



Lesson 1

Introduction, Definitions, and Biblical Basis for Christian Character¹

2 Peter 1:5–7 *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.*

Introduction

Peter urges us to add virtue and the other character traits to our faith. Virtue means “moral excellence” or “noble character.” Every Christian should be striving to develop (i.e., cultivate), maintain, and strengthen moral excellence in his life. Hence, the title of this series of lessons—“Cultivating Christian Character.” In it, we’ll consider a number of virtues or character qualities, define them, and suggest ways of adding them to our faith and life.

Definitions

A character trait is a pattern of thought and behavior that marks one’s personality. Character traits describe attitudes and actions that make a person who he/she is. Some character traits have little to do with morality—one may be outgoing, shy, boisterous, active, passive, irritable, steady, etc. Christian character has to do with Christian virtues (ethical values) that all Christians should develop and demonstrate. One has Christian character when he has personally adopted the Christian value system and is demonstrating such by virtuous living. Virtuous living is simply fearing God and keeping his commandments (Eccl 12:13). Our task is to be more consistent and comprehensive in fearing God and keeping his commandments.

Where does Christian character come from? Virtuous character is available to and expected of every genuine Christian. New creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) have a new nature and are thus capable of glorifying God in every part of life (1 Cor 10:31). All Christians have the capacity to adopt these traits, but some Christians do not attempt to do so. Since God commands believers to adopt these virtues, they are not a “hard-wired” part of one’s personality; they are not usually natural within one’s experience. Many of them run contrary to our sinful tendencies and are thus difficult to adopt (e.g., humility, generosity). We must make efforts to develop Christian character; it will not happen automatically.

Christian character development is another word for sanctification, that is, the process of developing Christian spiritual maturity. As one matures in the faith, he should also experience the deepening and strengthening of Christian character traits. The sanctification process is not automatic. Believers must make the effort to “add” virtues to their lives. Sanctification is a cooperative effort between the believer and the Holy Spirit. The believer increasingly yields himself to God (Rom 6:13) and presents himself as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2), the “old man” has less control and the “new man” asserts himself (Eph 4:22-24). But one must make

¹ Much of this material comes from Charles Wood’s curriculum titled *The Content of Christian Character*. He relied somewhat on Bill Gothard’s material on Christian character. Modified by Brad Anderson, 2017.

every effort to pursue this growth. He must work out his own salvation as God is working in him (Phil 2:12-13).

Some of these virtues may come quite naturally; others will take time and effort to produce. Just like a plant bearing fruit, the Christian must achieve a degree of maturity before producing a particular character quality. That is, we don't expect some of the Christian virtues to surface until spiritual (and often physical) maturity occurs. But there is no excuse for fruitlessness. All Christians ought to be displaying the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22f), if only partially and sporadically. Christian character is a fruit that appears to all (Mt 7:16f). Lack of fruit and/or evidence of bad fruit (i.e., evil character) proves one to be a "bad tree," one that will be cut down and cast into the fire. Thus, it's impossible for a genuine Christian to demonstrate no Christian character. Lack of Christian virtue means lack of spiritual life. This is not to suggest, however, that any Christian will possess any or all of the Christian virtues perfectly. "We all stumble in many ways" (James 3:2).

The goal in studying Christian character traits is to develop them personally. Honesty and sincerity are required in this process. Anyone can act out a role. An unbeliever or nominal Christian can hypocritically attempt to act like a Christian, and may succeed temporarily in convincing others (and even himself) that the trait is truly present. But if no sincere, internal change has occurred, the virtue has not been instilled.

Character is the one thing we make in this world and take with us into the next. The circumstances amid which you live determine your reputation; the truth you believe determines your character.

- Reputation is what you are supposed to be; Character is what you are.
- Reputation is what you have when you come to a new community; Character is what you have when you go away.
- Reputation is made in a moment; Character is built in a lifetime.
- Your reputation is learned in an hour; Your character is does not come to light for a year.
- Reputation makes you rich or makes you poor; Character makes you happy or makes you miserable.
- Your character is what God knows you to be. Your reputation is what men think you are.²

The measure of a man's character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out.³

Biblical Basis

The Bible contains a number of virtue/character lists in addition to those mentioned above (1 Peter 1:5-7 and Gal 5:22-23). Some of these passages list Christian virtues and others encourage believers to develop Christian virtues.

Romans 12:9–18 *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to*

² William Hershey Davis, as quoted at <https://bible.org/illustration/reputation-amp-character>

³ Thomas Babington Macauley, as quoted at <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Philippians 1:11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Colossians 1:10 ... walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Colossians 3:12–15 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

1 Timothy 4:12 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

1 Timothy 6:11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Titus 2:2–7 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility

Titus 2:12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

Arrangement of This Series

It's difficult to make a systematic order of the Christian virtues. Some no doubt are more central to the Christian life and some more secondary. Some develop early, some later. Some are more public while others are more private. Some can be expected of youth, others of adults. So we'll not observe a rigid, ordered approach to the character traits we'll consider in this series. Perhaps we'll not even discuss some of them we could. But we'll discuss most of them and pay particular

attention to those that seem to be most biblically significant. For lack of any other means of arrangement, we'll consider the virtues alphabetically.

Also, for each virtue, we'll consider it's opposite vice. For example, the opposite of contentment is covetousness or greed; the opposite of humility is pride. Examining a vice can help us avoid it and help us understand the corresponding virtue.

Depending on the amount of biblical data pertaining to each virtue and vice, we may examine one or more topics per lesson. Some are worthy of in-depth treatment and others of only cursory consideration. Some virtues may have slightly different nuances but are quite similar and will therefore be considered together (e.g., alertness and attentiveness).

	Virtue	Vice
1.	Alertness/Attentiveness	Indifference/Distracton
2.	Availability/Volunteer	Self-centeredness
3.	Boldness/Courage/Initiative/Determination	Fearfulness/Apathy Idleness/Faintheartedness
4.	Cautiousness/Discretion/Discernment	Rashness/Gullibility/Simplemindedness
5.	Compassion/Kindness/Sensitivity	Indifference/Callousness/Meanness
6.	Contentment/Security	Covetousness/Greed/Anxiety
7.	Decisiveness	Procrastination/Indecision
8.	Deference/Politeness/Flexibility Punctuality/Tolerance	Rudeness/Selfishness/Tardiness/ Resistance/Prejudice
9.	Dependability/Responsibility/Faithfulness	Inconsistency/Irresponsibility
10.	Diligence/Perseverance/Endurance	Sloth/Discouragement/Wastefulness
11.	Faith	Presumption/Doubt
12.	Forgiveness	Rejection
13.	Generosity/Benevolence	Stinginess/Covetousness
14.	Gentleness/Meekness	Harshness/Contentiousness
15.	Gratitude	Ingratitude/Unthankfulness
16.	Hospitality	Inhospitality
17.	Humility	Pride/Self-Esteem/Arrogance
18.	Reverence/Fear of the Lord	Irreverence/Blasphemy/Profane
19.	Joyfulness	Self-pity
20.	Justice/Righteousness	Injustice/Corruption/Unrighteousness
21.	Loyalty	Disloyalty/Unfaithfulness/Betrayal

22.	Obedience	Disobedience/Rebellion
23.	Orderliness	Disorder/Confusion/Chaos
24.	Patience/Perseverance	Impatience/Restlessness
25.	Thoroughness	Carelessness
26.	Self-Control (Temperance)	Indulgence
27.	Sincerity/Honesty/Truthfulness/Fairness	Hypocrisy/Deception/Unfairness
28.	Thrift	Prodigality/Extravagance
29.	Purity/Virtue	Impurity/Immorality/Defilement
30.	Wisdom	Foolishness



Lesson 2

Virtue: Alertness/Attentiveness

Vice: Indifference/Distraction

Have you ever experienced “selective hearing”? Children especially seem prone to hear what they want to hear and tune out everything else. No matter what our age, we have the ability to listen to or ignore the various sounds that surround us. Admittedly, we have to ignore many sounds; we can’t pay attention to most of the things we hear. But there are times in which we must pay careful attention to others and not allow distractions to hinder the message from getting through to us.

This lesson will consider the importance of paying attention. We ought to be attentive when others are speaking to us, and we ought to be alert for spiritual dangers that threaten us.

I. Definitions

A. Alertness/Attentiveness

1. Being aware of what is taking place around me so I can have the right responses
2. Showing the worth of a person or task by giving my undivided attention
3. Listening to the words of another in such a way that I not only hear what the speaker says but also understand what he/she means

B. Indifference/Distraction

1. Failing to be aware of what is happening around me and failing to have the right responses
2. Showing that I don’t value what a speaker has to say by ignoring him/her
3. Not caring about the speaker or the events surrounding me and thus failing to understand what is being communicated or what is being done
4. “Zoning out” by focusing my attention on something else

II. Texts (read)

- A. Mt 7:24-27; Mark 13:33; Rom 13:11; Heb 2:1; James 1:22; 1 Pet 1:13, 4:7, 5:8
- B. In the OT, the Lord and the prophets frequently exhort people to hear them or to hear the voice of the Lord. To hear is not merely to register sound in one's ears. To hear is to listen closely with the object of obeying what God commands. Read Deut 4:10; Jer 13:10, 19:15, 23:22, 29:19; Ezek 2:7, 3:10
- C. We find the words "take heed" 26 times in the NT (KJV) along with commands like "watch" and "be sober." Jesus, Paul, the author of Hebrews, and Peter use these and similar expressions repeatedly. The biblical expectation is that believers are alert to danger, sober-minded, and attentive to what is going on around them. They are alert to the false teachers, the wolves in sheep's clothing, who are trying to lead them astray. They are aware that their enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—are all working to deceive and destroy them. They are not ignorant of the wiles/snakes (2 Cor 2:11) that are arrayed against them.
- D. One may hear without paying attention, listen without responding, or "take heed" and obey.
Joh 6:60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?
John 8:43 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.
Joh 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

III. The importance of alertness/attentiveness

- A. The Bible commends this character quality. Instead of a sleepy, lethargic, indifferent attitude, God expects his people to hear, listen, and respond.
- B. False teachers have influence over those who are not paying attention. Those ignorant of the snares and schemes of the devil are taken in by them. Those who are alert can discern false teaching when they hear it.
- C. Our primary responsibilities are to love God and to love our neighbors. One way to show love for God and others is to listen when they speak to us.

