage and have little concern for what they can contribute in love. There is more and more talk of "symbiotic" relationships in which the self-centered interests of one member offer an unintentional benefit which serves the self-centered interests of the other. More and more couples anticipating marriage draw up marriage contracts so that each may protect and keep what they own, and gain the maximum advantage from the marital arrangement.

Contrast the Yuppies with a young woman who is far from typical of our young adult population. After completing college, she sought out organizations which might offer her an opportunity to give her life

in meaningful service to others. Following several interviews and study tours, she decided to work with an organization called Habitat for Humanity.

She was particularly drawn to this organization because of its founder, Millar Fuller. She learned that he himself had once been seduced by Babylon into a lifestyle of affluence. He had learned how to make money better than most people ever do and before he had turned thirty, he had become a millionaire. His success nurtured his greed and he seldom stopped to enjoy what he had earned. He hurled himself with increasing zeal into new ventures which promised more money and greater opportunities for investments. Then one day, unexpectedly his wife told him that she was leaving him. The news shook him to the depths of his being and forced him to reevaluate his life and the things for which he had lived. Consequently, he took a step that would launch him into a form of missionary service which would change his life, give a new beginning to his marriage, and bring hope to thousands of poor people. He decided to help the poor build decent housing for themselves. Fuller sold all his possessions and, along with his wife, became committed to working on the mission. First in Africa, later in Latin America and eventually in the United States, he organized poor people to work along with members of his organization in order to build housing that would allow them to live with dignity.

Habitat for Humanity makes the funds needed for building materials available through no interest loans. Fuller believes that the Bible teaches that loans to the poor should not entail interest. Habitat workers receive no salary, and get little public recognition for their long hours of service. But they radiate a joy that can only be regarded as the joy of Christ.

Today the young woman of our story is working joyfully with people who are blessed by the vision of a decent life. She is enthusiastic and excited about her vocation. She has learned the rewards of a sacrificial lifestyle that is marked by more than what have become the tribal practices of evangelicals. We must teach that it is not enough to give up obscene rock music, "R" rated movies, and beer parties. We must communicate to a lost generation that being a Christian is rejecting Babylon and becoming a citizen of the New Jerusalem. It is turning one's back on greediness and allowing Jesus to create a heart of self-giving in its place.

### 8.3.7 Homosexuality

The bible clearly forbids homosexuality in Lev. 18:22: "*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.*" Beyond this scriptural prohibition, there are additional moral reasons why homosexuality is a hazard to society.

1. It spreads communicable diseases, including aids. Aids activists have attempted to make it into a heterosexual problem by donating the blood of aids inflected homosexuals to bloodbanks, which ultimately has infected many thousands of heterosexuals, including many hemophiliacs.
2. It used to be illegal in our society, until politically active gays and a liberal media changed its status through a massive media campaign to glamorize and destigmatize and legalize it. However, keep in mind what Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers, said about this approach:

*"It is error alone which needs the support of government [or the media, for that matter].  
Truth can stand by itself."*

### 8.3.8 Idolatry

*3 You shall have no other gods before me.*

*4 You shall not make for yourself a carved image--any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*

*[Exodus 20:3-6]*

Idolatry is the greatest sin mentioned in the bible. That is why the first commandment from the ten commandments mentioned in the book of Exodus is about idolatry. Most other sins described in this chapter on sin occur because there is idolatry in our lives. The surest indicator that there is idolatry in our lives is that we lust after something or covet it, and that we value it more than we value God. For instance:

1. When we put sex ahead of God as an idol and/or an obsession, then fornication, homosexuality, and lust are the sins we experience. (see Col. 3:5)
2. When we put money ahead of God as an idol and/or an obsession, then lying and covetousness are the sins we are infected with. (see 1 Tim. 6:10)
3. When we put things or possessions ahead of God as an idol (materialism), then covetousness is the sin we are infected with.
4. When we put the praise of men ahead of God as an idol and/or an obsession, pride and envy are the result.
5. If we put our families and loved ones ahead of God as an idol and/or an obsession, then we cannot claim to be Jesus' disciple: "*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*" (Luke 14:26).
6. When we depend more on the government than we depend on God or our own efforts, then socialism and all that evils that accompany it, are the result.

In this context, an idolater is therefore someone who is so preoccupied with himself, his passions, and with his sin that he has no time or desire to serve God or develop a relationship with Him. How do we do this? Through regular prayer and bible study, fellowship with others, and donating our time and our money to charities and the needy. The notable absence of these things, either individually or collectively, is one basis for saying that we have an idolatry problem.

Idolatry is about priorities. If we are going to put God first, then everything else has to come after Him. The way we spend our money and our time is the most reliable indicator of what our priorities are. Our priorities will always be reflected in the way we spend our money and their time. The bible says in Matt. 7:15-17 that we can judge people by their fruits:

*15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

*16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

*17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*

Our fruits are manifested in our behavior as we spend our money and our their time, because these two things are the two most valuable and limited things we can have during our lives. You can see this in the way people worshipped God throughout the old testament. If you do a search on the word "firstfruits", it is mentioned frequently in the context of honoring the Lord and putting him first. Here is an example: *"Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people. 29 Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me."* (Exodus 22:28-29) People of old knew that the best way they could demonstrate that God was first in their lives was to give to Him their firstfruits as an offering.

Recall that we said at the beginning of this chapter that when we sin, we are slaves of sin. That slavery to sin keeps us separated from God and incurs his wrath. Idolatry is therefore where most other sins begin. That is why some people say "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." Whenever God isn't first, we are vulnerable to becoming slaves to many other kinds of harmful sins that will steal our allegiance and our time. The apostle Paul says we should avoid the fruits of idolatry:

*5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience.*  
[Col. 3:5]

Why? Because all of these sins mentioned above (fornication, uncleanness, passion, covetousness) that we become enslaved to detract is from having a relationship with God. That is why some people say that sin separates us or alienates us from God and hinders our prayers. That is also why Prov. 18:1 says: *"A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment."*

Lust (e.g. for money, sex, power) is the origin of most forms of idolatry. Idolatry can be described as a misplaced allegiance or misplaced priorities. See the section on lust for further details on how to address idolatry.

How can we overcome idolatry? By putting God first! Start tithing, and budget some of your most valuable time each week as a donation to helping the needy. When you see how little some other people have, you will see how much you have to be thankful to the Lord for. Another important way to show that we put God first is to pay him respect. This means not saying his name in vain or swearing by his name, which violates Exodus 20:7: *"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."* Instead, we should speak highly of the Lord in front of our friends and be thankful for our salvation.

### 8.3.9 Laziness

*Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest, how long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep--so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.*  
[Prov. 6:6-11]

It may surprise us that the sin of sloth, which in modern vernacular is laziness, is the most serious of the seven deadly sins. We tend to think of laziness as a weakness or a common human fault. Those of us raised according to the Protestant work ethic see laziness as an undesirable trait. Sloth is something we make jokes about. However, few of us would list it as a major sin.



We look on laziness as a cultural trait that enables us to jest wistfully about those people who appear to have a more “relaxed” attitude toward work than Type A personalities who are on their way to becoming workaholics. Listing sloth as the first of seven deadly sins may seem a little extreme. Those with politically leftist leanings might even consider the destination of sloth on this list of crucial sins to be an attempt by capitalists to use religion as an instrument for condemning any who are not enthusiastic members of the work force. Nevertheless, this designation of the church fathers may have genuine validity.

M. Scott Peck, a social scientist who has written some of the most popular books in the field of psychotherapy, would concur with their assessment of sloth. Peck says that laziness is a major cause of evil, a primary cause of psychological illness, and the main reason that Americans are increasingly failing at human relations.

### **8.3.9.1 Laziness in Loving**

First of all, Peck points out that laziness is what prevents us from being loving, and we all know that failure to be loving has horrendous consequences in our world. Love requires commitment and work, and those who are lazy are seldom willing to expend that kind of energy. For the lazy of the world, love is something that is just supposed to happen. As the song suggests, “Some enchanted evening, you will see a stranger...and somehow you’ll know...” Most popular songs make love seem like an accident. Our culture promotes a view of love that makes this most important characteristic of being human and of being Christian seem to be a spontaneous emotion which can be neither controlled nor created.

When youngsters ask their parents how they will know when they are “in love,” they receive the standard answer: “When you’re in love, you’ll know!” This failure to recognize that love is an art requiring discipline and hard work is largely responsible for the absence of love in so many of our interpersonal relationships. Nowhere is the lovelessness caused by laziness more evident than in the array of broken marriages in our society. Love becomes nonexistent and marriages collapse primarily because most people do not work hard enough to create love and build marital relationships.

I agree with Peck’s analysis. In my limited experience as a counselor, I too have found laziness to be the major cause for the failure of marriages. Time and time again, I have observed that the parties involved in marital disputes have known exactly what was needed to restore the relationship, but were unwilling to put forth the effort. Time and time again, I have been told by marital partners on the verge of separation that they just did not want to do what was necessary to create something positive out of what had become the “empty shell” of a relationship. Some claimed that they had tried too many times already and decided to give up rather than try again. Others have copped out with fatalistic statements such as, “This marriage was just not meant to be.” Still others have assumed that they were incompatible with their mates. In almost every case, those whose marriages failed simply were too lazy to do what was necessary to make their marital relationships work.

In one particular case, the husband had become preoccupied with sports. When he was in high school, he played on the basketball and football teams. In the early years of marriage, his wife tried to share his interest. She went to games with him and cheered for the hometown professional teams. She regularly read the sports pages of the newspapers in order to be informed enough to carry on conversations with her husband about how the players and teams were doing; but his interest in sports grew until it became a total preoccupation. Nothing else in life seemed to interest him. His sexual

interest in his wife diminished. His involvement in church declined and there was room for nothing else in his life but sports.

One day his wife left him for another man. He came to me to see if there was something he could do to get her back. I told him that there was something he could do. He could change. I told him that he could cut back on the time and energy he spent on being a sports fanatic and make a commitment to his wife to give time and attention to things that would interest her. I told him that he would have to rearrange the priorities in his life and begin to give the Lord and his family the time and attention they deserved. He listened to me for a while and then said, "I thought of all that; but to tell the truth, I don't feel it's worth the effort. I want her back, but not that much."

The case may seem a little extreme, but I assure you it is not. All across this country, sports are moving from pastime to preoccupation. More and more people (usually men) are allowing the games of their favorite teams to become the most important events in their lives. Too lazy to get out of the stuffed chairs that seem riveted in front of their television sets, vicariously involved in the exploits of their favorite stars, they become passive observers of the play of others, and feel they have done something significant when their teams win.

It is time that church leaders recognize that spectator sports are nurturing a latent tendency to laziness in the lives of their members. It is time that we all become aware that precious time is being absorbed by a sports mania that threatens devotion to God and to family. How many hours that are desperately needed for building relationships between parents and children are being consumed in the TV football games? How many Monday nights are lost to the pro game of the week? How many New Year's Days are turned into a meaningless progression of bowl games?

When these lazy observers of other people's activities are told about this encroaching evil in their lives, they joke about it. They know that what they are doing is a wrongful waste of precious time. They recognize that their mates and children are being denied one of the most precious gifts that can be given. Nevertheless, they refuse to change. Sloth prevents them from escaping from their lazy preoccupations and from paying attention to that which has eternal significance. They know better, but they are too lazy to do anything about it. Sloth makes what is ultimately important seem not worth the effort. The case of this derelict husband can be duplicated by hundreds of thousands across the country.

### **8.3.9.2 Laziness, Love, and Will**

I knew a woman who was going through a psychological hell. She was suffering from depression that seems to be getting progressively worse. Her husband brought her to believing that unless she received some help, she might hurt herself in some way or even commit suicide.

The first two sessions that I had with her revealed nothing that might be the cause of her neurotic condition. During the third visit, I took a shot in the dark and asked her, "Are you having a sexual affair?" She hesitated for a long time, then said, "Yes," and broke down in tears.

This woman had come from a Christian background and was still actively involved in the life of the church. She held to a conservative theological and ethical system of thought and was well aware of God's judgment on what she was doing. Furthermore, she was aware of the connection between her illicit affair and her depression. She did not need me to point out the nexus between what she was

doing and how she was feeling. She understood all too well that there would be no deliverance from her depression until she repented of her sin and got right with God. I asked her why she did not do what she knew she had to do to find an escape from her dire straights. She answered, “You don’t understand—I am in love. Losing him would be too painful for me to bear. What you are asking is too hard. I just can’t do it.”

Life is not easy. It is hard to do the will of God. Setting one’s life right through repentance is not a happy experience. But if one is too lazy to do what one knows has to be done, there will result a deadness to the heart and soul that psychotherapy cannot cure. Sloth is the demonic tendency to remain where we are when we ought to be moving on to do those things which we know will provide deliverance from the pain of our existence.

When I counsel someone who is about to walk out on a marriage partner, I ask, “Do you *want* to be in love with our spouse? Do you want to be turned on by your mate?” Usually I am told that questions like these are ridiculous, that people cannot make themselves love those for whom they feel nothing. They claim that when love is dead, nothing can be done about it.

After listening to their protestations, I point out that when the Bible describes love, it almost always speaks of something that is willed. Husbands are *commanded* to love their wives. Wives are *commanded* to love their husbands. All people are *commanded* to love their neighbors. There is no doubt about the fact that Jesus spoke of love as something that people should *do*; and if love is something we should do, then lazy people, who are unwilling to put forth the effort to love, are justifiably condemned by our Lord.

I challenge those who come to me for marriage counseling this way: “If you do what I tell you to do for an entire month, I can promise you that by the end of the month, you will be in love with your mate. Are you willing to give it a try?” It is amazing to me how many clients who try to plead that they are not primarily responsible for the breakup of their marriage refuse to accept this challenge. They act as though they are victims of broken marriages when, in reality, they too are causing the demise of the relationship because they are too lazy to do what I ask them to do. They see divorce as an easier alternative than working hard at bringing a dead relationship to life again.

When couples accept my challenge, the results are invariably successful. I offer neither a sophisticated scientific discovery nor a magical formula. My prescription for creating love is so simple that those whom I give it often scoff at what I recommend. “Do ten things each day that you would do if you were in love,” I tell them. “First think in the morning, make a list of ten specific things you could do that day to express your love if you were in love.” I know that if people do loving things, it will not be long before they experience the feelings that are often identified as being in love. Love is not those feelings. Love is what one wills to do to make the other person happy and fulfilled. Doing those things generates the feelings which are associated with “being in love.” In our society, we believe that what a person feels influences what he does. Often, we don’t realize that what a person does influences what he feels.

I tell clients who are trying to recreate positive marital relationships to take the time to write love notes and to say sweet things to their partners. If they make the effort to express love, it will not be long before they feel love.

The story is told of a couple who came to a marriage counselor. At the end of the session, the wife said sadly, “I can’t remember the last time my husband said, ‘I love you.’”

“Is that true?” the counselor inquired.

With some anger in his voice, the husband said, “The day I married her I said, ‘I love you,’ and I told her that if I ever changed my mind, I’d let her know.”

Within the story, his answer is meant to be funny, but its real-life implications are tragic. By not saying our love, we let it die. Love must be expressed in words and deeds in order to be revitalized and grow.

### **8.3.9.3 Too Lazy to Nurture**

Most of the problems related to rearing children in our modern world are caused by sloth. Children become undisciplined because parents are too lazy to do the hard work associated with nurturing them properly in the ways of responsible living. Many parents have given up on trying to get their children to straighten their rooms and make their beds because their children do not readily follow orders. Parents tell me that it is easier to take care of their children’s rooms than to get them to do it themselves. They explain that after trying repeatedly with little success, they give up. I point out to such parents that they are lazy, and that by their own admission, they are unwilling to keep at their responsibility until things are done right. Everybody knows that the most important thing is not the straightening of rooms, but the disciplining of children to do what they are supposed to do, even when they don’t feel like it. The parents who do not keep at the task of requiring their children to do what is expected of them, and who find it too much trouble to be checking constantly on them, are too lazy themselves to do for their children what God requires of them.

Knowing that they can get lazy parents to do the work that they should do, some children deliberately try to drive their parents to the point of such exasperation that they’ll say, “Never mind, I’ll do it myself.” They test their parents to see how hard they are willing to try to get them to work. Usually, they find that their parents have so little perseverance that they choose the easiest course, which is to relieve their children of responsibility.

I can remember as a boy being told that it was my job to do the dishes after dinner. My first response was to pretend that I did not know how to wash them and that I could not learn. My mother proceeded to show me how, and I pretended to be too stupid to learn. I thought she would give up after a couple of weeks, but she knew that I needed to do those dishes more than those dishes needed to be done. When my mother would not give up on me, I realized that there was no escape from the dishes, and that if I said for the next ten years that I did not know how to wash them, then for the next ten years my mother would daily teach me how to do them.

I hear many parents complaining about the kind of music their children like. I am told that many of the new rock records have sexually explicit lyrics and tend to glorify what is evil and ugly. Yet, in most cases, teenagers get into an indiscriminating style of listening to rock music because their parents are too lazy to do anything about it. Sloth is responsible for parents allowing their children to go off to their rooms, shut their doors and listen to the latest recordings of Prince or Black Sabbath. It is laziness on the part of the parents which is responsible for their laissez-faire attitude toward the development of their children’s taste in music.

To ask what records are being purchased, to ask about the messages of the songs and to discuss the value of the music with their children requires more time and effort than most parents are willing to

expend. Thus, a generation is left to the corrupting influence of a rock subculture because so many parents are unwilling to address the hard task of training their teenagers. It is true that parental control can become too restrictive. However, in most cases, the problems of youth are not related to parents demanding too much of them, but rather, demanding too little, because they are slothful.

I do not mean to suggest that if parents work as hard as they should at disciplining their children, all will be ideal. It should be noted that God had two perfect children, Adam and Eve, whom He reared in the perfect environment of Eden; yet both of them rebelled against His will. Where there is freedom there will be rebellion; still, parents should imitate the Heavenly Father, and never give up on their children. God works hard at being our Father and we should work hard at being parents to our children.

#### **8.3.9.4 Too Lazy to Enjoy**

Joy in Christ requires a commitment to working at the Christian lifestyle. Salvation comes as a gift, but the joy of salvation demands disciplined action. Most Christians I know have just enough of the Gospel to make them miserable, but not enough to make them joyful. They know enough about the biblical message to keep them from doing those things which the world tempts them to do; but they do not have enough of a commitment to God to do those things through which they might experience the fullness of His joy.

I know of a young woman who lacked any semblance of joy in her life, even though she had accepted Christ as her Savior. She lived a life of relative piety and went to church on Sundays with fair regularity. Nevertheless, life was depressing for her and she seemed bored with it. She went to a Christian psychotherapist for help, but after several sessions with him, felt that the effort was futile. Then one day she came into her therapist's office with her face radiant with excitement "I've had the most wonderful day," she said. "This morning I could not get my car started, so I called the pastor and asked him if he could drive me to my appointment with you. He said he would, but on the way he had to stop by the hospital and make a few calls. I went with him and while I was in the hospital, I visited some elderly people in one of the wards. I read from the Bible and prayed with them. By the time the morning was over, I was higher than a kite. I haven't felt this good in years."

The psychotherapist quickly responded, "Now we know how to make you happy! Our problem is solved! Now we know how to keep you out of the doldrums!"

Much to his surprise, the young woman answered, "You don't expect me to do this sort of thing every day, do you?"

Here is a very specific case in which the person knew what she had to do to experience joy, but was too lazy to do it. Sloth takes away the possibility of joy. Those who are not happy should make a list of those things they know God wants changed in their lives. Then, asking the Lord to help them, they should set out to bring about those changes. Those who allow God to have His way with them will find their lives infused with the joy and peace they ask.

Unfortunately, the tendency to be controlled by sloth kills the desire to change for the better. Sloth is a condition of the heart which works against doing what is necessary to find joy in life or to experience salvation. Most people know they need to be saved sometime and thing that they may get around to

putting things right with God some day, but they lack motivation to get moving on it now. Sloth takes a terrible toll.

### **8.3.9.5      Too Lazy to Become**

Some people are afraid of becoming Christians because they know that there are changes they will have to make, and are unwilling to do so. They want cheap grace that requires little response to what Jesus has done for them. They do not accept the fact that the good works God desires of them are means through which their joy might become full. They are afraid to become what God believes that they can be, because they are too lazy to face the challenges of living out the will of God in their daily activities.

