

A Christian  
in a  
Non-Christian  
World

Charles Seet

**A Christian in a Non-Christian World**

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## **A Christian in a Non-Christian World**

### **(Titus 2:1-15)**

Being a Christian is a full-time job. All of us here who believe in Christ are constantly employed in this full-time job of living as Christians in a non-Christian World. Being a Christian affects us constantly in the way we live, from day to day, at home, or at work, or even at play. It demands constant attention, diligent effort and mental and spiritual energy. It is something we have to keep working on (Philippians 2:12, 13). It will not come about by itself.

But it is gainful work, because it yields important results. It is this kind of consistent, daily Christian living that exerts a great influence on those around us: our family, our friends and colleagues. The influence that we have on others, can make a really important permanent impact on them. Being Christians means living lives that will consistently display God's work and power in our lives. It means consciously making a good impression on those around us, by our godly influence, so that they, too, will want to know and follow Christ.

Now, if we say that we are Christians, and yet live our lives in an ungodly way, influencing those around us to think negatively about our Saviour then there might be something terribly wrong about our claim to be Christ's followers. There are many people today who claim to be Christians, but their lives obviously contradict this claim. This is a real problem — a problem that is growing in many churches today.

But it was also a problem in the time of the Apostle Paul. He had to deal with it when he wrote the letter to Titus, his close friend and disciple, whom he had put in charge of a new, growing church on the Island of Crete, which is off the southern tip of Greece. In Paul's epistle to Titus, the apostle refers to a group of people who were part of the church. He says, "*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*" (Titus 1:16).

This verse states the main reason for all that Paul is going to talk about in the next chapter. There were people in the church at Crete who were professing to know the Lord and to be loyal to Him, but they were living lives that were not a godly influence on others at all. In fact they were influencing others to ungodliness!

In chapter two, therefore, Paul in answer to this, describes the kind of qualities that will be found in a person who truly knows God. These are qualities that will be found in all, regardless of how old a person is, whether man or woman, no matter what sort of personality he or she has, and no matter what rank in life, as long as they truly belong to Christ. You will notice in this chapter that Paul mentions each category of persons: aged men (v.2), aged women (v.3), young women (v.4), young men (v.6), and servants (v.9).

And if you will look carefully, you will observe that the qualities described for each of them are not entirely different. For instance, Paul mentions the quality of sober-mindedness. This means thinking sensibly and seriously, and not wildly and irrationally. This quality is mentioned with regard to aged men (v.2), young women (v.4), young men (v.6). The quality of love is described with reference to young women (v.4), and it is called charity with regard to aged men (v.2). The quality of obedience is also to be found in young women (v.5) and in servants (v.9). Besides these, Paul mentions other specific related qualities for the various age groups, like self-control, patience, holiness, gravity, sincerity, wholesome conversation, fidelity and honesty.

Finally he summarises all these things in verses 11 and 12. The subject of these two verses is now “all men” — and in this context it does not mean the whole populated world (and therefore it is not teaching a universal salvation) but it means all the different kinds of people that can be found in a church, men and women, old and young, servants and masters. And this would include every one of us who is saved in Christ. No matter who or what we are, these things mentioned here must be found in our lives. No one is exempted from exhibiting these Christian qualities. They are for every Christian.

Our lives should always deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (v.12). Our lives should also be lived soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. The qualities mentioned in this verse summarise all the rest of the qualities that were mentioned from verses 1 to 11. The next six messages will give us more details on how we may deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

What we will do first is to establish some good reasons that are strong enough to compel us to live out in our lives daily all that we have learnt from God’s Word. If we can only grasp fully in our hearts why we should be making every effort to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live righteously, soberly and godly in this world, I believe every one of us will take these words of instruction seriously and then commit ourselves to change accordingly.

So to begin, I would like to focus the attention only on the reasons we should all strive to be effective as Christians in a non-Christian world. There are two compelling reasons given by the apostle Paul in this passage of Scripture: (1) Because this is the least that we can do for the Lord after all that He has done for us, and (2) Because this is the means by which we become identified as God’s people.

## **Because this is the least that we can do for the Lord after all that He has done for us**

*“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men”* (v.11). The most important words in this verse are the words, “grace of God”. Do you know what the “grace of God” is? It can be described as the unmerited favour and undeserved kindness that He has shown to us in saving us from our sins. And this grace of God was fully revealed to us through Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. God sent His Son into the world to save us by taking all of our sins upon Himself and dying on the cross at Calvary.

And now that this grace of God has appeared to us, our lives can no longer remain the same. Such wonderful grace which we have received, must surely teach us to respond not only with gratitude, but also with godly living. It obliges us, it constrains us toward godly living. If it does not produce this response, then this grace is received in vain. And so our first reason for living godly lives is because this is really the least we can do for the Lord after all the great things that He has done for us.

A long time ago in England, there was a famous learned scholar by the name of John Selden. He had a powerful mind and a voracious appetite for books. He read all the books that existed in his time, and even boasted that he had a great library of 8,000 volumes on many subjects. And he was gifted with the ability to remember most of what he had read. But when he was dying this is what he said to someone: *“I have surveyed most of the learning that is among the sons of men, and my study is filled with books and manuscripts on various subjects. But at present I cannot recollect any passage out of all my books and papers on which I can rest my soul except this from the sacred Scriptures: The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious*



*appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Who gave himself for us . . . .” (Tit 2:11-14).*

Sometimes, we tend to forget how much the Lord has done for us. We tend to lose the sense of wonder and appreciation of just how gracious, kind and loving God has been to us. We forget that without the grace of God, we would be eternally lost in our sins, destined for hell and eternal punishment.

We need to get back to the basics again: How did God show His love for us? What did He do for us? I think there are no better words that can describe this fully than the words of Scripture itself. In Titus 3:3-6, we read this wonderful statement: *“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared [this is a restatement of v.12], 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: Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.”*

Can you see in these words how gracious and wonderful the Lord has been to us? This grace of God is so much more than anything you and I have ever received or can ever receive from anyone. And what makes it all the more amazing is that you received it even though for being a sinner filled with ungodliness and worldly lusts, you deserved the very opposite from God. How can it be? How can it be?

We may never be able to fully understand what made God so gracious and merciful to us, but this one thing we do know: such great grace surely deserves a good response from us. Such great grace must surely induce us and instruct us how to respond to it in an appropriate manner. And how should we respond to that grace that has been shown to us? How can we repay that kindness? Titus 2:12 gives the answer plainly and clearly: *“teaching us that, denying*

*ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*” Godly living becomes the only correct response we can give for the grace we have received from the Lord. Any other response than that would be a mismatch, and even an insult to the grace we have received.

Now it is worth asking the question then, “What does it mean to live godly?” It does not mean that we are just to confine ourselves within a set of rules and regulations. Some people reduce godly living to a list of “do’s and don’ts.” But the meaning of godly living goes far deeper than that.

Godly living means living in the manner that God wants us to live. It means having the same feelings, attitudes and heart’s desires that God has. It means that we love the things that God loves, care for the things that God cares for, and dislike those things which He dislikes. And since God loves righteousness, a godly person also loves righteousness. Since God hates sin, a godly person also hates sin, whether it is in his own life or in others. A godly person will seek to abandon every sin in his life. Since God wants His own will to be done and to be glorified, a godly person will likewise want God’s will to be done and to glorify God in everything he does. Now, if we have these feelings, attitudes and heart’s desires, we will soon find ourselves being quite different from the world we live in. And we will soon find ourselves coming into conflict with the world many times. So you see, being godly is not an easy thing.

But no matter how difficult it may be to strive to live a godly life in this world, no matter how hard and inconvenient it becomes to live differently from the rest, it surely is worth all the effort we put in, because the Lord deserves much more than this response from us, for all that He has done. The more we think of how Jesus gave Himself for us so sacrificially, nothing becomes too great for us to give to Him.

About 300 years ago, there was a rich young German nobleman, who visited an art gallery. And as he looked at the paintings on the

wall, one particular painting caught his eye and he just could not take his eyes off it. It was a painting of Christ dying on the cross. That painting showed the face of Jesus in great agony with drops of blood and tears streaming down his cheeks. As that rich young nobleman continued contemplating this painting, his eyes looked at the little label that was attached to the bottom of the painting. On it were the words, “*All this, I have done for thee. What has thou done for Me?*” And as he was reading these words, that young nobleman broke down and cried. And right there he gave his life to the Lord, devoting all his time and treasures to the cause of Christ.

And God used the godly life of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf to build up the famous Moravian missionary enterprise, which sent out hundreds of missionaries in the eighteenth century — and inspired countless others. The self-sacrifice, love, and total commitment to evangelisation of the Moravian missionaries who were motivated through Zinzendorf are unparalleled in the history of missions. They also influenced the Evangelical Revival in England through James Hutton and John Wesley.

And now it is our turn to respond to the same gift. It is our turn to answer the same question that von Zinzendorf faced “*All this, I have done for thee. What has thou done for Me?*” Titus 2:12 says “*that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*” Will you do this for Him?

And besides this, we who live in this present age have an even greater motivation to respond to this gift than those who came before us: while the grace of God has already appeared to us (v.11), the great God Himself will soon appear to us (v.13)! This same Jesus who has given Himself for us may in fact be returning soon with wonderful rewards for those who live for Him. The way that world events are unfolding right now indicates increasingly that He might be coming very soon. Well, no one can ever know the exact day and hour when Christ will return, but would it not be wonderful if He were to come today? Imagine what it will be like if Christ were to

return and find us living godly lives for Him. Would you not be glad to meet Him and see the smile of approval on His face? Let this prospect of seeing Jesus give you added motivation to live for Him now, as verse 13 says, *“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

So then, this is the first reason for godly living. It is the very least we can do for Him, after all He has done for us. But that is not the only reason for godly living. Let us go on now to see another.

### **Because this is the means by which we become identified as God’s people**

*“(Jesus Christ) Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”* (Titus 2:14).

The purpose for our salvation is spelled out clearly in this verse. Christ has saved us so that we may become a distinct people, set apart from the rest of the world, a people for His own possession: a special people whom He would not be ashamed to call His own, a people through whom God can reveal Himself to the rest of the world. A people who would reflect His glory. The apostle Peter said the same thing in 1 Peter 2:9 — *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:”*

Even in Old Testament times, before Christ came into the world, this purpose was already in existence. The ancient nation of Israel was meant to be this special people of God. God had redeemed them out of their slavery in Egypt, purified them through the animal sacrifices that were offered, and then He gave them the Law. The Law of God was a moral code, consisting of principles and practices that would distinguish them from all the rest of the nations of the world which were sinful.

For instance, Israel was the only nation that had no idol to represent God. Every nation had its own stone or wooden figure — of an awesome looking man or animal. And to them that was their god. But for Israel, God purposely instituted that the only thing which could represent His presence in any way was the Ark of the Covenant. This consisted of a box pedestal with two angel figures on top on either side whose wings formed an arch over the space above the box. Any nation of the world would be puzzled when they saw this, wondering why the Israelites worshipped an empty space! (We know, of course that this is to teach the world that God is a spirit and that those who worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth). Besides this, there were also many other ways in which Israel was distinguished from the rest of the world as being God’s special people.

But there was another purpose, besides that of distinguishing them from the rest, and that is: through these special laws and practices of Israel, God was revealing Himself to the world. What Israel was, as a nation belonging to God, was meant to reveal God Himself. They were meant to represent God to the world by what they did, by what they said, by what they believed and practised. And if they had faithfully followed these things, they would have fulfilled God’s purpose. But because of the problem of sin, they failed to do this.

The history of Israel after the Law was given to them is a record of failure after failure to obey the Law. All of this served to demonstrate the need for God’s grace, which was then revealed through Christ. It is God’s grace that now enables His people to fulfil the purpose of redemption. By God’s grace, His people now have the power to be his peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Now let us see how this relates to us: what God intended to achieve through the nation of Israel, He now intends to achieve through us, whom He has redeemed and purified through Christ. We are now His special people, different from the rest. We are the ones to reveal the character of God to this world, in our lives. In whatever

we do, in whatever we say, in whatever values we hold dear to ourselves, the Lord is revealing His moral character, His godliness to this world.

Did you know that by the way you live each day, you are exerting an influence that is affecting the people around you? Every moment of your life, you are exerting a tremendous influence that is going to affect the eternal destiny of your family, your friends and the ones you work or study with. You are making an impression on them either for God or against God. The question that I hope you will think about is this: “What kind of impression am I making right now by the way I am living?”

Do people say to you, “I have seen the kind of person you have become since you became a Christian, and I would like to find out how my life can be changed to be like yours too. Please tell me about Jesus Christ.”

Or do people say, “You know, the way that you live just confirms in my heart that you Christians are just a bunch of hypocrites. What kind of God do you have anyway that tolerates the things you do?”

I would like to use an analogy that may help you to remember this. We are like stones that are found on the ground where people walk. Do you know that stones on the ground can sometimes be very helpful? When it rains heavily and the path where we are walking becomes full of puddles of water, these stones are useful to step on, so that you can keep your shoes dry. These are what we call stepping stones.

On the other hand, stones on the ground can sometimes be a great nuisance and even a danger to people. When it gets dark, it’s very easy for a person to trip or stumble over a stone and fall to the ground, getting himself hurt. These are what we call stumbling blocks. Stumbling blocks prevent people from making progress, but stepping stones help them to move on.

As Christians we can either be stepping stones or stumbling blocks. If we are helping people to make progress toward God

through our godly living, then we are stepping stones. But if we are preventing them from making progress toward God because we are not living godly lives, then we have become stumbling blocks to people. So then, the question becomes: “Are you a stepping stone or a stumbling block?” I hope that we are all stepping stones. Then our lives would be truly useful to God.

What we really need in the world today are more stepping stones: Christians in every place today need to realise how important it is that their lives should exert a godly influence. What we have considered in this message are two compelling reasons to show why this is so important. The first reason is the wonderful grace that God has shown to us. Godly living becomes the least we can do for the Lord after all He has done for us. And the second reason is that God saved us so that we might be His Godly people. As the Word of God says in Titus 2:14, “*Jesus gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*” By doing this, our lives now become the means by which others may come to know the Lord and follow Him.

I would like to end this message by describing a real-life example of a person who has, to my mind, succeeded most wonderfully in living out the principles we have seen today. The life of this person has truly been a godly influence. The person I am talking about is a Filipino pastor, Rev. Donald Coniate. I had the opportunity to meet him and work together with him when I was on the mission field. Pastor Coniate is one of the lecturers at the Centre for Biblical Studies at the Hilltop. But he is also the full-time pastor of a growing church in Metro-Manila, called Lighthouse Christian Bible Church. About 5 years ago, he became quite sick and in order to recover, he needed to take a rest from his work at Lighthouse. Now, at that time the Hilltop construction had just begun and there was no one living on the site except for about 100 construction workers.

So Pastor Coniate decided to stay on the Hilltop for two months to recuperate from his illness. And while he was recuperating, I was

requested to help out with the preaching and teaching ministry at the church.

While Pastor Coniate was at the Hilltop, the Lord used him to influence the lives of the construction workers there. He lived, ate and conversed daily with the workers. And they came to know him very well. He became well-respected by them, and some sought his counsel for their problems. But they were not Christians. In fact, on one occasion, they tried to sacrifice a chicken as an offering to a tree which they believed was inhabited by a spirit. Pastor Coniate started a weekly Bible study on Fridays which was attended by most of the workers. And the best part of all is that 19 of them made professions of faith in Jesus Christ because of his godly influence in their lives.

Now, the contractor in charge of the Hilltop building project was a Christian and he was naturally delighted to hear about this. And some years later when the Hilltop project was over, this contractor paid a visit to his hometown on the island of Samar and when he visited his home church, he was pleasantly surprised to see some of those same construction workers now regularly attending the church and serving the Lord there.

Now you must remember that Pastor Coniate's purpose in staying in Antipolo was not primarily to start an outreach there. What was he there for? He was just going there to rest and recuperate. But a life that is godly cannot fail to have an influence on the lives of other people. I trust that his example will inspire us to do the same thing where the Lord has placed each of us: to live the kind of life that will be a godly influence on others and that will lead them to Christ. May the Lord Jesus be praised!

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What additional reasons for godly living can you find in the following passages?
  - a. Matthew 5:13-16



- b. 1 Peter 1:15,16
  - c. 1 John 2:3-6
2. In what way are the reasons for godly living in Christianity different from the reasons for good conduct in other religions and philosophies?
  3. Why is religious hypocrisy so dangerous? (Matthew 15:7-9; Philippians 3:17-19; James 1:22-24,26)
  4. What kind of influence, do you think, has your life had on others — for Christ, or against Christ? Why?
  5. What will you do to sustain your desire daily to keep up your Christian conduct?

## **How to Handle the Temptations of the Non-Christian World**

(Matthew 4:1-11)

There was once a little boy who wanted very much to own a computer game. He asked his parents if he could have one, and they told him that if he wanted a computer game, he would have to save up money on his own to buy one. So he began to save every cent he could spare for this. And at night, before he went to bed, he prayed, “Dear Lord, please help me to save enough money to buy a computer game, and please don’t let the ice-cream man come down this street!” The reason of course, was that if the ice-cream man came he would be tempted to spend his savings on ice-cream, which he was also very fond of.

This illustration shows us something which is common in our day to day experience. It shows us the unavoidable aspect of the Christian life, called temptation. None of us is exempted from it. Temptation assails everyone, saint and sinner alike. Temptation is no respecter of persons. Even the Lord Jesus Christ, when he was on earth faced temptation.

Temptation comes from many sources. Satan makes use of the environment we live in. Our senses are bombarded daily with the sights and sounds of the non-Christian world that tempt us with promises of fame or riches. Temptation may come from our non-Christian friends and colleagues, persuading us to join them in activities which are not pleasing to God. Many young people have succumbed to this kind of peer group pressure. Sometimes, even our

loved ones tempt us to sin. This is a particularly hard temptation to resist. Adam might have been able to withstand the serpent's temptation in the Garden of Eden by himself, but he yielded when Eve, his own wife whom he loved, offered him the forbidden fruit. And last but not least, temptation also comes from within ourselves — the flesh — through our own pride and selfish desires for gratification.

With all of these things against us in our daily lives, we now realise how easily we can fall into sin if we are not constantly vigilant and watchful in what we say, do or think. Temptation must be dealt with, and dealt with decisively. God's will for us is that we should resist temptation. God's will for us is that we should overcome temptation. God's will for us is that we should not yield at all to temptation.

But how are we to do this? How can we deal effectively with the temptations which we encounter daily? What can we do to keep ourselves from falling into sin? God's effective answer to us is that we can only do so through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. He alone has gone through all the different trials of temptations in this world and yet emerged completely sinless. He alone can strengthen us now in spirit to resist the urge to yield to temptation. And He alone has set the example for dealing effectively with temptation which is eternally recorded for us in God's Holy Word.