- D. We ought to be attentive to those in need (e.g., the Good Samaritan). Indifference is an evidence of selfishness (or at least a lack of interest in the needs of others). Attentiveness to others shows that you care.

IV. Why people are indifferent or distracted

- A. Indifference/disinterest/apathy—a failure to care about the other person, about what he is saying, or about one’s surroundings. The subject may be boring, beyond our understanding, or beyond our interest.
- B. Lack of attention becomes an excuse not to do what we didn't want to do anyhow (favorite excuse of kids). Children often pretend that they don’t hear, especially if their parents allow this excuse.
- C. Perhaps we think we can safely ignore someone since we already know the answer or have the information. Perhaps we assume that we know what the speaker is about to say (heard it all before, not convinced by the argument, not interested in the topic).
- D. We may stop listening and start preparing to answer or respond. When we are formulating an answer, we’re no longer listening.
- E. Our attention span has reached its maximum. Frustration and anger (or other strong emotions) may lead to an incapacity to take in any more information (or it may seem that way).
- F. Perhaps something about the speaker or something in the environment causes us to be distracted (e.g., other sounds, other people, odors [B.O., bad breath], invasion of personal space, eccentricities, etc.). We may have negative feelings about the speaker that hinder our desire to listen.
- G. The speaker may not be an effective communicator and we find it difficult to follow his/her train of thought.
- H. Some inattention may be due to physical difficulties or circumstances beyond one’s control. It’s hard to pay attention when one has been ill, sleeping poorly, worried, threatened, under stress, in pain, etc. It’s hard to stop in the middle of a task and devote one’s undivided attention to something entirely different.

V. Results of inattention

- A. Practical problems
 - 1. Miscommunication

2. Waste time and money
3. Foul up directions
4. Lose potential benefits
5. Fail to understand people
6. Needlessly offend others
7. Create avoidable conflicts
8. Have negative effects on speakers
9. Keep us from learning what we need to know

B. Spiritual problems

1. The worst Person to be indifferent toward is God. Apathy toward God and His Word reveals a genuine spiritual problem. In fact, lack of interest in the things of God is a primary indicator of an unsaved condition. Those who love God listen to His Word. Those who are unsaved cannot hear and do not listen to God.
2. Lack of attention to teaching or preaching likewise reveals indifference toward God and His Word. Everyone struggles occasionally (at least) to remain alert in class or during a sermon. But we should strive to be alert when others are teaching or speaking from the Bible. Do whatever is necessary to remain engaged in the process—chew gum, take notes, eat candy, pinch yourself, etc.

VI. What to do about indifferent/inattention

- A. Regarding spiritual threats—wake up (Rom 13:11), be vigilant (1 Pet 5:8), and “gird up the loins of your mind” (1 Pet 1:13). Prepare yourself for battle. Watch and pray (Mt 26:41). Don’t let the thief break into your house (Mt 24:43). Alertness and preparation is especially related to the Second Coming of Christ (cf. Mt 24:44; Luke 12:40, 21:34).
- B. With kids—train your children to pay attention when you speak to them. Do not allow indifference or inattention to you or your words. Confront this vice aggressively.
 1. Train them to make an initial response (at least). E.g., “OK, I’ll be right there.” They should indicate that they heard what you said and are preparing to obey.

2. Eliminate the distraction before trying to communicate. Shut off or mute the TV, turn down the radio, stop the car, etc.
 3. Gain their attention first. Call their name, tap on shoulder. Alert them to the fact that you are about to tell them something they need to know. Engage eye contact; “Look at me.” Make them recite back—”What did I just say?”
 4. Punish failure to listen to what was clearly communicated to them. Hold them accountable for what you tell them. Don’t allow the excuse that they did not hear when they should have heard. Show them that it’s in their best interests to listen to you.
- C. With ourselves (when trying to communicate with others)
1. Eliminate distractions (TV, Internet, phone, radio, etc.). If the person is clearly engaged in focused attention elsewhere, it may be futile to try to communicate at that time. Choose a better time and place. If you can’t stop to listen, ask the speaker to come back later.
 2. Interact with the speaker. Ask questions, take notes. “Why do you say that?” “Have you considered...?” “Is this what you are saying?” “Do you mean...?”
 3. Gain and maintain eye contact.
 4. Force yourself to listen. Paying attention communicates that you care. Indifference shows lack of concern, not only for what is being said, but also for the one saying it.
 5. Avoid the temptation to answer or insert your thoughts while the speaker is still speaking. Continue to listen until an answer is appropriate.
 6. Repent! If you are truly indifferent to your spouse, your children, your loved ones, or God, you need to turn from that sin, forsake it, confess it, and ask God to give you greater sensitivity to the needs of others.



Lesson 3

Virtue: Boldness/Courage/Determination/Initiative

Vice: Apathy/Faintheartedness/Fearfulness/

Idleness

Perhaps the best-known story in the entire Bible is that of David and Goliath. David's actions typify the virtues we consider in this lesson. In fact, many of the most memorable Bible stories include characters who display these virtues—Joseph, Daniel and his companions, Jesus, Peter, Paul, etc. Such character qualities are still necessary today among followers of Christ. The vices we'll consider are, unfortunately, quite common among professing believers. One of the reasons Christianity seems so powerless today is because believers often lack these virtues and display these vices.

I. Texts: Josh 1:9; 2 Sam 10:12; 1 Chron 19:13; Acts 17:6; 1 Cor 16:13; Eph 6:10; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 1:7, 2:1, 2:4, 4:7

II. Definitions

A. Virtues

1. Boldness—speaking or acting openly and forthrightly; having confidence or security that what one is doing is true, right, and/or just
2. Courage—acting in the face of difficulty or pain; being brave, having valor, nerve, or grit
3. Determination—purposing to accomplish right goals at the right time in spite of obstacles or opposition; resolute firmness; sticking with a task until it is finished; refusing to give up
4. Initiative—recognizing what needs to be done and doing something about it without being asked to do it; being a self-starter
5. These virtues can present as pushy, arrogant, and self-centered. Boldness in particular can cause a person to get involved where he has no business. A determined person can become a stubborn, obnoxious pest in some cases.

Sometimes boldness leads to an aggressive, caustic, faultfinding attitude that lacks sympathy and basic kindness. Constructive criticism certainly is necessary at times, but Christians must avoid a judgmental, critical attitude that seeks to destroy one's opponents. Avoid this extreme. Christians can display these virtues with sensitivity and caution.

6. These virtues, especially determination and initiative, make you a good employee. Employers are often looking for those who can work without supervision, do what's needed without being asked, and follow a task through to its conclusion. Virtuous living has its own reward.

B. Vices

1. Apathy—lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern; indifference; failure to sense a need or have compassion for others
2. Faintheartedness—timidity, lacking courage; nervous, paranoid, tense, uneasy, anxious, apprehensive; easily discouraged or diverted; prone to quit when opposed
3. Fearfulness—showing fear or anxiety; fear of the unknown; fear of embarrassment; fear of not knowing what to do; holding back because of fear or uncertainty
4. Idleness—lethargy, sluggishness, laziness, indolence; lacking enthusiasm; slack, lax; neglect
5. Procrastination, a “put it off until later” attitude, often results from these vices. The underlying hope is that if you put off a task long enough, perhaps you'll not have to do it.
6. These vices can sometimes present as humility, a desire not to be noticed or a reluctance to take credit for one's accomplishments. But in reality, these vices don't stem from genuine humility. They are the result of a sinful focus on the self (heightened self-consciousness/awareness). Because one is focused on self, he has little concern for others, little interest in solving problems, and little energy to take on tasks in which he is not interested. Don't allow yourself (or others) to think that these vices are virtues.

III. The basis of these virtues

- A. Each of these virtues assumes an absolute standard of right and wrong. Christians can be bold and determined because they are committed to doing the right thing, and they know with certainty what is right. A higher purpose leads Christians to have courage in the face of opposition. A commitment to high standards and ideals compels one to move boldly, to “take the bull by the horns.” These virtues compel believers to “attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.” E.g., evangelism, pro-life stand
- B. Obviously, unbelievers can also be bold, courageous, and determined. But to what end do they act this way? Often for selfish purposes and never for the greater glory of God. In fact, without a commitment to Christian morals, unbelievers can use these virtues to very sinful ends. They can boldly, courageously, and determinedly pursue all kinds of sin and mayhem. Thus, when employed sinfully, these virtues turn into vices.
- C. As noted above, Christians must insure that as they demonstrate these virtues, they don’t stray into selfish behaviors or self-promotion. Likewise, fellow Christians should not be overly-critical of those who attempt to do great things for God and for His people. We should commend the boldness and courage of those who step out by faith and try to change the world for Christ. Those who never attempt anything for God should hold their criticism of those who do (cf. Mark 9:38-39).