It is possible in any church to find people who want to be a part of the group, not because they find that the orthodox positions of Christianity are true, but because they do not want to think and work out the meaning of the Bible through honest labor. They find it easier to believe things to be true because some authoritarian person declares them to be true. They accept what they are taught without evaluation or question. It is work to search the Scriptures in order to determine whether or not what is being taught is biblical.

It is hard to struggle with working out the relationship of salvation to the affairs of everyday life. It is easier to let some “authority” tell us how to live and to explain what the Bible requires of us. The lazy like to be delivered from the arduous tasks associated with thinking about the meaning of Scripture for their lives and the painful process of changing their lifestyles.

When I was in the eighth grade, my math teacher gave our class a textbook which had the answers to the problems in the back of the book. She told us not to use those answers, but to work the problems out for ourselves. Most of us in the class could not resist the temptation to peep at those answers as we did our homework. We found it so much easier to “work out” the assigned problems if we had the answers in advance. However, those of us who took this easy route with our homework usually flunked the tests. I am convinced that the same is true in the Christian life. Those who try to get by on the answers of others probably will be unprepared for the real tests of life. Each of us should struggle with what we have been taught through Scripture and work out the meaning of these teachings for our everyday lives so that we can be certain of the faith that lies within us.

The church too often provides a haven for the slothful, especially if leaders want unquestioning acceptance of what they preach. Christians need to be encouraged to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). They need to avoid tendencies to sloth in their lives. Growing up in Christ is hard work, and other people cannot do it for us. We are called to do those things that will foster spiritual maturity.

### **8.3.9.6      A Style of Procrastination**

Parents know that one of the most effective techniques children use to get out of assigned work is to promise to do it later. Procrastination is an effective tool for the slothful. They can make themselves appear responsible even though they do nothing. The slothful hope that if they put off their work long enough, they can somehow escape from it.

Lazy college students usually put off reading the assigned textbook material until the night before the final examination, and usually fail to do research papers until the night before they are due. Procrastination is the most common cause of academic failure in higher education.

On several occasions, I have run out of gas because I did not feel like going to get the tank filled up. Somehow I felt that a later time would be better and, in each case, I suffered unnecessarily for not doing what I should have done.

Procrastination is one of the most effective weapons in Satan's arsenal. It is impossible to estimate the number of people who intended to become Christians at some later time, but who were not willing to make the decision when they were confronted with the Gospel. King Agrippa responded to the convicting message of the Apostle Paul by saying: "almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian!" (Acts 26:28, KJV). Sloth causes us to put off until tomorrow what is not absolutely required today. Agrippa put off making a decision for Christ and probably never did get around to doing what he was almost persuaded to do after hearing Paul's defense.

I remember attending revival meetings as a boy in which "Almost Persuaded" was used as a closing hymn:

*"Almost persuaded, now to believe;  
Almost persuaded, Christ to receive;"  
Seems now some soul to say,  
"Go, Spirit, go Thy way,  
Some more convenient day  
On thee I'll call."*

The Bible always calls us to act in the present. The Old Testament leader cried out:

*"Choose this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."  
[Josh. 24:15, KJV]*

In the New Testament we are told: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Those who are lazy can always find some reasons for delaying action, hoping that if they delay long enough, they will not have to act at all. Usually, they procrastinate until it is too late to act.

There are many parents who know that they should take time to share the Gospel with their children. They know that they ought to instruct their children in biblical teachings and that they ought to lead their children in family worship. They know what they ought to do, but they suffer from inertia. When their children assume a course of action that is destructive and sinful, they cry out, "If only I had done what I was supposed to do as a parent, this would not have happened." Procrastinating parents may hope subconsciously that even if they do not share the teachings of the Bible with their children, others will. They often realize too late that their children have failed to receive what they should have in Christian instruction. In the words of the nineteenth-century American poet, John Greenleaf Whittier:

*For all sad words of tongue or pen,  
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"*

I am convinced that on Judgment Day, the sins of omission will loom larger than the sins of commission. Consequently, more sins will have resulted from sloth than from all the other sins put together. In his letter to the church of Ephesus, Paul writes: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16). His admonition carries significant implications for all Christians. It is important to think of what can be done for Christ at home or at work, to consider ways to contribute to the well-being of others, to strive to become all that we can become as we do those things which God has called us to do. It is tragic to let opportunities of the moment slip away because of sloth, to allow life to be consumed in laziness. It is vital to respond to the challenges that each day presents.

One day a middle-aged man came to my office to talk with me. He explained how he had let the opportunity to serve God in a heroic and magnificent manner slip away from him. He told me, “Doc, once I was going to be a missionary and do something important for the kingdom of God, but I didn’t do it. I kept putting off taking the necessary steps that would enable me to fulfill the will of God for my life. Now it’s too late. My time has passed. There’s no way I can ever do what will please God. I’m married and have two kids in college. I’m in debt up to my ears. There’s no way I can stop everything in order to take up the call to Christian service. I came to urge you to talk to your students and keep them from making the same mistake I made. Keep them from putting off serving Jesus until it’s too late.”

I almost lost my temper with him. “Look,” I said, “I don’t want to hear about what you might have done for Jesus twenty years ago. I want to talk about what you are going to do for Him today. I think you’re using the failures of the past to evade the challenges of the present. You’re still excusing yourself from the tasks which God has set before you. Only now you’re trying to make you present responsibilities seem unimportant compared to what you think you should have done twenty years ago.”

The man was shaken by what I laid on him, and that allowed me the opportunity to go on. “You may think that the little things you can do for the Lord now are relatively unimportant, but the Bible says that if we are faithful in a very little thing, we shall have authority over great things. Why not get on with doing the work of God that is waiting to be done right now?”

### **8.3.9.7 Getting Rid of Sloth**

The way to rid of sloth is to become subject to the Holy Spirit. The same Jesus, who died 2,000 years ago on the cross to atone for our sins, is resurrected and present with us now through His Holy Spirit. All of us who believe in what Jesus did for us then are able to invite the Holy Spirit to effect changes in our lives here and now.

In the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul explains some of the changes that the Holy Spirit will bring about in our lives if we want Him to: “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Spirit which dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11).

1. The life generated by the Holy Spirit displaces the deadness that seems to typify those who are subject to the demonic influence of sloth. Laziness saps the vitality out of human existence. All of us who have wasted time know of that debilitation.



Days spent watching soap operas on television do not invigorate us. Rather, they leave us with a psychological fatigue. Sloth does not create a sense of well-being, but leaves us dissipated and groggy. However, when we open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit, He “quickens” us. Just as new life was imparted to the corpse of Jesus, giving Him the ability to rise from the dead, even so the Holy Spirit will give life to those who are deadened by sloth. Our repentance from sin and inward surrender to the will of God makes us fertile soil for the fruit of the Spirit to take root and grow, driving the deadness of our souls away.

2. Also, surrender to the Holy Spirit gives us a sense of direction as to what we should do. The Spirit thus enables us to overcome one of the major contributors to inaction and sloth—indecision. Without a sense of direction, we often find ourselves paralyzed by inability to decide what we ought to do. The Spirit of God delivers us from such a state of ambiguity by helping us to discern what we ought to be doing with our lives.

A young woman who was a student at Eastern College seemed unable to generate any enthusiasm for studying. Her grades were poor and her attitude toward her work was extremely negative. She was a classic example of sloth. She was continually late for class, and often cut. She could be counted on to drift off to sleep during the lecture on those rare days when she showed up to class.

Halfway through her first semester at college, she became friends with a vivacious Christian who was a dynamic leader in the Youth For Christ movement. Her new friend took an intense interest in her and, over the course of a few weeks, led her into a conversion experience that transformed her into a vital Christian. Overnight her academic performance changed. She was alert in class. Her assignments were done with care and insight. Her interest in the subject matter would have delighted any teacher. When asked her about the dramatic change in her attitude, she explained that since she had accepted Christ, she had gained direction and purpose for her life. She claimed that she sensed that God was leading her into Christian service and that this gave her academic programs new meaning. She didn't mind working, because she knew what she was working for.

God provides a purpose for life. He convinces those who surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives that they are called to be on a mission in His name. When such a sense of divine calling is imparted to people, they inevitably respond with enthusiasm and are freed from the burden of sloth.

3. Fear of failure is a major contributor to laziness. The Apostle Paul tells us: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship” (Rom. 8:15). This is good news to those of us who have found our lives frozen in sloth because we were afraid to act. If we are afraid that our efforts will come to nothing, and that we will appear ludicrous for attempting what we cannot do, we will probably attempt very little.

It is hard to say what percentage of children do poorly in school because they do not try, but I believe that many do not try because they are afraid of failure. These children often do not attempt to do their assignments because they know that if they do not try, they can still maintain the image of being intelligent. However, if they try and fail, they will be exposed as the inferior persons they believe themselves to be. Sloth is nurtured by fear. As long as children can convince the significant others in their lives that they are failing because they are not trying, they do not run the risk of failing because they are inadequate.

All of this changes when persons surrender their lives to the will of God and allow God to impart His Spirit to them. In Romans 8:16-17, we read: “It is the Spirit Himself bearing witness to our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.”

Feelings of inferiority will be eliminated in those who are inwardly convinced by the Holy Spirit that they are children and heirs of God, and that they will be glorified with Christ forever. The new status imparted to Spirit-filled Christians will create a confidence and self-assurance that will encourage them to attempt things they hitherto considered impossible. Their relationship with God through the infilling of the Spirit transforms them into fearless doers of those things they believe God wants them to do. Their new self-confidence overcomes the fears generated by former feelings of inferiority. This self-confidence is the result of their new concept of themselves as sons and daughters of God. The immobility of sloth is abolished and they are willing to give each task their best efforts, not worrying about the consequences. They know that if they faithfully do the will of God, the results need not be of concern to them. God has called them to be faithful rather than to be successful. They are assured that “in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

4. Lastly, the Holy Spirit motivates us out of a slothful state of consciousness because a needy world is waiting for us to become what we should be and do what we should do. “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19).

When the Holy Spirit fills us, we begin to feel what Jesus feels for His fallen creation. There are injustices, corrupt social practices, arms races, and wars. Economic oppression, hunger, and racial discrimination seem universal. Truly all of creation is in desperate need of the transforming efforts of a people led and empowered by God. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not intended only to perfect us so that we will be fit for heaven when we die, but to equip us to be God’s agents for change in this present age. The Spirit imparts to us the passion of Christ’s mission which He Himself set forth:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord”*  
[Luke 4:18-19, KJV]

To be filled with the Spirit is to have our hearts broken by the things that break the heart of Jesus. To be alive in the Spirit is to view people through the eyes of Christ. Consequently, whenever we see anyone suffering, we will feel what Christ feels for that person and seek to alleviate that suffering. Whenever we see anyone hungry, we will view that person as Jesus does and seek to feed that person. Whenever we see someone imprisoned, we will long to see that captive set free because we desire what Christ wills for that person. Being filled with the Spirit creates within us a hunger for justice and a craving for the salvation of the lost. With such an orientation to the world, it is impossible to maintain a slothful attitude.

Sloth deadens, but the Spirit gives life. Sloth thrives on feelings of inferiority, but the Spirit gives us the assurance that we are the children of God. Sloth is self-centered, but the Spirit creates a burning desire to change the world. Sloth leaves us bored and empty, but in the Spirit we find the fullness of God’s joy.

### 8.3.10 Lust<sup>4</sup>

Sigmund Freud shocked the Victorian world by declaring that sex was a preoccupation of all human beings. His comprehensive study of human nature and his analysis of human behavior led him to conclude that all of life is permeated with a craving for sexual gratification. According to Freud, even religious experience was filled with sexual overtones and meanings. When, as a young graduate student, I first read Freud, I dismissed his theories as totally devoid of truth. I refused to accept his premises and certainly disagreed with his conclusions. However, I have come to believe that this founder of modern psychotherapy cannot be dismissed so easily. This cynical explorer of human motivations makes more sense of what people think and do than most of us are willing to admit on reading his work for the first time.

The Apostle Paul probably would have found much in Freud's opinions with which he could have agreed. Paul, like Freud, understood lust to be a repressed, illicit sexual desire, which is a normal part of every human psyche. Paul made clear in his epistles that before the transforming power of Christ comes into our lives, we are people who are controlled by the lusts of the flesh. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17, KJV). As a consequence of being fallen creatures, we have a natural tendency toward sexual perversion:

*Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

*For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections; for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature; and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet  
[Rom. 1:24-27]*

According to Paul, lust is a perversion of love. Lust is the result of a demonic twisting of love. When we are converted by the Holy Spirit, we will be restored to what we were meant to be, and only then will we be motivated by love.

It is clear in Paul's writings that the primary thing that differentiates the behavior of the new person in Christ from the unconverted person is that the new person lives life to express love while the old person lived life to fulfill lust. This simple dichotomy separating the love-motivated Christian from the lust-motivated person could lead many of us to doubt our salvation. Paul's differentiation between these two types of people seems so crisply clear that when we experience lust, we may take the experience as evidence that we are not Christians. It is easy to conclude from Pauline writings that lust is the litmus test that designates us as unregenerate types who are alienated from God and devoid of the Holy Spirit. Not only does Paul offer us a clear-cut division of humanity into one group made up of love-motivated Christians and another group made up of lust-motivated sinners, but John and James support his judgment. Added to the spiritual self-doubt that is generated by these apostolic writings are the words of Jesus, who tells us: "You have heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'" But I

---

<sup>4</sup> Portions excerpted from Seven Deadly Sins, Anthony Campolo, Victor Books, 1987, ISBN 0-89693-533-7, pp. 32-53.

say to you that every one who looked at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

When new Christians read passages such as these, they sometimes are driven to despair. It would be easy for a newly converted person to reason, “Christians are delivered from lust and do not even think lustful thoughts. But I still have lustful cravings and I still harbor lustful thoughts. Therefore, I must not be a Christian.” The problem is made worse by the fact that there are always some church members around who claim to have reached a state of sinless perfection in which they no longer have any lustful dimensions to their personalities.

The Apostle Paul recognized this tendency to despair among sincere Christians who, in spite of accepting Christ as Lord, still experience lust in their lives. His response to those who taught that the saved are spiritually perfected is brilliantly set forth in his Epistle to the Philippians. There were pious pretenders in the Philippian church who put down those who, in humble honesty, admitted to having sin in their hearts. Paul endeavored to set the record straight on this issue.

*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended in Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12-14, KJV).*

In this passage Paul makes it clear that as a Christian, he was a person who was “in process.” He declared that the Spirit did not instantaneously transform him into a perfected person; because there was much within him that warred against the work of the Spirit. In the Epistle to the Romans, he wrote:

*For I delight in the Law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?  
[Rom. 7:22-24]*

When we become Christians, we give to the Holy Spirit the freedom to transform us into new creatures who are freed from sin and motivated by love. However, this transformation takes time. The lusts of the flesh must be driven out of our consciousness, and that process takes a lifetime to complete. If we are spiritually disciplined through regular prayer, Bible study and the strengthening fellowship of other Christians, we can experience increasing conquest over the flesh by the Spirit. There will be struggles and temporary setbacks, but in the midst of all this Paul gives us this assurance.

*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies  
[2 Cor. 4:8-10]*

When we say that it will take more than a lifetime to be freed from all the effects of the lusts of the flesh, we do so in the confidence that beyond the grave we will become people who are fully motivated by love as God intends us to be. Jude 24 tells us that when the Spirit finishes His work in us, He will be able joyfully to present us “faultless” before the throne of grace. And the Apostle John gives us the good news that when we see Christ, either on His return or in the resurrection, we shall be as pure as Jesus Himself (1 John 3:2).

## While You're Waiting for the Second Coming

Having faced the realistic declaration of Scripture that freedom from lust is not something which is instantaneously experienced with conversion, but is the result of a long and arduous spiritual struggle, we must press on toward becoming what Christ expects us to become. In order to do this we must carefully examine those things which increase lust, so that we may avoid them, and discover those things which enhance love, so that we can develop them in our lives.

I have already stated that lust is a perversion of love. In the famous narrative poem *Don Juan* by Lord Byron, we read of a man who seeks psychological gratification through sexual escapades. Don Juan looks for a woman who will meet *his* needs and satisfy *his* appetites. If the libertine of our day regards Don Juan as an ideal type to be imitated, as he seduces woman after woman, he misses the whole point of the story. Don Juan is a tragic figure who hungers for something that he never seems to experience. He longs for an erotic turn-on which will leave him not only physically satiated but psychically fulfilled. Don Juan seeks that woman who will make him fully alive and emotionally ecstatic. Like the worshipers of Dionysius in the ancient Greek world, Don Juan hopes for a sexual experience which will fill the spiritual vacuum of his soul. His tragedy is inevitable because lust does not deliver what it seems to promise. The gratification sought through sexual conquests is never delivered. Don Juan, like the rest of us, is deluded into thinking that the living out of sexual fantasies can give unspeakable joy.

Most of us have fantasized sexual experiences. The only difference between us and Don Juan is that he lived out his fantasies, while we usually do not, often more because we lack opportunity or audacity rather than because we are spiritual.

There was a time when I would have pretended that such was not the case. I was sure that the other Christians I knew would be shocked and break fellowship with me if they knew what went on in my mind. Those in the church seemed beyond the lustful fantasies which plagued my consciousness. However, I have since learned that I am not the only one in the church who, from time to time, fantasizes about the possible joys of sexual liaisons. In the words of one preacher: "It's depressing to realize that most of us are like the rest of us." The problem we have with lust is common to all who live this side of Eden.

What we all must learn is that lust does not deliver what it promises. If we were to live out our fantasies, we would not experience psychic ecstasy; instead we would experience the filthy side of personhood in a heightened sense. Soren Kierkegaard, having lived out one of his sexual fantasies by visiting a house of prostitution, wrote in his diary: "Tonight I paid a woman in order to experience my own despicableness." It may be true that at the moment of sexual satisfaction the person motivated by lust feels transported into a state of bliss; but that brief moment is quickly followed by a sense of emptiness and shame.

Erich Fromm, a disciple of Freud, understood this truth and broke ranks with his academic mentor primarily because he recognized that Freud failed to grasp the real hunger of human personality. According to Fromm, all of us have been created to gain our ultimate fulfillment in life from loving, rather than through the gratification of our sexual appetites. This world-famous neo-Freudian humanist is correct when he declares that lust creates a desire to gain through sex with the partners of our fantasies what can only be gained through loving self-giving.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians about the delusions of thinking that sex will provide our richest satisfactions. He described in graphic detail how the failure to gain the expected gratification will drive us to more and more extreme perversity as we hope that in some stranger and more esoteric sexual experiences. Lust leads us to extreme degradation as we seek to gain a sense of fulfillment by living out the fantasies which it generates. Paul further explained that lust drives people into such things as witchcraft. A study of Satan worship will reveal that in most cases, people get into it as a make-believe ritual that is part of perverted sexual games. Only later do they begin to view their satanic worship as a religious experience.

Some years ago, a foreign film captured the attention of students of cinema. The film, *La Dolce Vita*, picked up the theme of the gradual denigration of a modern man living in the sophisticated circles of Roman society, as he continually sought new ways to satisfy his sexual appetite. The film traced his decline into the occult, step by step, as he moved from one kind of sexual practice to another. In his moral collapse, he sought ever new forms of stimulation as the practices already tried lost their ability to excite him. Throughout his descent into the depths of demonic corruption, there were constant appeals from those who represented purity and love, but his lust controlled him and eventually led him into a pit of filth and degradation.

### **8.3.10.1 Lust as illusion**

Perhaps the most deceptive aspect of lust is that the more a person tries to satisfy it, the more intense it becomes. To feed lust is to generate an even greater hunger for its gratification. The person who yields to lust finds that the more the lust of the flesh is fed, the more ravishing it becomes. In short, when it comes to sexual lust, the more one gets, the less one is satisfied. It is this desperate longing created by yielding to lust that drives the individual into the hands of the demonic.

The longing to satisfy sexual lusts becomes so strong that one is willing to call upon the powers of darkness in hope that the hungers of the flesh might be satiated. The ultimate tragedy is that the Evil One is the great deceiver and gives what people *think* they crave, only to leave them emotionally empty and spiritually unfulfilled. Satan mocks those who worship him by delivering what they want while denying what they really need. Lust is his ultimate weapon in the battle for souls.