And so if we pay close attention to the means which Jesus employed in dealing with the attacks of Satan in His temptation, we will not fail to gain important insight into the way to deal effectively with temptation. These words of Scripture in Matthew 4 were specially given for our instruction in righteousness: that as God's people we will be thoroughly equipped to do God's will by learning from the excellent example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 4:1-11 records the temptations of the Lord, we first consider the question 'What were the circumstances that led to this event of Christ's temptation?' (v.1): "*Then was Jesus led up of the*

*spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.”*

The first thing we note, is that Christ was led by the Holy Spirit of God to be tempted. In other words, it was God’s will that Jesus should be tempted. Now, we know that God will never do anything or condone anything that would violate His own holiness. What we must understand, therefore, is that there is nothing wrong or sinful about being tempted. Temptation itself is not morally wrong, but yielding to temptation is. The Lord will judge sinners for yielding to the temptations they face, and not for facing temptations. In fact, temptations can sometimes be used by God for a good purpose. Sometimes, God sees it fit within His plan, to bring us into temptation: though He is not the one who tempts us. Let us be fully assured: He has a purpose for allowing us to be tempted, just as He had in the case of Job.

A Puritan writer put it this way: “God sometimes permits Satan to assail His dear children, the more to strengthen them in His spiritual graces, and to confirm them more fully in the assurance of His love and their salvation. For, as a city which has been once besieged and not sacked, will ever after be more strong to hold out if it be assailed by the like danger . . . so those who are besieged and assaulted by their spiritual enemies will ever after more carefully arm themselves against them with the graces of God’s Spirit, that they may not be overcome nor foiled by them.”

Temptations are therefore allowed in our lives by God as a means to prove and test our faith and character. And because of this fact we can rest assured that we will never face any temptation in this world that is too great for us to bear. The Lord knows exactly how much we can take. He will not allow Satan to tempt us beyond our resistance. One example of this are the trials that God allowed Satan to afflict Job with. At first, Satan was allowed to take everything Job had, but not allowed to harm Job himself. When Job successfully resisted the temptation to sin, Satan was then allowed to harm Job. His success in resisting the temptation to sin in his first trial may

have strengthened him to be successful in his second one. Perhaps if God had allowed Satan to take everything and harm Job at the same time, he might not have been able to resist the temptation so well.

God's Word in 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" You know, this is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible. How wonderful it is to know that God is in full control. So even though the temptations we face in this world may be very difficult and trying to us at times, and make us feel that our earthly pilgrimage is so difficult, we can be encouraged, if we know that we will be able to bear them and regard them as the refining fires specially designed to purify our faith, and to prepare us for our heavenly home.

In Matthew 4:1-11: we also note that in this event, Christ was led into the wilderness to be tempted. Traditionally, this wilderness was a place known as the Wilderness of Judah on the North-western side of the Dead Sea. This is a very hot and desolate place that none of us would want to be in. In the months of July to September the average daytime temperature here is above 38 degrees C (hotter than body temperature). It would be very uncomfortable to be there. But Christ spent no less than 40 days in this place, without any conveniences, food, shelter or companionship. Such extreme circumstances would really stress and weaken any man in body, mind and spirit and render a person more susceptible to temptation.

It is not in times when we are alert and strong but in times of great stress and weakness, when we are drained of spiritual vigour and vitality, that we become most vulnerable to the suggestions of the Evil One. Like a roaring lion, Satan strikes when he perceives that his prey is weak, as this gives him the best opportunity for overpowering us. We, therefore, ought to be more careful of his attacks when we are weak.

The prophet Elijah succumbed to the temptation of fear and depression after his glorious victory at Mount Carmel. Why did this happen? Probably because he was physically and mentally exhausted, having spent all his energies from morning until evening facing the Baal prophets, praying for rain, and then running from Mt Carmel to Jezreel. When he heard that Jezebel sought to kill him, he ran away and became very depressed. When a person feels depressed, he may be tempted to abuse the precious gift of life and commit suicide. When a person has to endure great physical and mental stress, he is tempted to do anything just to get out of the difficult or unpleasant aspects of the training.

Therefore, if we know that we are about to go through a time of physical and mental stress or any trying experience, we would do well to prepare ourselves for it. Later, we will see how Jesus was well-prepared to face his time of testing. He had done two things to prepare Himself: firstly, He filled His mind with the Word of God and secondly, He filled His heart with a firm resolve to obey it.

Now we will look at the three temptations that Jesus faced: first, an appeal to physical needs and desires; then, an appeal to the pride of life, and finally, an appeal to power and ambition. You will observe that each of them was different in nature, and they show us that Satan is quite skilful at employing different ways to get us to sin.

## **An Appeal to Physical Needs and Desires**

*“If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread.”* (Matt 4:3). I think we can imagine how hungry Jesus was after 40 days of fasting, and if He wanted to satisfy His hunger He could have done it very easily by supernatural means, just as He later satisfied the hunger of 5,000 people with just 5 loaves and 2 fishes.

But why did Jesus not do this? The reason is found in the reply Jesus gave from Scripture: *“Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”* (v.4). God’s Word takes precedence over one’s physical needs. Apparently at this

point, Jesus had received God's Word of command that He should not eat any food for forty days. Keeping God's Word was more important to Him than His immediate pressing physical need for food.

And this should be our conviction as well. Have you sometimes given in to the temptation of putting your immediate physical needs above the Word of God? Sometimes, when we wake up in the morning, instead of getting up immediately to start the day with God in our Quiet Time, we feel urged to go back to sleep.

When I was a Sunday School teacher, one of the excuses that was heard most often in Sunday School for absences by students is "*I am so sorry but I just could not wake up!*" But the strange thing is that when it comes to going to school or to work during the rest of the week, waking up does not seem to be a problem. Let us not allow our physical tiredness prevent us from spending time in the Word of God. Let us be like Jesus, who did not allow His hunger to prevent Him from keeping the Word of God. He understands our physical needs perfectly well because He Himself had the same physical needs here on earth, but He will not condone the meeting of physical needs at the expense of keeping God's Word.

We need to get our priorities right, so that we will not fall when Satan tempts us by appealing to our physical needs. And our priority should be based on the Scriptural principle used by Jesus: "*man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" Earlier, I mentioned Job and how he resisted the temptation to sin. How was he able to do this? Let us look at Job 23:12, "*I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.*" God's word ought to take priority in our lives. Obeying it is our most basic necessity. Keeping it is our most urgent requirement. Meeting our physical needs is useful only for this short present life. Meeting our spiritual needs with God's Word is useful both for this present life as well as for eternity. Let us therefore give God's Word greater priority.

Having seen how Jesus used a Scriptural principle to deal with Satan's first temptation, we now come to the second temptation.

## **An Appeal to The Pride of Life**

*“Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”* (vv.5, 6).

Here we see something interesting — the Devil himself quoting from scripture. Evidently Satan also studies God's Word — probably to see how he may distort it to his own advantage. And if we are going to deal with a devil who knows scripture, then I think we had better strive to know it better than he does.

If we compare what he quoted here with the original verses in Psalm 91:11, 12 we will see how he distorted God's Word. Firstly, he omitted the words *“to keep thee in all thy ways”*. Matthew 4:6 should read *“He shall give His angels charge concerning thee to keep thee in all thy ways.”* Secondly, he added the words *“at any time.”* The last part of verse 6 should read *“lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”* Thirdly, when we look at the original context of Psalm 91, we see that the protection of God is promised for dangers that we cannot avoid. It is not giving us permission to be careless or to put ourselves in danger.

Here, Satan was challenging our Lord to prove God's faithfulness to Him by jumping down from the highest point of the Temple to force God to save Him from being killed. The implication here is that if God's hand can be forced to do his bidding when Christ purposely puts himself in danger, then Christ can feel that He must be someone very great and special. This was therefore an appeal to self-centred pride, exalting itself at God's expense.



Now, this appeal to the Pride of Life has been used by the Devil even from the very beginning. When he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, he enticed her to eat the forbidden fruit by saying “*in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good an evil.*” (Gen 3:5) Satan himself fell from his original position as an angel because of this same cause: he yielded to his own pride and said, “*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*” (Isaiah 14:14)

Today, he is still persuading people to exalt themselves at God’s expense. He is still appealing to the Pride of Life. He is telling people — “*You can be as gods.*” The non-Christian world we live in is saturated with this. It is the basic premise of the eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, whose adherents believe that if they live well enough, they will move up the ladder to divinity. It is becoming popular in the West now in the New Age Movement. You know, to most of our non-Christian friends, God is merely a means to an end — to be used to obtain all the good things in life for oneself and to fulfil one’s own dreams and wishes.

How dishonouring to God this is! But do you know that this kind of teaching is actually coming into some churches today? It is known as the Health-Wealth or Prosperity gospel and it claims that all Christians have a right to use faith to claim healing and to claim riches and material prosperity from God because God has supposedly bound Himself to provide these things to them in His Word.

It is sad to see Christians falling into this error. To say that we have a right to make claims from God like this is really amounting to telling Him, “*My will be done*”. We have no right to impose our wills upon God and make use of Him for our own purposes. To do so would be to do exactly what Satan tempted Jesus to do and that is to tempt the Lord (to put Him to the test), and to violate the Scriptural principle quoted by Christ from Deuteronomy 6:16, “*Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God.*”

We must always remember that we stand in a subordinate relationship to God. We are to do His will and not He, ours. He has given us a privilege to ask in prayer, but not a right to demand or claim by faith. If our Lord Jesus Christ, who was God's only begotten Son who is so close to the Father, did not dare to test His Father's power and claim deliverance, how much less should we dare to do the same. Be careful when an appeal is made to pride in your life, to receive honour that is due to God alone. Remember the scriptural principle: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

### **An Appeal to Power and Ambition**

We now come to the third and last temptation. "*Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*" (vv.8, 9).

Here Satan tempts Jesus with an appeal to Power and Ambition by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world. He promises to give Jesus total power and full jurisdiction over all these kingdoms if Jesus would only fulfil one easy requirement — to bow down and worship Satan. In order to entice Jesus, he made a full display of all the kingdoms and their splendour, rich cultures and impressive cities.

The devil probably showed our Lord the greatness of the Empires that existed then. In the west, He would have seen the great superpower called Rome, whose territories included Egypt, Syria, North Africa, Western and Southern Europe and England. In the near east, he would have seen a kingdom which had resisted Roman conquest, called the Parthian empire. This empire became rich through its control of the trade-routes.

Far in the East, our Lord Jesus would have seen China flourishing under the Han dynasty which lasted for 400 years, a time when China was united by an excellent administration and was experiencing rich cultural development. All of these and more were

displayed before our Saviour's eyes with the promise that they would all be His possession and domain if He would only bow down and make obeisance to the Devil.

One thing we might like to know is how Satan could possibly offer these kingdoms to Christ. What right did he have to do this? The Bible tells us that Satan is the prince of this world or the god of this world (in John 14:30; Eph 2:2; 2 Cor 4:4). In fact he has his own organisation of fallen angels and the OT book of Daniel gives us the impression that each of the world's kingdoms seems to have been assigned a fallen angel to influence or control. In this sense, Satan did have the right to offer Jesus these kingdoms.

But why was this offer made to Jesus? Was Jesus at all interested in gaining the world's kingdoms? Yes, He was. According to 1 Corinthians 15:24 the ultimate mission of Jesus was to gain all the world for His Kingdom, so that He could finally deliver it up to God. In the process, Jesus would also destroy Satan's power over the world. But the means that had been ordained for Jesus to do this was by His death on the cross, and the resurrection from the dead. According to Philippians 2, Christ's obedience unto death, even the death on the cross, would be the cause of His exaltation over all principalities and powers, when every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

What we see in the temptation, therefore, was that Satan was trying to offer Jesus an opportunity to fulfil this ultimate mission without having to die upon the Cross, without having to submit himself to all the suffering of Calvary for our sins. Satan was tempting Jesus to take the easy way out, the path of least resistance, and this would make his offer so attractive.

Let us learn from this. Are you sometimes tempted to take the easy way out? As Christians living in the midst of a non-Christian world, we are sometimes offered an opportunity to gain something great, something we want very much if we would only compromise our standards a little, like giving a bribe, or overlooking an error that

should be reported. The temptation to take this offer can be very great because of the big advantages and conveniences we would stand to gain.

In the newspapers, you will often see reports of people who have been caught and convicted for doing something illegal just because they had the opportunity to gain wealth and power. But while many are caught, there are many more who do not get caught, and think that they are lucky. And this same attitude pervades the whole non-Christian world we live in. It is found in the rank and file of almost every secular institution and place of work.

A good friend of mine was being trained a long time ago in OCS (Officer Cadet School). One day he came back from field training and when he unpacked his full pack he found to his horror, a live grenade that he had somehow not returned. He could be charged and face severe punishment for this offence.

All his non-Christian section-mates advised him to get rid of it secretly at a nearby rubbish dump, and no one at all would then know about it. But because of his firm Christian convictions, he decided not to take the easy way out, but report the matter to his officer. He was prepared to face the worst — several weekend confinements or extra duties. But to his surprise, his officer, who was amazed at his honesty, just asked him to do a few push ups and let him go. And on the day that he passed out of OCS, my friend received a sword of honour.

So whenever we are tempted by the world to take the easy way out, let us remember that the end does not justify the means used to attain it. And this is why Jesus refused to agree to the condition laid down by Satan. The worship that he required would grossly violate the most important scriptural principle: worship belongs to God alone and to no one else. Jesus replied “*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.*” (Deut 10:20).

We must never do anything ethically or morally questionable or dishonouring to God, even though this might mean losing something

we want very much, and though it would mean forsaking some great opportunity to gain power or fulfil our ambitions. Our foremost consideration should always be: “Will the Lord be pleased with what I am doing?” And if we cannot answer “Yes” with a clear conscience, we must reject it.

To summarise the three temptations of Christ, we have seen the appeal made to physical needs and desires, the pride of life and power and ambition.

Now that we have seen them, we will be able to understand a little better how He dealt with them effectively. You will notice that there is one common denominator in the way that Christ handled all three temptations. This common denominator is the presence of three words, “*It is written*” In His first reply to Satan, Jesus says, “*It is written, man shall not live by bread alone*” In His second reply, He said, “*It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*” And in His final reply, He said, “*It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.*”

These three words “*It is written*” refer to nothing else but the written Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Our Lord, therefore, consistently used the Scriptures to deal with His temptations. By this example, He teaches us about the importance of knowing the Word of God to deal with our own temptations. Christ prepared Himself well by memorising scripture.

The key to dealing effectively with temptation is the knowledge and application of the Word of God. Unless we take the time to know the Word and resolve in our hearts to apply it, we would not be strong to resist temptation.

If we choose to neglect studying the Bible or spend only a little time reading it, then I am afraid, we will find ourselves vulnerable and weak when faced with temptation. And if we see a Christian always yielding to temptation, it is highly probable that he is not spending enough time in the Word of God or that he is not taking it seriously enough. But if we choose to give time and effort to learn

from the Word of God and resolve to keep it in our hearts, we will soon discover renewed ability to withstand the temptations of the non-Christian world we live in, because we would have solid scriptural convictions to withstand them. A good illustration of this is found in the man called Daniel. Daniel was a young Jew who was taken into captivity and forced to serve in the court of the Babylonian King. There he faced temptations like eating food that was forbidden to the Jews by God's Law. The Babylonian food might have been offered to the idol gods of Babylon before it was laid on the table. Daniel could have taken the easy way out and just eaten the food if he was afraid of offending the king. Daniel 1:8 tells us that he "*purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat.*" As a result of his firm convictions, he and also his Jewish friends were able to resist the temptation and were blessed with better health than all the other captive young people in the court.

The psalmist said, "*Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.*" (Psalm 119:11) So important is the knowledge of God's word in our conflict with sin and Satan that Paul designates it the foundational piece of our spiritual armour, namely "*the Belt of Truth*" (Eph 6:14). The word of God is also the "*Sword of the Spirit,*" the only weapon effective enough to counter the attacks of the Devil.

One of the latest teachings coming now from Charismatic circles is that playing the tambourine in prayer and praise services is a mighty weapon that believers can use against the Devil.

They teach things like "Every stroke of the tambourine is a knock on Satan's head, until he gets dazed and drops down." It is no wonder then that some churches are now offering courses in tambourine-playing. But if tambourines are really effective to defeat Satan, we wonder why our Lord Jesus did not bring one with Him when He was being tempted by him. The only thing that Jesus brought with Him was the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit, which he had carefully hid in His heart, ready for immediate use.

Christian, the best way to deal effectively with temptation is to know God's Word well. Let us not neglect the Scriptures. It is important that we should know it very well, for without it we would yield more easily to the temptations we face everyday in the non-Christian world. May the Lord help us through the knowledge of His word.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What would you regard as your greatest source of temptation?
2. What steps should you take to deal with temptation?
3. What are some situations in which God's Word must take precedence over physical needs?
4. How does one avoid making God a means to an end?

## **How to Handle the Values of the Non-Christian World (Ecclesiastes 2:1-15)**

Because of the recent regional economic crisis, Singaporeans have perhaps become a little more concerned about getting good value for their money for the things they buy. We are more careful now about how we use our funds. And only when we consider something to be really worthy to purchase, would we spend our money on it. Now when we think of values, we are thinking of things which are worth pursuing in life. Values are the principles, standards by which things are considered to be worthwhile, profitable or desirable to us. And only when we consider something to be really worthy to pursue, would we then spend our time and effort on it.

One of the great challenges that Christians in our present age must face is how to handle the values that are increasingly being forced upon us by the world. We live in a world with values that are entirely different from those that we have. The things that are considered to be most worthy of pursuit by the world's standards are not the things that we should consider to be most worthy. But sometimes, Christians find themselves under tremendous pressure to conform to the world's values. What are some of the values that the world wants us to have? The first one that needs to be mentioned is the high value placed by the world on the pursuit of achievements, appearance, and affluence.



## Achievements

King Solomon had many achievements in life. He wrote in Ecclesiastes 2:4-6, *“I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees”*

Some of the structures built by Solomon include the Holy Temple, His own palace, the armoury known as “the Forest of Lebanon” and a special residence for the Egyptian princess that he married. According to 1 Kings 6 and 7, he took twenty years to complete all these and we can only imagine how magnificent they must have been. Today, many are still trying to accomplish similar feats of building. Bill Gates, the richest man in the world today, recently built himself a US\$12 million house. This is no ordinary house, but an “intelligent” house, i.e. it is completely self-regulated and automated.

Besides building, Solomon also achieved much in the realm of wisdom: *“And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. . . . And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom”* (1 Kings 4:29-34). Many people must have gaped at the glory of Solomon’s outstanding achievements and wished they could be as successful as he was!

Today, the situation is the same. People always seem to be under pressure to accomplish things successfully, and to perform well. There are certain standards to keep. There are also higher standards we must strive to attain all the time. The world tells us that the great

rule in life is: that every one can in the end get what he wants if he only tries hard enough. Those of you who are working would have realised that you are constantly expected to meet your employer's or company's high standards of achievement: in meeting datelines, in improving quality, productivity and efficiency.

Incentives are given for you to outshine all your colleagues if you can. Even fast-food restaurants have an "employee of the month" incentive scheme. There is no doubt that the working world is very achievement-oriented.