IV. Developing these virtues

- A. Develop a knowledge of, confidence in, and commitment to the Word of God. When Christians demonstrate these virtues, it’s because they are pursuing biblical goals. They are confident that they know what is right and they are pursuing a righteous cause. David asked, “Is there not a cause?” (1 Sam 17:29). In spite of his brother’s discouraging words, and in spite of the incredible odds against him, David moved with boldness, courage, and initiative in defeating the fearsome giant.

Matthew Henry: David had right and reason on his side, and knew it. ... He broke through the discouragement with admirable resolution. He would not be driven off from his thoughts of engaging the Philistine by the ill-will of his brother.⁴

That's determination—refusing to be driven off from a task because one has confidence that he is in the right.

Likewise, Joseph demonstrated courage and initiative as he rose to authority as a slave and a prison inmate. People who have these characteristics naturally rise to positions of responsibility and honor. No doubt, determination saw Joseph through his darkest hours. Then when he rose to power, he showed initiative by proposing a solution to the foreseen problems.

- B. Refuse to focus on yourself. These character qualities are virtually self-less. Boldness, courage, determination, and initiative rarely take self into consideration. In fact, thoughts about self tend to weaken these virtues. Concerns for personal reputation, safety, or comfort tend to repress these virtues. They surface in those who don't think much about themselves but do think much about a cause or a purpose. "Dare to be a Daniel." E.g., Sgt York in WWI

Initiative, in particular, requires that we are looking outwardly, not inwardly. Those looking for things to do are rarely lazy or lethargic. They tend to be very productive.

- C. Walk by faith. Peter commands us to add virtues to our faith (2 Pet 1:5). Without faith, it's impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). Many of the characters listed in the Hall of Faith (Heb 11) demonstrated these virtues. Because they diligently sought after God, they were willing to step out boldly and they had the courage to attempt the impossible.
- D. Repent of sin. If you are guilty of the vices listed above, repent! Confess and forsake your sin. Mortify it—put it to death. Get rid of it and start acting like a "new man" (Eph 4:22-24). Renew your mind and refuse to be conformed to this wicked world (Rom 12:1-2). You must make serious efforts to undermine, weaken, and exterminate these vices (Rom 6:13-14).

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 413.

- E. Ask God for help and believe that He can do more than we ask or think (Eph 3:20). We must trust in God both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil 2:13). Yield yourself to God, not to sin (Rom 6:13). Put on the whole armor of God and trust in the “power of his might” (Eph 6:10). Trust God to conform you to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29).
- F. Take action; stand up for something; get involved. Look for something that needs to be done. Refuse to focus on self. Instead, focus your attention on others and their needs. Volunteer to serve in a program or project. Stand up for the weak and oppressed. Speak boldly for or against something (read Acts 9:27, 29, 14:3, 18:26, 19:8). Confront error or abuse when you see it. When confronted with challenging ideas or people, refuse to be timid or frightened. Stand fast; be brave; be strong (1 Cor 16:13).

Obviously, whatever you are involved in supporting or defending must be biblically correct and worthy of your efforts. “Stand not in an evil thing” (Eccl 8:3). Boldness and courage are appropriate when the cause is just and right. If you are confident that you are on the right side, move forward with boldness and courage. Determine not to stand in support of anything contrary to God’s Word.

Ecc 9:10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.

Col 3:17 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.

- G. Don’t allow excuses to undermine your resolve. Some might complain that they are naturally lethargic, weak-willed, selfish, apathetic, timid, and fearful. These vices are part of the sinful nature, and Christians ought to be fervently seeking to overcome them and replace them with strong biblical virtues. The fact that a vice may be natural is no excuse. All sin and failure is natural because of the sin nature and the sinful tendencies remaining in us even after we are saved. Adopting these virtues may take some serious effort, especially for those prone to these vices. But we must make the effort to overcome these weaknesses and become strong in the Lord (Eph 6:10).

Start making small steps in the right direction. Start acting with courage and boldness even if you don’t feel comfortable doing so. Show initiative and determination even if you feel lazy.

- H. Persist in project until you achieve success. Finish the projects you start. Determination is necessary to accomplish almost anything of value. We must at times force ourselves to continue on in spite of difficulties and opposition. Success and failure are often the direct result of determination/persistence (or lack thereof). Persist! Persevere until you overcome the obstacle or finish the task. Refuse to quit or give in.

A record of past failures can prevent a person from persisting in a task or from accepting new projects. Work on developing a record of success by persisting until you succeed. Remind yourself that failure is often part of the process; you learn much in the “school of hard knocks.” Failure can be a good teacher if you try to learn from it—don’t make the same mistakes the next time. Failure should be only a temporary setback, not a permanent condition. Refuse to allow failure to prevent you from achieving your goals. “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” “Get back on the horse that threw you.”

- I. Children will often resort to these vices if the parents tolerate them. Confront these vices wherever you see them in your children; don’t allow them to be lazy and indulgent. Don’t allow them to quit before they finish the job. Encourage your children to trust God and step out by faith when confronted with an obstacle. Reward persistence and initiative. Provide opportunities for children to exercise boldness and courage. Encourage these virtues by demonstrating them yourself.



Lesson 4

Virtue: Caution/Discretion/Discernment

**Vice: Rashness/Gullibility/
Simplemindedness**

Proverbs 14:15 *The simple believes every word, But the prudent considers well his steps.*

Proverbs 22:3 *A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, But the simple pass on and are punished.*

Acts 17:11 *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

As we survey the wider Christian world, we may be amazed at what Christians tolerate these days. Ignorance of the Scriptures and of sound doctrine has led many within broader Christianity to adopt and embrace much falsehood, bad ideas, and downright foolishness. Some of the leading figures within Christianity are marked by serious theological weakness and error. And those who listen to them don't seem to recognize that fact. Both Christian leaders and average occupants of church pews around the world seem to be ignorant of basic Bible doctrine and are thus susceptible to all kinds of error and fraud.

MacArthur notes that one important factor in the “abysmal lack of discernment today is a growing deterioration of the overall level of spiritual maturity in today's church. As knowledge of God's truth ebbs, people follow more popular views, seeking feelings and experiences. They are hungry for miracles, healings, and spectacular wonders. They grope for easy and instant solutions to the routine trials of life. They turn quickly from the plain truth of God's Word to embrace doctrines fit only for the credulous and naive. They chase personal comfort and success. Christianity today may be shallower than at any time in history. ... Spiritual ignorance and biblical illiteracy are commonplace. ... Churches are therefore filled with baby Christians—people who are spiritual infants.”⁵

Christians must develop the ability to evaluate claims and ideas, adopting those that are biblical and rejecting those that are not. Those who have the virtues considered in this lesson will have that ability. Those who have the vices considered here will not.

⁵ John MacArthur, *Reckless Faith*, 62f.

I. Texts: 1 Kings 3:9; Ps 119:66; Prov 1:4, 22, 32, 8:5, 11:22, 16:21, 21:11; Mt 15:14; John 7:24; Eph 5:15; Phil 1:10; 1 Thes 5:21; 2 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:9, 2:1

II. Definitions

A. The virtues

1. Caution—care in avoiding danger or mistakes; wariness; prudence; circumspection (Eph 5:15 “circumspectly” means “accurately, strictly, carefully, mindfully.”)
2. Discretion—the capacity for well-considered action; comprehending the right purposes, seizing the right measures, developing the right plans, making right responses; tact, diplomacy, delicateness, avoiding unnecessary offense
3. Discernment—”to separate, to make a distinction, to differentiate.” In order to separate or distinguish one thing from another, one must examine, test, try, judge, or prove the things in question. Thus, discernment is the ability to examine, test, try, judge, or prove something with the result of separating or distinguishing the good from the bad, the genuine from the phony. Discernment is the ability to evaluate something before giving or withholding approval.

A related word is discrimination. We discriminate all the time—food choices, purchases, medicines, relationships, sports, etc. Life requires that we discriminate in many ways.

Discrimination based on some factors (e.g., race, biological gender) may not be proper.

4. These virtues, like all the others, are based on an unchanging moral standard—the Bible. Because standards of right and wrong exist, believers must use caution, discretion, and discernment to insure that they are following the right and denying the wrong.
5. Denying error is a vital part of Christian virtue. We cannot embrace both truth and falsehood at the same time. Commitment to the truth requires that we recognize and confront error. Unfortunately, many professing Christians today make tolerance of error a high virtue; they rarely warn anyone about sin or error. In their effort to win approval from the culture (i.e., attract a large crowd), some today tolerate vast quantities of error (e.g., false ideas like same-sex marriage,

universalism, women preachers, etc.) while still claiming the Christian name.

6. These virtues make us sensitive to the needs of others in the sense that we strive not to offend people needlessly by words or actions (i.e., we have good manners). To be discrete is to speak and act in a way that avoids offense and does not reveal private information. It means having tact and diplomacy, showing delicacy in personal matters (as opposed to vulgarity, crudeness, and boorishness).