Lust is an illusion, but love never fails. As Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 13:8, “Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.” It is ironic that setting aside the desire for one's own gratification, and seeking to bring joy and fulfillment into the lives of others, provides the psychic gratification that eludes those who seek it through lust.

It is easy to see from Mother Teresa her a deep joy and serenity. She does not seek joy for herself, nor does she make self-actualization a quest of her life; nevertheless, she has found both. She realizes that the joy for which the heart longs cannot be gained by seeking for it, but comes unexpectedly to those who lovingly sacrifice themselves and all that they possess for the sake of the joy of others. It is this lesson that we learn from Christ's words: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matt. 16:24-25).

In order to illustrate this biblical truth we will contrast two marriages. In the first marriage, the husband complains constantly that his wife does not gratify a vast array of his psychic/sexual needs.

He is planning to leave her and take up with another woman who “really turns me on.” “Hey,” he says, “it’s not my fault that she fails to gratify me. We can’t change the way we are.”

This husband portrays the selfishness of so many who enter into marriage with the expectation that their partners are obligated to meet their needs. Blinded by the pop psychology outlined in some of today’s bestsellers, they think that marriage is an arrangement destined to deliver physical and emotional delights and actualize all their potentialities for happiness. These children of the cult of romanticism have bought into the lyrics of the songs that lead our hit parade and tell us such things as: “Lay Your Hands on Me,” “I Miss You, Can’t Stand to Live Without You,” “Talk to Me, Me, Me,” “Fairy Tale Lovers,” and “Lost Without Your Love.”

The self-centeredness of much of our romanticism is often ignored, but anyone who carefully examines the expectations that people usually bring to marriages will discover that most of them seek their own gratification without realizing that such an orientation has nothing to do with love. In the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:5, love is “not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.”

In the second marriage, the husband is committed to his wife’s happiness. Every day he tries to think of something he can do that will give her joy. I got to know this man because he brought his wife to me for vocational counseling. She had some writing ability and he wanted to know if it was possible for her to enroll in a journalism program at our college. Though her husband had not had the opportunity for a college education, he was excited about the prospect for his wife. He promised that if the college would take her as a student, she would have plenty of time for study because he would do the housework. When I asked him if it bothered him that his wife would be better educated than he was, I realized that he had never thought about it. All that he wanted for his wife was to have the opportunity to fulfill her dream to be a write and to that end he was willing to make any sacrifice. I have seldom met anyone was thrilled about life as that man was, or, in the terminology of Abraham Maslow, more self-actualized. Love meets our needs; lust delivers a void.

Those who complain that this biblical prescription for life ignores the sexual needs of people, belong to what James H.S. Bossard, one of the graduate school professors at the University of Pennsylvania, mockingly called, “The pure orgasm school of thought.” Bossard claimed that those who think that the “right” partners and the “right” techniques will produce marital bliss are greatly mistaken. According to his observations, those who paid little attention to things like sexual adjustment, but concentrated on making each other happy, proved to be the most sexually fulfilled persons he knew. I concur with Bossard and claim that lust betrays; as we live out the fantasies which lust generates, we gain little satisfaction in bed or, for that matter, in life. On the other hand, if we love our marital partners and sacrifice for *their* happiness and fulfillment, our marriages will deliver more joy than we ever could have imagined and more sexual pleasure than those who live by lust ever could dream possible.

### **8.3.10.2 Lust as Immaturity**

In 1 Corinthians 13, often called the Love Chapter of the Bible, the Apostle Paul points out that love is mature. He declares that there comes a time when our childish emotions must be outgrown because we are required to live like adults. Paul wrote in verse 11: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (KJV).

Lust is a childish thing. This is particularly evident as it expresses itself in the lives of married people. A young woman I knew enjoyed having an array of men want her as a partner. She dated many and was considered a femme fatale who could have any man she wanted. She eventually married, but in her marital state could not find contentment with one man; she wanted them all.

The inability to make choices is a primary mark of immaturity. I can remember when I was a boy going to the store with a quarter in hand, and having the delightful opportunity to buy some candy. I remember standing in front of the candy counter for what must have seemed forever to the clerk, trying to decide which kind of candy I should choose. There were so many different kinds that I would find myself immobilized.

When the impatience of the clerk finally would force me to decide, I would be filled with anxiety, and as soon as I had made my selection, I would wish for another kind of candy, which suddenly seemed much more appealing than what I had in my hand.

Being unable to choose one of a variety of possible delights is cute behavior for a ten-year-old, but is unbecoming a person of thirty-five. By that age people should have the courage to make decisions and then to believe that what they have decided is the most glorious of all the choices that could have been made. To make a choice and then vacillate and yearn for something else is childish.

At an office party, a junior executive began to “make moves” on one of the secretaries. After several of his clumsy come-ons, I overheard the young woman say with a tone of irritation in her voice, “Bill, why don’t you grow up and go home to your wife?”

“What a fitting response,” I thought. That was exactly what was wrong with that man—he needed to grow up. He had chosen a woman for his wife, and still wanted her; but he wanted other women too. In his immaturity, he refused to accept the limitations which his decision had imposed on him. He did not recognize that maturity involves a willingness to accept the limitations that go with choices and an ability to find joy in the situation one has chosen.

Lust thrives on immaturity. It encourages the imagination to fantasize about what it would be like to have this partner or that partner in bed. It gets people to play foolish games in which they try to hold on to the sexual partner they have chosen while at the same time trying to seduce for their own pleasure others whom they are forbidden to possess. But Scripture teaches that one should “put away childish things,” or, to put it more bluntly, to grow up!

Maturity is not passive resignation to the inevitable, but rather the state of mind that enables persons to create magnificent possibilities for happiness in the situations in which they find themselves. Abraham Lincoln once said, “Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” That makes sense. In most cases, persons who are sexually fulfilled in their marriages are that way because, having made a decision to be married, they simultaneously made a decision to find sexual fulfillment with their mates. On the other hand, much sexual dissatisfaction in marriage stems from the fact that people refuse to take full advantage of the possibilities for sexual gratification that are inherent in their marriages. Refusing to live within the limitations imposed by their marriages, they lust after other possibilities. If such childish persons do get out of their marriages and into the relationships about which they have fantasized, they undoubtedly will be disappointed. Their lustful cravings will not be gratified with their new partners, no matter what they dream, because their own failure to be satisfied with what they have is the real cause of their joylessness. Like little children, they do not want what



they possess, regardless of how wonderful it is; but instead long for what they are not allowed to have. The immature, who do not glory in what is theirs to enjoy, are easy victims of lust.

### **8.3.10.3 Lust as a Denial of Death**

One of Freud's most brilliant contemporary interpreters, Ernest Becker, in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, *Denial of Death*, contends that throughout our lives a growing consciousness of our own mortality is an increasingly dominant factor in our behavior. Becker helps us to see that most of what we do, and especially our sexual behavior, is the result of our vain attempt to suppress the intolerable awareness that we are moving inexorably toward death. Our bodies constantly provide reminders that we are getting older. Who among us middle-aged citizens has not stood pensively in front of a mirror and viewed with dismay what is, while remembering what has been lost?

Our thighs have become flabby and our hair (if there is any) loses its lustre. Cosmetics can do only so much for biological clocks that are winding down. In the midst of the malaise brought on by encroaching death, we look for deliverance. Usually we do not care from whence the deliverance comes, as long as it provides an escape from the pain of knowing what is happening to us. We will accept all forms of lies and distractions if they can make us forget the sinking feeling in the depths of our souls. Such is the fertile soil in which lust can be planted and thrive.

The lusts of the flesh seem to offer a diversion, causing us to forget that we are dying. They promise relief from the emptiness that comes with our knowledge of the inevitability of death. The imagined joy of being transported from the mundane by forbidden sexual pleasures seems like a way of salvation to our lost souls.

Who among us does not know of some person who had position, wealth, and family and then threw them all aside to fulfill a craving of the flesh? Which one of us has not thought of risking all that we hold dear in order to enjoy a moment of illicit pleasure? How often have we marveled at the scope of the disasters caused by yielding to sexual passions? David destroyed the glory of his kingdom in his lust for Bathsheba. Samson forfeited his charisma and strength for Delilah. Solomon allowed his wisdom to turn to cynicism because of his insatiable cravings for women. Who has not shuddered at what lust will drive people to do? Behind it all, contends Becker, is the desire to escape the consciousness of mortality.

The woman who is approaching menopause experiences a sense that her life is ending sooner than she thought it would. She becomes painfully aware that she is entering the waning years of her existence. The efforts of her husband to comfort her are of no avail; she realizes that she is losing more than her ability to bear children. She longs to express groanings which cannot be uttered. She wants to be young and attractive again. Then, unexpectedly, a man several years younger than she shows an interest in her. She wonders if, in spite of all that has happened to her over the years, she still possesses seductive powers. She asks herself if she appears to him younger than she really is. "Perhaps the aging process is not as obvious as I thought," she says to herself. "If I could just captivate him, then I would know." Then insidiously, lust begins to manifest itself. She imagines what it would be like to experience sexual ecstasy in his arms. And it is only a matter of time before she does. Her escape from reality happens without regard to the consequences.

There are few people I pity more than those middle-aged men trying to be "cool." With their slick casual shirts unbuttoned at the neck to display an array of gold chains, they attempt to look smooth and

sophisticated. They try so hard to be men who know what life is all about as they hungrily eye the women. They fail to notice if their stomachs have swelled from drinking too much beer and their bellies hang over their belts. They try to conceal what is obvious to any objective observer; they are scared little men, pathetic parodies of the selves they would like to be. They look for some validation of the façade they project, and they think that it will come if they can just hustle some women. Any woman will do. They think to themselves, “I know I’m just as good in bed as I’ve ever been, maybe better.” Lust is nurtured by their fears. They want sex for reasons that they themselves do not understand. The truth of why they lust is too painful for them to bear.

We cannot delude ourselves that all of this goes on only outside the church. Many pastors have sought escape from their fears of death by way of excursions into sexual immorality. Their own sermons have made them more aware than most people of the transitory nature of life. The funerals and tragedies of others are part of a pastor’s daily work and make the awareness of his/her own frailty all too real. It is difficult for any member of the clergy to be unaware of the presence of death in the midst of life. The laity is prone to assume that those in the pulpit live in the assurance of eternal life and therefore do not fear death. Many members would be shocked to learn of any self-doubt or lack of faith in eternal life in their clergy. Pastors are aware of this and respond by pretending that their steadfast convictions keep them from ever being troubled by such things. They learn to conceal their troubled souls within their clerical robes. But the fear of death is there, and the false affirmation of life through lust is a real danger.

I tremble at the thoughts of pastors counseling women in one-to-one situations. Very often such counseling sessions are difficult to handle because they encourage a level of honesty and reciprocity in which the counselor is often confessing to the counselee. Then there are two desperate souls reaching out to each other for affirmation. At first it is just an affectionate embrace...simply an expression of Christian love. Later there comes more...and still later... Hurting people are vulnerable. Spiritual counseling intensifies the consciousness of hurt and makes people seek comfort and escape without thinking rationally about the consequences. Lust lurks in the shadows of our minds waiting to express itself whenever fears about death and about the meaninglessness of life are exposed.

At a recent meeting of psychotherapists, a survey of participants revealed that a majority of them at one time or another had experienced sexual relations with their clients. While I am sure that the percentage of pastors who have such experiences would be significantly lower, I am also sure that the realities would be shocking. Because of the vulnerability to sexual exploitation that exists in counseling situations, extreme care must be exercised. Ideally, counseling should occur between members of the same sex. The next best arrangement is for a pastor to have his wife present when he counsels members of the opposite sex. Finally, if counseling must take place cross-sexually without others being present, it should be in a setting that is open and visible. To counsel behind closed doors is asking for trouble. Some of my more sophisticated colleagues in the counseling business will disagree with this advice. They will say that I fear that lust is lurking in every consciousness and that people will be tempted to give vent to their lusts whenever opportunity presents itself. In response I must say that it is much better to be safe than sorry. Too many ministries have been left in ruins and too many people have been hurt because insufficient care was exercised as to where and with whom counseling was undertaken.

#### **8.3.10.4     The Insights of Feminists**

It is amazing to witness so much wholesale condemnation of the insights of feminist leaders on the part of some who speak for evangelical Christianity. The truth is that much of what the feminists are saying needs to be heard by Christians, especially in male-dominated churches. Often the most meaningful insights into the nature of lust, and the most intense condemnations of lust come from the feminist movement. This is easy to understand, since women are more likely to be victimized by lust than are men. Over the years, women have lost their reputations as men have laughingly “sown their wild oats.” Women have been the victims of sexual exploitation and rape. They are the ones who suffer most from the sins of the flesh.

There are those who argue that it takes two to have sex and that the man and woman are equally to blame. At first that argument seems viable, but careful sociological studies will poke holes in it. In-depth interviews have revealed that men and women relate to sex and love quite differently. Men find it easy and almost natural to separate love and sex. Consequently, it is very easy for them to have sexual affairs without much emotional involvement. Most women, on the other hand, have a strong tendency to link sex with love. When they have sexual affairs, they are usually more emotionally committed to their partners. This significant difference means that usually the sexual act is very meaningful to the woman, while the male partner has more interest in the physical gratification. While studies show that this differentiation between men and women is breaking down, demonstrating that it has cultural rather than biological roots, the differentiation still holds for most of the population.

In light of that differentiation, it is easy to see why women are more likely than men to be exploited because of lust. In another study it was revealed that while women most feared being used and then discarded, the greatest fear of men was failure.

A second reason for the condemnation of lust by feminists is their anger at being viewed as sex objects. They are angry with a society that expects women to have bodies shaped to stimulate the sexual desires of men. They rail against the cheerleaders at pro football games who serve no other purpose than to expose themselves to the lascivious ogling of the male spectators between plays of the game. They are tired of being evaluated for jobs on the basis of how they look instead of being judged by what they can do. They are irate over a tendency within our culture to make their primary *raison d'être* to be sexually pleasing.

Is it any wonder that women with dignity reject such a function? Is it any surprise that they stand against a culture which would make them sexual things whose primary function is to serve as lust objects to a leering male population? Why does not the church join their crusade? Why is it that all that seems to concern us is the kind of pornography that reveals nudity, while we fail to recognize the kind of obscenity that reduces women to sexual “things”?

Many women suffer from the psychological oppression that comes with living in a sexist society. They are treated like sex objects and all too often are conditioned to enjoy this denigrating from of existence. There are many women who have learned to appreciate the sideward glances of men who mentally undress them. Such women thrive on the attention they get with their suggestive walks and poses, and, because they are winner at the game of “Who is the sexiest?” they are eager to play that game regardless of the costs. And the game *is* costly. The day always comes when those attributes enabled them to win the game fade away. When that happens, such women are no longer of any value to the lustful watchers and, therefore, have little worth in their own eyes. Is it any wonder that the suicide rate for women over the age of thirty-five is disproportionately higher than for men over the same age?

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ affirms the dignity of every person, male or female, in ways that transcend the standards of this lust-infected world. He lets us know that each of us is of worth to Him whose love has no limits and will never change. Jesus looks at us with love, never with lust. In His eyes we have everlasting value.

In Christ there is no sexism. As we grow into His likeness, we view others as He views them and hence we grow out of lust and look on others in love. As we are transformed by the Holy Spirit, we view ourselves differently. We are delivered from any false consciousness that leads us to see our worth in terms of how sexy we are, and we come to recognize that our worth is established by the fact that Christ loves each of us so much that He would have died for any one of us. In truth—He did.

### 8.3.10.5 How to Conquer Lust

The conquering of lust, as I stated earlier, is a lifelong process. However, it begins with a decision in the present. Having surrendered to the lordship of Christ, the Christian is expected to wish for the purification of the mind and heart. However, too many of us are like Saint Augustine, who once prayed, “O Lord, deliver me from lust—but not yet.”

The Bible hits our problem sharply as it describes us as people who love our sin (John 3:19-20). Lust gives us pleasure that we sometimes love more than we love Jesus. Consequently, the first step toward victory over lust is to wish to be free from its hold on us and to recognize that Jesus is willing and waiting to help us in this venture. Unfortunately, many of us have to wait until some dire consequence comes of our lust before we recognize our inability to overcome it by ourselves and call on Christ to undertake the struggle with us.

There was once a town reprobate who was wonderfully saved at a revival meeting. He pledged to start a new life and abandon his licentious ways, but he found that it was not easy to overcome the lusts of the flesh. Several months later he ran into the preacher who had led him to Christ and the preacher asked him directly, “Well, how’s it been goin’?”

“It’s been goin’ awful,” the convert responded. “It’s like two teams of horse pullin’ away at my soul. One team pullin’ in one direction tryin’ to get me to do what God wants and another team pullin’ in the opposite direction tryin’ to get me to do the things of the flesh.”

“Let me ask you something,” inquired the preacher. “Which team of horses wins?”

The new Christian answered with a twinkle in his eye, “Whichever team I says giddyup to.”

In the end that’s the position of each of us. God is able to help and He is willing to help—providing we want to change. The first step away from being controlled by lust is to wish to change by the grace of God.

The second step is to remember to think before you act. Remember what is at stake when you are tempted to give in to the lusts of the flesh. There is an old hymn of the church with says:

*I would be true, for there are those who trust me;  
I would be pure, for there are those who care;  
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;  
I would be brave, for there is much to dare.*

Some people suppose they can fulfill the lusts of the flesh without hurting anybody, because they think that nobody will ever find out about it or because they think their spouses won't care. I am sure that there are those who do get away with it in this life, but I am equally convinced that there are more who are found out. In Arthur Miller's famous play, *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman, the main character, is in a hotel carrying on a dirty little affair with a woman he picked up in a bar. Much to his surprise, his son Biff comes to the hotel and happens on his father with this woman. In one moment, Biff's whole image of his father collapses, and from then on he sees his father as a cheap, pathetic person. Willy Loman never dreamed he would get caught, but he did, and then it was too late to make things right again. Willy could not help but ask, "Was it worth it?" The answer for Willy is the same as for all of us—"NO!" The risks are too great and the stakes are too high. Only a fool plays this game.

Even if we think we can fool all of the people all of the time, any kind of thoughtful reflection would lead to the conclusion that we can fool Jesus none of the time. He is always with us no matter where we are or what we do (Matt. 28:20). This truth which is our hope in times of trouble is also one we must remember when contemplating lust. The Apostle Paul reminds us that when we enter into illicit sexual acts, Jesus becomes a silent witness and a forced participant in what we do (1 Cor. 6:15). In the Book of Hebrews, we learn that being present in our degradation pains Him as much as the nails that pierced His hands and feet on the day of His crucifixion (Heb. 6:6).

### **8.3.10.6 Alternatives to Lust**

Sex should be fun. If Christian couples do not find fun and laughter in sex, they have perverted it. In the sexual act there should be superb enjoyment, and to make it less than that is to destroy its spirituality. The mistake of the Victorians was that they did not think that sex was good unless it was entered into with somber disposition. The prevailing value system of the Victorians made women believe that sex was a painful ordeal that must be endured if they were to fulfill their wifely duty. The women of that age were afraid to let themselves go while engaging in sexual activity. They should have known that such sexual rigidity only encouraged their husbands to lust after other women who might make sex more fun. In one case study, Freud learned of a Victorian woman who, on her wedding night, drugged herself into unconsciousness, leaving a note for her husband which read, "Do to me what you must." God never intended sex to be viewed as a necessary evil, but rather as a glorious foretaste of heaven.

I am not suggesting that sex be devoid of reverence, thoughtfulness, kindness, and spiritual significance. On the contrary, I am suggesting that in sex we experience a whole gamut of godly emotions. Let's not forget that as laughter and joy belong to spirituality, so they belong in our sexual relationship as part of holiness. If sex in loving marital relationships is what God wills it to be, lust will lose its lure when contrasted with the ecstasy of love. The death of lust will come when the deadness of its consequences are compared with the vitality of the ordained culmination of love.