But the working world is not the only place that is achievement-oriented. The desire to achieve is inculcated in our children right from the time they enter kindergarten, through primary school, secondary school, junior college, polytechnic, university, and right until they enter into the working world. The process of getting educated is clearing one achievement hurdle after another: first there is the Primary four streaming tests, then PSLE, O levels, A levels, and it continues.

Those who enter National Service also have a set of achievement hurdles to clear. I remember a friend who told me that he got punished with confinement in camp one weekend because of test results. It was not because he failed; actually he did quite well — 70%. He was confined because he did not reach the higher standard which his training officer had set — 90 %. He was not the only one who had to stay in camp. The majority of those who took the test were also there with him.

It seems that in almost every place we go, we are always being tested, examined, judged, evaluated and graded all according to our achievements. Even foodstalls are now being graded – A, B, C, or D!

We are accepted and honoured if we have reached a certain level of achievement, but rejected and even disgraced, if we have not. That is the way in which the world sees our worth. Now, this poses a problem, because it is not possible for everyone to reach those standards of achievement. Many who try to do so, fail. And the sad

thing is that there is not usually much sympathy for those who fail. In the eyes of the world, those who fail to achieve cannot be of much worth. Failure has almost become a dirty word in our society. One philosopher has said, “There is no loneliness greater than the loneliness of a failure. The failure is a stranger in his own house.” This is perhaps the reason why so many young people today get very anxious, and even paranoid about standards of achievement — they do not want to be considered as failures, and when they do fail they become very, very upset and depressed.

There are some students who regard the situation of not being able to get a place in a university locally or overseas as being the end of the world for them. They feel rejected and dejected because they had not achieved what was expected of them.

And even those who do get into the university sometimes face the same problem. You may have heard a few years ago about one Singaporean student who topped his school in the A level exams and then went overseas to study in a very prestigious university overseas. But there he found that he could no longer be the top student because there were others who were so much better than him. Due to this, he took his own life, because he felt there was no reason for him to go on living.

So we see what awful results can come from following the world in placing such high value on achievement. And the tragic thing about this is that, in the final analysis, all of these achievements really amount to nothing — they will eventually be forgotten, or destroyed; they will eventually vanish into eternity. King Solomon, the epitome of achievement, wrote in Ecclesiastes 1:3 *“What profit hath a man of all his labour [or for all that he has achieved] which he taketh under the sun?”* The answer is None. Worldly achievements have no value. After years of success, what was Solomon’s own assessment of his achievements? Look at Ecclesiastes 2:11, *“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.”*

Should we then evaluate our worth on the basis of what the world values most? The answer which God gives to us in His word is NO. There is only One who is qualified enough to make an accurate assessment of how much we are worth, and that is God. He sees everything and He knows everything; nothing at all is hidden from his sight. Therefore, to know how we should view our own worth, we must look to God and understand the way that He sees us.

In the eyes of God, all a man's worldly achievements have no value, and man really has nothing to be proud of. Many who think that they are extremely successful today by their own labours will be utterly shocked to discover one day when they stand before the throne of God, that their vast business empires, high status, years of research, study and acquiring scholarly degrees, to append to their names, years of pursuing recognition, fame and power, have all come to nothing.

Many people were very disappointed when many Asian currencies began spiralled downwards from July 1997, and with that the value of their stocks and shares as well. It seemed that all their hard earned money and investments were now worth very little. Well, the disappointment that many will experience before God's Great White throne of judgement will be quite similar to that experience, but much worse. They will find that the value of all the glorious achievements they had invested all their lives in, will have depreciated down to nothing.

They will be filled with extreme regret that they had wrongly invested in pursuing their own glory when they should have invested in seeking after God and pursuing His glory.

According to Jeremiah 9:23 and 24, there is only one achievement in life that is recognised by God as having great value: "*Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I*

*am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.*” Can you see what achievement God values in us? It is the achievement of knowing and understanding Him.

Let us therefore be very careful not to get ourselves caught up in following the achievement-oriented value system of the world. This is the principle we must live by where our achievements are concerned. It is good for us to do well, if we can, in our studies, in our work, and career (Col 3:23, 1 Cor 10:31, Ecc 9:10), but we must always put much greater value on developing our relationship with God, and glorifying Him, rather than ourselves. We must learn from the example of Joseph and Daniel, in the Old Testament. They were very diligent in whatever they did and their achievements in life were even great by world standards – the typical “rags to riches” story. For Joseph, it was from being a slave in Egypt to becoming the prime minister of Egypt! For Daniel, it was from being a captive of Babylon to becoming the second most powerful man in Babylon! But for them, knowing God and doing His will was of far greater value than all their achievements, and they always gave God the credit for all they had achieved in life.

## **Appearance**

Appearance is another pursuit on which the world places a high value. While King Solomon was famous for his achievements, he had a brother who was famous for his appearance: Absalom. Absalom’s appearance is described in 2 Samuel 14:25, “*But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.*” Absalom was so charming and attractive that he even “*stole the hearts of the people*” (2 Samuel 15:6)! But Absalom treacherously slew his own brother and plotted to dethrone David, his own father. He died a very humiliating death. So much for his good appearance.

Appearance is extremely important in the eyes of the world. People often judge one another by their physical features, their personality, and their public image. It is commonly believed that our looks are what brings us love and acceptance, and everyone naturally wants to be loved and accepted. And that is why many spend a lot of time and expense on keeping up a good outward appearance. They think, “If I can only reduce my waistline and improve my figure and posture, people are bound to love me and accept me.” Or “If only I restore my hair, dye it a different colour, and get tattooed eyebrows, then people will love me and accept me.”

Long ago, I had a Jewish friend who had a big hooked nose. This would not have been a problem at all if he lived in Israel, where all have hooked noses. But because he lived in Singapore, where people have small straight noses, He did not like his nose. He became so self-conscious about his hooked Jewish nose that he spent a lot on plastic surgery to have it cut and straightened. He could not accept his nose, because it did not seem to conform to the world’s standard of noses.

Sometimes, Christians also get caught up in following this aspect of the world’s value system. They get very depressed because they feel that their outward appearance or image falls short of the world’s standards. Have you ever wished to be someone else, rather than yourself? Have you ever said, “I do not like myself for all that I am! Why can’t I look like him? Look at how impressive he is.” There are some who will deal with this problem by trying to emulate or copy someone else whom they admire very much. They copy his hairstyle, his attire, his mannerisms, his tastes, and his way of life. But no matter how hard they try, they cannot succeed, because inside them, they are still the same old person, with the same old features that they do not like.

If you find yourself spending a lot of time and money on your outward appearance, or if you feel depressed or insecure because you are not as impressive outwardly as other people, please be careful: it means that you are following the world’s value system, not God’s.

And we must be careful to establish our own value system on God's Word. So what does God's Word say about one's appearance? It tells us that outward appearance has no value. We see this principle stated at the time that Samuel was sent to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as the next king of Israel. Jesse naturally paraded the most impressive of his sons first. Samuel admired the tall and handsome appearance of Eliab. But look at 1 Samuel 16:7 to see what God said, "*Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*" In the end, the one who was chosen was David, the youngest son, and the only one that Jesse did not consider to be worthy enough to show to Samuel. David was God's choice because he was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

Let us also see what Jesus said to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:27, "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*" From looking at these verses, we learn that what we should value more than outward appearance, is what we are within. God looks at our heart, and He greatly values any inward beauty that he can find there.

But is that the way you look at yourself? To find out, here are some simple questions: Do you consider yourself a trend-setter – usually the first to buy the latest style in clothes? Do you spend a lot of time and money shopping for new clothes? Are you always thinking about what you are going to wear? Do heads turn to see your newest dress or shirt? And do you enjoy making heads turn to look at you? Listen to what the Apostle Peter said when he addressed Christian wives in 1 Peter 3:3,4, "*Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*" To that we can

also add Proverbs 31:30 – *“Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.”*

And this is what we should apply with regards to our appearance. Learn to accept your appearance. Remember that God made you the way that you are, with all the physical features and personality traits (but of course not your sinful traits — we must not accept those but change them).

If you cannot accept your appearance, you would be like the pot complaining to the potter, “Why have you made me so plain?” You would be questioning God. So learn to accept whatever appearance that God has given to you.

Now accepting your appearance does not mean that you should not care about it at all, going around with dishevelled hair and an untidy appearance. You may tidy up what God has given you in order to look socially acceptable, so that you will not look offensive to others, and attract undue attention to yourself. But do not spend more time and effort than what is necessary for this. Taking an hour to adorn yourself is probably too much. God tells us to redeem the time because the days are evil (Eph 5:16). Many will spend more time in the morning preparing their outward selves than they do preparing themselves inwardly by seeking God in prayer and His Word.

The more important thing is for you to spend more time to improve your inward appearance, to cultivate inner beauty. And there is much to be done here because none of us are born with a beautiful inward appearance. We are all born with hearts that are blemished with sin. Spend time and effort to remove all the blemishes of sinful attitudes like pride, hatred, envy, lust, deceit and hypocrisy. If you want to see your blemishes, James 1:23-25 tell us that God’s Word is the mirror you should use if you want to see them.

Then make yourself more attractive by adorning yourself with good works (1 Timothy 2:9-10) and by bearing the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,



meekness, and temperance. There is much greater value in doing all this than in trying to improve your outward appearance.

So far, we have seen two areas on which the world places a high premium: achievement and appearance. But rather than giving much value to achievements as the world does, we should give greater value to developing our relationship with God and glorifying Him. And rather than giving much value to enhancing outward appearance as the world does, we should give greater value to cultivating inward beauty.

## Affluence

The third pursuit on which the world values very highly is affluence. King Solomon's affluence is described in Ecclesiastes 2:7-8, "*I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I got me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.*"

Many would love to enjoy the opulent luxury that King Solomon lived in. Affluence has in fact become the number one pursuit for most people. Just look at the world today and you will see how greatly material wealth and riches are highly esteemed. Those who have great wealth to invest seem to have more power than anyone else in the world, being able to cause great regional economic crises just by shifting their wealth from place to place. The media always seems to portray the rich as people who really enjoy themselves, as being the most blessed and respected people in the world, as people who have created their own heaven here on earth. And because of this, it has become the desire and dream of many to become rich.

An English writer made this observation recently: "What this century worships is wealth. The god of this century is wealth. To succeed one must have wealth. At all costs one must have wealth."

We all know very well about the 5 C's that most Singaporeans desire to have. Because of God's blessing on our nation, we Singaporeans are now enjoying a time of prosperity that has put many things that we could not afford previously, now within our reach. And thus, many have upgraded themselves to a higher standard of living. A comparison between life in the 60's and 90's will reveal a vast difference. People are no longer looking just for a roof over their heads, but for a five-room flat or executive condominium, or even a private apartment. People no longer just want to have clothes to wear, but they must be Gucci, Lanvin or Versace. People no longer just want to have a car, but it must be a Volvo or Mercedes. For the annual family vacation, people no longer just want to go up to Malaysia, but now to Europe, the U.S. or Canada. And for a house pet, a rabbit or hamster is not good enough; it must be a chinchilla! The list goes on. As the standard of living goes up higher and higher, many things will get added into the list of things we must have, as if it would be a most dreadful thing not to have them.

Some concern has been expressed in the press or media about this trend that pervades our society. Some call it materialism. But this is just a milder term for greed and covetousness. We all probably have friends, relatives, and colleagues who are very much caught up in it. Sometimes, we may even feel that we are being left behind, while everyone else is moving up to higher and higher standards of living. When we visit their homes and gaze at all the wonderful things they have, or when we get invited by them for a meal at one of their country clubs, this little nagging thought may keep rising in our minds: "Hey, this is very nice. This is the life! How I wish I could enjoy such affluence."

When that happens, we must wake up from our dream world, and remind ourselves that this is all part of the world's value system. We must be careful not to fall into it, because in reality worldly affluence has no value. Christ our Lord Himself warns us in Luke 12:15, "*Take*

*heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."*

Human life is precious, and was not meant to exist merely to gain a great abundance of material possessions or great riches. When a person lives only for affluence, he has really reduced his life to being nothing more than a machine that accumulates and processes the many things of this world. Covetousness degrades human life which was meant for nobler and better purposes.

Thousands are living today like machines. All that they think about is how to make more money to build up their possessions. They work non-stop, seven days a week, 18 hours a day, as they are motivated by a desire to amass more and more riches. They are never satisfied, because there is always more and more to gain. And they think that that is what life is all about. They are just machines that accumulate, something like vacuum cleaners, that suck in everything and hoards it all up in a bag which is eventually disposed of. How degraded life becomes when it is lived only for affluence!

Human life was meant to fulfil the supreme purpose of serving and worshipping God. A man's life consists of the abundance of the glory that he can bring to God. This then is the proper place and purpose for our lives. If we are living for God, our lives become purposeful, meaningful and fulfilled. But if we are living for our material possessions, our lives become as worthless and valueless in eternity as our material possessions.

When a lifetime of accumulation ends, all the riches that have been hoarded up are eventually squandered away by posterity. The nett result of that lifetime: zero! And that is the outcome of following the high value given by the world to affluence. In Luke 12, Jesus told the parable of the Rich Fool who prospered and said to himself "*Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*"? What happened to him? He died that very night and never got to enjoy his riches.

While the world values affluence very highly, we must be careful once again to see what kind of value the Word of God places on it. Actually riches or material wealth in themselves are not evil. It is not sinful to be rich — Abraham and Job were both rich, and yet they were godly men. It is the attitude of Covetousness, or the desire to be rich, which the Scriptures frequently warn us against. In 1 Tim. 6:9-10, the love of money is described as the root of all kinds of evil.

Furthermore, the Bible recognises that the possession of material wealth brings with it great dangers. For example, there is the danger of failing to acknowledge that God is the source of the blessing, *“And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth”* (Deut 8:17-18)

There is the related danger of trusting in riches (Ps 52:7), *“Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.”* Some people have the idea that money solves everything. It is dangerous to hold to this. This danger of trusting in riches is so great that our Lord said that it was extremely difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, *“And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God.”* (Mark 10:23, 24).

In the parable of the sower, God’s Word warns us that riches can hinder a person’s spiritual life: Look at Mark 4:18, 19, *“And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”*

It is interesting to see the description given to riches in this verse: *“The deceitfulness of riches”* Why did Christ describe it like that? Because He wants us to know that all the happiness and comfort that wealth and affluence seem to promise us, will never materialise. Riches have a way of deceiving us into thinking that all will be nice and well with us when we have them, that we will be content and satisfied when we have them. But the truth of the matter is that riches do not bring happiness. And those who have them are not content and satisfied. Rockefeller, one of the richest men in the world, was once asked, “Now that you have everything a person could have, what else do you want?” he said “I want more of it!” When he was asked, “Which is the best million you ever made?” he answered, “The next million!”

But as Christians, this the principle that we should live by with regard to material wealth: if God blesses us with material wealth, we must be content and be thankful to Him for it. But we must be careful not to let it deceive us, and not to put our trust in it. We must not love it or place too great a value on material wealth. And we must regard ourselves as stewards who have been entrusted with this wealth to dispense according to God’s directions.

Instead of seeking to be rich in material wealth, we should rather seek to be rich in two other ways. *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate”* (1 Tim 6:17, 18).

Let us now see what else we should be rich in, according to James 2:5, *“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”*

God’s Word esteems faith and good works to be of greater value than material gains. These are the true riches we should seek. And besides that, we should also seek to be rich in the knowledge of

God's Word. We are told that God's Word is more valuable than gold (Ps 19:10).

How should a Christian handle the values of the non-Christian World? We have seen that as believers, we must not follow the world in giving great value to Achievements, Appearance and Affluence. Our values must be different from that of the world. In 1 John 2:15,16 we are told very clearly: *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh (Affluence), and the lust of the eyes (Appearance) and the pride of life (Achievements), is not of the Father, but is of the world.”*

But let me tell you that when you do not conform to this world's values, you will not have much worth and value in the eyes of the world. Since you have no great achievements to boast of, no attractive appearance to show off, and no affluence to glory in, you might be regarded as a nobody and you may not gain much attention, glory, honour and respect from the world.

What should your response be? You can say: So what if the world regards us as being of no value? In 1 Cor 1:27, God's Word says that He *“hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”*

And though you may not have much value in the eyes of the world, take comfort in the fact that you have very great worth in eyes of God, since you have been purchased with the precious blood of Christ. By the death of Jesus Christ, God has drastically upgraded your eternal value. From being a sinner worthy only to be condemned to eternal death, you have now become very precious to the supreme God of the whole universe. An infinite price has been paid for you in the death of God's only Son. Therefore, you have

tremendous worth in God's eyes. Do you see yourselves in this way? Do you live according to this understanding? If you do not, please examine these truths again and see the tremendous difference that Christ's death should make on the way to regard your worth. May the Lord use these words to bless our lives.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **1. On Achievement:**

- a. What can we learn about the way you should regard your achievements from Daniel 4:28-37?
- b. What can you learn from the way that the Apostle Paul viewed his human achievements? (Philippians 3:4-10)
- c. Why does God allow us to fail sometimes? (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

### **2. On Appearance:**

- a. How much time and effort do you think you should spend on your appearance?
- b. How would you define a dress code that is appropriate and modest?
- c. What steps can you take to improve your inward appearance?

### **3. On Affluence:**

- a. Define what you think is a reasonable standard of living for a Christian in Singapore to aim for.
- b. Define what you think is good stewardship of wealth.
- c. What are some ways to avoid being wasteful in your stewardship of time and money?

## **How to Handle the Pleasures of the Non-Christian World**

(Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13)

Whenever the June and December holidays come each year, many Singaporeans take the opportunity to take leave and go on vacations overseas. Others choose to visit new places of amusement locally or go on a luxury cruise to a nearby island. All these have one object — Pleasure. I am glad that you have decided to spend your time here at this camp, to enjoy fellowship with one another and feed on God's Word, while at the same time enjoying the nice environment, the good food and service and facilities here.

We live in a pleasure-seeking world. Never before has there been an age like ours — where a man can pursue pleasure in a thousand different ways. Look at all the sophisticated video and computer games on the market, for instance. About 50 years ago the only games which people could enjoy were chess and draughts. And you could not enjoy music unless you had a huge gramophone or valve-radios at home. But right now there are portable stereos, walkmans, CDs, car radios. And the latest in entertainment are the Internet, Cable TV and virtual reality. Many cannot imagine what life will be like today without all these things.

The influence this has upon us is very strong. Therefore we often come into conflict with this influence. We face questions like: Should I or should I not do this? And if I do it, how far should I go in doing it? Where do I draw the line? We must try our best to find good scriptural answers to these questions if we are earnestly desiring to



live lives that will not compromise our relationship with God and our testimony for God.