B. The vices

1. Rashness—acting too quickly, often without thinking; lack of consideration for others; impetuosity; following one's "heart" instead of one's "head," rushing in without adequate thought
2. Gullibility (naiveté)—easily deceived or cheated; credulous; willing to believe without evaluation
3. Simplemindedness—ignorance, foolishness; lacking in mental acuteness or common sense; slow, dull-witted

III. The need for these virtues

- A. Biblical warning passages imply the need for them. Mt 7:15; Acts 20:29-31; Col 2:8; 2 Tim 4:3-4; Heb 5:14; 2 Pet 2:1-3

Incorrect and perverse teaching and teachers will confuse and even draw away believers. We are surrounded by false doctrine, unbiblical religious practices, and downright absurd religious assertions. Wolves in sheep's clothing are actively trying to draw us away from the truth. In many cases, truth is mixed with error, the genuine with the phony. Since this is the case, believers must develop the ability to choose between competing claims.

Further, cults and other religions are growing in size and influence. Mormonism and Islam are both spreading quickly and becoming more mainstream, especially in the U.S.

Obviously, we can't believe many things we hear, even from well-known and respected leaders. Many clashing philosophies and ideas are competing for our attention, and if we don't exercise discernment, we'll be led astray.

- B. The influence of popular culture makes them necessary.

What is culture? Generally speaking, culture is the usual way of thinking and living in a particular place and time. A culture is usually reflected in art, music, dress, language, architecture, literature, etc. Popular (or “pop”) culture today is expressed in music, TV, movies, magazines, fashion, etc. It’s what’s “hot,” or “in.”

Examples of false, immoral, vulgar and offensive ideas, words, and behaviors abound today on TV, in movies, and in popular music. The entertainment industry seems to be committed to providing increasingly graphic, vulgar, profane, and explicit material. Believers ought to reject most of what popular culture offers (as displayed through TV, pop music, websites, movies, many magazines, etc.) as hostile to a Christian worldview.

Can we escape all influence of pop culture? Not entirely. But there is a difference between *exposure* and *acceptance*. We can’t help but being exposed to some elements of pop culture, but we don’t have to accept or approve of what we see and hear so commonly around us.

IV. The danger of these vices

The primary danger in each of these vices is error.

- A. Personally, these vices lead to all sorts of bad decisions. Rash choices inevitably lead to negative results. Gullibility results in one being led astray. Simplemindedness prevents one from thinking things through rationally. These vices lead people to make bad decisions regarding behavior, education, marriage, career, recreation, entertainment, relationships, etc. Virtually every aspect of life is negatively impacted by these vices.
- B. Theologically, these vices lead to all sorts of false doctrine and unbiblical practices. Those with these vices are easily led astray (cf. Gal 1:6-7) and are immature in the faith (Heb 5:14).

V. Developing these virtues

- A. These virtues are based on knowing the truth and avoiding error, so the best way to develop them is to gain a deep knowledge of the truth—the Word of God. We must be able to discern the real from the counterfeit, and the best way to do that is to be intimately familiar with the Bible (cf. John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16-17).
- B. Many elements of false doctrine come from improperly interpreting the Bible. Sound interpretation principles lead to sound doctrine.

- C. Take plenty of time to think over and pray about claims and ideas. Talk with your pastor about it. Consult books on theology. Don't jump to conclusions without adequate thought and research. Wait until you are certain (or nearly so) before adopting different ideas.
- D. When evaluating teachers, ideas, and practices, ask the following questions.
 - 1. Is it supported by solid biblical evidence? Where is it found specifically (chapter and verse)? Is the argument convincing?
 - 2. Is it merely a fad, a popular but temporary diversion?
 - 3. Has it appeared in church history? What has the church historically thought about it? Have any of the first few councils of the church addressed it?
 - 4. Does it contradict what you know to be true? If it contradicts the Bible or contains logical errors, it is false.
 - 5. Is it within the mainstream of orthodoxy or at the extremes? Do respected, mature believers consider it to be orthodox, heterodox, or heretical?
 - 6. Is it emotionally driven? Is the idea merely an appeal to my feelings/sentiments?
 - 7. Is it popular just because of the people supporting it? Who supports it or is associated with it? Am I interested merely because of the people advocating it?
 - 8. Do I have all the information necessary to make a choice? Do I know both the facts supporting it as well as the factors denying it?
 - 9. What will be the results if I adopt this viewpoint/behavior/philosophy? What will I have to change? What will be the impact on my daily behavior?
 - 10. *Must* I adopt it? Is it really necessary? Am I driven to it by biblical necessity? Is it so important that I have to take a position on it? Can I put off making a decision or remain neutral/agnostic?
- E. Make use of available discernment helps and ministries. Several individuals and organizations research and review the claims of

various teachers, ministries, and movements. They alert the public to their findings. This is called polemics. Examples:

1. Alpha & Omega Ministries (James White—books, sermons, videos, website, podcast)
 2. Polemics Report (JD Hall—website, podcast, sermons)
 3. Christian Research Network (website)
- F. Avoid the “just my Bible and me” attitude. It’s simply unwise to ignore the contributions of others when sorting out complex issues. God has given pastors and teachers to the church (Eph 4:11) who spend years in training and research with the goal of protecting the church from error.

VI. Displaying these virtues

- A. Be skeptical about what you see, hear, and read. Carefully assess and examine claims, assertions, and arguments. Ask questions and demand solid answers. Withhold judgment on things until you are convinced (by solid biblical evidence) that what is being taught is the truth and has valid biblical support (or is a legitimate consequence of clear biblical principles). Don’t allow yourself to be stampeded into adopting questionable doctrines or practices.
- B. Search the Scripture to find out whether claims are true (Acts 17:11). If a claim is true, it should find clear support in the Bible (as properly interpreted).
- C. Be aware of the common logical fallacies that surround error, such as
1. Hasty generalization: drawing a conclusion about a whole class or group based on too few members or from non-typical members.
 2. Mistaken causal relationship: to conclude that one thing is the cause or reason for an effect without a direct causal link between the two. Two types:
 - a) *post hoc*: since B follows A, A must be the cause of B. E.g., “I went out in the rain, and now I have a cold.” Problem: chronological sequence is not a proof of a causal relationship. This is similar to the *non sequitur* (Latin, “it does not follow”), in which there is no valid connection between the premise and the conclusion.

- b) reductive fallacy: simple or single causes are given for complex effects. Problem: single actions are rarely the only cause of complex effects.
 - 3. Reasoning by analogy: a comparison between two different things or events showing the way in which they are similar. Problem: an analogy can be illustrative or suggestive, but it cannot be conclusive.
 - 4. Avoiding the question: diverting the question to another issue. Also known as a “red herring.” Three types:
 - a) begging the question: using the point one is trying to prove as proof
 - b) ad hominem attack: rather than arguing the issue, one attacks those who disagree
 - c) straw man: setting up and attacking a “dummy” issue instead of the real issue at hand
- D. Recognize the distinction between varieties of truth and error.
 - 1. Orthodox—straight or right belief and practice; right, proper, consistent with the teaching of the Bible. Orthodoxy generally pertains to the core doctrines—the fundamentals—of Christianity.⁶
 - 2. Heterodox—other than what the Bible clearly teaches; different from orthodox; not necessarily a “damnable heresy” or “doctrine of demons,” but outside what is commonly held to be true. One can be heterodox on some issues and still be saved. E.g., Annihilationism
 - 3. Heresy—a doctrine that contradicts the fundamental teachings of the faith. Believing heresy brings one’s profession of faith into question (or even proves one to be unsaved). E.g., Pelagianism
- E. Filter what your children are exposed to. Young people are notoriously gullible. They are especially susceptible to being led astray by adults. Thus, parents must act as filters to prevent bad ideas from influencing the minds of their children. Parents cannot prevent all negative influences, but they can deflect most of them. Parents

⁶ This does not pertain to various churches or denominations that might use the word “orthodox” in their name, e.g., Greek Orthodox Church. Many that use the name “orthodox” are not.

should expose their children to the wider world slowly and only after the child is well-versed in biblical truth. Parents should counter bad ideas with good ones. Answer questions, show connections, explain why we do/don't believe certain claims/ideas/doctrines. Help your children compare what they hear in the world (i.e., TV, videos, Internet, books) with what the Bible says. (e.g., evolution vs. young earth creation, biblical relationships vs. corrupt forms)



Lesson 5

Virtue: Compassion/Kindness/Sensitivity

Vice: Indifference/Callousness/Meanness

Rom 12:15 *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

Eph 4:32 *Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

Kindness is a basic Christian virtue. One can hardly claim to be a Christian if he lacks kindness. Even pagan idolaters demonstrate kindness; how much more ought Christians to be characterized by this virtue!

I. Texts

Mark 8:2; Luke 6:35-36; Acts 28:2; Rom 2:4, 3:12, 11:22; 1 Cor 13:4; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:32; Col 3:12; Heb 10:34; 1 Pet 1:7, 3:8; Titus 3:4; Jude 22

II. Definitions

A. Virtues

1. Compassion/sympathy—sharing the feelings of others; showing mercy; an urge to help those suffering
 - a) *Splanchnizomai*—to be deeply moved in one's "gut" (lit. "bowels"; i.e., "heart"); to be affected in one's inner being
 - b) *Sympatheo*—to sympathize, feel the same, affected by the same sufferings or emotions; fellow-feeling
2. Kindness—goodness characterized by being warmhearted, considerate, humane, and sympathetic; being gently pleasant; not harsh, stern, or severe
 - a) *Chrestos*—gentle, friendly, helpful, gracious
 - b) *Philadelphia*—brotherly kindness; the love of a brother
 - c) *Philanthropia*—humanity, clemency, mercy, generosity, aid
3. Sensitivity—awareness of the feelings and needs of those around me; consideration for others; exercising care so as not to needlessly offend others; avoiding causing pain; the ability to

understand a situation and know what is proper/fitting to say and do

4. These virtues are all based on caring for others. Those who care are kind, compassionate, and sensitive. Those who don't care are indifferent. E.g., the characters in the parable of the Good Samaritan
5. These virtues are clearly based in the emotions/feelings but go beyond that to motivate practical action (the root meaning of the word "kind" is "useful"). We are moved to help others when we sense a need. Internal feelings produce physical action.
6. We have a natural desire to be treated kindly, but that doesn't necessarily translate over to treating others kindly. For many people, kindness and compassion do not come naturally; they must be learned.