Those of you who are single are faced with an on-going struggle with sexual desires. I cannot pretend that living without sex is easy, and yet it is necessary if you are going to live according to a biblical morality. If you think I am saying "You've got a painful and unresolved struggle on your hands for which we Christian preachers have no solution," you read me right. God does not diminish the sexual hungers of the single person, even though decent ways to gratify those hungers are not available. In short, it's a tough thing to be single and Christian at the same time. I can offer no effective consolation, except to quote from the Apostle Paul:

*Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy...I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband*  
[1 Cor. 7:25, 32-34]

Lust is often an escape from boredom. Jesus came that our joy might be full. He imparts His Holy Spirit to us, to fill us to that we can live on a higher plane of fulfillment. Those of us who work out our Christian commitment by serving soup to street people must remember that the kingdom of God is also a joyful banquet where there is singing and dancing before the Lord. We must let the world know that the kingdom of God is celebration by demonstrating in our own lives something of the joy we will know when His kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. Even our sacrifices should be expressions of joy, because joy is the fruit of the Spirit. Show me a person who is singing songs, sharing laughter, bubbling with the excitement of life, and I will show you a person who is being delivered from the destructiveness of lust.

One problem with our age is that people have forgotten how to experience passionate joy. They think that they must go to Disneyland or have 600 channels on their television to be entertained. They think that by getting *things* they will find fulfillment. All the while, a voice echoes down the corridors of time asking, "Why do you spend your money for that which does not satisfy?" The Christian life is a vitality in which the deadness of lust has no place. In the words of Moses: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. 30:19, KJV).

### 8.3.11 Lying

The Bible, and especially the book of Proverbs, identifies lying as one of the most deadly sins a person can commit and something God hates:

*"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."*  
[Exodus 20:16 (The Ten Commandments)]

*"A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish."*  
[Prov 19:9; Prov. 21:6]

*"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are his delight."*  
[Prov. 12:22]

*"A righteous man hates lying, but a wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame."*  
[Prov. 13:5]

*"16. These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: 17. A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, 18. a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, 19. a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren."*  
[Prov 6:16-19]

*Whenever we lie, we destroy trust, security and stability in all of our interpersonal relationships. Therefore, truthfulness is the foundation of the security in all of our personal relationships.*

We describe the sin of lying as an Intermediate sin in section 3.5.3 deserving of private reproof and reporting to the police if a violation of law (fraud, for instance). Lying often results from pride and selfishness and happens most often after a person has committed a sin and wants to cover up that sin to protect their credibility.

It is important to remember that true security in all our relationships comes only when we are honest and truthful. Whenever we lie, we destroy trust, security, and stability in all types of interpersonal relationships. God wants us to feel safe, secure, and at peace, and that is why he hates lying.

Lying has many ill affects on everyone it affects:

1. Turns everyday communication into emotional abuse.
2. Discredits the person who did the lie.
3. Creates mistrust and suspicion in the family.
4. Is a product of selfishness and reveals selfishness.

Make no mistake about it: God hates lying. It is one of the deadliest sins a person can commit and undermines our relationships with other people and all of civilization. The only cure for lying is to repent and apologize to the people who have been hurt by your lies and promise never to do it again.

### **8.3.12 Murder**

God forbids murder in Exodus 20:13:

*"You shall no murder."*

Jesus recognized that murder begins with anger and so he forbid us to be angry at all:

*"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."  
[Matt. 5:21-22]*

We recognize that the above passage says "without a cause" but as we pointed out in section 8.3.3, Jesus didn't actually say this phrase, but made *all* anger a sin.

Statistically, 60% of women who kill use poison. They will most often poison the food of the intended victim. This approach is a variation on the old female motto: "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." In this case, they way to his pocketbook *and* his heart is through his stomach, since women will often kill men to inherit their assets. The majority of men, on the other hand, kill using guns instead of poison.

### 8.3.13 Pride<sup>5</sup>

Pride can be very destructive of relationships. The Bible talks a lot about pride. The book of Proverbs, for instance, addresses this subject probably more than any other single subject. Here are a few of the scriptures on the subject:

*“By pride comes nothing but strife. But with the well-advised is wisdom.”*  
[Prov. 13:110]

*“18. Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. 19. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.”*

[Prov. 16:18-19]

*“A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.”*

[Prov. 29:23]

*“For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”*

[1 John 2:16]

*“16. These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: 17. A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, 18. a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, 19. a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.”*

[Prov 6:16-19]

We describe pride as an intermediate sin deserving of private reproof in section 3.5.3 of this constitution. Pride:

1. Is the original sin Satan had that made him fall from God’s grace.
2. Destroys relationships.
3. Causes endless strife.
4. Is self-serving and selfish.
5. Is the opposite of love.

In today's vain and misguided culture, psychologists often use the term "self-esteem". If you look up the word pride in the dictionary, you will find that self-esteem and pride are synonyms. Pride is just an exaggerated or excessive form of self-esteem. What makes pride different from self-esteem is that it has a contemptuous, conceited, and disdainful aspect to it. Self-esteem is a good thing, but we should be careful not to allow it to grow or transform into pride, conceit, or disdain for others, because this will cause us to be alienated and isolated from the people we love around us.

Savonarola, the great Florentine preacher of the fifteenth century, one day saw an elderly woman worshipping at the statue of the Virgin Mary which stood in his city's great cathedral. On the following day, he noticed the same woman again on her knees before the Blessed Mother. With great interest, Savonarola observed that day after day, she came and did homage before the statue.

<sup>5</sup> Portions excerpted from Seven Deadly Sins, Anthony Campolo, Victor Books, 1987, ISBN 0-89693-533-7, pp. 74-90.



"Look how she reverences the Virgin Mother," Savanarola whispered to one of his fellow priests.

"Don't be deceived by what you see," the priest responded. "Many years ago an artist was commissioned to create a statue for the cathedral. As he sought a young woman to pose as the model for his sculpture, he found one who seemed to be the perfect subject. She was young, serenely lovely, and had a mystical quality in her face. The image of that young woman inspired his statue of Mary. The woman who now worships the statue is the same one who served as its model years ago. Shortly after the statue was put in place, she began to visit it and has continued to worship there religiously ever since."

Pride is arrogant self-worship. It is the sin of exalting oneself and placing one's own interests above the interests of others. Pride craves admiration and even adoration, and will not share the limelight. Pride deludes its victims into believing that they have no peers and drives them to try to destroy anyone who takes recognition away from them. The proud are in love with themselves and seek to call attention to their admirable qualities.

Pride is a primary barrier to salvation. God has provided our deliverance from sin through the death of His Son. We are saved by putting our faith in Christ and believing that His death atoned for our sin. Salvation is not something that we earn, but comes as a gift from a gracious God. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

Pride makes it difficult for many of us to accept this gift. We have a tendency to want to be saved because we are somehow worthy of God's blessings. Our pride drives us to want to earn our salvation by doing enough good deeds so that the Heavenly Father will owe us eternal life. But this is not the plan God has devised. Rather, He requires us to humble ourselves, acknowledge our inability to live righteous lives, repent of our sins, and depend only on His grace.

We prideful people have trouble with this plan because it renders our own good deeds and personal achievements worthless. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5, KJV). As spiritually impoverished sinners, our only hope for salvation lies in God's gift, yet pride leads us to try to prove our worth to God. God despises our pride and calls us to trust only in Jesus who was willing to humble Himself and become the ultimate servant of humanity.

Even among evangelical Christians who say that they are saved by grace, I find blatant expressions of pride. I am amazed to discover how many of those who claim to be in Christ still believe that their own righteousness will earn them credit with God. They do not claim that their good works will gain them access *to* heaven, just status *in* heaven. They are convinced that by serving Jesus here on earth, they can improve the position they will occupy when they get to heaven. But whenever Christian service is rendered with hope of reward, it is not really Christian at all. That any of us should seek superiority over the rest of us is anti-Christian and a contradiction of the Gospel. That anyone should even think about being better off than others in heaven is an expression of a prideful disposition that is unworthy of a follower of Jesus. Nevertheless, I have heard Christians complain about the injustice of deathbed converts receiving the same rewards in heaven as longtime Christians.

It was against this kind of prideful thinking that Jesus was speaking in the Parable of the Vineyard. At harvest, a man bargained with laborers to work in his vineyard for a fixed daily wage. As the day passed, the hired others to work for fewer hours at the same daily wage. When those who had begun to work in the morning complained about this arrangement, the man responded: "Is it not lawful for me to

do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first shall be last: for many be called, but few are chosen (Matt. 20-15-16).

The cure for pride is pretty clear:

1. Recognize the brevity of our life on earth and our own mortality. For instance: "No one on their death bed looking back at how they spent their precious time on earth ever wished they had spent more time at work."
2. Adversity builds character more quickly than any other thing. Get yourself in a few difficult situations or make friends with people who have been through a lot of adversity. Volunteer to help people who have a lot of adversity in their lives: Prison, poverty, teenage pregnancy, cancer, old age. Talk to people who have declared bankruptcy, had multiple divorces, and deaths in the family. Ask them what is important in life to them. You will learn some surprising lessons about what is *really* important!
3. Learn to be good at and feel good about complementing and helping others.
4. Have an "attitude of gratitude" and thankfulness for the many gifts and blessings God has bestowed on us.
5. Learn to depend less on self and more on God and others.
6. Don't worry so much about what other people think of you. Don't worry about impressing them.
7. Be willing to freely admit and repent for our mistakes.
8. Do something funny or stupid that makes people laugh at you once in a while!
9. Learn to laugh at yourself. Lighten up!
10. Be less competitive and independent and focus more on team efforts, leadership, and delegation. This takes more focus off self and puts more onto others.

### 8.3.13.1 Pride Infects the Spirit

Pride infects Christians in a variety of ways that can spoil their commitment to Christ. I have known some missionaries to be caught up in their own nobility as they minister in the name of Christ. Like the Pharisees in the days of our Lord, some of them want people to acknowledge their sacrificial lifestyle and tell them how wonderful they are.

I find that the easiest way to escape from the pitfall of pride while serving others in the name of Christ is to remember His words:

*Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

*"For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in; Naked, and ye clothed Me; I was sick, and ye visited Me; I was in prison, and ye came unto Me."*

*Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?"*

*And the King shall answer and say unto them, "Verily say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me"*

*[Matt. 25:34-40]*

If I can serve others as if I were serving Jesus, I am delivered from any feelings of nobility in what I do. It is one thing to lift some drunk out of the gutter, take him home, shower him and put him into my

bed. In such a case I might view myself as a wonderful person who did something worthy of praise. On the other hand, if when I look into the eyes of that drunk, I think of ministering to Jesus Himself, I am only left inquiring of myself, "Am I worthy?"

To recognize the image of our God in even the most socially despised of creatures is to become a humble servant of these people.

Pride mars so many ministries. As a young pastor, I caught myself time and time again going into the pulpit more concerned about what kind of image I was projecting to my congregation than about how much glory I would bring to God. Even in the midst of Christian service, I found myself seduced into seeking personal recognition rather than the spiritual well-being of those who had come to hear the Gospel. I constantly needed to repent of the sin of pride.

One of the most disturbing practices among American pastors is the promotion of unnecessary church building programs. Because we can glorify God through art forms, there is a place for magnificent architecture. However, from one end of this country to the other, there are tens of thousands of church buildings with low aesthetic value, many of which do little more than provide gratification for the egos of the pastors and committees who plan them. Someone has sarcastically suggested that many American clergy suffer from an "edifice complex." A number of the church buildings being constructed are unnecessary, because their congregations will underuse them. Some of these groups could rent a local school or theater at a fraction of the cost of a new building, or facilities could be shared by two or three congregations.

There are ways for churches to have places for worship and Christian education without entailing the exorbitant cost of new buildings. Nevertheless, the construction will go on because the pride of pastors and church leaders demands it. No matter that the money going into bricks and mortar is desperately needed to feed a half billion hungry people. No matter that the financial resources given for buildings that glorify pastors could be used to save some of the 40,000 children in our world who starve to death each day. No matter that they funds spent on structures that will be fully used for only a few hours a week are essential to finance the propagation of the Gospel to the billion people who have not heard the story of God's salvation. Pride, not need, often determines how money give to churches will be spent. Paul tells us: "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit but in humility count others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3). Unfortunately, those members of the clergy who are obsessed with buildings have failed to get this message.

We can prevent this kind of prideful waste of the Lords money by holding Pastors and each other more financially accountable. These kinds of wasteful projects could be prevented at churches if the congregation insisted on being more involved in the affairs of the church and being informed about what is going on. Some churches have a budget committee, for instance, consisting of senior members of the congregation as well as the pastors and they vote in order to decide on financial issues. When the vote comes up, as a member of the committee, you can vote no.

When one preacher was in seminary, he had to take a course in homiletics under Professor Albert G. Williams. This dear saint of God required each of the students to preach a sermon that he and the members of the class would evaluate. The preacher vividly remember delivering his homily. It was well-constructed with three points which he deemed to be profound and biblically sound. The body of the sermon was laced with illustrations and witticisms. He delivered the sermon with practiced gestures and made sure to employ the techniques of proper eye contact with his listeners. In short, he knew he was good.

Following the class, he was handed a bundle of papers containing the evaluations of his fellow students. They offered praise for my sermon and assured him that he would really go places after graduation. The last evaluation in the pile was from Professor Williams. He did not comment on the pastor's message or on its delivery. His one sentence was concise and cutting: "You can't convince people that you're wonderful and that Jesus is wonderful in the same sermon." That pastor never forgot that simple line. Remembering it just before he preaches acts as a safeguard against using his sermon as a prideful play of recognition.

### 8.3.13.2 Pride Ruins Relationships

Pride keeps us not only from God, but from each other. In order to elicit the admiration of others we deceive one another. Our pride hinders us from being open and honest. We would rather have people admire the selves we pretend to be than to love the selves we really are. In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, the tragic Willy Loman is so anxious to convey the impression that he is a successful businessman who knows how to handle people, that he conceals his frightened, lonely self from his closest friends and even from his wife. He becomes a solitary man who lives out his days in desperate isolation. His pride keeps him from the kind of self-revelation essential for meaningful relationships.

Sociologist Erving Goffman contends that society is nothing more than a complex system of con jobs in which we try to convince each other that we are something we are not. He says that doctors try to inspire awe in their patients by pretending to be able to diagnose what they really do not understand; that lawyers pretend to know exactly what the law allows when in reality they are very limited; and that teachers present themselves to their students as possessing more knowledge than they really possess. Goffman claims that pride makes con artists of us all.

It seems to me that one of the most important dimensions of salvation through Christ is deliverance from the dishonesty that stems from pride. When you come to that awareness of how important you are to Jesus, you see your boasting as hollow and meaningless. If you view yourself as so special to God that He would have sent His Son to die just for you, you find that playing games to establish a sense of importance becomes unnecessary.

When you recognize that the righteousness of Christ has been ascribed to you, you know that any attempt to add to your image through righteousness of your own is ridiculous. When you are in Christ, you do not need the praise of others to maintain your identity.

Once we become aware of who we are with God, we can afford to be open and honest with others because we no longer fear their rejection. And once we can dare to be open and honest about ourselves with others, we are able to enter into deep relationships with them. False pride leads us to deceive one another. Knowing ourselves in Jesus delivers us from foolish pride and gives us the grace to make ourselves transparent to each other.

Many people who consider themselves Christians remain at odds with each other because their pride will not allow them to make the confessions necessary for reconciliation. There is the father who in an angry tirade orders his son out of the house, and then anguishes over what he has done. But pride prevents him from going to his son to say that he is sorry. There is the deacon who verbally attacks his pastor at a church business meeting, and stomps out of the church in a huff. He misses the fellowship of his former church friends, but will not confess his sin because he is afraid of losing face. Pride so often acts as a barrier to reconciliation, but there is a remedy for this kind of alienation in the example

of Christ. He did not wait for us to come to Him confessing our sin and begging forgiveness. The Bible tells us that while we were still in our sinful state, Jesus took our sin upon Himself. What He did for us, we should be willing to do for others.

What this means in practical terms is that when someone wrongs you, you should not make that person's repentance the basis upon which reconciliation can begin. Rather, you should recognize that his pride will probably keep him from taking that important step. Therefore, you should go to him, assume the guilt for what has happened, and take the sin upon yourself. Pray yourself to the point where you can take the blame for what has happened. Remember that is exactly what Jesus did for you on the cross.

There is a strong likelihood that once you have taken this difficult step and the offending party no longer finds self-justification necessary, there *will* be repentance. People are far more willing to repent when they realize that they will not be condemned if they do. At that point they are free to look at themselves with honesty and recognize that *they* did that was sinful. It is probable that when you go to the person who has hurt you, and acknowledge that you are to blame for what has happened, the offending party will say, "I'm responsible too," and will confess his failures. We can help people to overcome their prideful self-righteousness by rendering such an attitude unnecessary.

### **8.3.13.3 Pride Destroys Those We Love**

The pride of parents can lead to the destruction of children and sometimes the relationship we have with them. People who are out to prove that they are better than others often use their children to achieve this end. We will never know how many children have had their lives made miserable by being pushed to achievements which make their parents look good. Children who are driven to psychological exhaustion for academic achievement often know that their labor is primarily to enhance the status of their parents. Behind the claims that the parents expect the children to do well, because success in school will increase their options, is the ugly reality that the achievements of the children visibly demonstrate the superiority of the parents.

Sports are ruined for many teenagers. There is not much fun on most varsity teams because there is a deadly seriousness about the games being played. From Little League through interscholastic sports, the omnipresent parents are pushing their children in order to gratify their own ego needs.

Another expression of the prideful exploitation of children can be witnessed in the beauty contests for teenage girls and even for children. Recently, I saw a television special about little girls competing for such dubious titles as Miss Junior Miss. With stark amazement, I watched interviews with parents who admitted that they pushed their daughters through arduous routines so that they might become winners. It took very little analysis to discover that the parents were nurturing a desire to achieve success through their children.

As I watched those girls mastering the techniques of women who have become the sex objects of our society, I wondered how long it would be before many of them would be destroyed by the parents' desires for recognition.

Even young marriages can be manipulated to serve the interests of parents. We all know of parents who reject the prospective mates their children have chosen because they think these potential sons or daughters-in-law are beneath them. Since the status of women is significantly influenced by the men

they marry, some parents try to prevent marriages which will diminish a daughter's position in society. Such parents are sometimes more concerned what others will think of the mate their daughter selects than about whether she will be happy. Happiness is often a casualty of pride.

Other forms of exploitation of children are evident in Christian circles. How many people have been pushed into church vocations because of the pride of parents? When I taught in seminary, I was well aware of the fact that many of my students were studying for the ministry, not because God had called them, but because being ministers of the Gospel would serve the ego needs of their parents.

As a preacher, I would like to be able to say that my son or my daughter is in the ministry. But why? Is it because I believe that they will find spiritual fulfillment in such positions and actualize their God-given potential? Is it because I believe God has ordained them to such service? Or is it because my pride drives me to want to brag about the fact that my children want to follow in my footsteps?

In some cases it is pride rather than love that makes parents want their children to have a salvation experience. They want to be able to say pompously, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Pride can pervert the motivation of even the noblest objectives.

Perhaps the most ugly expression of pride that destroys children is seen in incest. Recent studies reveal that in most situations where fathers have been exploiting their daughters sexually, the mothers are well aware of what is happening. However, these mothers usually allow the sexual molestations to continue and say little or nothing, because they are afraid of the shame of prosecution. These mothers are willing to sacrifice the psychological and physical well-being of their daughters rather than to endure the humiliation of exposing their husbands for what they really are. They may urge their daughters to say nothing about what is going on, or even worse, may pretend that they do not believe the stories their daughters tell them. The preservation of pride can lead to unspeakably cruel treatment of children whom parents profess to love.

#### **8.3.13.4 Pride Can Destroy A Nation**

"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). That warning not only applies to personal relationships but is particularly applicable to what goes on at the societal level. I am convinced that the United States has its greatest enemy in itself. The pride of America, more than any other single factor, threatens our existence as a nation.

A good example of how national pride can destroy a nation could be found during the Vietnam War. I will always remember the shocking words of President Nixon: "I will not be the first President of the United States to lose a war." There was no talk of the rightness of the war or the concerns of justice. There was no discussion of what this war was costing America. All that seemed to matter was that the pride of the president be kept intact. President Nixon may have had noble motives for pursuing a military struggle that cost the lives of over 40,000 American soldiers and left half a million of the scarred for life. I want to believe that there was more than national pride and the face-saving of an American president at stake in that painful conflict. However, there is no doubt that because our leaders found the humiliation of defeat too much to endure, the Vietnam War continued long after it became evident that it could not be won. There is a gigantic price to be paid for pride.