Is pleasure to be regarded as something that must be alien to us? As something a Christian cannot have at all? There are some who have thought so. In history, there have been many ascetics like the medieval monks who believed that the Christian life means denying all pleasures in life. They lived in total seclusion from society in monasteries and nunneries. One of the most austere monasteries was started by an Egyptian monk called Pachomius in the 4th century. Their monastery consisted of small rooms called cells. And the monks lived three to one cell. All had to give absolute obedience to the Abbot (head monk). They could never at all take off their goat-skin clothes, and slept in an almost standing position. They prayed many times a day, fasted 2 days a week and were under a vow of silence and allowed to talk on only 2 days of the week. At mealtimes, they were not supposed even to look at each other. When you hear of this, you would probably say, “That is going to an extreme.”

There are non-Christians today who think of the Christian life like that. Many have the wrong notion that once a person becomes a Christian, he cannot enjoy anything in life any more, or at least, what they regard as the ‘joys’ of life (which, to them, is smoking, drinking, immoral relationships, gambling). And they would not like to become Christians, because they think it is much too restrictive, austere, dull and uninteresting to be one.

But the Christian life is not meant to be devoid of any pleasure and enjoyment. Let us understand that God is not a killjoy. He is not against pleasure. Pleasure is not incompatible with godliness. The psalmist declares, “*Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*” (Psalm 16:11).

According to this verse, pleasures are found with God. Pleasure by itself, is therefore not a bad thing. It is God’s gift to us. The word “pleasure” denotes enjoyment and sweetness, which comes from

something that pleases us, and brings delight to us. It has to do with our senses. We see, hear, touch and feel the things around us and gain pleasure from it.

In fact all the things that God created are meant to be enjoyed. And Genesis 1:31 says, “*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.*” God Himself takes pleasure in the things He made, as Revelation 4:11 testifies: “*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*” According to 1 Timothy 6:17, God giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

He made the wondrous beauty of nature and we can enjoy seeing it. He made the music of birds and of the human voice, and we can enjoy hearing them. He made different kinds of foodstuff: a whole variety of fruits that are sweet or sour, vegetables and meats, and we can enjoy eating them. He created man with abilities to rule over creation and derive pleasure from it by processing the raw materials of nature into new products and inventions.

Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13 says, “*I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.*” From all this we learn that enjoyment or pleasure is a gift from God. And if we regard it as such, we should receive it from God with thanksgiving.

But pleasure can become bad. And the cause of this is sin. It has caused the downfall of many men, nations and even whole empires. If you have ever studied history you would have learned about the Roman Empire and how great it became. You would have learned also about its downfall. Do you know what were the major causes of its downfall? Too much pleasure. Heavy taxes were being used to provide social security for the unemployed and free food for the poor. Many people did not want to work, but just live on the dole,

enjoy themselves in the public entertainment that was also financed by taxes.

There was a mad craze for all kinds of pleasure in the Roman Empire. Sports became more and more brutal and exciting as audiences became more bloodthirsty. Gladiators fought to the death in the arena. There were endless parties filled with debauchery going on all the time. Eating was a favourite pastime and people even induced themselves to throw up what they had eaten, so that they could eat some more. Immorality was widespread. Divorce was very common. The people became very decadent. Because of man's sin, pleasure has brought the downfall of many, and it can also become the cause of our own downfall, if we are not careful.

When does pleasure become bad? Let us look at some passages of Scripture to find out. Proverbs 21:17, "*he that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man.*" The key word here is the word "love". When our desire for pleasure becomes so great that we love it, and become obsessed with it, addicted to it, and are willing to forsake many important priorities in order to have it, then that pleasure becomes a snare to us. Instead of spending time with God and for God, we spend time in pleasure. Instead of loving and helping our fellow men the way we should, we seek pleasure for ourselves. If pleasure becomes the most important consideration in your life, and you cannot live without it, beware! It just shows that you have begun to love pleasure, and that is very dangerous.

First Timothy 6:17, "*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.*" The key word here is "trust". Timothy was being told by Paul to address those who enjoyed riches, and were trusting in them, instead of in God. But although Paul was speaking about riches, the principle can also be legitimately applied to pleasure, since pleasure, like riches, is given for us to enjoy. If pleasure diverts away your trust from God, then it becomes bad. Instead of seeking fulfillment and satisfaction in God alone, we seek for fulfillment and satisfaction in pleasure. Instead of

looking to God for comfort and help when we feel down and depressed, we console ourselves by indulging in pleasure and enjoyment. If you find yourself turning to pleasure instead of turning to God to satisfy you, then beware! It shows that your trust is misplaced. You have become an idol worshipper, for pleasure has become your idol. God will not tolerate any other gods in your life!

Both of these verses point us to one very basic principle: You must not give pleasure the place in your life that only God deserves. It is Him that we must love with all our hearts, soul and mind. It is in Him alone that we should trust for every need we have.

But there are perhaps many Christians who think that they can give both pleasure and God equal priority. They would like to have both. This is not possible. A Sunday School teacher was teaching her class the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. She told them how the rich man went to hell because of his sins while Lazarus went to heaven, because he was right with God. Then she asked her students, “*Who would you rather be, the rich man or Lazarus?*” The answer she expected was of course “*Lazarus.*” But one of her students answered “*I want to be like the rich man in life, and like Lazarus in death!*” Well, you just cannot have both.

In the Parable of the Sower, as told by Jesus, he described what happened when the seed sown by a sower fell on different types of ground: “*And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*” (Luke 8:14). In an earlier chapter, we saw that riches can be dangerous to one’s spiritual life. Now we see that pleasures can also do the same thing. The pleasures of this life are listed as one of the contributing factors that hinder a person from obeying the Word of God, and from becoming a fruit-bearing Christian.

There are perhaps many times when our hearts were very deeply touched by hearing a good, meaningful message from God’s Word in the worship service, and we resolved to apply what God had spoken

to our hearts and make changes for the better. But after the end of the worship service we got involved immediately in some kind of recreational activity, and the whole impact of the message was lost. While enjoying ourselves, we soon forgot the important lessons that should have been applied. This is one reason it is not good to plan to have one's recreation or sports activities on the Lord's day, after church. I have known of some who immediately after the benediction and postlude would be out of the church in a few seconds, and spend the rest of the day enjoying themselves at a country club, golf club or sailing club. The seed of God's Word that was sown in the morning has been choked by thorns and bears no fruit. Christians must reserve the Lord's day for the things of the Lord rather than to let our love for pleasure rob us of the precious manifold blessings we have gained in the Lord's house.

It would perhaps be better to spend the rest of the Lord's day in quiet meditation on God's Word or in edifying fellowship with other Christians, or in visiting the sick, encouraging the discouraged either on the telephone or by mail. I have heard of one family that spends a portion of the Sunday afternoon to review what was learned during the Sunday school and morning worship.

Paul writing to Titus says, "*For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.*" (Titus 3:3). This verse speaks about the lives that we once had before we knew Christ. The life that was characterised by sin, and in which we even found pleasure in committing sin.

What we learn from this is that we should not seek any kind of pleasure that involves sin, or what we may call "sinful pleasures." Notice that Paul said that at one time, we were actually serving divers lusts and pleasures. The word "serve" here has a strong idea of being enslaved. Thus the picture is one of slavery — being a slave to lusts and pleasures. The desire for pleasure was the master, controlling the past sinful life so much that it was even considered necessary to sin in order to serve this master. This is the thing that

motivates an alcoholic or a drug-abuser: he knows he should not continue his addiction. He knows that it is wrong, that it destroys his body, and that it may even make him lie, cheat and steal. And yet he still does it, because he craves the pleasure it brings. He is a slave to it. Therefore, if you want pleasure, please be sure that it is not any kind of pleasure that is sinful or that involves sin in it.

Sometimes, however, the pleasure that is sought by men does not involve any act of sin but is somehow associated with sin or with a sinful lifestyle — a lifestyle that is characterized by self-centredness, rebellion to authority, indifference to God and the truths revealed in His Word. To distinguish this from sinful pleasure, we call this kind of pleasure “worldly pleasure”, because it is so closely identified with the ungodly non-Christian world system that is accepted everywhere. And God says in 1 John 2:15, *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”*

God commands us not to love those things, if we truly love Him. This means that we should keep away from pleasures that are closely identified with them, because they are the expressions and products of the sinful, rebellious, ungodly lifestyle of the world: things like rock music, trashy novels, outrageous fashion designs, social dancing, and a big proportion of the shows and videos that are being churned out by the huge entertainment industry today.

Some people say: “Why make a big issue out of this? These things are merely cultural. We must not be so narrow-minded. They are not wrong or sinful. It is alright to enjoy them.” But we must have the conviction that not all things that are cultural are neutral. Since the Fall of man took place, man’s culture has often reflected his own sinful nature. And though many cultural things are not bad, and there are good novels, good music, poetry, art and also good wholesome entertainment which do reflect the image of God in man, there are also many things in culture which are the expressions of his sinful nature. As such, they express ideas of corruption, futility, permissiveness, rebellion, self-centred pride and ambition. If we say

that all that is merely cultural and immerse ourselves in enjoying them, we will definitely be adversely influenced by them.

A long time ago, when I was a very young Christian in my teens, I actively pursued listening to rock music and a lot of pop music. In the 70's, groups like the Beatles, Abba, America and the Bee Gees were very popular. I used to listen to tapes and records by them over and over again. But I found that it affected my relationship with God. For some reason the music always left me in a mood that was totally unsuitable to thinking about the Lord, reading the Bible or prayer. And even when I was not listening to the music, it would seem to come back into my mind and really took some effort to get it out and concentrate on spiritual things. It was not only the lyrics of the songs that affected me, but the rhythm and the tunes that were not conducive at all to worship and personal devotions.

Therefore, it is important that Christians recognize that they cannot just accept everything that claims to be merely cultural. We need to draw definite lines between what is acceptable in culture and what is not.

And even if we were to think that there is nothing wrong with listening to rock music, reading worldly books and going to certain places of entertainment, like cinemas or karaoke lounges because we think that they are merely cultural, think about how it affects our testimony before others. Our non-Christian friends may conclude that we endorse the worldly, rebellious lifestyle that these things promote.

In the Philippines a few years ago, there was a big fire in a disco in Manila, called the Ozone disco, that killed over a hundred young people. As the identities of the victims were published in the newspapers, it was revealed that about forty of them were Christians. And while we feel sorry for them that they suffered such a terrible death, it also makes us wonder "What were they doing there? Why were they there in the first place?" The papers said that most of the young people there were celebrating the end of examinations and beginning of school holidays. These forty or so Christians had no

doubt been invited by their non-Christian classmates to join them in celebrating at the disco. They agreed, and lost not just their testimonies, but also their lives. We must be careful not to be closely associated with worldly pleasure by going to such places or sharing in such activity. Our testimony is important.

Now that we have seen the ways in which pleasure can become bad, let us try to outline three concrete steps we can take to avoid these pitfalls, when we seek pleasure.

### **Seek your chief pleasure in the time you spend with God**

The first step is that God must be your greatest source of pleasure. The pleasures associated with God are real, deep, complete, satisfying and eternal. King David testified in Psalm 16:11, *“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”* I believe that King David, who wrote this psalm was describing for us what he himself had experienced when he had his quiet time alone with God. There were many things that King David enjoyed: he had wealth and riches and lived as a king in a nice palace at a time when God blessed the nation of Israel. And yet of all the joys that King David enjoyed in this life, he says that none could be compared to the joy of being in the presence of God.

This verse uses a figure of speech called an anthropomorphism. When David refers to God’s right hand, this does not mean that God actually has physical hands and feet like we do. What the word “right hand” means in this verse must be connected with God’s presence mentioned earlier in the verse. It refers to a special position of close, intimate favour with God. This is a privilege that very few are allowed to have. Our Lord Jesus Christ is said to be at God the Father’s right hand. He enjoys the sweetest and most intimate fellowship with the Father. And the good news is that we who are in



Christ, can also now partake of this very close intimate fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

And King David, who has partaken of that sweet fellowship tells us that there are great pleasures there: *“At thy right hand, there are pleasures for evermore.”* What are these pleasures? The Hebrew word used here is *“Na’iy moth”* and in different passages it describes all kinds of things that are lovely, pleasant, sweet, and delightful, which may include nice music, or delicious food, or physical beauty. In this particular context, however, it must refer to all that is lovely, pleasant, sweet and delightful to the soul.

When we spend time alone with the Lord, we will enjoy a deep sense of delight and pleasure that is very hard for me to describe. It is like a foretaste of heaven even while we are still here on earth. But the best part of it all is that the pleasures are lasting. They are eternal. They do not disappear or vanish away, the way that earthly pleasure often does.

This is why in Psalm 27:4, David testified, *“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to enquire in his temple.”* If we can find full satisfaction in God alone, like David did, then all other pleasures in this world will not attract us as much as they used to. And even if we lose them or have to forsake them, we will not feel a sense of loss. Therefore, seek pleasure first in your relationship with God.

## **Keep yourself away from all sinful pleasures**

We have already seen how any pleasure that involves sin is wrong, and not to be sought after. If I have to steal in order to obtain pleasure, that pleasure is wrong. If I must tell a lie to obtain pleasure, then that pleasure is not for me. If I must hurt someone or even myself in order to gain the pleasure, that pleasure is wrong — and that is why it is wrong to smoke, drink, take drugs, sniff glue, or

overeat. The second step is to keep away from any pleasure that involves breaking any of God's commandments.

Is it alright for a Christian to drink if he does it moderately? No, because that is the first step toward addiction. Many alcoholics started just by drinking on social occasions.

Another sinful pleasure we should not covet is Gambling. Gambling is a social evil that has ruined many lives and even whole families. It ranges from playing with one-arm bandit coin machines, to games like mahjong, and poker to betting on horses, buying four digits, or buying Singapore Sweep tickets. Now even passengers on SIA flights are able to indulge in playing black jack and one-arm bandit machines during flights. But we must not compromise our conduct. Stay away from such machines or places that have such machines. Why? Because the tendency of our weak human nature is to succumb to temptation and to come under its powerful effects.

The most sought after pleasure in this world today is sexual pleasure. And sexual pleasure is a gift from God, but one that we can legitimately enjoy only within the confines of marriage. That is what it was designed for.

Therefore any sexual pleasure that is derived outside of marriage is outside of God's plan. This is why adultery, fornication, pre-marital sexual relations, homosexual and other immoral relations must all be regarded as sinful pleasures, and we must keep ourselves far away from them.

We have also seen that there are some forms of pleasure that may not be sinful, but are just closely identified with the sinful lifestyle of the world. Here we must learn to exercise discernment between what is good and bad in culture. Questions often arise about where we should draw the line. For instance between rock music and classical music, there are so many other different types, forming a gradual continuum from one end to the other. A young person may say, "Alright I won't listen any more to rock music, but what about jazz

or pop music? or country and western? or folk music? How close can I get without crossing the acceptable limit?"

Once upon a time, a rich man put an advertisement for a chauffer to drive his car. Three men responded and came for interview. Each of them was asked exactly the same question by the rich man: "How close can you drive to the edge of a cliff?"

The first man interviewed said, "I can drive so well that I can drive the car one foot away from the edge of the cliff."

The second man, not to be outdone, said, "My driving skill is so good that I can drive just one inch away from the edge of the cliff."

But when the third man was asked this, he replied, "I will drive as far away from the edge of the cliff as possible!" Well I think you can guess who got the job – the third man.

The lesson to learn from this is that if we understand the issues at stake, we would not ask how far we can go in seeking pleasure in questionable forms, nor would we be always asking people to define for us the furthest possible limit in the kind of music we are allowed to hear, the kind of clothes we can wear, the kind of places we can visit, the kind of shows that we can watch, or the kind of functions we can attend without crossing the threshold. If we understand the danger that comes from associating oneself with sinful lifestyles and the folly of loving the world and the things that are in the world, if we treasure our relationship with God and do not want to compromise our love for Him, then we should be asking instead, "How far can I safely keep myself away from these things?" And whenever we feel even the slightest doubt that God would approve of the pleasure in question, we should be willing to give it up.

## **Receive good pleasures from God with thanksgiving**

In the epistle written by James, he said, "*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...*" (James 1:17). The Apostle Paul said in 1 Thess 5:18 "*In*

*everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”*

The thing that is being stressed here, is seeing all the good things we find in our lives, including the pleasures we enjoy, always with reference to God. A Christian does not look at these things as just things by themselves anymore, but always with reference to God, recognising Him as the Maker and Final Cause of all things. The third step involves the Christian acknowledging the fact that He gave them out of His love and kindness to us.

This is very different from the way that the world perceives pleasures and good things in life. They see them as things that every man has a right to have; as things they deserve to have, for their own efforts. As a result, when a person does not get to have some good thing or pleasure, he feels that he has an unfair deal in life. He feels deprived, he feels that he is not getting his fair share. On the other hand, a person who has all the good things and pleasures he wants, feels that his whole life consists of them; he would not give them up for anything because he feels it is his right to keep them.

Is this the way we should view good pleasures and good things in our lives? Not at all, because God is not considered at all. And He is really the One responsible for bringing all the good things into our lives, and into the lives of non-Christians. Therefore, we regard them as things received from Him, as things to be thankful for, and as things that must never be put before God in terms of priority. If, for the sake of God, we cannot have something good that we like, we should not feel sore about it. God comes first, and this sometimes requires us to give up good legitimate pleasures or to limit them.

This is a very important biblical principle for us, and it was stated by Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians, not once, but twice, *“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”* (1 Cor 6:12). And *“All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”* (! Cor 10:23).

This principle must be applied when we have to choose between things that are legitimate and things that are expedient, or more important. There are many legitimate pleasures and comforts in our lives. Sleep is one of them. Watching television is another. Then there is the pursuit of various kinds of hobbies: surfing the internet, collecting stamps, playing chess, reading novels, body-building, painting, sports, going window shopping. A Christian does not do anything wrong if he does any of these things. But if, as a result of them, there is not enough time to spend with the Lord, or to do what He wants us to do, and if we find ourselves neglecting our responsibilities as God's stewards, of caring for our loved ones and helping others who are in need, then we must seriously assess our priorities and apply this principle. Sometimes we must firmly regulate our time spent in them and discipline ourselves to stop doing something even though we want to continue, as we are enjoying them so much.

And this we do, because of the deep conviction in our hearts that God must come first. What we enjoy are good things that He has given to us. They can be put aside when His business requires our time and attention.

A father once bought a computer for his son. The son was, of course, delighted and the father told him, "Son, I give this to you because I love you and want you to enjoy yourself with this. You can play whatever games and programs you want. But I ask only this of you: be good, don't neglect your studies, Listen to what I tell you to do, and don't be stubborn." The son eagerly agreed to all of these things and thanked his father greatly. But later on he became so engrossed with the computer, and I think you can guess the rest of the story: he neglected his studies, was stubborn when told to stop, and misbehaved when he could not have his way, and he also spent less time helping his father with household chores and even less time talking with him.

We have the tendency to be like that with the things that God gives to us to enjoy. And every Christian must be careful. This lesson

gives us three important steps to follow to avoid the pitfalls of handling pleasure in this world. They are: (1) Seek your chief pleasure in the time you spend with God. (2) Keep yourself away from all sinful pleasures. (3) Receive good pleasures from God with thanksgiving, making sure always that God has first priority over them.