B. Vices

1. Indifference/apathy—uncaring, unconcerned, inconsiderate; heartless; disinterest in how others feel
2. Callousness—demonstrating hardness toward the needs or feelings of others; cruel disregard for others
3. Meanness—abusive, hardhearted, unkind, spiteful, unfair, vicious, malicious, offensive, nasty, ignoble, ruthless
4. These vices are (often) driven by self-centeredness. Selfish people are rarely kind, compassionate, or sensitive to the needs of others. Generally, mean people are so focused on their own concerns that they fail to notice the needs of others.

III. Importance

- A. All virtues stem from God's character, and these virtues are clearly attributes of God's goodness. God is kind to all (Ps 145:9), even the ungrateful and wicked (Luke 6:35). God extends mercy and compassion to those who don't deserve it (Rom 9:15; Titus 3:4-5). Believers ought to emulate this character quality of God.
- B. The Bible commands believers to show kindness to others. Jesus expected his followers to love their enemies and do good (Luke 6:35). Paul directly commands us to "be kind to one another" (Eph 4:32). Kindness is included in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22f).

- C. The Bible contains many examples of kind people—Abraham, Joseph, Ruth, Boaz, David, Elijah, Jesus, Dorcas, Paul, Barnabas, etc. Jesus was marked by compassion (Mt 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34, etc.). He told stories about practical kindness (i.e., the Good Samaritan—Luke 10:25f). Christlikeness demands that we strive to be kind and compassionate (cf. John 8:1-11; cf. 1 John 2:6).
- D. These virtues make life with others much more pleasant. When everyone is trying to be sympathetic, gentle, and understanding, life just goes better. Kind people are easier to get along with in just about every context—home, school, work, church, government, culture, etc.
- E. Those lacking these virtues make life difficult if not miserable for those who have to deal with such people.

IV. Dangers

- A. Like any other virtue, kindness/compassion can be pushed to unbiblical extremes. Some claim that God will not judge sin because of His kindness and love. This is clearly unbiblical. God's love does not prevent Him from being just and holy. God's kindness (grace) was most fully revealed in the death of Christ for our sins (Rom 5:8). The goodness of God leads sinners to repentance (Rom 2:4), not to continued sin (cf. Titus 2:11-12). God's kindness and compassion provided a means of salvation; but if sinners reject that means, God will punish them for their sins.
- B. Kindness can prevent one from exercising discipline or confronting sin or error. Those with tender hearts are often moved with compassion to the extent that they tolerate sinful or inappropriate behavior in others. Their gentleness prevents them from applying "tough love," with the result that bad behavior goes unpunished. Children grow up to be brats, and adults continue in their destructive patterns because kind, well-meaning people refuse to confront them. True compassion is concerned about the best interests of others, and what is best is often confrontation and discipline, not allowance or tolerance.
- C. Feelings of kindness, compassion, and sympathy must not prevent us from fulfilling our other responsibilities. We must still exercise discipline and discernment.

- D. When others confront us about our sin or error, we should see it as a kindness, not an affront or offense. It's only because others care that they confront. Correction is a sign of love. Read Ps 141:5.
- E. Probably the best picture of balanced virtue is Jesus. He was kind and compassionate to the sick (both physically and spiritually), yet quite confrontational to the hypocritical and complacent (cf. Mark 2:17). Christlikeness implies that we do the same.
- F. Those with the above vices often take advantage of those with the above virtues. Mean people mistreat kind people because they can get away with it. Kind people turn the other cheek. Compassionate people are often the target of fraud and abuse because they are easily taken in by a sentimental "sob story." Naturally compassionate people must exercise caution to avoid being cheated.
- G. Intellect must govern emotion. Don't allow your "heart" to do something your "head" says is unsuitable or unhelpful. E.g., our desire to help others (generosity) may hinder the needy person from changing his bad behavior.
- H. We live in a culture that is increasingly violent. Many people indulge in entertainment choices that create indifference and callousness toward the suffering of others (e.g., violence in movies and video games). People are increasingly desensitized to human need and focused only on themselves. Such attitudes work against developing kindness.
- V. Developing these virtues
 - A. Cast off the old; put on the new (Eph 4:22-24). Determine to rid yourself of these vices and gird yourself with these virtues. Intentionally work at adding them to your faith (2 Pet 1:5-7).
 - B. Obey the commands to be kind, tenderhearted, compassionate, and merciful to others, especially those who mistreat you. Even notorious sinners love for those who love them (Mt 5:46). It's unusual that someone treat a mean person with kindness. Treat everyone with kindness; try to be friendly toward all, no matter how they treat you. Turn the other cheek; repay evil with good.
 - C. Turn your focus from yourself and notice what others are going through. Develop concern for others and their needs and problems. Care about others to the same degree you care about yourself. Try to see things from the other person's point of view. Think about how

your attitude and behavior affects others. Look for opportunities to help those in need.

- D. Kindness and compassion motivate us to help in physical, practical ways. E.g., Boaz being kind to Ruth—he recognized the need and filled it. What needs are you aware of and able to fill? Keep your eyes and ears open for hints regarding who has needs. Think of ways to show practical kindness.
- E. We convey kindness or lack of it through our language. The law of kindness ought to govern our mouths (Ps 141:3; Prov 31:26; Eph 4:29).
- F. Ask God to help you develop these virtues. Allow yourself to be “moved with compassion” like Jesus was (Mt 9:36). Those who are naturally stern and/or impassive tend to struggle with being warmhearted and sensitive. Give others the permission to confront you regarding a lack of kindness if they see it in you.
- G. Strive to be kind to all (1 Thes 5:15). Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect as those who bear the image of God (James 3:9). Even the most debased and corrupt miscreant should be treated with at least a basic level of kindness.
- H. Teach your children to be kind and compassionate.
 - 1. Kindness begins at home. Set the example yourself. Don’t expect from your kids something you are not. Self-centered parents produce self-centered children. Home should be filled with these virtues and absent of these vices. Unfortunately, often it’s the reverse.
 - 2. Teach these virtues in the home (cf. Deut 6:7). Talk about how important it is to you that your children are kind and compassionate, especially to siblings. Confront these vices if they appear.
 - 3. Demonstrate your concern for others in practical ways that your kids can see. Help those in need. Go out of your way to care for others. Pray for the needs of others. Remind children of how blessed they are and how others are suffering. Involve children when you assist others.
 - 4. Demand that children treat their siblings with kindness.
 - 5. Don’t allow violent movies or video games into your home.



Lesson 6

Virtue: Contentment/Security

Vice: Covetousness/Greed/Anxiety

1 Timothy 6:6–10 *Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

I. Texts

Ex 20:17; Prov 21:25-26; Isa 57:15; Jer 6:13; Mark 7:22; Luke 3:14, 12:15; Rom 1:29; 1 Cor 5:11; Eph 4:19, 5:3, 5; Phil 4:11; Heb 13:5; James 4:2; 2 Pet 2:3, 14

II. Definitions

A. The virtues

1. Contentment: Trusting that God has supplied everything I need; satisfaction, a sense of having what is required/necessary; sufficiency of the soul; realizing that true happiness does not depend on material conditions⁷
2. Security: Freedom from feelings of anxiety or fear because I trust that God will meet my needs; a personal sense of stability based on the fact that I am God's good creation; knowing who I am and what I'm supposed to be doing; knowing my identity in Christ

B. The vices

1. Covetousness/greed/avarice: selfish desire, evil craving; intense desire to possess what someone else has; excessive desire to possess more and more wealth; envy or jealousy over possessions; loving money or the things it can buy; striving for material possessions (materialism)

⁷ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

Bishop Lightfoot, commenting on Romans 1:29, defined covetousness as “the disposition which is ever ready to sacrifice one’s neighbour to oneself in all things, not in money dealings merely.”⁸

One of the primary words for covetousness or greed is *pleonezia* (πλεονεξία), literally meaning “having more, receiving more, wanting more.” It’s based on a root word meaning “too much.”

Note: in some contexts, words translated as “covet” (i.e., earnest desire [*epithumia*—”lust,” *zelow*—”zeal”]) are used in a positive way (e.g., 1 Cor 12:31; 14:1, 39).

2. Anxiety: Fearfulness that my needs will not be met; lack of security regarding my identity; instability due to ignorance of God’s Word

III. Importance

- A. The virtues are commanded and the vices are forbidden throughout the Bible.
 1. The 10 Commandments prohibit covetousness (Ex 20:17/Deut 5:21). One must not covet anything that belongs to a neighbor.
 2. The prophets prohibit covetousness (Isa 5:8; 57:17; Eze 33:31; Am 2:6; 5:11-12; 8:5-6; Mic 2:2).