As we find ourselves caught up in an incredible arms race worldwide, I am beginning to wonder whether it is national defense or national pride that drives us to build bigger and more devastating bombs. I wonder whether it is our fear of being destroyed by the Russians and the Chinese or our compulsion to be the number-one nation in the world that is responsible for our willingness to spend ourselves into national bankruptcy in order to feed our military machine. The Prophet Isaiah once offered this warning to the Children of Israel: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!" (Isa. 31:1).

It would be well for us to heed that warning today. Our pride will lead us to trust in our own strength for our salvation. We would be wise to humble ourselves as a nation, repent and trust in the Lord.

### 8.3.13.5 Develop Healthy Humility

A common mistake among evangelical Christians is to confuse humility with humiliation and to think that pride can be overcome through self-contempt. Humility enhances our humanity and makes us more like Christ, whereas humiliation diminishes our humanity and tempts us to forget that we are made in the image of God.

John Perkins, the founder of Voice of Calvary, gives us one of the most moving illustrations of the destructiveness of humiliation in a touching story from his youth:

*I was about eleven years old when I got a powerful lesson in economics. It was a lesson which helped me see why poor families like mine stayed poor while the rich got richer.*

*I stood on a farmer's back porch, waiting for him to come back with the money. I was bone tired, that good kind of tired that comes after a hard day's work. The kind of tired a boy earns from doing a man's work. The kind of tired a boy earns from doing a man's work of hauling on a hot, humid summer day in Mississippi.*

*But if my body was remembering the day's work, my mind was flying ahead to what I could do with the dollar or dollar and a half that would soon be in my pocket. Would I buy a shiny new pocket knife? That would really wow the guys back home. Or what about a wallet?*

*Not that I really needed these things, you see. But I was a few miles away from home. For kids in our town that was big stuff. Vacations were always an occasion for bragging--so much that the kids who did not go on vacations had to invent them.*

*So that's how this thing got started, this custom of buying something while you're gone to prove where you've been. What I bought wasn't all that important. What was important was what it would prove.*

*The farmer came through the kitchen onto the back porch. I held out my hand expectantly. Into it fell--I could hardly believe it--just two coins! A dime and a buffalo nickel! I stared into my hand. If that farmer would have knocked the wind out of me, I couldn't have been any more surprised. Or hurt. Or humiliated.*

*I had been used. And I couldn't do a single thing about it. Everything in me wanted to throw that blessed money on the floor and stomp out of there.*

*I couldn't. I knew what white people said about "smart niggers." I knew better than to be one of those. I shuffled off that back porch, head down--ashamed, degraded, violated. I didn't want anyone to know I had been exploited. I hated myself.*

God does not want any of us to endure such loss of dignity and self-respect. He sent His Son into the world not to condemn us, but to give us new identity as His sons and daughters. God wills for us to accept His adoption whereby we become "heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17).

There are discoveries to be made about ourselves, when we are in a right relationship with God, which will make us spiritually healthy. Not the least of these discoveries is the good news that we are accepted even though we are unacceptable. When the Prophet Isaiah went up into the temple to pray, in the year that King Ussiah died, he discovered that his sin made him acceptable. Overwhelmed by a vision of the glorious presence of God, he responded: "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Is. 6:5, KJV).

While Isaiah realized his own inadequacies and unacceptableness, he also discovered the grace of God which made him acceptable. God provided cleansing from his sinfulness when an angel was sent to purge him: "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, 'Lo, this has touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged'" (Is. 6:6-7, KJV).

Lastly, Isaiah learned that God had a mission for him that gave his life ultimate significance: "also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?'

Then said I, 'Here am I; send me;'" (Is. 6:8).

Therein lies the basis on which each of us can gain a wholesome sense of selfhood. Like Isaiah, we must be humbled with the discovery that our sinfulness has rendered us unacceptable to a holy God; but through the grace of God, we learn the amazing news that He makes us acceptable and gives to each of us significant mission in life. When we grasp what we are apart from Christ, we are stripped of our pride; and we realize that because He still loves us, He purges our sin and gives to each of us special gifts in order to carry out His calling for us, our dignity is established.

A pastor told this story from his boyhood. He came home from school one day in tears, threw himself into his mother's lap, and cried, "Manna, am I a nigger?" His mother asked firmly, as only a black mother can, "Who told you you're a nigger?"

"The kids down at school, they told me I'm a nigger."

Listen," said his mother, "You're a nigger when I tell you you're a nigger--and I never will."

Whenever the people around us attempt to degrade us, we must remember what God says we are. He calls us to a high calling and gives us a title that clothes us with dignity.

Once a friend of mine encountered a little girl carrying a huge mass of cotton candy on a paper cone. He asked, "How can a little girl like you eat all of that cotton candy?"

"Well you see, Mister," the little girl answered, "I'm really much bigger on the inside than I am on the outside."

Pride leads us to pretend to be bigger on the outside than we are on the inside. Healthy humility is the recognition that God has imparted to each of us, by His grace, a gift which makes us greater on the inside than most people will ever know.

### 8.3.14 Selfishness



Selfishness hurts our loved ones. In many ways, it is the opposite of love and is most frequently demonstrated as pride or ego. Selfish people don't spend a lot of time thinking about how their behavior affects others or demonstrating empathy, so they generally have great difficulty relating to other people. This causes them to be isolated and scare people away from intimate relationships with them. This isolation can lead to chemical dependency, which in turn leads to many of the other sins and dysfunctional behaviors we have talked about in chapter 7. The cure for selfishness is the same as it is for pride, so please read the previous section.

### **8.3.15 Sexual promiscuity/fornication**

The cause of sexual promiscuity is lust, which we covered in detail in section 8.3.9. Lust is the thought that leads to the behavior of sexual promiscuity. Sexual promiscuity and adultery can in turn lead to several other types of sins, including lying (to cover it up), sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) that can affect our eventual or current spouse and children, and eventually divorce. Along these same lines, we wanted to provide an interesting observation about Sexually Transmitted Diseases:

*The leading cause of death is birth.*

*Life itself is a sexually transmitted terminal disease that we are all infected with.*

Sexual promiscuity is a type of sin that can also lead to unwanted pregnancies, which can then lead to abortions that God regards as murder. Marriage is the only way God identifies in the Bible to responsibly and ethically satisfy our sexual desires. Anything else is regarded as either fornication if the perpetrator is unmarried or adultery if the perpetrator is married.

*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*

*[1 Cor. 6:18]*

Infidelity or fornication also undermine the trust found in relationships and makes us look selfish and undisciplined to our eventual marriage partners. Healthy relationships require mutual trust, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and mutual respect, all of which require us to be very careful and selective about our sexual partners.

### **8.3.16 Unwillingness to submit sexually to our marriage partner**

Lack of sexual submission in marriage leads to self-destructive behaviors in marriage, most especially for men, who have stronger sexual desires than women. The consequence of this sin, however, include both adultery, and the divorce that the Bible authorizes in Matt. 5:31-32 following the adultery. A woman who doesn't submit sexually to her husband or make efforts to increase the enjoyment of sex in marriage is every bit as much to blame for her husband's adultery as her husband in this regard. The Bible is very clear on this issue in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. Section 4.8.5 (Sex and Affection) goes into great detail on this subject so we won't belabor this issue further. The humorous quote below sums this up:

*"When you put men in the doghouse, then they play in the cathouse."*

## **8.4 Dysfunctional Behaviors**

Dysfunctional behaviors are those behaviors that are harmful to our relationships but which are not classified directly as sins by the Bible.

### 8.4.1 Authoritarianism

Being authoritarian means being pushy, manipulative, legalistic, inflexible, judgmental, and dictatorial in one's approach towards personal relationships. Being authoritarian in many ways is the opposite of showing unconditional love. Authoritarianism can have a very damaging affect on one's personal relationships because it can scare people away from us and result in us being isolated and alone and unhappy. Even if the reason we are doing these things is the noble expressed wish of pursuing the best interests and good of people around us, our friends and loved ones won't perceive it that way. They don't want to be controlled and if the control is extreme, then they will view it as emotional abuse and their rebellion will be equally extreme also.

Instead of being authoritarian, we need to learn to be flexible and give them the room and freedom and respect to manage their own affairs. This is what we call the "*let go principle*." We alluded to this in section 4.3, where we talked about the purposes of marriage, by saying that Christ revealed the paradoxical truth that we can't really live until we first die. The Bible talks about the "let go principle" in the following passages as well: Matt. 10:39; Mark 8:35; Luke 17:33. In a Biblical context, what the "let go principle" means is that we have to be willing to give up self, the glorification of self, and our own desires to really enjoy what is around us and see our situation clearly. If we don't give up most of what people think of as "self" just as Jesus did, then we commit sin and become slaves of sin and self. Other examples of the "let go principle" in action we can all relate with are exemplified below:

- If you need a loan from a bank, you dress like you are wealthy and act like you don't need the money. Banks always want to loan money to people who can prove they don't need it, because they know you will pay it back. However, if you desperately need the money, have bad credit, or can't pay your bills, then they won't give it to you!
- In the realm of romance, the best time to find a mate is when we aren't focused on looking. If you were to survey all the people who are married and asked them how they met, it was often a coincidence in which they weren't actively looking for someone, but simply "stumbled" onto their mate through happenstance in the process of doing things and activities they enjoy and which make them both feel happy and fulfilled. They will often share an interest in this common activity. That hobby or activity they have a shared and passionate interest in oftentimes ends up becoming the glue that holds the marriage together after they decide to get married. Many people will tell you that the worst thing one can do in a relationship is appear desperate or codependent. This scares away prospective mates quicker than anything. Codependent people are the type who, when they meet someone who might be a romantic prospect and who expresses even the slightest interest, they will be pounced on and mercilessly pursued and hounded for attention, dates, etc. In the realm of people, a good analogy to the approach of codependents is that when you ask them for a drink, they turn the fire hose on you!

In the context of parenting, an authoritarian approach may work when children are younger, but it will wear thin as the years pass and they declare their independence. Their rebellion will be a certainty—and probably will be spectacular. A more flexible and loving approach towards discipline is warranted. We have to balance love and limits. Unconditional love is the key to doing this. We need to remind our children of the following at every opportunity as they are growing up:

*You are loved, you are important, and you always will be, no matter what happens. I care enough about you to provide for you, stand with you, coach you, correct you, and even die for you if necessary. My commitment to you is not based on what you do or don't do, how you look, whether your body is perfect or handicapped, or how you perform in school or sports. It is based on the fact that I am your parent and you are my child, a priceless gift that God has loaned to me for a season. Eventually I will release you to live your own life, but while you are growing up, I consider caring for you an assignment of utmost importance.<sup>6</sup>*

Children need, and actually fervently seek, boundaries and ground rules. Expressing love and enforcing limits are not contradictory but intimately related. Allowing a child to have her way without any restraint is not an expression of love. At the other extreme, harsh, rigid, or authoritarian treatment of children, even if it produces apparent model citizens, isn't an appropriate exercise of limit setting.

The Bible is clear that being overly legalistic and authoritarian produces "death". In 1 Cor. 15:56, Paul states: "*The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.*" Lord, let us not make too much room in our lives for sin by being too legalistic with the people we love and care about. We'll just isolate them and undermine our credibility and influence in accomplishing positive results in their lives.

#### **8.4.2 Chemical addictions**

Alcohol and drug abuse can be devastating to a marriage, most often because they interfere with effective communication by making us irrational and unpredictable. For instance, 67% of emotional abusers frequently use alcohol. Also, 90% of all child abuse involves abuse of alcohol. Communication is the absolute key to meeting our responsibilities and to building strong and meaningful personal relationships. Because we need other people's help, we need to communicate to them the needs that we have and the ways we think they can help us satisfy those needs. When we can't communicate properly and lovingly because of drugs or alcohol, then we alienate people around us and our problems multiply.

Drugs and alcohol can also impair our ability to deal effectively with our problems. They undermine good judgment and cause us to adopt self-destructive behaviors. Because drug and alcohol abuse impairs our judgment, it has the affect of creating, intensifying other dysfunctional behaviors listed in this section. For instance, when we drink or take drugs, we have the tendency to avoid fulfilling our responsibilities and obligations. This multiplies our problems and gives us even more reason to use alcohol to escape the consequences of not fulfilling those responsibilities. We then lose credibility when we can't manage our own lives, and this makes us more evasive of other people and fearful to have relationships. We have the tendency under those circumstance to avoid relationships because of guilt about being judged for our irresponsible or dishonorable behaviors. This creates further isolation that makes us turn even more to chemicals as a way to escape the unpleasantness of reality.

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A) or Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.) are support groups dedicated to dealing with chemical addictions. When you or your loved ones have chemical addiction problems, we suggest getting everyone in the family involved in these groups. Below is a summary of the 12 step program promoted by A.A. for dealing with alcohol addictions:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Baby and Child Care, Paul C. Reisser, M.D., 1997; Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.; pp. 292-301.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.aa.org/em24doc6.html>.

1. *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.*
2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*
3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.*
4. *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*
5. *Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*
6. *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*
7. *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*
8. *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*
9. *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*
10. *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*
11. *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*
12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

A.A. newcomers are not asked to accept or follow these Twelve Steps in their entirety if they feel unwilling or unable to do so. They will usually be asked to keep an open mind, to attend meetings at which recovered alcoholics describe their personal experiences in achieving sobriety, and to read A.A. literature describing and interpreting the A.A. program.

A.A. members will usually emphasize to newcomers that only problem drinkers themselves, individually, can determine whether or not they are in fact alcoholics.

At the same time, it will be pointed out that all available medical testimony indicates that alcoholism is a progressive illness, that it cannot be cured in the ordinary sense of the term, but that it can be arrested through total abstinence from alcohol in any form.

### **8.4.3 Cyberaddiction**

This problem is a relatively recent phenomenon that didn't become widespread until about the mid 1990's.

#### **8.4.3.1 Symptoms**

The symptoms of computer addiction are quite specific:

1. Psychological Symptoms
  - 1.1. Having a sense of well-being or euphoria while at the computer
  - 1.2. Inability to stop the activity
  - 1.3. Craving more and more time at the computer
  - 1.4. Neglect of family and friends
  - 1.5. Feeling empty, depressed, irritable when not at the computer
  - 1.6. Lying to employers and family about activities
  - 1.7. Problems with school or job
  - 1.8. Loneliness
  - 1.9. Shyness
  - 1.10. Depression
  - 1.11. Low self-esteem

2. Physical Symptoms
  - 2.1. Carpal tunnel syndrome
  - 2.2. Dry eyes
  - 2.3. Migraine headaches
  - 2.4. Back aches
  - 2.5. Eating irregularities, such as skipping meals
  - 2.6. Failure to attend to personal hygiene
  - 2.7. Sleep disturbances, change in sleep pattern
3. Behavioral symptoms
  - 3.1. Divorce
  - 3.2. Incurable children

Computer addiction has been identified by many professionals and the media. Family therapists hear about it frequently. Clinical Psychiatric News reports increasing complaints related to computer use. At many colleges and universities, counselors and Deans of Students report increases in inappropriate and excessive computer use associated with rule infractions, student failures and academic drop-outs. Lawyers find that compulsive computer use can be a major factor in divorce.

#### **8.4.3.2      Treatment**

Like any addiction, this one can be treated. Some doctors believe that one of the most effective methods to deal with all these types of problems is Cognitive Behavior Therapy, which teaches the patient to identify the problem, to solve the problem and to learn coping skills to prevent relapse. Often the treatment is helped by medication. In addition some doctors recommend support groups for the other affected persons.

Maressa Hecht Orzack, a Harvard University psychologist and founder and director of Computer Addiction Services at McLean Hospital, a Harvard-affiliated teaching hospital in Belmont, Mass. She says that computer addiction is a real and growing problem. She receives messages every day from people who ask for help or want information about the signs of computer addiction. She also maintains a website at <http://www.computeraddiction.com>.

Treatment for cyberaddiction is tricky, according to Orzack. "Like an eating disorder, you can't expect people to give it up completely," she says. "Tempting 'food' is all around < at work, at school, and in their homes. You have to limit the time spent in front of a machine the way you limit the time spent at the table. Moderation is important, especially for the new generation of kids who begin to use computers in the first grade, or even before then."

One of the hardest things is to get people to come in and talk face- to-face with a therapist. They want to do it all on the Internet.

Orzack describes one man who spent all night on the Internet. He couldn't get up to go to work or keep appointments. She kept contacting him by Internet to remind him of his obligations until he finally came to see her.

Orzack and other therapists use the same treatment methods as they do with gambling, alcohol, or eating addictions. In one technique, known as cognitive-behavioral therapy, people are taught to monitor their thoughts and identify those that trigger addictive feelings and actions. At the same time, they learn new skills to cope with the addiction and ways to prevent, or handle, relapses.

In another technique, motivational interviewing, patient and therapist work together to set goals such as learning to recognize the difference between healthy and addictive computer use. "The efforts of patients are constantly reaffirmed, and they are not scolded for slips or failures," Orzack explains.

She uses a combination of both techniques, making "contracts" with people to specify how much time they will spend in front of a computer screen. As an example, she encourages them to set an alarm, or two alarms if needed, to signal when to turn to other activities. Orzack tries to get them to devote more time to other pursuits, such as exercising, talking with family and friends, and developing new recreational or social interests

The average treatment takes three months of regular sessions and telephone (not e-mail) checkups. But, Orzack acknowledges, some people require a year or more to deal with their bad habits.

"Nobody's ever cured," she says. "You just learn to deal with the problem."

#### **8.4.4 Gambling addiction**

Gambling addiction is perhaps the most destructive of all the compulsive behaviors, because it can financially devastate a family, enslave the family to gambling debts, and thereby cause divorce. The most frequent cause of conflicts in marriage are related to financial problems and perhaps no behavior produces more financial problems than gambling addictions.

##### **8.4.4.1 Symptoms**

Gamblers Anonymous offers the following questions to anyone who may have a gambling problem. These questions are provided to help the individual decide if he or she is a compulsive gambler and wants to stop gambling.

1. Did you ever lose time from work or school due to gambling?
2. Has gambling ever made your home life unhappy?
3. Did gambling affect your reputation?
4. Have you ever felt remorse after gambling?
5. Did you ever gamble to get money with which to pay debts or otherwise solve financial difficulties?
6. Did gambling cause a decrease in your ambition or efficiency?
7. After losing did you feel you must return as soon as possible and win back your losses?
8. After a win did you have a strong urge to return and win more?
9. Did you often gamble until your last dollar was gone?
10. Did you ever borrow to finance your gambling?
11. Have you ever sold anything to finance gambling?
12. Were you reluctant to use "gambling money" for normal expenditures?
13. Did gambling make you careless of the welfare of yourself or your family?
14. Did you ever gamble longer than you had planned?
15. Have you ever gambled to escape worry or trouble?
16. Have you ever committed, or considered committing, an illegal act to finance gambling?
17. Did gambling cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
18. Do arguments, disappointments or frustrations create within you an urge to gamble?
19. Did you ever have an urge to celebrate any good fortune by a few hours of gambling?

20. Have you ever considered self destruction or suicide as a result of your gambling?

Most compulsive gamblers will answer yes to at least seven of these questions.

#### **8.4.4.2 Treatment**

Treatment of gambling addictions uses the same 12-step program as Alcoholics Anonymous as follows:

1. We admitted we were powerless over gambling - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this Power of our own understanding.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have these defects of character removed.
7. Humbly asked God (of our understanding) to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.

The 12 Step Program is fundamentally based on ancient spiritual principles and rooted in sound medical therapy. The best recommendation for the program is the fact that "it works."

If you need help, we suggest that you see a mental health professional or at least get involved in a treatment program. A good 12-step recovery program for compulsive gamblers is offered by Gamblers Anonymous at <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/>.

#### **8.4.5 Obsessive/compulsive (OCD) disorders<sup>8</sup>**

Obsessive compulsive disorders are behavioral disorders characterized by recurring obsessions and compulsions, especially as symptoms of a neurotic state. Ironically, some forms of obsessive compulsive disorder can earn admiration, particularly in a society as highly driven as America is today. Personal hygiene, domestic cleanliness, and perfectionism, for instance, are widely regarded as virtues: Perfect grooming turns heads, a spotless house wins praise, and corporate culture rewards organizational skills.