Every Christian must consider the following questions honestly. Have you been putting pleasure before God? Have you been secretly indulging in some form of pleasure which you know He does not approve of? Have you grown cold in spiritual things because you have become involved in pleasures that are closely associated with the sinful lifestyle of this world? In areas where we have fallen short, we must ask the Lord's forgiveness and his strength to help us start afresh to live our lives for Him rather than for ourselves.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What can you do to make God your greatest source of pleasure?
2. Are you pursuing any forms of pleasure that are questionable or sinful?
3. Are you pursuing any forms of pleasure that are closely associated with an ungodly lifestyle?
4. Are there any legitimate pleasures that have taken up more of your time and energy than it should?

## **How to Handle the Practices of the Non-Christian World (Ephesians 4:17-5:12)**

How should we respond to certain practices that we see our friends, colleagues or classmates doing? How far can we participate with them in the things they do? When should we say “No”?

Anyone who has worked in the building or engineering profession would know that there are certain reference books that must be referred to, known as the Code of Practice. These books define things like factors of safety, the minimum number of steel bars that must go in a column or beam, or the minimum time needed for the curing of a concrete slab. And all who are involved in the design and construction of buildings and other structures are required to comply strictly with the code of practice. If one fails to comply with it, his name may be struck off the register, and he will not be allowed to practice as an engineer or contractor.

But sometimes, under the pressure of deadlines or pressing financial obligations, there are inevitably some who try to “cut corners.” The results can be really disastrous! Twelve years ago, we saw what happened in the awful Hotel New World disaster which claimed about fifty lives, including the life of the very person who was responsible for its substandard construction. What a big price he had to pay for violating the Code of Practice he was required to follow!

As Christians, we are also required to comply strictly with a Code of Practice as we endeavour to live our lives in a world that is

largely non-Christian. And if we were to cut corners due to the great pressure exerted on us by those around us, we may also suffer disastrous results. Our testimony before the world would be destroyed. Not too long ago, there was an article on the front page of the newspapers about a senior official in a statutory board who was charged and arrested for corruption. It was specifically mentioned in the article that this official was a very devoted Christian and that he had wrongfully awarded contracts to his church friends. How this shames the name of Christ! Therefore, since we know how important it is for us to be above all reproach and follow the Code of Practice, let us now pay close attention as we look into it and study it.

In Ephesians 4:17 to 5:12. First, we notice that in this passage the Apostle Paul uses the word “walk” three times as a metaphor for the way we conduct ourselves daily: “*Walk not as other Gentiles walk*” (4:17). “*Walk in love*” (5:2), and “*Walk as children of light.*” (5:8). These 3 exhortations are found in a passage which defines what our standards of conduct should be. Our conduct should be different from other Gentiles who do not know God at all (v.17). We cannot adopt the world’s practices and local ethical and moral standards as our own. According to verse 19, these are characterised by lasciviousness, uncleanness and greediness. According to verse 22, we must put off this kind of conduct which belongs to the old sinful nature (which is referred to here as the “old man.”)

In Ephesians 5:5-6, we are told that this kind of conduct disqualifies a person from having an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and that this conduct is the main reason why the great wrath of God is going to come upon all unbelievers one day. With such a strong warning we must, therefore, keep ourselves away from the things that unbelievers practice, and have no part in them. In 5:11 we are told not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them. Remaining silent is not enough; our disapproval must be expressed.

Now, besides defining what our conduct should not be, the passage also defines what our conduct should be. While Ephesians



4:22 tells us to put off the old conduct, verse 24 tells us that we are to put on this new conduct which is created in righteousness and true holiness. The picture used here is that of changing clothes — taking off a dirty soiled shirt and putting on a new, clean one. According to 5:1, this conduct makes us followers of God, as His dear children. To be specific, we should conduct ourselves in love as 5:2 mentions, and as children of light. Light is a metaphor often used in the Bible, to represent holiness. This means we must now live in purity, lives that are clean and holy.

But what exactly do we mean by all these terms that characterise this new conduct? How do we accurately define things like righteousness, purity and holiness? We cannot just guess what they mean, and we do not have to. God has already spelled these out for us carefully in the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were given to Israel when God entered into a covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Remember how Moses received them on two tables of stone written by God himself. But they are also meant to be the standard of conduct for God’s people of all time and thus, it stands as such for us today. All the ethical teaching of both the Old and New Testaments are based on the Ten Commandments. The Sermon on the Mount, for example, was basically a detailed exposition by Jesus of the Ten Commandments. Of all the Ten Commandments, the last five are especially very important as standards for our dealings with people around us.

And the interesting thing we will find, is that these last five commandments are restated in this passage of Ephesians we are studying. Look at 4:25, “*Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour:*” This is a restatement of the ninth commandment: “*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour*”?

Look at the next verse: “*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:*” Is not this a warning for us to be careful not to break the sixth commandment, “*Thou shalt not kill*”?

In verse 28, *“Let him that stole steal no more”* This is the eighth commandment, *“Thou shalt not steal.”*

In Ephesians 5:3, *“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.”* In this verse, there are references two commandments: the tenth commandment *“Thou shalt not covet,”* and the seventh commandment, *“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”* This passage tells us basically how to apply the last five of the Ten Commandments, and we will consider them in the order in which Paul gave them in the fifth chapter of Ephesians.

## **The Ninth Commandment**

The ninth commandment is restated in Ephesians 4:25, *“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.”* How serious is the sin of lying? To the world, this does not seem to be a very serious sin. But in Revelation 21:27, we are told that God hates lying so much that no liar will be allowed to enter heaven. And Revelation 21:8 tells us that all who are liars will have a part in the lake of fire and brimstone together with Satan, the father of lies.

But what is a lie? How do we define it? A lie is not just to say words that are not true (e.g. when parents tell their children a bedtime fiction story, they are not lying). And sometimes a person can use words that are true but still be lying. And sometimes a person can be lying just by keeping silent! So what is a lie? A lie is any attempt to deliberately deceive someone.

Deceit leads away from reality so that ultimately, Truth is not recognised. And there is no more sure method to destroy character than to deceive. Deceit fouls all relationships. Once a person has been deliberately deceived by another, it is difficult to restore full confidence. There are various ways in which such deceit may be carried out.

**Distortion of Truth:** The usual form of lying is to distort the truth. For example, the boss does not want to be disturbed and so he tells the secretary to tell anyone who calls: “If anyone calls, tell him I am not in.” This is not true because he is actually in the office all the time. Supposing you are the secretary, what would you do?

Here is a dilemma: Would you carry out his instructions to tell an obvious lie to everyone who called, just because you want to keep your job? Or would you refuse to obey the order given and tell people who called: “The boss is in” and get sacked for insubordination? There is a better way. Simply tell people, “The boss has instructed me to tell anyone who called, that he is not in. I think he really does not want to be disturbed.”

**Deceit by Silence:** A person can be guilty of lying just by saying nothing. Let me give you an example. Some of you have cars. And one day you drive your car out of a parking lot and accidentally put a dent in someone’s parked car, and no one saw what happened. What will you do? Will you pretend not to have noticed and hope that no one else saw it, and drive off because you have to hurry to an appointment. If you do that, then when the driver returns and finds the dent in his car, he will of course be furious, but he does not know who did it because of your lie. In a situation like that, the right thing to do is to scribble a little note with an apology and your contact number on it and slip it under the owner’s windshield wiper.

**Deceit by Half-Truth:** A person can also lie with true words. For example, a person may quote another person out of context and thus deceive as to the meaning of the original statement, or tell only part of the truth, as Abraham did concerning his wife when the Egyptians saw Sarah and inquired how she was related to him. He said, “She is my sister” which was true, because they had the same father. But he left out the more crucial part of the truth, which was the fact that she was also his wife. When he was found out, he was rebuked and chased out of Egypt. This was not a good testimony.

**Pretence:** In Genesis 27, the story is told of Jacob pretending to be Esau. When Isaac, their blind father wanted to bless Esau, Jacob and Rebecca conspired to impersonate his brother and received his blessing. The same thing happens today when a person pretends to have knowledge when he only thinks or feels or guesses. He is deceiving others. This temptation is especially strong for someone who is recognised as an expert — the renowned teacher or physician, for example, who is asked a difficult question. He has absolutely no idea what the answer is, but does not want to lose face by saying “I don’t know.” And so he makes up an answer to impress others.

**Exaggeration:** Do you sometimes exaggerate? For example, you are given a task to do but you don’t feel like doing it because you are a little tired, and so you deliberately make it worse by saying, “I am much too exhausted to do it.” Or perhaps you have to solve a problem, and you tried to do it once but failed, and you don’t feel like trying again, so you say, “I tried everything, but nothing worked.” Ananias and Saphira were guilty of this: they exaggerated that they had given all, when in fact it was not all. They lied to the Holy Spirit and were struck dead!

Now, while the verse in Eph 4:25 tells us to put away all forms of lying, it adds that we should speak every man truth with his neighbour. We need to be honest, truthful in our conduct. People must be able to trust in and rely on whatever we say. And we also need to keep our word. If you make a promise or pledge to do something, always be sure to keep it. Do not make promises that you cannot keep or that you do not intend to keep. If someone shares a need or a problem with you and you say “I will be praying for you” — please be sure to pray for him.

So as we think about the ninth commandment let us be careful to use our tongues well, not to lie, but to speak the truth, and more than that, let us use our tongues to edify people and minister grace to them as Ephesians 4:29 says: *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”*

The next category of practices, which relates to the sixth commandment, which is “*thou shalt not kill.*”

## **The Sixth Commandment**

“*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:*” (Eph 4:26). This is related to the teaching that our Lord Jesus Christ gave in the sixth commandment in the Sermon on the Mount. “*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*” (Matt 5:21-22).

When Christ taught on the sixth commandment He included anger and verbal abuse as sins against it. Jesus did not say that they were as evil as murder. But they are the same variety of sin and may not be excused as mere human weakness. The heart attitude of anger against a person can lead to hatred and even murder if left unchecked.

There is such a thing as righteous anger, which is directed against sin rather than people. For example in Exodus 32:19 “*Moses’ anger waxed hot*” because the Israelites had sinned against God by worshipping the golden calf. Anger becomes sinful when it is for the wrong reason or results in wrong action. According to our text “*Be ye angry, and sin not*” (Eph 4:26), we can be angry for a moment if there is a good reason for it, but we must be careful not to let that anger grow into sin. The same verse reminds us not to hold a grudge and allow our anger against someone keep on burning: “*Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*” Let your anger cool off quickly. This especially applies to parents when disciplining children — never discipline a child in anger.

Some people have the problem of getting angry too quickly. We say that they are short-tempered or that they have a short fuse. Many acts of violence and even killing may be the result of a person losing his or her temper. If you have this problem you need to read James 1:19 *“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”* Learn how to be slow to anger, you can overcome your short-temper through learning to love those around you, and through the power of Christ that works in you.

In Ephesians 4:31, 32 we are told what we ought to do instead of being angry: *“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”* A readiness to forgive helps us not to be angry with people when they do something against us. And we can be ready to forgive if we always remind ourselves that we have been forgiven of all our sins by God.

## **The Eighth Commandment**

Stealing may be defined as depriving someone of the use of something that is rightfully theirs, no matter how small or insignificant that item may be. Do you know that the eighth commandment is one of the most quoted commandments in the Bible, and that stealing is one of the most mentioned sins? It is still the most widespread sin today. There are many punishable crimes in society that are within the category of stealing: theft, housebreaking, robbery, shoplifting, embezzlement of funds, cheating, extortion, criminal breach of trust, tax evasion, and kidnapping.

But *“Thou shalt not steal”* applies not only to property and money; many other things can be stolen — for example, to take credit for something that was done by someone else. Copying homework assignment is another form of stealing — the stealing of grades. There are five kinds of people who must be particularly careful not to steal.

**The Borrower:** Though borrowing is not wrong in itself, it is prudent to avoid borrowing when possible. It can become a habit! But if we do borrow, good care should be taken of all borrowed items. If we spoil something we borrow, we should replace it with a new one. It should be returned on time. Do not hold on to it longer than you need it. Some things that people are sometimes careless about: books, tools, clothes, utensils, furniture.

**The Businessman:** Businessmen must be honest, and free from any form of cheating, stealing or taking advantage of others. E.g. selling defective products, selling pirated items. Under-declaring the price of a piece of property. (Use to be very common in resale flats a few years ago.) In the corporate and industrial world — technicians or junior executives have been hired away from their company by competing companies in order to get its secrets.

Some businessmen attempt to make more money by hoarding up supplies of a basic necessity — to create an artificial shortage and so increase the price. This is also stealing. In some countries when one's business is in trouble, one can declare bankruptcy in order to avoid obligations, maintain one's personal resources (even wealth, with a clever lawyer) and build a fortune that cannot be touched by former creditors. This may be legal, but it does not make it moral. Liabilities must not be avoided.

Do not delay the payment of bills when you are able to pay. Some are in the habit of taking things on credit and stretching their credit as far as possible. The sum of money he ought to pay, that is accruing interest in his own bank account, is not his to hold on to. Tax evasion is condemned by Christ. “*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's*” (Matt 22:21a).

**The Owner:** Forgery and fraud are hardly heard of here in Singapore. Recently 40 employees of Seagate were charged with forging MCs to get medical leave. There are other forms of forgery that are very widespread. For example, plagiarism, “the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of

another author, and representation of them as one's original work" is commonly practised even by some students. Even teachers sometimes steal the ideas and work of their own students! Proper acknowledgement is important — give credit to whom credit is due by using footnotes.

Owning and using computer software without paying for it at all (i.e. just copying it from a friend). This is permissible if one is only trying it out for a few days, but if he decides to keep using it he must pay for it. If he decides not to use it, he should remove it from his computer. If you cannot afford expensive software and want to avoid this, use Public Domain Software: those that have no copyright but are distributed free.

Be careful of any infringements of copyright law. A common practice: you need to get a textbook but when you look at the price, you say, "It's so expensive!." So you save money by photocopying the whole book instead of buying the original. What should you do if a book is out of print? Write to the publisher for permission to xerox a copy.

**The Employee:** Carelessness concerning work responsibilities is also stealing. Those of you who are in the working world, have probably seen all kinds of ways in which people steal at work, such as colleagues who come late for work and leave early. They pretend to be working hard when the boss is around. They take long breaks, they drag a job assignment to fill up the time — "skiving." If we are being paid to do a certain amount of work, be sure to do at least that amount of work.

There are small ways in which people steal: not paying the full fare for bus rides and hoping that the bus inspector will not come. Putting an unfranked stamp back on an envelop to use it again; moving with a child through the MRT gate, when the child is already old enough to have to pay his own fare.

"Finder's keepers, loser's weepers" is not a biblical text nor is it taught at all in the Scriptures. To keep an article that has been found



or comes to one by error, such as when a store sales clerk returns more change than is due, is to steal. What if the owner of a sum of money cannot be traced (e.g. you found it in a drinks dispensing machine or in a pay phone)? Donate it to a good cause, not your own.

**The Traveller:** Dishonest declaring at customs. For example, smuggling in electronic equipment that has customs duty to be paid on it. Though it is true that customs officials are sometimes corrupt and that they may overcharge or ask for a bribe, we must be above board.

Positively, instead of stealing we should work hard, be honest, be generous and give more than what is required. Ephesians 4:28 *“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”*

For example, it is good practice when you borrow an item to give it back to the owner with something extra, a little interest just to show your goodwill and gratitude. Work hard to be able to give to those in need, to support the weak. Acts 20:35, *“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

## **The Seventh Commandment**

In Ephesians 5:2, two words are mentioned: Fornication and Uncleaness. These sins come under the 7th commandment: Exodus 20:14 *“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”* Human sexuality is actually one of God’s most delightful gifts to man. But remember that this joy is reserved for those who carefully follow the “Divine Manufacturer’s instructions.”

It becomes sinful when people fail to follow the instructions God gave for its use. Paul includes sexual sins in every one of his many lists of sins, and in most cases they head the list and receive the

greatest emphasis. Today we find that sexual sins are being promoted widely by popular media and behavioural scientists. They are trying to make people believe that true happiness is found outside monogamous faithful marriage. The latest therapy for boring marriages recommended is that both partners agree to have affairs with other couples! (Exchanging partners for a while, just like in social dancing.)

In Matthew 5:28, Christ spoke against lust and said that to look at a person lustfully is already committing adultery with that person in the heart. “*whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*” This can be called “Mental Infidelity”. A person whether married or single, is guilty of immorality when he or she has sexual thoughts about anyone who does not rightfully belong to him or her by marriage.

Some say that sexual fantasies are normal and harmless so long as the imagined acts are not carried out. But the danger of having such fantasies is that they do not satisfy: they just stimulate the desire for more and more until they ultimately lead a person into committing what he or she imagines. And that is why it is so dangerous to indulge in them. Every single act of sexual immorality begins with immoral thoughts. In fact one writer has said that the mind is the chief sex organ in the human body.

Therefore, we must “*flee youthful lusts*” (2 Tim 2:22). Do not let your mind imbibe anything that will cause temptation. Deliberately avoid the thing, the person, the place, the activity that sets the stage for temptation.

But one thing that is difficult to avoid is the mass media. We observe that much of the art, entertainment, and advertising in publicity and media today are suggestive. Whether the advertisement is for a car or a cup of tea, there is a beautiful woman in it. Christians who are in the advertising line or in mass communication must be very careful about this. Do not end up becoming a promoter of sin by using suggestive ideas to promote a product. Some Christians who

want to be successful and recognised by the world as writers or artists would try to excuse themselves by saying that they are just attempting to depict reality for the reader or viewer, whether that reality is sinful or not. But they forget that what they depict also causes the reader or viewer to experience them vicariously. So they cause people to sin.

What about dancing? Christ indicated that there are two sources of temptation: sight and touch (Matt 5:28-30). Physical touch normally stimulates the desire for more intimate contact and is biologically designed to prepare for conjugal relations. This is why dancing raises ethical questions. The only person that you should dance with is your spouse. To choose to dance with someone who is not one's spouse is to deliberately "*make provision for the flesh.*" So keep away from social dancing. It is full of potential moral danger. Furthermore, dancing halls are associated with a worldly lifestyle and we should keep away from them.

## **The Tenth Commandment**

Ephesians 5:2 tells us that just like fornication, covetousness is a sin that should not be found at all in the conduct of God's children. To covet is to seek for something, someone, some position, some recognition, or some pleasure not in the will of God for us. When we covet these things we are dissatisfied with God's care.

God views covetousness as a terrible evil. The world views it as the least of human problems and in fact encourages it as the route to all kinds of personal fulfilment. It is a deep-rooted problem in Singapore.

Now, the desire to have things is not evil in itself. When we are hungry, we desire food; when we are thirsty, we desire to drink, and when we are tired, we desire rest. But when these God-given desires become distorted, and aim at whatever God has not intended for us, rather than being content with what God has provided, then they become evil and destructive.

The covetous spirit leads to stealing, gluttony, drunkenness, adultery, scheming and plotting to make unjust gain, to pursue undue recognition, to give sparingly and grudgingly. Covetousness is a root sin that leads to other sins. It is opposed to God's greatest commandment: the commandment to love because covetousness is interested in getting; love is interested in giving.