Prov 23:4 *Labor not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.*
 3. Jesus taught the importance of contentment (Mt 6:19-21, Luke 12:15).
 4. The apostles expected believers to live without covetousness (Phil 4:11; Heb 13:5).
- B. Contentment is found internally, not externally. Contentment begins with a personal walk with the Lord in salvation and grows through the process of sanctification.
 1. Spiritual satisfaction is found in a proper relationship with God.
 - a) I am saved and enjoy a perfect standing/status before God (Rom 8:1). Justification insures that I am perfectly

⁸ Ronald F. Bridges and Luther A. Weigle, [*King James Bible Word Book*](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 89.

accepted by God. I have peace with God (Rom 5:1) and the peace of God (Phil 4:7).

- b) God is working out all things for His glory and for my good (Rom 8:28). Nothing can be against me because God is for me (Rom 8:31). Nothing can separate me from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35). These truths give me a sense of security and stability.
- c) I am simultaneously a sinner and a saint. Whenever I sin, the blood of Christ (i.e., the merits of his sacrificial death for me) continues to cleanse me from all sin (1 John 1:7). If we confess our sins, he will forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9). Christ serves as our advocate before the Father, pleading our case (1 John 2:1).
- d) A genuine believer should enjoy assurance of salvation, i.e., security in his spiritual condition. Habitual disobedience weakens such assurance and leads to spiritual anxiety over the condition of one's soul.
- e) I need not be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:14) when I know what I believe and why I believe it.

2. Spiritual satisfaction is found in a continuing walk with the Lord.

- a) Christ is always present with me (Mt 28:20; 1 Cor 6:19-20; Heb 13:5-6).
- b) When we abide in Christ, we can be assured that we are his disciples (John 15:1-8).

C. Contentment is not based on external circumstances.

- 1. Christians learn to be content in whatever condition the providence of God provides for them (Phil 4:11).
- 2. Material goods never ultimately satisfy—they can be stolen or lose their value (Mt 6:19).
- 3. Our sense of joy and satisfaction should be independent of material things and physical conditions.

II. Dangers

- A. Greed stems from lack of contentment with one's lot in life. The desire for more reflects a failure to find satisfaction in what God provides.

John D. Rockefeller, owner of Standard Oil, was at one point the world's richest man. When a reporter asked him, "How much money is enough?" He responded, "Just a little bit more."

- B. The vices often lead to terrible and tragic consequences. Read 1 Tim 6:10—"many sorrows" come from greed.
1. E.g., Adam & Eve (Gen 3)—Eve ate from the tree because she thought it would benefit her personally.
 2. Achan (Josh 7)—Greed moved him to take gold and garments. The sin cost him and his family their lives.
 3. David (2 Sam 12)—He coveted his neighbor's wife, leading to the sin of adultery, the murder of Uriah, the death of the child, personal shame, blasphemy of God, and trouble for the rest of his life.
 4. King Ahab (1 Kings 21)—He coveted Naboth's vineyard, which resulted in Naboth's murder and in Ahab's and Jezebel's deaths.
 5. Personal experiences like depression, anxiety, broken relationships, unhappiness, bad decisions, jealousy, and the like can often be traced back to a lack of satisfaction with God's providential care. Discontent is a strong emotion that may lead to all manner of upset and trouble.
- C. Ephesians 5:5 equates covetousness with idolatry and prohibits entry into the kingdom of God to those who sin in this way. The lowest and worst form of covetousness is the worship of self, i.e., self-centeredness, self-glory, self-love/esteem. When one's ultimate purpose is to fulfill his own desires, he has become an idolater who worships at the altar of self.
- D. Note that the *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil, not money itself. The Bible does not condemn money, wealth, or possessions. God does not (usually) call His people to a life of poverty. God blesses some with great wealth, and He expects them to use their wealth for godly purposes.

- E. Contentment need not prevent believers from enjoying the resources that God provides. Content people may occasionally upgrade their clothing, car, or house. One need not remain in poverty just because he's content to be there.
- F. The primary concerns for Christians should not be financial, i.e., money for retirement, money for vacations, strategies for paying less in taxes, accumulating assets to pass to one's heirs, etc. These things have a practical importance but are clearly secondary as we pursue God's goals for us (Mt 6:33).
- G. For some, contentment may be confused with complacency, indifference, or self-satisfaction. True contentment does not result in laziness or apathy toward the needs of others. This is especially true spiritually. One should be spiritually content but not complacent. One should always be striving for higher levels of spiritual maturity and knowledge. One should never think of himself as virtuous enough. We are always striving for higher levels of growth (2 Pet 3:18).
- H. Contentment does not undermine biblical stewardship. Men are responsible to provide adequately for their families (1 Tim 5:8; 2 Thes 3:10). They can be content with what God provides through their efforts, but they cannot be complacent/indifferent. Providers should always strive to provide the best they can given their circumstances in life. If our goal in making more money is to provide better conditions for our families, increase our giving to our church, and help more people in need, then greed is not the problem.

III. Developing these virtues

- A. If you've been greedy, repent! Acknowledge it as sin and forsake it. Likewise with lack of contentment. Confirm within yourself that God provides all you really need, and determine to be satisfied with what God provides. Find your highest and ultimate contentment in Christ. Be thankful and content, not greedy or materialistic.
- B. Like all the other virtues, believers must obey the biblical commands to be content and hate greed/covetousness. Remember that we brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we'll carry nothing out (1 Tim 6:7). Material things have little or no true (spiritual) value. Don't waste your life accumulating things that cannot make you happy. Live within your means and don't set your affections on physical things (Mt 6:21).

- C. Resist daydreams of wealth and luxury. Dreaming about exclusive mansions and luxury automobiles doesn't lead to contentment with modest cottages and used cars. Avoid the "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" programs and the sensational reporting regarding those who flaunt their wealth.
- D. If you are struggling with feelings of greed and materialism, perhaps the best solution is to become generous. Give cheerfully to meet the needs of God's work and God's people. Visit a region where people live in true poverty and you'll be thankful for what you have.
- E. Extreme measures may be appropriate if one cannot control inner urges to buy more stuff (Mt 5:30). Cut up the credit cards, close the charge accounts, start paying with cash, put yourself on a strict budget, quit going to auctions, hold a garage sale, etc.



Lesson 7

Virtue: Decisiveness

Vice: Procrastination/Indecision

James 1:5–8 *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

I. Texts

Gen 24:27; Ps 37:23; Prov 16:9; 1 Cor 7:8-9, 25-28, 10:27, 16:3-4; 1 Thes 3:1-2; Phil 2:25

II. Definitions

A. The virtue—decisiveness

1. The ability to make prompt, wise, and firm decisions in keeping with the will and ways of God
2. The ability to make decisions and stand by them
3. The ability to make a firm decision or take appropriate action on the basis of the facts and within the proper time frame
 - a) The decision is firm—you stand by it without compromise, believing it is the best option available.
 - b) The decision is factual—based on objective facts primarily, not subjective feelings.
 - c) The decision is timely—fitting for the present time, made within the period allotted for it.
 - d) The decision is thought to be the best, most likely to succeed, and suitable to the circumstances.

B. The vices—procrastination/indecision

1. Delaying or postponing decisions
 - a) Some people delay in order to gather more facts or consult with advisors so as to make the best decision. This is not really procrastination.

- b) Some people simply have a hard time making decisions; they are indecisive, not necessarily procrastinators.
- c) Procrastinators delay because they don't want to make the decision immediately and find it easier to put it off until later.
- d) Some procrastinators are lazy and hope that the decision and/or task will go away if they ignore it long enough. They've learned that if they don't make a decision or do a job, someone else will do it for them.

"One of these days I'm going to stop procrastinating."

2. Inability to make up your mind

- a) Indecision may be due to an inner difficulty with decision making in general. Some people are simply paralyzed in the face of major decisions, while under pressure, or if lacking certainty. E.g., marriage, career, large purchase.
- b) Indecision may be due to over-choice—too many options leads to difficulty in choosing just one. Particularly true given the options now available through the Internet.
- c) Indecision may be due to worry over the potential results of the decision.

Indecision may be due to fear of failure—"I don't want to be held accountable/liable for this decision." One may avoid decisions or tasks out of fear of being blamed for the outcome of the decision or the quality of the job.

- d) Indecision may be due to the habit of deferring decisions to others. In some cases (e.g., controlling husband), one may have been prevented from making decisions or punished for doing so.
- e) Indecision may be due to feelings of guilt, unworthiness, or lack of assurance of one's salvation. We rarely do what we think we are unworthy of doing or don't deserve to do.

3. Procrastinators convince themselves that they'll get to a task later, when they feel better, have more energy, have the tools, have help, have more time, etc. Perhaps they think they work

better under pressure. Or they convince themselves that the job is not important or can be done by someone else.

4. Procrastination may be a habitual pattern that affects virtually every aspect of life. Procrastinators typically delay paying their bills, miss out on special events, fail to show up on time, miss appointments, and do everything last minute. In many ways, procrastinators squander their own resources and the goodwill of others.
5. Most procrastinators are selective in their reluctance to make a decision. In some areas, they rarely neglect making decisions; in others, they always do. Procrastination usually hinges on personal desire and interest (i.e., emotion).

III. Importance

- A. Decisive people generally do more in a shorter amount of time because they don't spend much time or effort on making decisions. They quickly evaluate the options and make a choice, thus wasting little capital in the effort.
- B. Decisive people are generally better leaders. Followers expect their leaders to make decisions, not waffle and stumble in the face of options.
- C. Decisive people generally don't worry too much or over-think a problem. They face a decision, evaluate options, make a decision, and move on to the next challenge. They are not paralyzed by the process.
- D. Procrastination generates anxiety as the individual struggles to make the decision.
- E. Procrastination is the enemy of success. Success is usually found in determination, concentration, and effort. Those who delay beginning the job seldom achieve much success.