To the casual observer, an OCD sufferer might appear to be a highly efficient, fully functioning person. But to close observers, such as family members and friends, the OCD sufferer looks more like someone mysteriously enslaved by incomprehensible forces that are beyond his or her control.

---

<sup>8</sup> OCD Resource Center; <http://www.ocdresource.com>.

### 8.4.5.1 Symptoms

Answering these questions will help you to reflect on your condition and organize your thoughts to facilitate your diagnosis.

If you lose more than an hour a day to any of the below, and if the need for such repetitive behavior causes marked distress or significantly interferes with your normal routines, relationships or occupational or social functioning, discuss it in detail with your doctor.

1. Does performing a certain ritual feel like an urgent necessity of life?
2. Do recurrent intrusive thoughts cause discomfort or anxiety?
3. Does an extreme need for order and cleanliness force you to tidy things/bathe/shower/wash your hands excessively?
4. Do you do things (e.g. checking locks) over and over?
5. Do you repeatedly perform certain routines to prevent "bad things" from happening?
6. Do you have great difficulty discarding things even when they have no practical value?
7. Are you persistently late or absent from work, school or other appointments?
8. Do you constantly question things and express needs for reassurance?
9. Do you have difficulty completing simple tasks in a reasonable amount of time?
10. Do you suffer from undue concern over little things and details?
11. Do you experience extreme emotional reactions to insignificant events?
12. Do you suffer from inability to sleep properly?
13. Do you find yourself frequently staying up late to get things done?
14. Do you avoid certain things or situations?
15. Is your performance of daily routine tasks a struggle?

Common obsessive, intrusive thoughts include:

1. Fear of contamination. Fearing dirt, germs, cancer, AIDS, bodily waste, asbestos, chemicals, radiation, sticky substances.
2. Fear of causing harm to others. Putting poison in food, spreading illness, smothering a child, pushing a stranger in front of a car, running over a pedestrian.
3. Fear of making a mistake. Setting fire to the house, flooding the house, losing something valuable, bankrupting the company.
4. Fear of behaving in a socially unacceptable manner. Swearing, making sexual advances, saying the wrong thing.

Common compulsive, ritualistic behaviors include:

1. Cleaning/washing. Hand washing, showering or cleaning oneself repeatedly.
2. Checking/questioning. Checking to see if light switches, appliances and faucets are off; if doors are locked; numbers are correct.
3. Collecting/hoarding. Collecting old objects, mail, or trash to the point of filling up one's house.
4. Counting/repeating. Counting to a certain number or counting objects over and over; repeatedly performing a movement or set of movements before being able to move on.
5. Arranging/organizing. Arranging items in perfect symmetry or in a particular order (for example, cans or books on shelves).



### 8.4.5.2 Treatment

Treatment should be sought out when the symptoms escalate to a point where they interfere with life. Common OCD symptoms—such as extreme concern about order, germs or contamination, or the need to perform certain rituals to prevent imagined catastrophes—may not, in and of themselves, interfere with daily life. But OCD is a disorder defined by degree. When its symptoms escalate to the point of chronic preoccupation, when they consistently consume more than an hour of each day, it's time for help.

#### Medications:

The drugs that have been shown to be effective in the treatment of OCD are potent serotonin inhibitors: one product is a tricyclic antidepressant and the others are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). These medications may help normalize the brain's balance of serotonin—the chemical linked to OCD.

Beneficial effects of SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) are documented by research. While the relationship of serotonin to OCD is not entirely understood, the condition seems to be linked to low levels of this substance in the brain. SSRI therapy is helping a growing number of OCD sufferers. LUVOX® (fluvoxamine maleate) Tablets is an SSRI that, since its approval by the Food and Drug Administration, has become one of the top prescribed medications for OCD.

People respond to medication differently, and your doctor will be able to prescribe the one best suited for you. It is important to work closely with your doctor to monitor your response to the medication. With all medications, you should talk with your doctor about side effects and possible interactions with other drugs you are taking. Even so, the maximum improvement of symptoms may not occur for several weeks or months. Ideally, medication should be used in conjunction with behavioral therapy.

#### Behavior therapy:

Medication and behavior therapy often complement each other. While medication appears to alter the body's level of serotonin, behavior therapy helps the patient learn to resist compulsions and obsessions.

The focus of behavior therapy is a process called habituation through which the patient learns to confront their fears and reduce anxiety without performing the rituals. Gradually, the person exposes himself or herself to situations that cause anxiety, but refrains from performing the rituals that relieve the anxiety. For example, an individual might be exposed to an unclean object like the floor or a waste basket. This will cause anxiety for the person, but he or she will not reduce these feelings by washing, cleaning or performing rituals. Eventually, the patient realizes that the feared consequences will not occur and the anxiety decreases.

### 8.4.6 Phobias

The foundation of all human relationships is trust. When we are afraid of someone or something, we have anxiety. We can be afraid of something real or something imagined that exists only in our mind. This anxiety creates mistrust and suspicion of the people and things around us that interferes with healthy human interaction and normal human functioning. Examples of types of phobias include:

1. Fear of heights.
2. Fear of being closed in (claustrophobia).
3. Fear of relating to other people.

With fear of people, we undermine our relationships unnecessarily. People want to be valued and feel important and respected. This is where they get their self-esteem from. By mistrusting people around us, we make a basic statement about them that says: “You are dishonest, irresponsible, and/or selfish so I can’t rely on you to do the right thing in my behalf or other’s behalf. There is no telling what kind of damage you are going to do to my relationship to you or the people I care about, so I have to watch you.” No one wants to hear that kind of message, and so they will naturally avoid us.

Phobias and fear in general are best treated with lots of the following two ingredients:

1. Love. This includes acceptance, loyalty, and commitment.
2. Knowledge. It is difficult to fear something that you completely understand.

Using love to fight phobias involves being positive, encouraging, honest, and frank when dealing with either ourselves or other people who have phobias. We need to be careful to be tactful and nonjudgmental in describing our fears and dealing with people who have phobias so we don’t offend others in the process or spread our irrational fears. Try to focus on developing relationships and activities that increase our self-esteem. This will naturally increase the esteem that we have for people and things around us. Remember: with people phobias, we can’t value and esteem others until we first can value and love ourselves. Loving people who have phobias is the best approach to eliminate the phobias and help them feel secure and valued. Focusing on the thing they are afraid of and showing that it isn’t going to hurt them will help calm them down. The Bible is clear on this in 1 John 4:18:

*“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”*

Using knowledge to fight our fears deals with focusing on the origin of our mistrust or anxiety and trying to understand it as thoroughly as we can. We need to question whether it is rational, normal, and will promote a healthy interaction with the people around us. We need to solicit feedback or assistance from mental health professionals in helping to eliminate the anxiety. If we understand where the fear is coming from, then we can eliminate the cause of the fear and solve the phobia problem.

#### **8.4.7 Poor communication skills**

Communication is the foundation of all human relationships, and especially of marriage. Unhealthy or bad communication can create a great deal of mistrust, suspicion, and anxiety in other people, which can only isolate us and destroy our relationships with people we care about. The Bible says we should avoid negative communication:

*“7. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. 12. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? 12. Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”*  
[James 2:7-12.]

Communication is an art form that we can easily spend our whole life learning and improving and never be good at. The hardest aspect of avoiding bad communication is not allowing expedience or our emotions to get the worst of us so that we say words in haste that we can never take back which might irreparably damage our relationship perhaps forever. Developing quality communication takes a lot of time, love, discipline, patience, and unselfishness to perfect, because we need other people's help to practice! You can't talk unless you have an audience! A person once said in this regard: "You are entitled to an opinion, but not to an audience!" Section 4.8.4: Communication covers this subject in greater detail and is highly recommended reading.

#### **8.4.8 Pornography addiction<sup>2</sup>**

Pornography addiction in the Internet age is a very common form of dysfunctional behavior. It has been described as "an affair of the mind" and is based on lust. Because it is based on lust and because lust is a sin as we described in section 8.3.9, indirectly it is a sin. However, the Bible doesn't directly address this topic as a sin. Pornography addiction increases conflict and undermines the sexual bond between husband and wife that sustains the relationship. It is a problem that women often have trouble understanding because they lack the strong libido that most men have. Below is a list of common reasons why pornography addiction is regarded as a dysfunctional behavior that is bad:

1. Porn destroys families from the inside out. It usually starts with the man, who God intended as the spiritual leader of the family. Porn will help block God's blessing and favor from a family. Once a man is hooked on porn, he will do almost anything to keep his addiction secret. Results can include: sexual dissatisfaction with his spouse, habitual lying, incest with other family members, rape, serial murder, divorce, abandonment, bankruptcy, violent behavior and a loss of rational thinking.
2. Your thoughts toward other people are increasingly sexual in nature above all other thoughts - you have a warped or perverted perspective that will never be satisfied as long as you feed it. You'll find yourself repeatedly returning to porn.
3. Your thought life is inseparably permeated with the images you view - they are stamped into your brain with the aid of hormones released during sexual arousal.
4. Pornography is habit forming and in many cases progressive. It can lead to more and more hard core material, including perversions of homosexuality, bestiality, necrophilia (sexual interest in corpses) and sadism (a sexual perversion in which gratification is obtained by the infliction of physical or mental pain on others).
5. Pornography intensifies an individual's drive to serve oneself, rather than serve others.
6. The financial impact of a pornographic addiction can be very large. The convenience of credit card transactions on the internet encourages spending without limit.
7. By viewing and purchasing porn, you are supporting the porn industry and facilitating its growth.
8. Your children could get hooked on porn if they find your material.
9. If married, you are expending your sexual energy in area other than with your spouse - your sex life could suffer, your spouse may get unhappy, causing problems in your marriage.
10. If you get caught, you can suffer consequences professionally, socially and emotionally.
11. You are allowing your sexual appetite to feast on images of other people having sex. God intended a different plan for you.....one where you and your spouse can enjoy each other in a marriage relationship. The porn you fill your mind with now, will detract and destroy your satisfaction,

---

<sup>9</sup> Porn-free; <http://www.porn-free.org/>.

intimacy and fulfillment from sex in your marriage, whether you are currently married or married in the future.

12. Porn has power over you. Do you doubt this? Just try to walk away from it and never view it again - its almost impossible! This kind of power is destructive and will attempt to dominate and ruin your life.
13. Porn will increase your chances of committing a sexual crime, including incest, rape, indecent exposure, sodomy, etc..
14. Porn will increase your propensity to lie
15. Reality and fantasy rarely match up. Sex in porn is a portrayal, purely made for the viewer's enjoyment. Sex in real life is, or should be, an expression of love between a man and a woman in a marriage relationship.
16. Jesus says in the Bible in Matt. 5:27-28: *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

The presence of several of the following signs may indicate a pornography addiction:

1. He looks at pornographic materials such as magazines, books, videos, the Internet, and clothing catalogs.
2. He secretly gets up at night to watch television.
3. He will not account for the increasing number of 800 and 900 number phone calls.
4. He often isolates himself and doesn't let his wife know where he is.
5. He is controlling during sexual activity or has frequent mood swings before or after sex. He demands sex when and where he wants it.
6. He has tried to switch to other forms of porn to show he isn't dependent on one form and makes rules to cut down on usage, but never seems to fully adhere to those rules.
7. He seems preoccupied in public with everything around him.
8. He lacks intimacy before, during, and after sex. He offers little or no genuine intimacy in the relationship.
9. He gets angry when anyone shows concern about his problem with pornography.
10. He is increasingly dishonest.
11. He offers no appropriate communication during sex.
12. He has no close male friendships.
13. He frequently uses sexual humor.
14. He always has a good reason for looking at pornography.
15. He does not want to socialize with others, especially those who might intimidate him or hold him accountable.
16. He has feelings of depression.
17. He hides pornography at work or home.

Two very good resources for Christians in dealing with pornography addiction can be found on the World Wide Web at:

<http://www.porn-free.org>.

<http://www.estheronline.org/>

They have a very good in-depth structured process for diagnosing and treating pornography addiction.

## **8.5 Common Sinful Excuses to Evade Responsibility for Sin**

### 8.5.1 It's an Obsession

The world defines the word obsession as: A compulsive preoccupation. No, the Bible calls this kind of behavior sin. In fact, the Bible calls this kind of sinful behavior idolatry. An obsession (idolatry) in any form is a sin. Idolatry is understood to be any area of blind devotion in a person's life. Like an idol, an obsession takes God's place in our lives. His place must be number one. To be obsessed is to be out of focus with God's plan and purpose for our lives. For example, we can be obsessed with an unhealthy romantic relationship. However, we can also be obsessed with seemingly good things like a career, a particular biblical doctrine, or even a genuine ministry from God. Anything can become obsessive and consequently become a sin. What then is the solution to ungodly obsessions? Obsessions are removed from the believer's life as they walk in openness, yieldedness, honesty, transparency and most of all obedience to God and His Word. Obedience to God always brings clarity of His will for the believer's life. Obsessions cloud the Christian's understanding of God's will and distract the believer away from God. Therefore, since obsessions hinder us from doing God's will, they are sin.

### 8.5.2 Its an Addiction

The world defines an addiction as: An eventual uncontrollable physical or mental dependence. No, the Bible calls this kind of addictive behavior sin. Usually an individual becomes addicted only after long-term or habitual sinful behavior. Repeating sinful behavior time and time again until you become addicted does not change the fact that each time you indulge yourself in this behavior you are sinning. (It must be noted that there are accidental addictions to various medications, etc., but these are rare.) Rather, we are addressing willful and conscious cooperation with practices that lead to a dependence, usually on certain substances. However, we can also become addicted to many things other than substances. For example, we can become addicted to certain behaviors or attitudes. (Lust, envy, pride, anger, greed, gluttony, gambling, sex, pornography.) Whether in attitude or action, this type of addictive behavior is sin.

### 8.5.3 It's an Impulse

The world defines an impulse as: A sudden, uncontrollable thought, an activity of the mind. No, the Bible calls this type of impulse a sin of the mind. Impulses in this context are best understood as arguments of the mind that resist God, mental barriers against God's will, mental theories that discredit and dishonor God, conceits of the mind (mental pride), mental deceptions, mental fantasies, sophistry, imaginations and mental speculations. Second Corinthians 10:5 says we should "Demolish (cast down) arguments (of the mind) and every pretension (of the mind) that sets itself up against the knowledge of God..." Therefore an impulse is a choice you make in your mind and heart that can sometimes go against God's knowledge and will. This type of impulse is a sin. Believers have a choice to demolish these kinds of impulsive thoughts. The unbeliever does not.

This same verse continues by instructing us to "...Take captive every (human) thought to make it obedient to Christ." This means we are to take every impulsive thought "captive" (submissive towards and obedient to the Word of God) and not yield to sinful impulses in our minds and hearts. We do this only through the power of the Holy Spirit in us as believers. Nonbelievers are unable to control their thoughts (impulses) since they are slaves to sinful thoughts and actions. It is the new birth by the Spirit

of Christ in each believer that allows us to live above impulses. As the believer exercises his authority to control sinful impulses, the result is a "...demolition of (mental) fortresses, a demolishing of reasonings and every haughty mental elevation...and a taking captive of every thought into obedience to the Christ..."

#### **8.5.4 It's Hormonal**

The world defines the word hormonal as: A strong (often sexual) physical urge. No, the Bible calls this type of behavior lust. Lust in any form is a sin. For the believer, hormones do not act independently of their will for they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live above sin. If our hormones "act up" it is because our hearts are not right with God. Believers control their "sanctified" hormones. Their hormones do not control them. Hormones will do exactly what our hearts tell them to do.

#### **8.5.5 It's a Sickness/disease**

Let us look at alcoholism. The Bible calls such a behavior sin. Robin Boisevert states, "The Scriptures very clearly teach that alcoholism (or the life-style of a drunkard) is sin and a matter of morality, not pathology. In the Bible the decision to get drunk is presented as a moral one for which every person is accountable to a Holy God...recognizing the reality of guilt, rehabilitation centers...seek to absolve a person's sense of justifiable guilt by seeking to convince him or her that alcoholism is a genetic malady or biological disease for which he has no moral responsibility and should experience no guilt.

"I believe the above approach is a tremendous to the individual and to society. The only authentic way to deal with alcoholism (or drug abuse, homosexuality, gambling, gluttony, etc) is to accept responsibility for your actions by acknowledging they are wrong and then asking God to forgive you through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

"Finally, I grant that alcoholism can become physically addicting. Initially, however, drunkenness is something someone voluntarily chooses. In time the choice becomes less voluntary, but this too must be seen as a consequence of irresponsible behavior. A person doesn't start off addicted." <sup>10</sup>

#### **8.5.6 It's a Compulsion**

The world defines a compulsion as an irresistible impulse to act; forced behavior over which one has no control. No, this type of behavior is sin. In other words, we can resist behavior that seems to overtake us. For example, anger is frequently a purposeful sin and not a mere involuntary compulsion. Our own selfishness, for example, can trigger an angry response; we haven't chosen to resist; thus, we have sinned; then, with self-preservation in mind, we try to excuse our behavior. Paul wrote that we can grieve the Holy Spirit as a result of anger (Ephesians 4:29-32). Grieving the Holy Spirit only occurs as a result of sin. This "grieving" could result from all forms of anger such as:

1. Bitterness
2. Malice
3. Clamor

---

<sup>10</sup> People of Destiny magazine, "The Couch or the Cross?", November-December 1991, p. 4.

4. Envy
5. Resentment
6. Intolerance
7. Criticism
8. Revenge
9. Wrath
10. Hatred
11. Seditious
12. Jealousy
13. Attack
14. Gossip
15. Sarcasm
16. Unforgiveness

(List taken from *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*, by Tim LaHaye, copyright 1996 by Post, Inc.)

### 8.5.7 It's a Weakness

The world defines a weakness as: A moral defect or failing for which you are not liable. No, it too can be sin. This does not include Paul's "weakness" which he described as a "messenger of Satan" which "buffeted his flesh" (2 Corinthians 12). We do not fully understand this, but it was clearly not a moral failure or defect of his character. Paul hinted that this weakness involve dill treatment, hardships, persecution and difficulties, but there is not mention of moral failure or physical infirmities, as some may believe. Frequently, a weakness is our sinful nature manifesting a "work of the flesh." The works of the flesh are sin. For example, fear is frequently viewed as a legitimate weakness. The Bible calls fear a sin. Fear is the result of a form of selfishness (self-dependence, lack of faith, trust). When we do not trust God, we fear. This would include all forms of fear, such as:

1. Anxiety
2. Doubts
3. Timidity
4. Indecision
5. Superstition
6. Withdrawal
7. Loneliness
8. Over-aggression
9. Worry
10. Inferiority
11. Cowardice
12. Suspicion
13. Hesitancy
14. Depression
15. Haughtiness
16. Social shyness

(List taken from *Spirit-Controlled Temperaments*, by Tim LaHaye).

We also dismiss depression as a weakness. However, like many forms of fear, depression too is usually the result of selfishness. We become filled with self-pity (which is sin\_) and the consequence of this self-pity is termed depression. The church could be freed from spending millions of dollars on sedatives and antidepressants, counselors and therapists, if she would only repent of the sins of anger, fear, and depression.

As previously stated, the apostle Paul wrote about his weaknesses but these must not be confused with sinful weaknesses like those mentioned above. Specifically Paul's "weaknesses" were described as those situations listed in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 that kept him humble and relying on God's grace to carry him through the demands of a difficult calling of God. Paul was not justifying sinful behavior. He was describing the "cross" which he was called of God to bare and which ultimately led to his martyrdom, according to church history. That is why after three requests by Paul to have his "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan" (2 Corinthians 12:7) removed from his life, God answered Paul by saying, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Again these weaknesses were God-ordained circumstances designed to maintain Paul's usefulness to God by keeping him totally dependent on God. In contrast to this understanding of Paul's weaknesses, sinful weaknesses (moral failures) are deliberate acts of disobedience to God and His Word.

### **8.5.8 It's Genetic**

No, it's the result of choosing to sin. We can't continue to blame our gene pool for our tendencies toward sin. The 1990's became the decade for genetic rationalization and excuse. Contrary to what medical science and research may tell us, everything is not dependent upon or a result of the genetic! Don't blame your genes, blame yourself!

Jesus was the greatest geneticist who ever lived. In fact, Jesus created the gene. HE knows its function; its fixed location on a chromosome; its specific influence on phenotype; and its ability to mutate to various allelic forms. Jesus never said sin was the result of an individual's genetic heredity history. Jesus should know, He created us as genetic beings. Jesus said sin came from the heart (spirit) of man and was an act of the human will.