Covetousness motivates people to gamble, and we have already seen that gambling is a sinful pleasure. But what about speculating on the stock, currency or property market? This is actually a form of gambling, as it has the same risks involved as gambling. There is nothing wrong, however, with investing in shares just as a means of getting dividends from a long term investment. No speculation is involved in this.

Sometimes, we are guilty of coveting non-material things. When we desire whatever is not ours in the will of God, we are coveting. It is possible to covet the position or abilities of another person. It is possible to covet the affection of another person, or the popularity of another person. We call these sins "envy", a particularly pernicious and destructive form of coveting. Envy is condemned in Galatians 5:21 as one of the "*works of the flesh.*"

It often leads to scheming and plotting by the person who envies, to bring the other person down or outdo his success. Cain killed his own brother, Abel, because he was envious of the approval Abel received from God for his offering. Jacob pretended to be his brother because he coveted his firstborn rights. How do we tell if we are envious or not? Ask yourself this question: Can I rejoice when others are successful in areas where I am not? If we can't rejoice when others increase or get promoted ahead of us, then there is probably envy in our heart. This then shows up the covetousness spirit in our hearts. And we have to deal with it before it destroys us and ruins our testimony.

Another form of non-material coveting is coveting a desired outcome. This often leads to the sin of bribery and corruption. These

sins are hated in the Bible. When a judge can be moved to acquit the guilty by receiving a gift from a person, both that person and the judge are guilty of covetousness. The person covets an illegitimate result while the unjust judge covets money.

We have looked at some of the practices relating to each of the five commandments. I am sure that some of you may probably have questions to ask regarding many other practices that were not mentioned.

To make decisions on questionable matters, you can use the following:

**1. Is it for the Lord? Does it bring praise to Him?**

*“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor 10:31). (See also Rom 14:6-8)

**2. Can I do it in His name (on His authority, implicating Him)? Can I thank Him for it?**

*“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Col 3:17).

**3. Can I take Jesus with me? Would Jesus do it?**

*“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?”* (Psalm 139:7). *“Christ liveth in me”* (Gal 2:20). *“Christ . . . leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”* (1 Pet 2:21). (See also Matt 28:19-20; John 14:16-17, 23)

**4. Does it belong in the home of the Holy Spirit?**

*“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”* (1 Cor 6:19, 20). (See also Eph 4:30).

**5. Is it of faith? Do I have misgivings?**

*“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).  
“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God” (1 John 3:21).*

**6. Does it positively benefit, build up (not simply, “Is it harmless?”)?**

*“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 14:19).  
“Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor 14:26). (See also Rom 15:2; 1 Cor 10:8; Eph 4:12-16)*

**7. Does it spring from, or lead to, love of this world and its value system?**

*“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). (See also Mark 9:47; 11:14-15).*

**8. Does it involve union with an unbeliever?**

*“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14).*

**9. Does it come from or have the potential of leading to bondage?**

*“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (1 Cor 10:23).*

**10. Is the motive pride, or love?**

*“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Cor 8:1, 2).*

**11. Is a godly mind-set the context of my decision on the matter?**

*“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are*

*pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil 4:8). (See also Rom 12:1-2)*

## **12. What does the church say about it?**

*“For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men” (Rom 14:18). “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Acts 15:28). (See also Rom 14:16).*

## **13. Would I like to be doing this when Jesus comes?**

*“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming . . . we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 2:28; 3:2-3). (See also 1 Thess 5:2-4; Matt 24:44-51; Luke 23:34-35).*

These questions are taken from a book that I would like to recommend for your reading. It is by Robertson McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*. A lot of what you read in this chapter is taken from this book.

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that one danger of discussing ethical issues like these is that it sometimes creates a judgmental fault-finding attitude among Christians, that can really spoil fellowship. Now, I want to stress very strongly, that the ones we should judge and find fault with primarily, are ourselves. If you have been personally convicted that something you have been doing is sinful or questionable, you need to deal with it with repentance. We need to ask God to forgive us for violating His Code of Practice, and resolve to put things right from now on, with divine help. Only when we are living holy and pure lives following the Code of Practice God has given us in His word very strictly, will we be able to build a

strong, solid testimony that will show to the world and to people around us that they need the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

Many times I have heard a new believer testify that what made him come to know Christ is that he saw something wonderfully different in the life of a Christian friend he knew. This Christian's life was full of goodness and righteousness. He was always honest and sincere. And the light that shone in this Christian's life was the light that guided him to find salvation in Christ, the true Light of the World.

We should perhaps ask ourselves whether our own lives are like that. Can people see the light shining in your life? Has someone ever told you that what brought him to Christ was the light that shone in your life? If we truly have been saved and love the Lord, let us strive to live as children of light.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Have you faced any situation where you had to make a decision to follow Christian standards of conduct rather than the world's standards of conduct?
2. Read Ephesians 5:4 — What limits should Christians have for their jokes and humor?
3. Ephesians 4:31 says that we should not speak evil about others. What guidelines should we observe in order that we will not be guilty of gossiping when we share about someone's needs and problems with others to be prayed for?
4. What attitude should a Christian have toward responsibilities at work and at home?



## **How to Handle our Relationships with the Non-Christian World**

(Matthew 10:34-37)

When we speak about relationships, the most important relationship is that of marriage. The reason this is such an important relationship is that it is the only human relationship we have that must cause necessary changes in many other relationships. When a man gets married, he commits himself fully and only to his wife. This instantly causes a change in his relationships with his parents — he is no longer dependent on them, and with his friends — he is no longer single and free to be very close to them, and most especially with female friends — he cannot pursue an intimate relationship with any female friend other than his wife. He can no longer relate to them the same way that he did before, because he is now a married man. The marriage relationship also creates many new relationships for him. All of a sudden, he now has parents-in-law, brothers and sisters-in-law, new uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews, all from his wife’s family. The same thing also happens for the wife. Her relationships with others also change as a result of the marriage.

And this is the point that I am making: this is why, when we become Christians, all our relationships with everyone around us are drastically affected. When we turned to Christ for salvation, we entered into a permanent and unbreakable covenant relationship with Him. We took Him to be our God. And He took us to be His people. And this binds us now to God in a relationship which is very much like a marriage relationship, but one that is much closer and much more important than marriage. We are now “*married to God*” in a

sense. And He is a Holy and Righteous God, who will not tolerate any sin. And this relationship which we have with God must bring about some fundamental changes in the way we relate to others, and especially in the way we relate to non-Christians around us.

I think I might not be wrong to assume that most of us are first generation Christians. Most of us probably came from non-Christian family backgrounds. Before we came to know the Lord, we probably did not face much conflict in our relationships with our parents, brothers and sisters. And we were free to make friends with anyone we liked. Nothing at all restricted us from developing any friendships and relationships with others except of course, for our own personal likes and dislikes.

But after we became Christians, our relationships changed. Our new-found relationship with God caused these changes and we found ourselves no longer able to enjoy the same level of intimacy that we used to have with those who are still outside Christ. Conflicts suddenly arise where there were no conflicts before. Some of us had greater conflicts than others. I have heard one brother testify that when he told his widowed mother that he had become a Christian, she instantly chased him out of the house and would not let him in for a few days. Other brethren may have received just a reprimand or the cold shoulder for a while. Thus far I have never heard anyone testify that their non-Christian loved ones were overjoyed or thrilled to hear that they had become Christians!

According to the passage we read awhile ago from Matthew 10:34-37, the gospel is like a sword that divides families, setting a person's own loved ones against him or her. And when such deep conflict arises, our love for Christ must remain strong and steadfast, although we may feel a great sense of sadness over the changes that has taken place.

And our close friendships with non-Christians may also undergo the same kind of change. We may still enjoy each other's company and conversation for a time, but as we grow in our love for Christ,

while most of our non-Christian friends remain unreceptive to the gospel, a painful parting of ways inevitably comes.

Usually, however, the pain of losing close friends is compensated by the joy of making new friends with like-minded Christians in church, or in fellowship groups. We develop new relationships that are closer and more meaningful to us than the ones we used to have, because there is now an added dimension in the relationship: a spiritual dimension that we did not have in our earlier relationships.

But our relationships with the non-Christian world are not over yet, because our daily interaction with people in the course of our work or studies still brings us into contact with them.

And God never intended us to isolate ourselves completely from society. In fact the Lord wants us to still be in the world, and to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13, 14). For oftentimes it is only through the relationships that non-Christians have with us that they will be able to learn about Christ and be saved.

But while God wants us to be in the world, He also wants us to be careful not to be of the world (John 17:15, 16). And what this means ultimately is that we must strike a careful balance in our relationships with non-Christians. On one hand we must be close enough to them to influence them with our Christian lives, but on the other hand we must not be so close to them as to be influenced by their non-Christian lives. Striking this balance is not an easy thing to do. And we need to study what God's Word says about these relationships by looking at three important guidelines that we should follow closely in our relationships with non-Christians.

### **Strive to bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ**

We see this in Philippians 2:15, 16: *“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ.”* In 1 Peter 3:1-2, the wives of non-Christians are told to win

their husbands to Christ by godly submission and conduct, *“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.”*

Both of these verses emphasise the important role that our conduct plays in winning our non-Christian friends and loved ones to Christ. Non-Christians should find in Christians, people who are most generous, reliable and trustworthy, honest and sincere, gentle and kind, helpful, patient and forgiving to them. Look at Galatians 6:10, *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”* In Matthew 5:44, Jesus says that even if non-Christians hate us, curse us and abuse us, we should still bless them, do good to them and pray for them.

The Apostle Paul was persecuted many times by his own countrymen, the Jews, who were non-Christians. And yet he earnestly prayed for their salvation. This is what he said, *“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”* (Romans 10:1)

Is it your heart’s desire and prayer to God that your own loved ones who are still outside Christ, may be saved? If it is, you must do your best to let them see Christ in your life at home. If you have offended one of them in any way, be very quick to apologise and make amends. And if a loved one has offended you in any way, be more than willing to forgive him. Do not let any grievance or grudges remain between you and your loved ones. Some of us may have unpleasant memories of the past when we were not treated fairly by our loved ones or were given much unfair punishment by our own parents. Do not hold this against them. Learn to forgive them and forget the past. And we are able to do this through Christ who now lives in us.

And always be ready to demonstrate love, care and concern for them. For example, remembering the birthdays, wedding anniversaries, of our parents, brothers and sisters can help tremendously. Visiting them and offering our help when they shift house, or when a new baby comes, or when someone is hospitalised, is also useful. And try your best to be available to encourage them when they are going through a difficult trial or problem in life. Very often it is through times when our family members and friends are going through trials and periods of suffering, like sudden illness, grief and loss, that we have perfect opportunities to share the gospel of Christ with them and get a favourable response.

And when you have the opportunity to share Christ with a non-Christian friend or loved one, remember that manner in which you share Christ with them is as important as the message. Your speech should always be gentle and gracious, and yet also persuasive and penetrating. We see this in Colossians 4:5, 6 — “*Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time* (which means making the most of every opportunity we have). *Let your speech be alway with grace* (which means speaking graciously and pleasantly), *seasoned with salt* (which means that whatever we say is to be pure and penetrating), *that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*”

Try not to condemn their gods or religion directly or make fun of their beliefs. They might take this as a personal insult to them and will not listen to you after that. There are gentler and more effective ways to help them understand the truth, like talking about the peace and blessings you have found in trusting in Jesus alone. So do your best to bring the non-Christians in your life to Christ. That is our first guideline. Let us now go on to look at the second guideline we must follow in our relationships with non-Christians:

## **Guard yourself from being influenced by them to compromise your loyalty of God**

This principle can be seen clearly in Deuteronomy 13:6-10, *“If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.”*

Now of course this does not mean that we must put to death anyone who leads us away from the Lord today. Remember that this command was given in the context of Israel, which was a theocracy, ruled by God Himself. The church and state were not separate but were one and the same. Spiritual apostasy was therefore regarded as a criminal offence, equivalent to treason, which deserved a death sentence.

We are no longer under a theocracy today, so this punishment does not apply any more. But the principle behind it all is still very applicable to us. We must not allow anyone to compromise our relationship with God, even if they are people who are very close to us. The Bible shows us the disastrous results of violating this principle in the life of Solomon: King Solomon with all of his great God-given wisdom could not resist the strong influence of the 700 wives and 300 concubines he married. Most of them were actually gifts to him from neighbouring nations that wanted his favour. But these women brought their pagan idol worship right into Jerusalem and gradually they led Solomon into idolatry. First Kings 11:4-6 relates the sad account of Solomon’s spiritual decline: *“For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart*

*after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father.”*

This was one of the saddest turning points in OT history, because it brought the whole nation of Israel from the great heights of its golden age of spiritual and material prosperity all the way down into the depths of sinful darkness and destruction. Let this example of Solomon be a grim reminder to us of the dangers of allowing ourselves to be influenced to compromise our commitment and loyalty to God through our relationships with non-Christians.

There are some who have the mistaken idea that in order to win non-Christians to Christ, they must identify with them and come down to their level, even to the point of adopting the same kind of appearance, language and worldly lifestyle that they have. They think that this was what the Apostle Paul meant when he said “*I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*” (1 Corinthians 9:22) So, to reach out to those who frequent discos and other nite spots, they actually join in with them, going to these places and doing whatever their non-Christian friends do, hoping that this would give them the opportunity to communicate the gospel to them. But what usually happens is the very opposite. The non-Christian asks them, “How is it that you as a Christian can indulge in all these things with us?” This kind of evangelism is known as infiltration, and it does not work.

Remember this principle: you must never allow any friendship or relationship you have to compromise your loyalty and commitment to God. If you have a good relationship with a friend who is a non-Christian and it has been going on for some time and you find that all your efforts to influence him for Christ are not producing any results; and you find also that it is starting to have an adverse influence on

you spiritually, then you should seriously consider ending the relationship.

When I was a teenager, I had a close friend in school whom I was very fond of, because we really had so much in common. We were always together, studying, eating and playing. We went through secondary school, pre-U and even NS together. But I was a Christian and he was not.

And though I had tried a number of times to share Christ with him, he refused to budge an inch from his Buddhist beliefs. When we became university students, I saw him less and less because we were in different campuses. And because I became more involved at that time in a Christian fellowship group and was growing spiritually, I did not have much time for him. I had to turn him down a number of times when he asked me to go for a concert or party. My friend was upset about this and he came and confronted me one evening with another friend. We had a very long heart to heart talk and it finally boiled down to this: he felt that my commitment to Christ was hindering our friendship and I felt that our friendship was endangering my commitment to Christ. And so with heavy hearts, we ended our friendship. It was a painful decision, but it was necessary.

But this raises the question: what if the relationship that is affecting my commitment to God is not just a friendship, but a family bond? What if my parents, brothers or sisters are the non-Christians who are influencing me against Christ? Then I cannot just leave and separate myself from their influence. Instead I have to resist it. There may be times when issues like ancestor worship, eating food that has been offered to idols, and Chinese funeral rites will come up. And because we love and respect our parents and do not want to upset them, it might be quite tempting to just do everything they want us to do. Then we must remember the important principle that no matter how much we want to please our loved ones, we cannot compromise our loyalty to God.



There is one way that you can avoid unpleasant confrontations if you come from a non-Christian family: talk with them plainly about these issues long before any critical situations arise. For example, if a Chinese festival is coming, it is good to tell them a few weeks beforehand that you as a Christian cannot eat the food that will be offered to idols. They might not be happy to hear this, but at least this will give them time to get used to the idea, and you can avoid greater unhappiness.

Now, what if you are not an adult yet and your non-Christian parents do not allow you at all to come to church on Sundays? Please do not do what some have done: lie to their parents that they are going to the library or community centre when they are actually going to church or Bible Study. The end does not justify the means. Imagine how that will affect your testimony when they discover the truth.

If you are faced with this situation, what you should do is to obey them, pray that God would soften their hearts, and keep asking again and again to be allowed to go to church. In the meantime, you can still keep the Lord's Day holy as you worship the Lord at home, in your quiet time, and fellowship with Christian friends in school. Ask your Christian friends to pray for you. And if your parents can see that your life has changed for the better, that you have become more obedient and loving, that will help prepare them for the day that the Lord will move their hearts to give you permission. You can think of your situation like the Jews in captivity, who were not allowed by their Gentile lords to go back to Jerusalem, rebuild the temple and worship God there, until God moved the heart of the Gentile King Cyrus to give them permission. In the meantime, they continued to worship God in the land of their captivity in synagogues. The principle of submission to God-ordained parental authority applies here.

We now go on to look at the third and final guideline that you should follow for your relationships with non-Christians.

## **Do not become unequally yoked with them**

The Scriptures very clearly demarcate a line that we must never cross when we develop relationships with non-Christians. Once we cross that line, we become *unequally yoked*. This term is taken from 2 Corinthians 6:14, “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*”

We would be going against the Lord directly if we involve ourselves in relationships that compromise our holiness, and especially in relationships with members of the opposite sex. This must be a major concern for all who are not married yet. Let us face the facts — many if not most of you who are now unmarried, by sheer probability, will have settled down with a life partner in five or ten years’ time. You may deny it now and say, “Oh no, not me – I am quite content to remain free and single,” but after some years, for some uncanny reason, you meet someone whose personality and disposition somehow attracts you and affects your whole life, and you might just change your mind very quickly!

But this is where you have to proceed with the utmost care. I say this with great emphasis, because I have known so many fine Christian brothers and sisters who ended up marrying non-Christians, even though they knew full well exactly what the Bible says about unequally yoked partnerships.

The question is sometimes raised, “I know it is wrong to marry a non-Christian, but can I go out for a date with a non-Christian?” Please realise that this is a dangerous thing to do. A Christian friend I knew when I was a university student was very attracted to a tall and handsome classmate who was not a believer. One day, he asked her out for a date, and she found it hard to resist his request. In spite of her Christian convictions, she went out with him, reasoning to herself that she will use the opportunity to win him to Christ. This missionary dating did not lead him to Christ but instead it led them both deeper and deeper into a steady relationship.

Her closest Christian friends observed this and they all counselled her about the dangers of the relationship, and then in desperation, she asked me to do an evangelistic Bible study with him. She prayed very hard that he would be converted. After about 8 weeks of in-depth personal Bible study, this tall guy told me that he now accepted Christ into his life. You can imagine how overjoyed my friend was when she heard the news. They started going to church together, reading the Bible and praying, but did they live happily ever after? — No they did not! As soon as their relationship became steady enough, he stopped going to church, stopped reading the Bible, stopped praying and professing to be a Christian. On looking back, I realise that his conversion was a false one, because what he wanted was her, not Christ. As she continued her relationship with him, her own spiritual life suffered severe backsliding, and the last that I heard is that she has not yet come back to the Lord.

The tragedy of this story is that it is not an isolated incident, but is repeated again and again as time after time single Christian men and women find themselves attracted to non-Christians by a love that is not from God. It is never God's will for a Christian to fall in love with a non-Christian. Probably no committed Christian ever sets out purposely to fall in love with a non-Christian. The relationship starts out as plain, simple friendship or even a casual acquaintance.