Procrastinators sabotage themselves. They put obstacles in their own path. They actually choose paths that hurt their performance.⁹
- F. Indecision often causes some difficulties in life but rarely is catastrophic. Decisions come more slowly and cause more anxiety, but even indecisive people eventually do something. True procrastinators,

⁹ Hara Estroff Marano, "Procrastination: Ten Things to Know."
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200308/procrastination-ten-things-know>

on the other hand, would rather not make a decision or deal with a task if the experience is unpleasant.

IV. Dangers

A. Regarding decisiveness

1. Decisive people may charge ahead without considering all the facts or all the options available. They perhaps fail to consider the needs or feelings of others. They may fail to think through the possible results of their decision.

Decisiveness need not be inconsiderate of others or ignorant of the facts. Good decision-makers take all the pertinent facts into consideration and evaluate options fully before deciding.

2. Decisive people may be unwilling to change a decision or reverse course even when faced with hard evidence that the decision was wrong. Decisive people tend to be rather strong-willed and sure of themselves.

Decisiveness need not be stubborn and inflexible. When a decision proves to have been wrong or unwise, the best choice is to reverse course or modify the decision. Decisive people should be able to acknowledge their bad decisions. No one can maintain a perfect record of uniformly good decisions.

3. Decisive people may stick with a poor decision because of personal pride. Reversing course may seem like weakness or compromise, and in an effort to save face, they retain the decision even if it was a bad one.

B. Regarding procrastination

1. Procrastination amounts to a lack of self-discipline. Procrastinators simply refuse to regulate themselves. They allow themselves to be ruled by feelings, not principles. Perhaps they believe the lie that they have to feel like doing a job before attempting it. They feel like they have to be in the right mood to work.
2. The main danger in procrastination is that one fails to do what needs to be done in a timely manner. Procrastinators generally get around to making decisions and finishing tasks, but in the process, they waste time and energy. They are often

disorganized and inefficient; procrastination is just a symptom of a larger problem—lack of self-discipline.

3. Procrastinators tend to busy themselves with alternative tasks in order to avoid the task they don't want to do. Instead of tackling an unpleasant job that needs to be done, they work on a more pleasant job that is not important.
4. In children, procrastination may be a sign of rebellion, especially in authoritarian households. One way that children can retaliate against their parents is to delay obedience. In permissive households, parents tolerate procrastination, which in turn supports the habit.
5. Procrastination can have significant health consequences, like increased frequency of colds and flus, stomach problems, and insomnia. The physical stress of putting things off invites health problems.
6. No one enjoys working with a procrastinator. Such people are always running late, rarely contribute to the team, shift work to others, and are not reliable. Procrastinators have trouble retaining close relationships because they are unreliable and irresponsible.

V. Developing decisiveness

- A. Read your Bible. We make good decisions when the relevant principles are clear in our mind. These guiding principles become clearer the better we know and affirm what the Bible teaches about them. Follow the commandments and implement the clear principles. Many of our decisions are virtually set for us if we simply follow the biblical guidelines. Our choices (especially on moral issues) narrow down considerably when we apply the Bible. E.g., marriage, career.

The principle of spiritual expediency: making the best possible decision while attempting to glorify and please God in it

- ✓ spiritual: governed by the moral will of God; concerned with what God wants; pleasing to God, employing biblical principles, submissive to God
- ✓ expedient: best, most advantageous, fitting, most beneficial, wisest, suitable, what works best, most sensible, most likely to succeed

- B. Ask God for wisdom in general and specifically regarding a particular decision. Wisdom is “the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it” (J. I. Packer).
- C. Base your decisions on fact rather than feeling. Occasionally, we have to make a decision on impulse, “gut” feelings, or personal intuition. But normally, our decisions should be the result of an unbiased evaluation of the facts, the pros and cons, the costs and benefits. Make the best choice given the facts and potentials for success or failure.
- D. Act on principle, not on impulse. If we wait until we feel like doing a project, we’ll possibly never get around to it. If a task needs attention, we should address it no matter how we feel about it. Get used to doing what you don’t want to do. Concentration and directed effort are matters of the will, not the emotions. Self-disciplined people force themselves to do things even when they don’t want to do them.

“Prod yourself! — kick yourself! — it’s the only way.” —Winston Churchill
- E. Uncertainty is the great enemy of decisiveness and the great motivator of procrastination. Reduce uncertainty and decisions become easier to make and tasks easier to complete without delay. Try to make the decision or task as concrete and defined as possible before tackling it.
- F. Work on the hardest, most important, and/or most undesirable job first. Work at it until it’s done, and then go on to the next, then the next. If you tackle your work in order of importance, the decision is not really yours to make. You don’t give yourself the option of distracting yourself with something less important.
- G. Make lists. Write out pros and cons, cost and benefits, risks and rewards. Make sure you are working on the right decision, not a secondary one. Write out all the factors on each side of the decision. Note the biblical principles involved. Consider the time limits, if any.
- H. Reduce distractions. Turn off the media, the smart phone, and the computer (if not necessary for the decision or task). Isolate yourself so you can focus on the issue at hand and concentrate without distraction. Focus on the task until it is done. Study the issue until you are satisfied that you can make a good decision.

- I. Seek godly counsel and expert advice. Talk to those you respect for their input. If you receive significant opposition to your tentative decision, it may be best to change the decision or wait.
- J. On non-moral decisions, realize that you are free and responsible to choose the course of action that you desire. Any decision here, as long as it follows biblical principles, is acceptable to God. A non-moral decision may or may not be wise/smart, but it can't be sinful.

Aren't we supposed to wait for God to tell us what to do? If we pray hard and look for the "signs," will God tell us what decision to make? It's unwise for us to expect God to speak to us directly or reveal his will through hints, circumstances, dreams, visions, voices, etc. We need not "put out the fleece" like Gideon did to confirm God's will. We should base our decisions on biblical principles and sound wisdom rather than on what we perceive to be God's "still, small voice," leading, inner promptings, peace or lack of it, etc.

Prov 16:9 A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.

- K. Delaying decisions may be appropriate in some cases. If you've recently experienced a life-altering disaster (e.g., death of a loved one, loss of employment), it may be wise to delay a decision until things have settled down and you can think clearly. It's generally unwise to make a major decision when experiencing great personal upset, loss, grief, pressure, stress, etc.
- L. Once you've made the decision, stick with it; don't waffle or compromise, unless facts prove that the decision was seriously in error. Be flexible but not easily moved. In some cases, we must make the best of a bad decision rather than trying to go back to the previous condition or making another decision.
- M. In all decisions, the believer should humbly submit, in advance, to the outworking of God's sovereign will as it touches every decision (cf. James 4:13-15). God is the ultimate determiner and controller of everything that happens (Eph 1:11). God's sovereign plan will certainly be fulfilled, and nothing can hinder it or change it.
- N. The sovereignty of God does not reduce man's responsibility to make wise decisions. One cannot blame God for his own bad choices. The Bible teaches *both* the sovereignty of God and the reality of our own personal decisions. Cf. Gen 50:20.

A Simple 5-Step Strategy for Decision-Making¹⁰

1. Identify and describe the decision to be made. What is the problem? What is the cause? Is it necessary or optional, a need or a want? Define the decision you have to make with all limits, parameters, guidelines, etc. Make it as concrete and precise as possible.
2. Gather several alternative solutions. Brainstorm for potential ideas. Check with experts and advisors.
3. Compare various alternatives. What solution(s) seem best? Pick the best ones (two or three); drop the rest.
4. Calculate the risk and benefits of each possible decision. Evaluate pros and cons. Do a cost-benefit analysis.
5. Select the best alternative and implement it. Pick the course of action that best addresses the issue and apply it. Only if the results of the decision turn out to be disastrous should you overturn the decision.

¹⁰ Robert Welch, *Church Administration*. We're assuming that you have prayed about the decision, applied the biblical principles, and it is within the moral will of God.



Lesson 8:

**Virtue: Deference/Politeness/Flexibility
Punctuality/Tolerance**

**Vice: Disregard/Rudeness/Stubbornness
Tardiness/Prejudice**

- I. Texts: Gen 13:9; Matt 7:3-4, 12; John 7:24; Rom 12:10, 14:1-3, 15:1-2; 1 Cor 8:13, 10:32-33; Eph 5:11, 21; Gal 6:1-2; Phil 2:3-4; 1 Pet 5:5
- II. Definitions
 - A. The virtues
 1. Deference: regard/respect for others that causes me to yield to their desires; limiting my freedom so I do not offend those around me
 2. Politeness: showing good manners toward others, as in behavior, speech, etc.; courteous; civil; refined, cultured, gracious;¹¹ decency, civility
 3. Flexibility: Willingness to change plans or ideas according to the direction of my authorities¹²
 4. Punctuality: Showing esteem for others by doing the right thing at the right time¹³
 5. Tolerance: a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, beliefs, practices, racial or ethnic origins, etc., differ from one's own; freedom from bigotry;¹⁴ realizing that everyone is at varying levels of character development;¹⁵ recognizing and accepting differences among people and allowing them to be themselves; accepting other people as I would want to be accepted

All of these virtues depend on concern (i.e., love) for others. If you love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:39), these virtues are the natural result. The vices, on the other hand, are the result of putting yourself first and failing to love your neighbor as yourself.