As a man, Jesus Himself came "...In the likeness of sinful man..." (Romans 8:3). Yet He never sinned. He lived above sin, He knew the temptation of sin without ever having committed it. He was as much a genetic being as any human being. But, genes were not the issue then and they are not the issue now. The heart of man is the origin of sin, not his gene pool. There is no such thing as sinful genes, but there is such a thing as a sinful heart! Genes are neither sinful or sinless. They are neutral. They are no more a vehicle for sin than the harmless atom, molecule, cell, or chromosome.

### **8.5.9 It's Environmental**

Personal choice can always override poor environment. "Where there is a will, there is a way." NO one has to sin simply because of his or her surroundings. Many individuals may not have had much choice in selecting their particular environments, but God has promised that all believers can live victoriously over sin, no matter what their environment may be (Romans 8:28-39). If this was not true, Jesus never would have remained sinless on earth. He went out of His way to mix with sinners, yet never once sinned.



If sinning or not sinning would be the automatic effect of environment, then Lucifer should have never sinned in the beginning. There was no sin that existed or occurred in heaven up to that time. Yet Lucifer sinned against God. Sin was and is a matter of personal decision. We decide to sin. We do not merely reflect our environment or act in subjection to it when we sin. An incredibly sin-filled environment could not force Jesus to sin while on earth. And Lucifer, in an incredibly sin-free environment (heaven) committed terrible sin by attempting to overthrow God. So environment cannot be called responsible for an individual's sinning. However, if you are unable to live above sin in the environment you are in, then take some good advice: get out of that environment or infiltrate that environment with God's Word, God's people, and prayer!

### **8.5.10 "It's my Upbringing--The Way I Was Raised."**

No, if your behavior is contrary to the standards of the Bible, then your actions are sinful. Blaming your parents or your childhood experiences does not change the fact that you are totally responsible for your present behavior. As believers, we all have a new Father. God, our Father, is rearing us to be like Him. Therefore we are expected to act like our heavenly Father in all Godliness.

### **8.5.11 "It's My Personality"**

More than that it is a sin. Never blame God for your sinful behavior by claiming that's the way He made you. Many times our very personalities are altered because of our own sinful lifestyles. We must never turn that around on God and make Him responsible for our wrong choices. We are told by God that our sinful personalities were "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). We are then told to walk in this reality. Truly we are now to "...Live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

### **8.5.12 "It's My Disposition"**

If you were not "born again," you might have an argument with this point. Since "...old things pass away and all things become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV), for the born-again believer, you haven't "a leg to stand on" when eliminating or ignoring sin based on the excuses of personality and disposition.

### **8.5.13 "It's Chemical"**

Here is a whole new attempt by the medical and scientific community to understand, label, and explain that which the religious community recognizes as sinful behavior. If you are struggling with fits of rage, that is a sin, not necessarily a chemical response (Galatians 5:20). If you are a convicted sex offender, the cause for your behavior is not chemical, it is spiritual. For example, lust is a sin, not a chemical reaction. Science is even attempting to prove that such sinful behavior may be congenital, that is, present in the individual at birth. Thus, they falsely conclude that this reasoning effectively eliminates any personal responsibility for sin. They argue "You can't help how you were born!" Nowhere does the Word of God allow for such a lie. Uncontrollable rage, sexual lust, and a host of other transgressions are clearly identified in the Bible as sin. Sin (transgression) is a choice, not an inherited trait or congenital defect. What does this mean for the Christian? The believer, although born in sin, does not have to sin! The believer has effectively been born again as an overcomer of sin!

Generally speaking, what some identify as chemical the Bible identifies as sinful. What we diagnose as a severe physical and psychological disorder, the Bible calls sin. What the medical community has been medicating and to which it has been applying therapy, probably needs repentance!

Many forms of depression are not chemical but are the result of lack of trust in God. Many forms of mental illness are the result of yielding to fear. Many forms of unbelief (the inability to have faith in God). are the result of willful refusal to live by faith--a lack of desire to fight the good fight. Yes, in many cases, we are responsible for these types of behavior, not our chemical organic composition.

#### 8.5.14 "It's a Bad Habit"

The world defines a bad habit as: A (negative) pattern of behavior acquired by frequent repetition. More than that, it is sin. Here is sin in one of its most subtle forms, for we all have habits of one kind or another. This is not to say all habits are sinful. But denying sin because a bad habit has developed which is repeated time and time again, is still just an excuse. It is an excuse that is unacceptable, because Jesus came to break the "habits" of sin in our lives.

Sociologists tell us that within different cultures, many subcultures exist. These subcultures frequently develop their own vocabulary of terms and phrases. This creates for the members of that subculture a greater sense of belonging and importance to that particular group.

In the church today we have such a subculture. We have a growing segment of the church population that is increasing in their acceptance and approval of sin. One proof of this accusation is found in the vocabulary or language of this subculture.

#### 8.5.15 "The Devil Made Me Do It"

No, that is a lie. The devil cannot make you do anything you do not want to do! (1 John 5:18). It is your sin that causes the spiritual breakdown of your relationship with God. Don't blame someone else...grow up!

#### 8.5.16 "It's My \_\_\_\_\_'s Fault"

(Fill in the blank---husband-wife--pastor-boss-police-parent-government-teacher, etc.) Some believers even go so far as to blame almighty God! Imagine blaming God! "It's not my fault. It's God's fault!"

King Saul repeatedly used this classic excuse throughout his reign as king over Israel. In 1 Samuel 15:3, God told Samuel to go to war against the Amalekites, "...And totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them: put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." Contrary to God's command, Saul allowed Agag, the king of the Amalekites, to live (vs. 8). He also spared the "best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs--everything that was good" (vs. 9).

When confronted by God (through the prophet Samuel) Saul made two mistakes. First, he lied and tried to excuse his actions as if he had truly obeyed God'. Deceivingly Saul said, "...I have carried out the Lord's instructions" (vs. 13). Second, Saul blamed others when he was caught "red handed" by the prophet. Again Saul said, "...The soldiers brought sheep and cattle..." Then to make matters worse,

Saul conveniently got religious and claimed that the animals were spared in order to "...sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest" (vs. 15). He tried to place the blame and find fault with the soldiers. He made excuse for his disobedience by trying to impress the prophet that the animals were for sacrifice. Finally, he made the classic excuse for disobedience. Saul was hoping that Samuel, as God's representative, would accept his partial obedience as compensation for obvious and blatant disobedience. Saul said deceptively, "But I did obey the Lord" (vs. 20). However, Saul's scheme failed. Samuel, the prophet, was not fooled by Saul. He pronounced judgment on Saul and announced that Saul would not forfeit the position of king which God had given him. God called Saul's actions of finding fault with other rebellious and arrogant (vs. 23). Eve-like throughout his life, Saul blamed everyone else: the people, Samuel himself, the Philistines, his soldiers, or whoever was available. Blame shifting and faultfinding are sin.

### **8.5.17 "That's Just the Way I Am"**

No, that is a lie and a very poor excuse. That is why you were born again, to become a new person!

### **8.5.18 "I Can't Help It"**

No, that is a lie also. The Bible says, "I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

### **8.5.19 "I Was Born That Way"**

No, that is a lie. You yielded to sin so many times you have become what you are today. You have reaped what you have sown. In a recent study of the brain structure of deceased homosexual men, a distinct physical difference was noticed. Compared to normal brains from heterosexual men (also deceased), there was actually a clear and distinct physical contrast. There appeared in the majority of homosexual brains, a different physical feature not found in any of the heterosexual brains. The scientific team drew two possible conclusions concerning this evidence. The first possible conclusion was this physical difference determined the behavior of these homosexual men. This, they suggested, justified the argument (with proof, they thought) that homosexual behavior is the result of a physical (genetic and/or chemical) cause. After all, these experts had the obviously different physical brains of these homosexual men right in front of them. The homosexual and lesbian community cried out, "At last our life-style has been recognized or justified. We are all normal, or as normal as our brains will allow!" They thought surely there could be no question now that homosexual men and women did not choose, but were born into their sexual preference.

The second conclusion put an abrupt end to their rejoicing. The second and equally accepted possibility was the opposite of the first conclusion. They concluded that over time the behavior of the homosexual men affected and even caused this mutation in the structure of their brains. Think of it, behavior changing the physical features and structure within a human being's body!

### **8.5.20 "I'm Diagnosed as Having \_\_\_\_\_."**

We live in an age of over diagnosis, especially in the mental/ emotional sciences. It seems everyone has been diagnosed as having some kind of disorder. It has become almost fashionable. This tendency

is clearly visible both in the world and the church. I understand how the world arrives at such conclusions, but I am deeply concerned that the church has arrived at the same conclusion about herself. I have some difficulty with the idea that such a growing portion of the body of Christ is seemingly becoming dysfunctional! Yet many believers attempt to place such a false diagnosis on individuals in the church of Jesus Christ. I strongly disagree. It is as if spiritual hypochondria has crept into the church. Whole segments of the body of Christ have a neurotic conviction that if they are not ill, they should be. Falsely, we assume that God primarily exists for our happiness. After all, is not God's main function to meet my need? Absolutely not! God primarily exists and His main "function" is to receive worship and unquestioned obedience from His children. After all, He is God! Secondarily to this is our wholeness and well-being as His followers. He comes first; we come second.

Obviously, accurate diagnoses have their place in the church, only as long as they are not used to justify sin. I agree with Dr. Larry Crabb when he said, "One problem contributing to this simplistic thinking is a well-intentioned overreaction to the tendency of many professional counselors to excuse sinful living on the grounds of psychological complexity. It is regrettable that many Christian psychologists talk more about such things as unconscious motivation and emotional damage than they do about sin and responsibility. The net effect is to weaken the influence of the Bible's insistence that we choose to live righteously. A number of Christians, and I am among them, react strongly to any view that explains sinful behavior as the understandable consequence of psychological forces."<sup>11</sup> Dr. Crabb continues, "I am unalterably opposed to any line of thinking that undermines the concept of personal responsibility, and I find myself in general agreement with those who insist people are accountable for choosing Godly responses to life's situations."

### 8.5.21 "It's Not Hurting Anyone."

No, that is a lie and a sin. The Bible says the sins of the parents can hurt the children (Exodus 10:5), the sins of the people can hurt their nation (Proverbs 14:34), and an individual can be hurt, even in his physical body, as a result of yielding his body to (sexual) sin. ("...He who sins sexually sins against his own body" 1 Corinthians 6:18) Most of all, your sin hurts God who loves you and died for you. Either directly or indirectly, sin hurts everyone.

### 8.5.22 "Who Are You to Judge?"

Some years ago there was a cute little saying that swept through the church. It was so popular that some thought it may have been in the Bible. The saying went something like this: "God has called the church to be fruit inspectors." Believing this was scriptural, we flocked to stand alongside this new truth. In actuality, this saying is clearly unscriptural and has done some real damage to the cause of truth and righteousness. Let us look at what Jesus said. "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matt. 7:16). That sounds like fruit inspecting to me!

Another misconception in the church is the idea that we are not to judge. The Bible does not say that at all. The reason we think the Bible says that is because we have quoted only half the verse for so long we forgot there was more on the subject. Jesus said, "Do not judge or you will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:1-2). First Corinthians 2:15 says the spiritual man makes judgments. Judging is not

<sup>11</sup> The Marriage Builder, Dr. Larry Crabb, Zondervan Publishing House, 1982, 1992, p. 8.

wrong. The focus of Jesus' statement is who you judge, what you judge, and how you go about the judging. He was addressing hypocrisy and not righteous judgment. To stand up against sin is a righteous judgment. To call a sin a sin is what Jesus did for three and a half years while on earth. A careful survey of the gospels show us He spent more time judging the scribes and the Pharisees than He did preaching the Gospel to them. The church will one day even judge angels! (1 Corinthians 6:3).

### **8.5.23 "Where is Your Love?"**

When sinful behavior is called into question in the church, almost immediately there are charges of, "Where is your love?" Let us look at a few Scriptures dealing with truth and love. "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted.." (Proverbs 27:5-6), "...Speaking the truth in love..." (Ephesians 4:15). "...In faithfulness you have afflicted me" (Psalm 119:75). According to these verses love means telling the truth, rebuking, and if necessary even "wounding." "Wounding" means speaking the truth in love in order to expose sin and restore a believer. When sin is challenged you will be accused of not operating in love. The opposite is true. Love speaks the truth about sin.

### **8.5.24 "Jesus Accepts Me, Why Can't You?"**

Let us look at what Jesus expected of His followers and on what Jesus based His acceptance of a person.

First, if you made excuses for sin and tried to manipulate Him, Jesus was brutally honest and straightforward. He called the Pharisees "white sepulchers full of dead men's bones," "A brood of vipers," "hypocrites," etc. (see the gospels). Jesus never tolerated excuses for sinful living. You were told to "go and sin no more." Sin was never negotiable with Jesus. It has been said that Jesus loved the sinner and hated the sin. I agree! The church must accept the sinner but stand firm against the sin. Like Jesus, the church cannot afford to compromise in this area.

Second, as Dudley Hall said, "Jesus let people know right up front the cost of serving Him. At times it almost seemed as if Jesus was trying to drive people away. He did not tolerate their weaknesses, He forced them to grow strong and overcome their weaknesses. That is why the Lord only had high-impact, low-maintenance converts."<sup>12</sup>

### **8.5.25 "Nobody's Perfect"**

Nobody is perfect (when referring to oneself) but this is still no excuse to sin. Jesus Christ is perfect and He is our role model and example. We are to walk as He walked, talk as He talked."...For we realize that our life in this world is actually His life lived in us" (1 John 4:17, J.B. Phillips). If we do not continually look to Jesus as our example then we begin to settle for second best. "We know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). This verse tells us we should not excuse ourselves but should purify ourselves. Here the word purifies means to cleanse from defilement, including the body, soul, and spirit. If our eyes are on the One who is perfect, we will not want to make lame excuses for our imperfections. The church should be in a constant process of ongoing

---

<sup>12</sup> Morningstar Journal, Vol. 3, Number 1, "Deliverance From the Welfare Church," pgs. 60-64.

purification through relationship with Jesus Christ. We are to "...Continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at this coming" (1 John 2:28). The statement "Nobody's perfect" is just an easy excuse for permitting sin to continue and spread in our lives.

### 8.5.26 "Don't Play God With Me."

What is an individual really saying when he says angrily, "Don't play God with me"?

1. "I know you're right, but I don't want to face my sin."
2. "I've successfully rebelled against God in this sin for years and you're certainly not going to change me."
3. "I've never taken God very seriously."
4. "I probably never will take sin very seriously."

It is true, we are not to play God in anyone's life. However, the Bible does tell us to "sharpen" each other. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). Sin dulls the spirit of man. Even believers become dull as sin wears down our spiritual edge.

### 8.5.27 "We're Mutually Consenting Adults"

More than that, regardless of agreement, it is a sin. Mutually consenting to sexual promiscuity does not change the fact that it is a sin. If two people mutually consented to steal money or tell a lie, does it make it less a sin or an unlawful act? In the same way, committing fornication is a sin and against the law of God. It matters not whether you are an adult, nor how many people consent to do it.

### 8.5.28 "Everybody Does It"

This worldly sentiment is expressed in God's Word in the following references: "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly" (Proverbs 26:11). Or, "A dog returns to its vomit, and, a sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud" (2 Peter 2:22).

If we are going to excuse sin based on the number of people committing that particular sin, we are doomed. The Word of God compares this type of individual to a dog and a sow. Both dogs and pigs symbolize religious hypocrites. "Returning to their vomit" is symbolic of their gross stupidity and their rejection of God's righteous laws. Jesus addressed this argument in His day as well. He said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). The choice is ours. Choose the wide gate and broad road (the "everybody does it" path) and you guarantee destruction in your life. Choose the small gate and the narrow road (the spiritual minority path) that only a few find, and you guarantee yourself life.

Frequently in the Bible the majority was wrong (10 of the 12 spies were wrong; the people of Noah's time; even the disciples were wrong!). Being in the minority usually meant you had faith in God (Joshua and Caleb; Noah, Paul). According to the Bible, numbers seldom prove anything in terms of right and wrong.

### 8.5.29 "It's Adult Entertainment"

More than that, it is a sin. Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23). It would be difficult to get much clearer than that. Jesus had a way of "making a point."

### **8.5.30 "It's My Body"**

No, it's not your body solely, not if you are a believer. Your body belongs to God. "You are not your own: you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Even civil law agrees with the Scriptures on this point. The law states that certain practices are not allowable when it concerns your body. It is illegal to kill the body (suicide). It is illegal to inject harmful chemicals into the body (drug abuse). It is illegal to mutilate or otherwise harm the body (self-mutilation). It is illegal to sell the body for sexual purposes (prostitution), to name a few. It is even illegal to improperly dispose of a dead body or use it in an improper way.

The Bible requires a much higher standard for the believer when God speaks concerning our physical bodies. "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life: and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:13).

### **8.5.31 "It's Not a Sin to Me"**

Here is one of the most diabolical lies of all! It does not matter what we as humans consider to be sin. Our opinions must be in line with the Word of God. The only thing that matters is if sin is a sin to God. Try this argument ("It's not wrong to me") with the traffic officer who just pulled you over for speeding. Try convincing him that your personal speed limit is significantly higher than the state's speed limit. It may be an excuse he's never heard before, but it won't get you off (see Romans 13 for some insights on secular authority). With God there are clear absolutes and one of these absolutes is the eternal truth about sin. Sin is sin whether you think or believe it or not.

## **8.6 The Solution for Sin**

### **8.6.1 Jesus' Advice on How to Deal With Sin**

There is no question about it, Jesus was a radical when it came to addressing the subject of sin! Radical yet at the same time His radical solution was the right solution. He understood sin. He had a fix on it. He did not underestimate it. He spoke forcefully about sin. So forcefully, in fact, that even today we need help in understanding His words.

Jesus said if your hand, foot, or eye causes you to sin, cut it off, or pluck it out. He said it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God without these body parts than to have these body parts and be thrown into hell (paraphrased from Mark 9:43-47). Exactly what did Jesus mean?

Jesus was not teaching His followers on-the-spot surgery for the removal of certain troublesome physical organs and limbs. As always, Jesus used the parable to illustrate a spiritual truth. Jesus was saying that His followers (the church) must strike at the root of sinful thoughts and actions. We must

deal with the sinful behavior of the organ and not the literal organ itself. For example, Jesus said sin originated in the "heart." This was not a reference to the physical organ responsible for the pumping of blood in our body's circulatory system. Jesus meant the spirit of man, his inner being, thus the "heart of man." *Jesus taught that we must cut off even the occasion to sin no matter what the cost!* This may seem like sharp language from the lips of love incarnate, but Jesus did say what He meant and meant what He said! Sin must be "cut off" from our lives daily.

As a believer, I deeply resent and grieve the fact that the world is dictating to the church, in which I am a living stone, concerning sin. We in the church have allowed this to happen so the church must assume responsibility for returning to God's Word as the source of truth and judgment. She must repent and begin to once again call sin by its true name. Sin is sin. It always has been and it always will be. Why has God made sin such a seemingly dogmatic issue by human standards? Why is sin such a black and white matter? Cannot sin be a gray matter, resolved through reasoning and logic? Herein lies some of the answer. It is our human, worldly standards that clash with the eternal righteous standards of God. It was God who authored the book concerning sin before the worlds were made. He and He alone determines what is good and what is evil. There is not "middle of the road" policy with God concerning sin. He will allow no compromise. He will tolerate no excuses, for it is His holiness, righteousness, and truth that are on trial every time we trespass.

Sin is a direct challenge to God. Sin challenges God's holiness, righteousness, and truth. Sin literally "sickens" a perfect loving heavenly Father. God has given no authority to man to override Him concerning sin. God Himself is the measure by which the church must determine what is right and what is wrong.