The critical point when the faith of a single Christian is put to the test is when the friendship crosses the line into a dating relationship, a relationship which is exclusive to some extent. He spends all the time with his non-Christian date and is not keen to bring her to fellowship with his Christian friends. As he spends less time with them, he cuts himself off from their support and admonition and has no one to turn to when problems begin. Single Christians must be extremely careful and selective about who they should and should not date. Why? Because for most men and women, some date will eventually lead to marriage. While the purposes of dating go beyond just looking for a marriage partner, the fact is that the majority of

marriages (and probably all marriages in Singapore today) begin with a dating relationship. When you regard someone as your special friend, eventually you may say to that someone, “I want you to be the most influential person in my life. I want to share your values, your goals, your successes and failures. I want to marry you.”

When a Christian deliberately marries a non-Christian, he or she has fallen into two very serious errors: Firstly, the Christian has disobeyed God’s explicit command — “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers*” (2 Cor 6:14). Secondly, the Christian has broken the first of the Ten Commandments, “*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*” Because he or she has made an unholy and unsaved sinner an object of greater love than God. He or she has actually violated the precious covenant “marriage” relationship with God and mocked God to His face.

As true believers, what should matter most to you is not whether “she is all that you’ve ever wanted” or whether “he is the man of your dreams.” What should matter to you most is whether he or she is the one God wants you to marry. This is one instance where you must be controlled by your mind, by what you so well know from the Word of God, and not allow your heart to take over the control from your mind. Because as the Word of God says, “*the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?*” (Jer 17:9).

Now, what should you do if you are already involved in a dating relationship with a non-Christian? Please do not let it continue. Although breaking up will be a painful experience, it is better for you to bear the pain than to grieve the Lord your God. And if you do this, God will surely bless you and help you, as He promised, “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*” (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18).

This same principle of unequally yoked relationships applies also to a Christian who enters into a close business partnership with a non-Christian. Although you may think that from a human point of view, the prospects for success in such a partnership are very good, there is no firm assurance that you will prosper. Amos 3:3 tells us *“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”* Sooner or later you will encounter differences. The non-Christian partner will not have the same ethical principles as the Christian partner. The Christian will probably end up making all the compromises.

The Scriptures warn us about the awful consequences of entering into a business partnership with a non-believer in the story of King Jehoshaphat’s shipping venture with the ungodly King Ahaziah. This is recorded in Second Chronicles 20:35-37, *“And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Eziongeber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.”*

Now perhaps someone may say, “I have a non-Christian business partner, but my business is doing extremely well. And I think that this means that God approves of my partnership, since He is apparently blessing it.” Please do not be mistaken.

We must never use prosperity as the criterion to judge if something is right or wrong. Even the wicked prosper but this does not mean that God is blessing them and approves of their wickedness. Psalm 73 reveals that He is just allowing the wicked to prosper, for their greater destruction!

The only criterion that we must use for judging if something is right or wrong is the Word of God. And God’s word says *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath*

*righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”*

We must be committed to believe that God’s Word has the final say in all our relationships. And if we believe that, then we must faithfully follow the three guidelines we have studied today about our relationships with the non-Christian world. The first: Strive to bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ. The second: Guard yourself from being influenced by them to compromise your loyalty to God. And the third guideline: Do not become unequally yoked with them. May the Lord help us!

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What changes have there been in your relationships with others as a result of your relationship with God?
2. How, do you think, do the non-Christians you meet daily perceive your conduct?
3. Are there relationships in your life that are hindering your spiritual life?
4. List as many reasons as you can, why a Christian should not marry or date a non-Christian.

## **How to Testify for Christ in the Non-Christian World**

(Acts 1:8; 8:1-4, 11:19-21)

Jesus commissioned His disciples to be his witnesses in Acts 1:8, and it is interesting to note that by reversing the verse reference (8:1 and following) we find the verses that tells us how this commission was fulfilled. Note the names of the places mentioned in them: “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8) “*And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. . . . Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*” (Acts 8:1, 4)

The same commission has now come down to us in this generation. It is therefore our turn to be witnesses for Christ unto the uttermost part of the earth. Now this is not an easy task as there are many barriers to overcome — like language, culture, and political restrictions. But what do you think is the greatest hindrance to fulfilling the commission? Excuses! It is the excuses that we make that prevent us from sharing Christ with others. We say, “The time is not right yet. Our present circumstances are just not favourable for it.” Many think that because they find themselves busy most of their time with their own personal pursuits, or are trying to settle their own personal problems, that the time is simply not right yet for them to

think about winning others to Christ. But if we study the Scriptures well enough, we will be quite surprised to find that very often, the occasions when evangelistic activity took place, were actually when circumstances were least favourable.

Take for example, the time when Jesus witnessed to the Samaritan woman at the well, recorded in John 4. The account begins by describing that Jesus and His disciples were on a journey from Judea to Galilee, a distance of about 100 kilometres, which would have taken them at least four days to travel on foot. After the first two days of their journey, they needed a place to rest and have a meal. And so they stopped at a place called Sychar in Samaria (v.5), *“Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.”* (John 4:6, 7).

From these verses we can just imagine how physically tired and exhausted Jesus was at this point. He has to sit down, probably because his feet and legs were aching and He needed to catch His breath. The time given in verse 6 is that it was the sixth hour — probably noon time, because the hours were counted by the Jews from sunrise. It was the hottest time of the day, and we imagine that Jesus was all sweaty and covered with dust from the hours of traveling. Our Lord was definitely uncomfortable, to say the least. Since the disciples were sent to buy food, He was probably hungry and evidently He was very thirsty too. And it was that thirst became the occasion for His request for a drink from the woman at the well that eventually led to her salvation, and the salvation of many others in the city! Now, if our Lord was looking for valid excuses for not doing God’s work then, would He have had any? Yes! But did He allow these things to keep Him from doing God’s work? No! So we see that even in the least favourable circumstances the gospel of salvation was brought by our Lord to others.

In Acts 8:1-4, we see another instance where circumstances were least favourable to winning people to Christ. *“And Saul was*



*consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”*

The account begins with “*And Saul was consenting unto his death.*” (v.1). The person who died here was a church leader named Stephen. In the previous chapter, Stephen had been arrested on false charges of blasphemy and when brought to trial, he had given a very powerful defence of the Christian faith, but the Jews stoned him to death. The death of Stephen was a great blow to the church, since he was the first to be martyred, one of the most able leaders (see Acts 6:8, 10) and was also a very great teacher of the Scriptures. His death was a great loss! It caused the whole church (about 8,000 strong) to realise how vulnerable and weak they were in the midst of a nation that was oppressing and persecuting them.

And this realisation must have become more acute as the persecution intensified and got much worse after Stephen’s death. The church now began to suffer the full force of Jewish hatred against Christ, and all Christians became regarded as outcasts, outlaws, criminals that were hunted down like rats and thrown into jail. Verse 3 mentions that men and women who professed Christ were forcefully removed from their houses and then imprisoned. Many others who escaped arrest fled from Jerusalem as refugees. They went to Judea and Samaria, and as Saul pursued them further they were forced to move on further.

But it was when the church was helpless and weakest, that it also had its strongest and most glorious moment. Instead of destroying the church, the great persecution made the church grow even faster, extending her witness further than ever before. And as the persecuted believers continued to testify for Christ, new churches were planted.

*“Now they which were scattered abroad [cf. Acts 8:1,4] upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. 20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” (Acts 11:19-21).*

In these two passages (Acts 8:1-4 and 11:19-21), I want you to notice one important point. The ones who were preaching the gospel were not full-time missionaries, pastors, nor a special group of gifted evangelists. In fact in Acts 8:1, we are specifically told that the Apostles stayed behind at Jerusalem, and they were primarily the ones who had been given the ministry of preaching the Word. But who were the ones that were now bringing the gospel beyond Jerusalem? They were members of the church at Jerusalem. They were actually ordinary believers who simply made use of the opportunities they met as they migrated to new places and met with new people.

And the amazing thing to us is that they were doing all this even though they themselves were going through an extremely stressful and difficult period of their lives. They uprooted themselves in a hurry and were relocating their homes and families to new and unfamiliar places. But despite this, they still bothered to witness to their neighbours and the new friends they made in their new places of residence.

I think that the zeal of these Christians, really puts us to shame. Here we are, enjoying a much easier and comfortable life without any persecution and we are well settled in nice homes. And yet most of us are probably not as fervent as these Christians were in testifying for Christ to those around them. Many Christians today hinder themselves with excuses saying that they are too busy, or that their circumstances do not permit it, or that they are not full-time workers or missionaries, and so they do not really need to make an effort to win others to Christ.

But the Bible shows us here that each and every believer is to be concerned and involved in the work of testifying to others about our Lord Jesus Christ. This work is not to be carried out just by a selected group of trained specialists, but by the whole church. The work is not just the responsibility of pastors, evangelists and missionaries alone. It is the responsibility of every born again Christian. Let us therefore not make excuses for ourselves anymore but take every opportunity to testify for Christ wherever God has placed us: in our homes, in our schools, or in our places of work. Now is the accepted time! For the rest of this message we will look at some practical points on how to testify for Christ.

Let us first consider some points on testifying for Christ at home. In chapter six, I have already mentioned the importance of living godly Christian lives at home before our non-Christian family members and finding opportunities to share Christ with them. But sometimes the situation we face at home is not very conducive for us to share Christ. Some of us face a language barrier and cannot communicate well in the dialect of our parents and grandparents.

We may also face a cultural barrier. Christianity is often perceived by them to be a Western religion. But the most difficult barrier to overcome is perhaps the generation gap between us and our loved ones. It is particularly hard for parents in our Asian culture to receive instruction from their children. Usually the immediate reaction would be, “I have eaten more salt than you have eaten rice. Are you trying to tell me that you know better than me?”

Do not be discouraged. In a situation like this, what we can do is to look for opportunities for our loved ones to come into contact with the Word of God, in some form that will circumvent these barriers. If your parent is able to read, then giving him or her a book on Christianity might help (e.g. Laidlaw’s *The Reason Why*). We will be surprised at how God can use books to bring a person to Christ. My father became a Christian because my elder sister happened to leave a library book she had borrowed on a table at home. The book was not the Bible but a biography of the Apostle Paul. My father was

curious and began to read this book and this made him want to know more about the God that had changed Paul's life. This subsequently led to his attending church, attending Bible study and his conversion in 1966.

Sometimes, you can overcome the language and cultural barrier as well as the generation gap by enlisting the help of another mature Christian who speaks the dialect well and is about the same age as your parents. I had a friend at another church who did that. He asked an elder of another church who spoke the same dialect as his father and was just a few years younger than him to come and visit. The Lord blessed their meeting and his father was saved and is now attending the same church as him.

Sometimes when a Gospel rally for parents is held in your church, you could try to persuade them to attend. But one thing may prevent them from coming to a Gospel rally. That is: they are afraid to enter into a church compound for the rally as it is quite alien and unfamiliar to them and they are afraid of feeling like a "fish out of water" in the midst of the people, the surroundings, the singing, and the praying. We must try to understand this and put ourselves in their shoes. I do not think anyone here would be quite keen if someone were to ask you to go with him to a meeting place of some strange cult you have never heard of before to join in some strange activities going on there. How can we help them to overcome this feeling of strangeness?

I have a little suggestion. There are some social occasions held in church when we may legitimately expect our loved ones to attend if they are invited. Things like our wedding (or our children's wedding), getting engaged, or baptism (of our selves, children and grand-children). These are golden opportunities to invite and persuade our non-Christian loved ones to come to church so that they can get themselves accustomed to the surroundings and to the things that go on in church. When Frieda and I got engaged and married, this is what we did. We invited all our relatives, including all those who were outside Christ to church. For a number of them, it was the

very first time they had ever attended a church service. In this way, if they are invited to church for Bible study or for church service or for a gospel rally, they won't feel so apprehensive about the unfamiliar surroundings.

Now that we have considered points about testifying for Christ at home, let us go on now to look at some points about testifying for Christ beyond our home. For some of us, that would be at our place of work, and for others that would be at our school or campus. First, we want to list some reasons why we should make every effort to testify for Christ in these particular places.

First, for most of us here, our place of work or study is our main area of influence outside our home. We spend six to eight hours a day at our working place or school, five days a week. That works out to nearly a quarter of our total time or one third of our conscious time. We see our colleagues or classmates and they see us day in and day out. This is therefore the main area where we can have an influence on other people and witness to them.

Second, the place where Christians work or study is one of the largest sources of new converts. In most churches, one will find that the majority of new believers that are added to the church, do not come from holding public gospel rallies, or from going tracting in the neighbourhood, or from doing door to door evangelism, but from the friends, work colleagues, classmates and contacts of church members, who introduce them to Christ. If every Christian in our church will therefore take seriously his privilege of being a witness for Christ and concentrate on that in his area of influence, our church will soon be growing rapidly.

And finally, it is easier to follow up people we bring to Christ in our place of work or study than other people because we see them almost every day.

We can watch their progress, encourage them to keep on following Christ, and counsel them when they face problems at work

or school. We can do Bible study during lunch break or just before or after work or school hours.

In contrast to this, if we were to bring someone to Christ who is not our colleague or classmate, we would have to make an additional effort to keep in touch with them, make extra time to meet them and follow them up. So evangelising those in our areas of influence has some distinct advantages over other kinds of evangelism.

But unfortunately, many believers are not making good efforts to bring their colleagues or classmates to Christ. Somehow most people do not seem to be keen to talk about Christ in these places. Some do not even want to let others in their place of work or school know that they are Christians, and will try their best to keep this a secret from them. Why is this so? Let us examine some reasons.

### **The Fear of Endangering our Good Relations with them**

I am sure all of us want to have good relations with our colleagues or classmates. We do not want to do any thing to damage those relations, or else it may become quite difficult later on to gain their cooperation for activities in which we have to work together as a team. Well, actually this may be a rather selfish reason for not wanting to share God's word with them. Another reason for doing this is:

### **The Fear of Being Rejected by them**

There are bound to be peer groups or cliques of people that we like to associate ourselves with. We want to be accepted by them and be regarded as one of them. And we fear that if we begin to witness, they will reject us, ridicule us, isolate us and perhaps they may even make things difficult for us, and we might become victims of office politics. Those of us who have been in National Service might know

about the fear of being “saboed” (sabotaged) by those who do not like us.

But the Scriptures tell us that if we honour the Lord, He will honour us also. That applies even to our working place. One clear example in Scripture of a person who was sabotaged by his colleagues was Daniel. They made things extremely difficult for him. In fact they got the king to throw him into the Lion’s den. But the wonderful thing is that as Daniel honoured God, God in the end honoured him by delivering him from the schemes of evil men. He retained his job and they lost their jobs as well as their lives.

### **The Fear of Not Knowing How to Witness to them**

How do I introduce the gospel to them? What should I say? What if they ask me questions that I cannot answer? This is another reason many Christians do not witness at their place of work or study. It is a very natural fear, but one that we can easily deal with if we just take time to learn some simple basic steps. If we take the time to plan, pray, read books on evangelism, consult other Christians who have done it, and attend seminars and talks on how to bring our friends to Christ, we can overcome this fear .

Now, you will notice that all the three reasons listed here deal with the same basic feeling: fear. The devil specialises in paralysing us with fear. The command of Jesus to His disciples and to us is not to fear because He is with us, at all times and in all places (Mat 10:28; 28:20). Very experienced evangelists will tell you that the feelings of fear never go away. You must overcome them.

Remember that the only fear you face is the fear of being rejected by people or, at the most for those who are working, the fear of losing your job. Our non-Christian colleagues or classmates have much more to fear than we do. They have to fear being rejected by God and losing their souls to eternal damnation if no one shares Christ with them.

You may be the only one they will ever come into contact with, who have the message of salvation which is able to deliver them from the wrath to come. Let us do everything we can to overcome all our fears of sharing Christ in our work place or school. And let us have the same attitude expressed by Paul, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”* (Rom 1:16)

Now that we have seen the reasons we should testify for Christ and why we must overcome the fears that keep us from doing this, let us consider some practical steps that we can take to witness to them.

### **Do not hide your Christian profession**

Let them know that you are a believer. There are some subtle ways of doing this. E.g. Students: A Christian bookmark in your school textbook. A little Bible verse written on your pencil box or file will give away your identity as a follower of Christ. Those who work: Placing a Bible or Christian book at your work site, putting a verse of Scripture on the memo board will tell others that you are a Christian.

### **Match Your Christian Profession with Christ-like Conduct**

We must be careful in how we live and be wise in the way we act toward our colleagues and classmates so we can make the most of any opportunity with them. Remember that we must live by much higher standards of righteous conduct than what the world accepts as normal. The testimony you bear before others is very important. All it takes is for you to fail just one time in living uprightly, and your testimony before your colleagues or classmates may be badly damaged. And it is immensely difficult to restore that testimony when it is damaged.



But if you can consistently maintain a good uncompromising testimony before your colleagues, you may actually gain great respect from them. They will regard you as being a person of principles, of integrity, someone that they can look up to, depend on, trust and confide in, and they might even seek your counsel and advice when they are in trouble. When Joseph was in prison in Egypt, he maintained such a good testimony that he was allowed to take charge of the other prisoners. He even won the trust of two high-ranking prisoners: the pharaoh's baker and butler. They were willing to confide in him and shared what they dreamt for him to interpret.

If you have succeeded in the first two steps of making known your Christian profession and living up to its standards of conduct, then you are ready to go on to the third step:

### **Look for Opportunities to Witness**

For example, if it is recess time in school or if you take a lunch or tea break at work and go together to the canteen, you are bound to talk with others. Sometimes in our conversations, we find it difficult to begin talking about Christ. Most of the time when we meet with people in our work place during our free time what do we talk about? The food? The weather? Politics? Good investments?

And how about those of us who are students. What do we talk about most of the time in school, before and after lessons? Homework? The coming test or exam? Teachers we like and do not like? How do we switch from talking about these mundane things to talking about spiritual things? It is not easy, and it takes some effort. We need to find what we call a transition point, a link, which will help to steer the course of the conversation in the direction of salvation. This transition point can take the form of a question.

A question was what the evangelist Philip used when he witnessed to an Ethiopian official. *“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose*

*and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.” (Acts 8:26)*

As Philip came near to the chariot, he may have been wondering, “Now how am I going to introduce the subject of the gospel to this person. I am a total stranger to him, and he does not know me. I can’t just come out of nowhere and say to him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” As Philip was coming nearer and nearer the carriage he heard the voice of someone reading aloud, and he realised that the Ethiopian official was reading aloud from a copy of the Old Testament. And immediately he knew how he should begin his conversation. Not by saying, “It’s a nice day, isn’t it?” or “Where might you be going?” His question was designed to lead to the gospel. He asked: “Do you understand what you are reading?” And immediately the response that he knew he would get came: “How can I understand this unless someone guides me?” So Philip sensed the need and then offered to guide the official. This became his golden opportunity to use the scriptures to share Christ.

You must believe that in the course of your daily interaction with colleagues in your workplace, the Lord will open doors for you to share the gospel with them. But you on your part have to look for them. I remember the time when I was in reservist in-camp training and my fellow reservists and I went for our lunch break together. When we all got our food and sat down to eat, everyone else just ate straightaway.

But I took a moment to say grace before I ate. Then, while we were eating the person sitting next to me, by the name of Benny, asked me if I was a Christian. This became a useful transition point and I was eventually able to share the gospel with him.

Another way you can make a transition point is to divert the conversation to some recent disaster in which lives were lost. For example, the SilkAir plane crash in 1997. Then when your colleague is thinking about how unfortunate the victims were, ask him a thought-provoking question like: “What if you were one of the victims? Would you be ready for that? What do you think will happen to you when you die? If God were to ask you, why should I allow you to come into my Heaven, what would you say?” The best kind of transitions or bridges are often thought-provoking questions.

We have to think of ways like these, where we can introduce the subject without offending the person, but cultivating interest and curiosity in him, so that he will want to discover God’s salvation plan. You may recall what was mentioned earlier of how Jesus converted the woman at the well. He used a simple request for a drink as a transition point to bring the message of salvation to her. He skilfully made her interested to know more and more. Once you have found a suitable opportunity to witness, you are now in a position to share the gospel.

## **Share the Gospel**

When the opportunity to testify for Christ actually comes, it may be hard for us to immediately construct a brief, accurate and complete message of salvation right there on the spot. So we have to rely on resources already prepared by others. The most helpful resources are gospel tracts, which are small booklets, containing the basics of the gospel message. Carry a few tracts with you in your purse or wallet. You may never know when they will be useful.

There are several advantages gained from using tracts. First, some of them present the gospel systematically. We can learn the main points and memorise the verses that substantiate the points in order to share our faith. Secondly, we can give the person a copy of the tract to take with them. This is important, so that when they are alone and ready to review God’s message, they can do so. Thirdly,

the person can also check up the verses in a Bible, if they have one, just to prove that you are not making these things up!

Now, after you have shared the gospel with him, your friend may respond in one of two ways — he may be interested in what you have shared, or he may not be interested at all. Whatever his response is, please observe the next step.

## **Leave the Results to God**

Do not worry or think you have failed if you do not get results. The Apostle Paul himself did not always see a warm response to what he preached. In Acts 17, when Paul preached his gospel message to the Council of Mars Hill in Athens, it was not well-received at all, *“when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again on this matter.”* (Acts 17:18). Did Paul get the response he had hoped for? From the passage, we see that Paul was dismissed from the meeting amid much laughter and ridicule.

There will be times when we are tempted to feel disappointed and discouraged because people do not respond well to our efforts to bring them the good news of salvation. We expect them to accept our message with joy, but instead, most of them reject it with ridicule.

When we feel this way we need to remember that it is not our efforts, not our methods, not the approach we use, nor our skill in delivering God’s Truths that saves men. It is God alone who saves. We will do well to do our part, and we ought to do it well. But the results must be left to God. Only God can change a sinner’s heart and convict him of his need for salvation.

Our responsibility is to sow the seed. The rest is left to God. He will cause it to germinate and grow. Sometimes, the seed will flourish and grow, and sometimes it will not. Christ mentioned this in His parable of the sower. Sometimes, the seed takes a longer time than expected to germinate. Many people hear the gospel but do not

respond to it until many years later, when they encounter a crisis and call upon Christ to save them. Sometimes a person may have to hear the gospel ten or twenty times before he would ask the Lord to come into his heart. So if someone says to you “*I’ve heard it before*” don’t stop, but tell him “*It’s good to hear it again. Some have to hear it many times before they are saved!*” The timing of salvation and the results of our preaching are best left to the mysterious work in the heart by the Holy Spirit. Our success is measured not by the number of souls we win to Christ, but by how well we have used the opportunities given to us to share the gospel with people around us.

Even though at times we may find very little or no results at all from our efforts, remember this: No results are possible at all if we do not first seek the opportunity and use every means to witness to our colleagues and classmates. So let us keep doing our best and let God do the rest. For if we withhold the message of salvation from them, we will be hurting them.

Hudson Taylor was a pioneer missionary to China. Once he was asked by one of his first Chinese converts, “How long have you people in the west known this good news?” And Hudson had to reply, “We have had it for many centuries.” On hearing this the Chinese convert looked painfully at Hudson and said in effect, “Do you mean to say that you Christians in the west had the truth for hundreds of years, but only now you have come to tell us about it?”

Let us not keep the truth to ourselves but make it known to the non-Christians who cross our paths everyday. Remember that we were once like them. They need the truth as much as we did. May the Lord help us to make Him known to them.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why were the Christians in the early church so zealous to share their faith with others?
2. What barriers do you face in testifying for Christ at home?

3. What are some ways of overcoming your fear of testifying for Christ at your place of work or study?
4. In what ways can your church or fellowship group help you to be a better witness for Christ?

## **The Challenge to Live as a Christian in a Non-Christian World**

**(Daniel 3:8-18)**

The most obvious issue for us as we come to the end of the book is whether or not we will actually work on all the things that we have learned when we go back to our normal routines. It is my hope and prayer that this concluding message from God's Word will challenge our hearts to do just that.

Ultimately, the implementation of all the principles we have learnt boils down to the willingness to deny ourselves in order to take a stand we need to take, for the Lord in the non-Christian world. If only we have this willingness to take a stand for the Lord, even if it means denying ourselves certain conveniences, advantages, opportunities and even if it means denying ourselves our right to live, then we would really seek to implement these principles. One way that we can find this willingness in ourselves, is to consider the godly examples of those who have denied themselves to take a stand for the Lord. We are therefore going to look at Daniel chapter 3, and see how three godly Jews by the name of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did this.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were three friends of Daniel (who is famous for being delivered by God in the Lion's Den). With Daniel they had been taken away from their homeland in Judah by the Babylonians about the year 607 B.C. to live as captives of King Nebuchadnezzar and to serve him. And so, as young men, they found themselves totally immersed in a sinful and ungodly environment,

and were always under tremendous pressure to conform to its values, practices and relationships.

The place where they were taken to was the city of Babylon which had existed for 1,000 years. Nebuchadnezzar had rebuilt the city and made it the greatest city in the world of his time, famous for its towers and the structure called “The Hanging Gardens of Babylon” — about 35 storeys high. But it was also a place of sinful idolatry with no less than eight big temples, each dedicated to a different god — Adad, Belitnina, Ninmah, Ishtar, Marduk (chief), Gula, Ninurta and Shamash (sun-god).

Our situation today, as Christians living in a non-Christian world has some similarities to theirs. Like them, we also find ourselves living in a sinful and ungodly world and we are always under pressure to conform to its values, practices and relationships.

These three Jewish friends had successfully taken a stand with Daniel in the very first chapter of the book, where the issue was whether they should violate God’s Law by eating the king’s food. But in that event, Daniel appeared to have been their leader and they benefited much from his solid convictions and resolute initiative.

But now, in chapter three, Daniel was not around to help or influence them. He must have been away in some other place when all the events of this chapter happened. This then would be the real test of their convictions. Would they still take a stand even when Daniel was not with them? There are times when Christians have the courage to do what they should do, only because they are under the strong influence of other spiritually strong Christians, like their pastor or their Bible study leader. But once they are no longer under their influence and have to stand all on their own, they succumb to the pressures around them. This unfortunate thing has happened to many students who went for studies overseas and it is sad to hear that. You cannot always depend on someone else’s spiritual convictions. You must have strong spiritual convictions of your own.



Daniel's friends proved to have developed strong convictions of their own. They demonstrated it well here in chapter three. Let us study this passage now and see what really happened: Daniel 3:1, "*Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.*"

## **Nebuchadnezzar's monument to His Kingdom**

**The Description of the image (3:1):** There are several things for us to note about this image or statue.

- a. *The size:* 60 cubits high, 6 cubits wide (about 27.5 metres by 2.75 metres ), higher than a ten-storey building. The image was probably placed on a pedestal. It is interesting that archaeologists have recently discovered a brick pedestal in the mounds of Dura in present-day Iraq. It measured 14 by 14 by 6 metres. There was no sign of the statue — it was probably destroyed.
- b. *The location:* The plain of Dura, near the city of Babylon. Since it was on a flat plain, it could be seen easily for miles around. The plain was named after the river Dura which empties into the Euphrates river just 10 kilometres south of Babylon.
- c. *The material:* Gold. Either solid gold (700–800 tons, which would be valued today at about S\$15 billion) or gold-plated stone or metal. The statue may well have been solid gold, as Nebuchadnezzar was famous for making gold very common in the city of Babylon. Also, this would explain the presence of the huge furnace nearby in which the three friends were cast. This furnace would have served the purpose of casting the image.
- d. *The form:* Probably that of a man, judging from its tall proportions. Perhaps it was the statue of Nebuchadnezzar himself, or of his patron god, Nebo. The size, material and form of the image reflect the greatness of this god and on the whole Babylonian empire.

Although there are still many people in the world today who worship idols of stone, wood and metal, for the majority of the world, the idols are no longer material anymore, but no less imposing than Nebuchadnezzar's image: Power, Wealth, Fame, Health, Success, and Pleasure. These are now the gods that many in the non-Christian world serve and worship today.

**The Worship of the Image (3:2-6):** *“Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. 3 Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”*

- a. Eight classes of Babylonian bureaucracy from the whole empire were ordered to come for the dedication ceremony of the image (3:2). There must have been a great crowd, perhaps a few thousand, standing before the image. *“Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”*
- b. The worship of the image was instituted as a state religion — it was compulsory! Failure to comply would be regarded as a crime against the state, and would be punishable with death in the nearby giant furnace (cf. Rev. 13:14, 15, the same thing will happen again during the time of the Antichrist).

## The Three Jewish Friends' Obedience to their God (3:7-20)

**Their test:** In spite of the great pressure to conform to what everyone else did, the three friends did not comply with the king's order. When the crowd grovelled on the plain, these three stood out like sore thumbs. They deliberately defied the king's order, willing to risk their high position, the royal favour they enjoyed, and even their own lives.

According to verse 8, their enemies took this opportunity to accuse them before the king. *"Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews."* Look at what they said in verse 12, *"There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."* The charge was misconstrued as one of disloyalty to the State ("they have not regarded thee.")

In verses 13 to 15 the king made them an offer: *"Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace;"*

Despite his anger, Nebuchadnezzar gave them the opportunity to save themselves. He would order the musicians to play the song of worship once more so that the three men would have another chance to prove their loyalty and obedience by bowing down to the image (3:15).

Now look at the King's proud boast at the end of verse 15, "*who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?*" By saying this Nebuchadnezzar had now converted his confrontation with the three men into a contest with the Lord God Almighty! He had challenged God.

**Their Stand:** Let us see how the three Jews responded to this threat in verses 16 to 18 "*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*"

There are three points to note in their response. Firstly, they made no defence or apology for what they did ("*we are not careful to answer thee in this matter*" (v.16). Secondly, they were confident that God would be able to deliver them if it was His will to do so (v.17). And thirdly, they were willing to meet their end, if it was not God's will to deliver them (v.18) — They put God's glory before their own personal safety.

**Their deliverance:** The King then issued his diabolical order (3:19-23) "*Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.*" The heat of the furnace was increased probably by installing additional bellows to blow more air in.

*"And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the*

*flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.” (vv.20-23)*

Remember now, that all these gruesome proceedings were being carefully watched and witnessed by the great multitude of officials. The king planned to make a public example of these three to strike terror and fear into the hearts of the officials and teach everyone never to disobey his orders. Nebuchadnezzar expected to watch the three men burn to ashes. To his utter amazement, he saw them walking around inside the super-heated furnace, unbound and unharmed, *“Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”* (3:24-25).

Who was this fourth man? In 3:28, Nebuchadnezzar concluded that it was an angel from God. Perhaps this could have been Christ Himself in one of his pre-incarnate appearances (cf. Micah 5:2). It is interesting to note that more than a hundred years earlier, the Lord had made a wonderful promise in Isaiah 43:2, *“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”* If this event in Daniel 3 was the literal fulfilment of this promise, then the Lord was, in a real sense, with them. He was the fourth man in the furnace. This gives us a picture of the Christian who takes a firm stand for the Lord in this sinful world — Christ will be with him to strengthen him — what great comfort!

After getting over the shock of seeing the fourth man, Nebuchadnezzar’s attitude changed. He was no longer angry with them, but had fear and respect for them. *“Then Nebuchadnezzar*

*came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.” (26-27).*

What a powerful impact this must have made! The whole crowd of officials who had been summoned to be there to be impressed by the image, ended up being more impressed with the power of God. When they returned to their respective provinces, they would probably talk about it — God would be glorified in the whole empire. What far-reaching effects were accomplished by the stand which the three men took for their Lord!

The only way in which we can make a similar impact on others for the Lord, is by taking a firm stand for Him. If we compromise our stand by following the values and practices of the world we live in, we lose our testimony, and God is not glorified at all. But if we refuse to compromise, God is ultimately glorified, and our testimony may have far-reaching effects.

The account ends with the three Jews receiving unexpected rewards from the king of Babylon, *“Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in Him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon.” (3:28-30).*

In these words we see Nebuchadnezzar admitting that he had been soundly defeated by the God of three Jews and he promoted them. He totally forgot all about his own glorious golden statue he had made and paid no more attention to it, because he had learned far more glorious things through the willingness of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to deny themselves in order to take a stand for their God.

Now let me ask you this question: What do you think would have happened, if these three men had not taken a stand, and just conformed to the world by simply bowing down to the image when everybody else did? Then they would not have faced any danger to their lives at all. They would not have to fear the flames of the hot furnace at all, and everything would be very nice and comfortable for them. But they would have lost the unique opportunity to bear a most powerful testimony for the Lord.

Now let me ask you another question: Can we expect God to deliver us always whenever we deny ourselves and take a stand for Him? The answer is “No.” God does not always choose to deliver those who take a stand for Him. Sometimes He sees it fit to let them suffer and even die for Him. Take the case of John the Baptist in Mark 6. He was imprisoned by King Herod for rebuking him for his sins and then he was beheaded. Take the case of Stephen in Acts 7. He was stoned to death for preaching Christ. Take the case of James in Acts 12. He was executed by King Herod to please the Jews. We can add to that the long list of martyrs in the history of the church of Jesus Christ, who bravely gave their lives and suffered great losses to take a firm stand for the Lord. God always knows what is best, and we, on our part should be willing to take a stand for Him, regardless of whether He will deliver us or not.

And that was the real attitude of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, *“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will*

*not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” (vv.17, 18).*

The important words “*But if not*” (v.18) shows that the stand they took for the Lord was not at all conditional on any expected deliverance from Him.

Now what should we learn from all this? How does this relate to living the Christian life in a non-Christian World? Like the three Jewish friends in this account, we too must be willing to take a stand for the Lord. Just as they faced tremendous pressure from the world they lived in, Christians will also face tremendous pressures against their faith from the world. And this world which we live in is full of sin and ungodliness, which are increasing now at an alarming rate. The world is not getting better but worse every day. Let us see how bad things are at present.

Do you know that children are being murdered every day before they are even born? In the 1980’s about 40 to 60 million induced abortions occurred each year in the world; about 33 million of them were done legally. The figures for Singapore are also grim. In the 1990’s an average of 17,000 abortions took place each year. This amounts to one abortion for every three live births! Euthanasia or mercy-killing has become legalized in Holland, and parts of Australia and some states in the U.S. In Holland, the situation has grown so bad that some elderly nursing home patients are afraid to drink their orange juice for fear that it may contain poison!

The marriage institution has suffered the most in this century. Common-law unions, infidelity, wife-beating, prostitution have all increased, particularly in urban and industrialised nations. Many respectable politicians today have private lives that are laced with scandal. Do you know that the Gay movement is growing stronger and stronger every year? In the 1990’s gay political candidates in the US had been elected openly to offices ranging from mayors to congressmen; and individual homosexuals had been granted rights to



adopt children, to serve in the army, and even to be ordained as pastors in some church denominations.

Closer to home, we hear of organised tours to certain places in Thailand and Indonesia that are designed for those who want to indulge their fleshly lusts. If not for the fatal threat of the AIDS virus, immorality today would be much worse. Censorship has now been relaxed in the name of artistic expression and so people flock to the movie houses to watch RA rated shows. Violence and permissiveness appear more often now in the mass media — television, cable TV, and certain internet websites and magazines.

Broken marriages and divorces are also increasing. In 1996 Singapore saw one divorce for every 150 marriages. In 1990, the United States saw one divorce for every two marriages. This often results in broken homes, child abuse and delinquent children. Delinquency has become a major problem in the U.S. Between 1960 and 1978 the number of juvenile court cases jumped 166 percent, and the rate continues to rise, with juveniles accounting for nearly 40 percent of those arrested for serious crimes in 1988. Earlier this year, two children were arrested for wielding guns in their school, killing and hurting teachers and students.

Legalised gambling in the form of sweepstakes, horse racing and 4-D are very much a way of life now for many Singaporeans. Just look at the long queues of people at the booths to buy tickets or place bets. A Sunday School student once shared with me with deep sorrow about the tremendous problems his family was facing because of his mother's insatiable appetite for gambling.

Every sector of our society is affected by the materialism and godless philosophies of our present age. It is a fact that in our education system, evolution theory is taught as if it was already proven by science. This has caused many university graduates to become atheistic or agnostics, who try to find the answers to life in New Age teachings or in one of the many strange new cults that have proliferated in Singapore. Recently, when I was traveling in an

airplane, I saw a very well dressed professional Singaporean apparently on a business trip. The book he was reading was “How to contact your spirit guides.” A few years ago, the world was amazed at how well-educated Japanese professionals could be used by a cult leader to hurt people with poison gas in subway stations. Then at Easter last year, another cult called Heaven’s Gate claimed a number of lives in a suicide pact.

All of this is only a short description of the non-Christian world we live in. Let us never forget that we are Christians, we are God’s children, specially called by God from this world and saved from sin by God’s grace, to live lives that are holy, godly, and righteous, for His sake. But we live in a world that is largely unholy, ungodly and unrighteous. For this reason, we are bound to come into conflict with the world we live in. We are bound to come under pressure to compromise and conform to the world.

The challenge that we face then is three-fold: 1) to maintain our godly living, 2) to withstand these great pressures to conform, and 3) to exert a godly influence that will deliver as many as possible from the sin and ungodliness of this world.

The question before us is: Will you take up this challenge? Think very carefully now, because it will not be an easy path to take. It is a path of self-denial, for it may require you to give up some of life’s legitimate conveniences and comforts. It is also a path of loneliness, for you may find yourself being despised and rejected by everyone around you for being out of step with the ways of the world.

But despite all that, will you still take up this challenge? If you really regard Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Master, then you must take up this challenge. It is really not an option, but an imperative requirement. In conclusion, let us recall the passage of Scripture that we started with: Titus 2:11-14, and let God be the One to speak the final word to our hearts: *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously,*

*and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”*