### **8.6.2 Personal Relationship with God**

Paul wrote, "My determined purpose is that I may know him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of his person more strongly and more clearly" (Philippians 3:10, AMP). God is looking for people who will practice intimately with Him. As one minister so aptly put it, "The church needs to learn how to practice the presence of God." Amen! We practice the presence of God by pursuing intimacy, fellowship, and relationship with Him. The solution for sin in the church is simply this: The church must "fall in love" with Jesus again! Each believer in the church must grow stronger in his/her love for Him! The church must fellowship with Him longer, more reverently, and with deeper conviction, setting aside all hindrances. The church must gain a new focus by beholding Him for who and what He is. The church needs to return to a Christ-centered gospel. The church needs to return to a Christ-centered understanding of Christianity over all.

The church's purpose (why it ultimately exists) is to serve Jesus Christ. The church draws her life from Jesus Christ. If the church loses her relationship with Christ she will lose the life of Christ she so desperately needs in this hour. First John 3:6 says, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning." This is the answer to the problem of sin. The believer must practice abiding in Him. Each believer must "live" in Him. It is this love relationship that will produce the "side effect" of a life progressively free of sin. What a wonderful side effect it is!

### **8.6.3 God's Grace**



Let us define grace in a way that simplifies the concept. Grace is best defined by the letters that make up the word:

G-God's  
R-iches  
A-At  
C-Christ's  
E-Expense

What a beautiful understanding of Grace. Grace is God's riches at Christ's expense to the church!

Grace is incredibly important in our efforts to find God's solution to sin. Paul wrote, "I do not set aside the grace of God.." (Galatians 2:21). If we "set aside" the truth of God's grace in our lives then we forfeit much of God's power in our lives to conquer sin.

What does God's grace do for us?:

When we fail, God's grace succeeds for us!

When we quit, God's grace perseveres for us!

When we are faithless, God's Grace is faithful for us!

When we feel condemned, God's grace forgives us!

When we feel worthless, God's grace reminds us we are worthy!

Grace reminds us our son-and-daughter relationship with God!

Grace reminds us of our inheritance in God!

Grace reminds us that sin has been defeated!

Grace reminds us that Christ died for our victory!

Grace reminds us that Christ died for our victory!

Grace reminds us that we are not fighting for a place of victory, but that we are fighting from a place of victory.

**Grace reminds us we are unconditionally loved, accepted, received, adopted and embraced by a God who is love. Grace is the immeasurable love of Christ to us.**

Forty-four books of the Bible record something on the subject of sin. However, before we become discouraged about this reality, there is another side of the issue of sin. Twenty-eight books of the Bible record some powerful and exciting information about the subject of God's grace. A favorite verses concerning grace is found in Romans 5:20: "...Where sin increased, grace increased all the more..." This is a precious promise from God. No matter how deep sin is, God's grace is deeper. If sin increases, God's grace will always increase proportionately, and then some! God said His grace will increase "all the more" in our lives.

**(NOTE:** Romans 6 teaches that we are not to sin in order that grace may somehow be activated or "increased" in our lives. In fact, Paul writes, "Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin: How can we live in it any longer?" (vss. 1-2). So that the reader may fully grasp the role of grace in his life, I recommend that he read Romans 5 and 6.)

Some have said that we live in the age of "sloppy agape" and "cheap grace" as far as sin is concerned. No amount of love or grace can substitute for the cleansing blood of the lamb, which washes sin away. **It is possible to experience God's love and grace and still need forgiveness of our sins.** The church

has confused these truths to the degree that we have effectively diminished the power of the blood of Christ. Love does not wash away sin and grace does not wash away sin. We do ourselves no favors when we allow preaching in the church to offer a cheap imitation of truth to compensate for the unadulterated truth of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. Only Christ's blood can redeem! Only Christ's blood can wipe away sin through forgiveness! Here is God's order on the subject of sin and forgiveness:

First, the blood of Christ.

Second, the love of Christ.

Third, God's grace in Christ.

Only when these truths are put into practice can the church experience full salvation from sin. The church needs all three, but love and grace can only be appreciated after we first understand the cleansing blood of Christ. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse us--forgive us from sin.

#### **8.6.4 Sanctification: To be set apart**

One of the greatest truths given to the church so that she may be able to live above sin is the doctrine of sanctification. First Thessalonians 4:3 says, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified." Paul wrote to "Those sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:2). We will define sanctification as: The process of, or result of, being made holy by God, to be sanctified means to be set apart for use by God and to be consecrated. The King James translation of the Bible uses the term "sanctification." Many newer translations use the term holiness as a synonym for the term sanctification. Thus, when one is sanctified he is also understood to be holy in God by the working of the Holy Spirit.

The error of much of the teaching on this truth of sanctification is that the emphasis is always placed on the individual who needs sanctification rather than on the finished work of sanctification. The church needs a new vision of the "One" who does the sanctifying! Jesus Christ is the great "sanctifier." In fact, sanctification is more a person than it is a mere doctrine. First Corinthians 1:30, KJV, says, "Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." The greater truth of sanctification is that Jesus has already sanctified us. By faith in Christ, it is already done! It is our reality today! The New Testament clearly places believers as already sanctified in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30). As this truth that sanctification is a finished work is restored to the church, sin will lose much of its "punch." Until this happens, many will needlessly continue in the slavery of sin (Romans 6:16).

Here is the basic truth of the doctrine of sanctification: First, keep in mind that sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit in us. Second, believers are holy in Christ (set apart for God by His sacrificial atoning blood), and are to be holy in practice by the power of the Holy Spirit. Third, we are to be sanctified, in attitude and action, because we are already sanctified in Christ! It is this truth called "sanctification" that provides the believer with the ability to live above sin.

"The consequence of a sanctified life will be the elimination of sin as a power and the establishing of righteousness in your life. A basic understanding of the doctrine of sanctification will include:

1. "A growing understanding of our union with Jesus Christ as the basis of all positive change (Romans 6).
2. "A spirit-empowered 'putting off' of sinful habits and putting on of righteous patterns of living (Romans 8:3-14).
3. "A continual renewing of the mind according to New Testament truth (Romans 12:1-2).
4. "A daily denying of ourselves to follow Jesus Christ in a life of discipleship" (Luke 9:23).

### **8.6.5 The Holy Spirit**

The solution over sin is found in the power of the Holy Spirit in each believer. The Holy Spirit puts within the grasp of each believer a new potential daily, to live above sin, on one hand, the Spirit of God is a pledge and foretaste of the future, but He is also our present source of strength and overcoming power today. The church must avail herself of this power now, for without this power sin will prevail.

The Spirit-filled life (Galatians 5:16-25) is the only answer for living above the sins of the flesh. Fortunately God has provided the church with all the power necessary to live this Spirit-filled life. However, the church needs to understand that there is no viable substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit in order to live this life in victory over sin. The power of the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit that comprises the Spirit-filled experience which the church so desperately wants and needs. If unconfessed sin remains in the life of the individual, he risks forfeiting this power in his life. The power of sin has been broken and each believer needs to maintain this victory. How do we do this? By dependence on His power and might. Through Him "we can do all things" and "we are more than conquerors" and "if God is for us, who can be against us?" Amen!

#### **8.6.5.1 Satan Condemns, the Holy Spirit Convicts**

Satan condemns Christians into states of hopelessness and defeat, while the Holy Spirit convicts believers of the need to seek repentance which leads to righteousness. Condemnation is not the answer to the problem of sin, conviction is. For example, if this book gave no solution to the issue of sin, it too would be guilty of promoting condemnation. This is not the case, since much of this content is devoted to the solution of sin.

The Holy Spirit works like this too. He points out areas of specific sin but always tells us how to successfully deal with these same sins. There may be shame and repentance required to deal with these sins but this too is from God. Believers are supposed to feel the guilt and shame of their sins. This is called conviction. The Word of God describes conviction as a Godly sorrow. Godly sorrow leads us to repent of our sins. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.." (2 Corinthians 7:10). This is why the conviction of sin from the Holy Spirit is a gift. The conviction of sin is the great mercy of God in demonstration in the life of a believer.

Satan, on the other hand, never lets us know exactly what our sin is and never lets us know what to do about it. Satan condemns us and offers no hope of forgiveness. In fact, he would rather we did nothing about our sin except feel condemned about it and defeated by it. Condemnation paralyzes the believer's effectiveness in God. Condemnation is vague, abstract, nebulous, and confusing. Condemnation offers no solutions, and traps its victims in a sea of doubt and ambiguous agony. Condemnation never "lets up." It constantly reminds us of our alleged hopelessness to live

victoriously above sin. This is the life of satanic condemnation. Jesus Christ came to destroy this cloud of condemnation over all believers.

In contrast to this, the conviction of the Holy Spirit is extremely accurate, clear, thorough, and in every way liberating to the believer. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin it is always for the purpose of the believer receiving forgiveness and having his relationship with the Father restored. Satan uses condemnation to destroy, but the Holy Spirit uses conviction to restore. For the believer, a restored heart is a confident heart. "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God..." (1 John 3:21).

### **8.6.5.2 Truth Versus Condemnation**

Jesus said that His truth always sets us free. "*Then you will know that truth and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32). Notice that Jesus said it was knowing the truth that sets us free. Truth only frees us if it's the truth of God's Word; that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world; and only if we know it! To state it more precisely, since truth is the person of Jesus Christ, then we must know Him in order to be truly free!

Jesus was Himself truth incarnate, consequently, there was literally no condemnation in His person. He was totally, completely, eternally and perfectly free. In one sense, it was impossible for Jesus to condemn! This reality led Jesus to never once condemn anyone. "Then neither do I condemn you, Jesus declared, go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11).

### **8.6.5.3 Jesus' Conviction of Sin**

Jesus was quick to convict people of their sins and show them the way out. Truth shows us our sin and the way out of that sin. Truth identifies the hard target of sin in us and then gives us the strategy to deal effectively with it. The conviction of the Holy Spirit always specifically identifies our sin and places the emphasis on the solution for that particular sin. Satan uses condemnation to emphasize the problem of sin but the Holy Spirit is always solution oriented when it concerns our sins. Victory over sin is God's plan for us. Defeated in sin, at the hands of the accuser, is Satan's plan for us. The believer must choose to whom he will respond and believe. Again the choice is the believers.

In opposition to the truth, condemnation is usually the result of two incorrect types of thinking which have little or no truth in them. First, it is the result of rationalizing in our minds that continuing in unrepented, chronic sin is somehow acceptable. This opens up the believer to experience condemnation from Satan who takes full advantage of our failures. Truly he is the accuser of God's people (Revelation 12:10). Our sins only add to the strength and validity of his accusations. Consequently, by receiving this condemnation we begin to entertain negative thoughts about our life and situation. which attempt to destroy our identify in Christ. Second, it is the result of failing to understand true forgiveness and appropriate this forgiveness by faith. This type of thinking usually results in spiritual bondage in the heart or spirit of the believer which limits the spiritual effectiveness of the individual. Condemnation "locks up" the believer, putting him in a kind of spiritual prison. Both effects of condemnation (negative thoughts and spiritual bondage) are major hindrances to true freedom and release from sin. Condemnation imprisons both our minds and our hearts.

What then is the solution? First, repent of all sin. Second, identify condemnation in your life as originating from the devil and refuse to allow it to ever enter your life again. Third, recognize that you are in Christ and that in Christ there is no demonic condemnation. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The key to living above condemnation is seeing that it is trying to rob you of your true identity and purpose in Christ! To be liberated, victorious, and effective disciple in Christ, you must not allow this to happen!

### 8.6.6 Controlling the Mind

*"As a man thinketh, so is he."*

There is little controversy that all sin originates in the mind. The mind (one's thought life), is the real battlefield for the believer. Sin always begins with a thought. Sin is never spontaneous. Sin is premeditated. For example, murder is frequently the end result of harboring hatred, anger, and bitterness in the mind. These sins are resident in a person long before they are manifested in the act of violently taking another's life. Before adultery is committed, that person already lusted in his heart and mind.

The book of James clearly outlines the destructive progression of sin in our minds. First, each of us is tempted or "dragged away" by sinful thoughts in our minds (1:14). Obviously this dragging away occurs in our thought life. It is not a physical battle. It begins as a mental battle. Actually being tempted as a result of our own sinful thoughts then becomes a "self-imposed" spiritual battle of our own making! These sinful thoughts, "evil desires," entice us to spend our time and energy dabbling deeper and more frequently into considering impurity and ungodly temptations. Finally our sinful desires, the result of sinful thoughts, conceive. In other words, these thought patterns have come to life in our minds, and as a result sin is generated in the everyday actions of our lives. Thus tragically, the conception of evil in the mind is then "birthed" in us as sin in the flesh. Finally sin, "when it is full-grown, gives birth to (spiritual) death."

According to James, "temptations" (not to be confused with testings that come from God to strengthen us), "Evil desires" and "enticements," all occur as a result of allowing sinful thoughts to "take root" in our minds since our minds are like gardens. They can "grow" good thoughts or bad thoughts. It is as simple as that.

Similarly, our minds can either be the "wombs" for sinful thoughts or Godly thoughts. If we allow sin to become "full-grown" in our minds, like a womb, our mind will eventually give birth in direct relation to that which conceived it--to sinful actions. However, the believer can control this entire process of sin that takes place in our minds. In the sense that sin is birthed in us, all of us have "fathered" some horrible sins because we did not understand God's power in us. No matter how reluctantly, we have all participated in the birthing of sin. Therefore, we are fully responsible to do something about sin in our minds.

The Bible gives us some clear instruction on what to do with our thinking. This is one key to living above the slavery of sin in our minds. The Christian does not have to allow any sinful thought to find a "home" in his heart or mind. The thought may enter our minds but we have full authority to reject that same sinful thought. This is what the "helmet of salvation" mentioned in Ephesians 6:17 is all about. Divine protection and authority over our thought life is ours as a result of Christ's blood being shed. We have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) as part of the armor of God. The helmet of His

salvation guarantees each believer personal power from the Holy Spirit to control his or her thought life.

Billy Graham once gave his analogy about our thought life as believers. Graham said, "You can't stop the birds from flying overhead, but you can stop them from building a nest in your hair." Thoughts will come from God, the devil, or even your own mind. Through the Holy Spirit in us, we do not have to allow the birds to build any nests in our hair! We can sort through our thoughts and learn to identify those that are sinful and reject them. We need not allow them to give birth. We can choose to restrict the use of our "mind-wombs" for the birthing of only Godly thoughts. We can pull the weeds of sinful thoughts out of our "mind-gardens" as we rely on God's power in us.

God's Word gives us the guidelines for exactly what purpose we should be using our minds. It tells us what to think on, that is, what to accept and what to reject as far as our thoughts are concerned. I call this list a filter for our minds. If we filter out thought life through this list (Philippians 4:8), we will keep our minds free from sin.

1. True thoughts--as compared to false thoughts.
2. Noble thoughts--as compared to ignoble thoughts.
3. Right thoughts--as compared to wrong thoughts.
4. Pure thoughts--as compared to impure thoughts.
5. Lovely thoughts--as compared to ugly thoughts.
6. Admirable thoughts--as compared to dishonorable thoughts.
7. Excellent thoughts--as compared to compromising thoughts.
8. Praiseworthy thoughts--as compared to discrediting thoughts.

God's Word says, "Finally, brothers (all believers)...think about such things!" (Philippians 4:8). Let this list be your mind's filter.

## 8.7 Diagnosing Sin in Interpersonal Relationships

Every sin is caused by certain behavior and has certain symptoms in the relationships that it affects. This is related to the idea that we will reap what we sow and that for every action, there will be a response. Below is a table that concisely identifies likely types of sin within a relationship based on the symptoms or behavior that the sin can produce in people. This list can be useful when exercising the Problem Solving techniques identified in section 3.1.4 in order to correct one's personal problems effectively:

**Table 8-1: Behaviors and the Sin that Causes Them Within Relationships**

<i>Behavioral Symptom</i>	<i>Probable sin(s) that may be causing the symptom</i>
Adultery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Spouse not submitting sexually.</li> <li>2. Temptation of one spouse.</li> <li>3. No joy or contentment with present situation.</li> <li>4. Lust.</li> <li>5. Poor communication or passivity on the part of one spouse (conditional love and immaturity on the part of that spouse are the cause).</li> <li>6. Lack of empathy or unconditional love.</li> </ol>
Anger	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Selfishness.</li> <li>2. Love is conditional rather than unconditional</li> </ol>

<i>Behavioral Symptom</i>	<i>Probable sin(s) that may be causing the symptom</i>
	(selfishness). 3. Inability or unwillingness to love as God commands us to. 4. Expectations about marriage unrealistic. 5. Discontentment. 6. Unthankfulness.
Crying	1. Selfishness. 2. Lack of contentment.
Deceit	1. Selfishness. 2. Pride. 3. Lust.
Denial	1. Selfishness. 2. Pride. 3. Irresponsibility.
Depression	1. Anger (repressed). 2. Lack of contentment. 3. Lack of thankfulness. 4. Envy. 5. Selfishness. 6. Greed. 7. Unrepentant. 8. Irresponsibility or unwillingness to repent 9. Lack of wisdom or ignorance (about ways to deal with problems).
Drug or alcohol abuse	1. Improper response to suffering. 2. Irresponsibility (escaping from problems). 3. Addiction (slave of sin).
Fear or anxiety	1. Presence of sin in one's life (Adam and Eve became afraid after they ate the fruit). 2. Irresponsibility (unwillingness to deal with or fix own problems). 3. Deceit of oneself (won't admit one's sin or repent for it)
Guilt trips	1. Selfishness.
Health problems	1. Anger. 2. Resentment. 3. Premature birth.
Hiding or locking up things in the house to prevent them from being viewed by other family members	1. Sin and the wish to hide it. 2. Irresponsibility. Unwilling to take responsibility in front of the other spouse for one's own actions.
Hypochondria	1. Selfishness. 2. Lack of contentment. 3. Lack of thankfulness. 4. Pride (needs too much affirmation or attention from others).
Hypocrisy	1. Selfishness, unrighteousness.
Impatience	2. Selfishness.
Irresponsibility	1. Laziness. 2. Fear (of accepting consequences). 3. Lack of faith in God (unwilling to leave results up to Him.)
Jealousy	1. Envy.
Lying	1. Selfishness
Negativity	1. Bitterness and resentment.

<i>Behavioral Symptom</i>	<i>Probable sin(s) that may be causing the symptom</i>
	2. Fear. 3. Irresponsibility (wants to avoid examination by others by keeping focus off self and onto the faults of everyone but self.
Passivity, running away from spouse or family	1. Irresponsibility (running away from marriage commitment). 2. Sin and the desire to. 3. Unwillingness to hear the truth
Suppression of free speech Anti- "hate crime" laws	1. Sin, and a desire to hide it. 2. Selfishness. 3. Irresponsibility. 4. Idolatry.
Resentment	1. Unforgiveness. 2. Selfishness.
Theft	1. Greed. 2. Drug or alcohol addiction. 3. Sloth (too lazy to work to support oneself).
Unforgiveness	1. Selfishness. 2. Lack of faith. 3. Pride.
Withholding information from a spouse	1. Selfishness.

## 8.8 Statistics On Sin in the Bible

Here are some "facts and figures" on the subject of sin as gleaned from the NIV translation of the Bible. I thought these might be of some interest to the reader. I hope they help the reader gain a better general knowledge of the Bible's content on the subject of sin.

1. Total of references using the word **sin**--420 times, **sins**--275 times, **sinned**--88 times, **sinning** -- 20 times, **sinful**--49 times, the total of combined words is 852. Obviously the Scriptures have a great deal to say about **sin**.
2. First use of the word **sin** -- the word "die" (Eve quoting God) "...And you must not touch it (fruit from the tree) or you will die" (Genesis 3:3).
3. First casualty of sin -- (eve) "...She took some and ate it" (fruit) (Genesis 3:6-7).
4. First human reaction to **sin** -- (Adam and Eve) "...They hid from the Lord God..." (Genesis 3:8-10).
5. First example of fear as a result of **sin** --(Adam) "I was afraid because I was naked..." (Genesis 3:10).
6. First excuse by a man ever spoken due to **sin** -- (Adam) "The woman you put here with me --she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Genesis 3:12).
7. First excuse by a woman ever spoken due to **sin** --(Eve) "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:13).
8. First shedding of blood for **sin**. "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21).
9. First example of **sin** separating man from God -- (Adam and Eve) "So the Lord banished him from the garden...he drove the man out..." (Genesis 3:22-24).
10. First example of **sin** on a "citywide" scale -- "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me" (Genesis 18:20-21).



11. First evidence that **sin's** consequence can be passed down through generations -- "...Punishing the children for the **sin** of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me."