¹¹ politeness. Dictionary.com. *Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition*. HarperCollins Publishers. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/politeness> (accessed: April 17, 2017).

¹² <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

¹³ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

¹⁴ tolerance. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/tolerance> (accessed: April 17, 2017).

¹⁵ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

These virtues and vices pertain to things like opinions, desires, ideas, viewpoints, lifestyle, etc. Those possessing the above virtues allow others to have and express themselves without taking offense (within limits). Those characterized by the following vices upset others by their behaviors and attitudes and are easily offended when others disagree.

B. The vices

1. Disregard: contempt for others; apathy toward other's feelings and desires; failure to consider what others want or think
2. Rudeness: poor manners, offensive conduct; boorishness; disrespect
3. Stubbornness: unreasonable obstinacy; unmoving; set in purpose; difficult to shape or manage¹⁶
4. Tardiness: habitual lateness for appointments; failure to manage one's schedule so as to arrive on time
5. Prejudice: an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought, or reason; unreasonable feelings, opinions, or attitudes, especially of a hostile nature, regarding an ethnic, racial, social, or religious group;¹⁷ intolerant attitude toward those who are different; irrational disdain for anything different

Judgmentalism: disapproval or criticism of others over failures that one is guilty of himself; hypocrisy; an inappropriate sense of moral superiority over another because of that person's moral failures¹⁸

III. Importance

- A. These character traits pertain to daily, practical behavior. Who will get into line first? Who will open the door for another? Who will insist on having his own way? Who will offend others through his stubborn inconsideration or rude behavior? Who will win friends and influence people? Who will be on time, and who will be late? Who will take

¹⁶ stubborn. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/stubborn> (accessed: April 17, 2017).

¹⁷ prejudice. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/prejudice> (accessed: April 17, 2017).

¹⁸ Paul Copan, "Who Are You to Judge Others?"—In Defense of Making Moral Judgments" https://theosophical.wordpress.com/2011/02/09/the-biblical-teaching-on-judgmentalism-setting-the-record-straight/#_ftn1

offense and who will extend grace? Who will share and who will jealously protect his territory? Character or lack of it will have a large impact on your daily behavior, and hence, your personal relationships.

- B. Good manners are a practical expression of charity and grace toward others. Love and respect for others demands that we treat them the way we would want to be treated (the Golden Rule). If we love our neighbors as ourselves, we will modify our behavior so as to be courteous and polite, not rude and boorish. Failure to extend common courtesies to others is an evidence of self-centeredness and disregard.
- C. Those who display these virtues tend to enjoy strong, long-lasting relationships because these character traits tend to promote healthy interactions between people. Those who exhibit these vices tend to destroy relationships and seldom find long-term stability in their lives.
- D. The virtues make us easier to live with. We extend grace when others make mistakes. We are not easily offended by others' inconsideration or neglect. We are not focused on ourselves and are not easily upset when others don't conform to our desires. Even when the actions of others upset us, we exercise self-control and don't needlessly offend others.
- E. Whole chapters of the Bible are dedicated to deference/tolerance—Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8. In these passages, Paul exhorts us to accept others who hold different views without being offended or causing offense.

It's natural that people will come to different conclusions regarding various issues of life. If the Bible does not give specific guidelines on an issue, believers are free to come to their own conclusions, which may differ from person to person. Some Christians are more mature than others are. Some consciences are more sensitive than others are. Paul prohibits believers from causing needless offenses and/or taking offense needlessly over issues that are insignificant.

IV. Dangers

A. Dangers of the virtues

1. The primary danger of pushing these virtues too far is that tolerance of one's neighbor becomes more important than love for God. That is, the desire not to offend others can easily lead to spiritual compromise. In an effort to be polite and tolerant, people often accept what is evil. Flexible people may tend to

bend too far. Polite people are reluctant to say what needs to be said. They smile and make small talk while their friends continue traveling down the wide road to destruction. They refuse to burden others with their problems. Biblical tolerance does not require us to ignore evil. Politeness should not prevent us from confronting error or sin.

2. Tolerance is a virtue, but we must not tolerate some things. For example, modern culture demands that everyone tolerates moral perversion. Naïve Christians think that they'll have more influence in society if they appear cooperative instead of hostile to the perverted direction of the culture. Instead of offering a prophetic voice in opposition to moral perversion, polite, tolerant people smile and say nothing. Or worse, they endorse the perversion as a new civil right because they feel sorry for supposed victims of discrimination (e.g., supporting same-sex marriage).

Enemies of Christianity begin by insisting on tolerance but eventually demand acceptance and then celebration of their perversions. Their real goal is not tolerance but the eradication of all opposition. They want society to accommodate and respect their immorality. Christians compromise spiritual principles when they tolerate what God hates.

Permissive parenting creates spoiled children. When parents tolerate all behaviors, children will naturally behave badly. Undisciplined children grow up to be undisciplined adults who create problems for everyone around them.

3. Politeness and good manners can be pushed to the degree that one does not feel that he can speak his mind or share his problems with others. A desire not to offend others can result in one bottling up one's feelings or masking one's emotions. One may feel that he's rude or impolite if he shows emotion (i.e., sorrow, grief, pain, remorse, etc.).
4. The Cross of Christ is inherently offensive to unbelievers (Gal 5:11—"the offense of the cross"; cf. 1 Cor 1:18). We dare not compromise Christian principles to avoid this offense. Unfortunately, many today are guilty of this very thing—seeking to minimize the more difficult parts of the faith in order to attract unbelievers. A real danger lies in the desire to

modify the Christian message in order to make it more appealing or respectable to those who hate God (e.g., modifying our view of Genesis, our view of the issue in Sodom).

5. Leadership may be hindered when the leader tries to take all viewpoints and desires into consideration. Most organizations (including churches) function best with a recognized single authority providing leadership and direction. If that leader tries to defer to everyone, the organization won't accomplish much. Shepherds don't do well when they cater to the opinions of all the sheep.
6. It's not wrong (or judgmental) to tell others that they are wrong. When right and wrong are measured by the unchanging standard of God's Word, anyone can apply the standard and evaluate whether someone's behavior conforms or does not conform to the standard. Politeness and tolerance must not hinder us from confronting error and ungodliness when appropriate.

What Jesus was opposed to was not making moral distinctions between right and wrong or calling a spade a spade, but rather a critical and judgmental spirit stemming from a sense of moral superiority. Jesus requires that we make moral judgments, but we must convey those moral judgments in love, and only after we have examined ourselves to make sure we are not passing judgment hypocritically. Moral judgments are inescapable, morally justified, necessary, and integral to the Christian worldview.¹⁹

7. The solution to these potential dangers is to understand and apply the biblical meaning of love. To love one's neighbor is not to tolerate anything someone does without comment or rebuke. Biblical love is doing what is in the best interests of another. Sometimes, the best thing you can do for your neighbor is to confront and rebuke him/her.

Many today advocate "unconditional love" as a Christian virtue. By this, they mean unconditional acceptance and approval of anything one might do. Real love, they claim, is

¹⁹ The Biblical Teaching on Judgmentalism: Setting the Record Straight.
https://theosophical.wordpress.com/2011/02/09/the-biblical-teaching-on-judgmentalism-setting-the-record-straight/#_ftn1

supporting a loved one in whatever he might do without negative comment or confrontation. But is that genuine, biblical love? No. Genuine love pursues what is best (from God's point of view) for the individual, and sin is never in the best interests of anyone. True love confronts and rebukes when necessary (cf. Ps 27:6). Failure to discipline stems from a lack of love (cf. Heb 12:7f).

8. Part of the solution is to understand God's wrath against sin and the corresponding hatred God's people should have toward sin and, in some cases, those committing the sin. Read Psalm 139:21-22 and Ephesians 5:11.

B. Dangers of the vices

1. The driving motivation behind these vices is selfishness. The presence of these vices reveals a person who cares only for himself and does not consider the needs or feelings of others. Such a person offends others frequently and takes offense easily. He interprets everything from his own viewpoint. He excuses his own conduct and criticizes others.
2. All of these vices hinder social relationships. Those displaying such vices are hard to live with. They seldom form strong, enduring relationships because no one can stand being with such people for very long.
3. The solution to these vices is salvation and spiritual maturity, especially developing love for others (cf. 1 John 4:10-11).

V. Developing the virtues

- A. These virtues run contrary to our natural, sinful self-centeredness. Adopting them takes self-discipline and intentional effort. One must put off the old way of living, start thinking correctly, and put on the new way of living (Eph 4:22-24).
- B. Love the Lord with your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mt 22:37). When you have the first commandment as your primary focus, fulfilling the second command (i.e., love your neighbor) is easier.
- C. Adopt an others-centered mindset. Get the focus off self and consider the needs and desires of others. In other words, think of others more than yourself (cf. Phil 2:3-4). When interacting with others, think

about how you would want to be treated in that situation. Repent of self-centeredness and humble yourself before God.

- D. Be willing to limit your own freedoms to avoid offending others (read 1 Cor 8:13, 10:32-33). Be sensitive about how your behavior influences others, especially how it affects less mature believers. Never allow your behavior to embolden others to violate their consciences. The mature believer yields to the weak believer until he becomes stronger.
- E. Intentionally put others first; consider their needs and desires before yourself. Ask others what they prefer. Allow others to go before you. Try to anticipate what others might want. Extend honor and recognition to those who deserve it. Make sure others are satisfied before satisfying yourself.
- F. Seek to do things in way that causes no offense (read Acts 24:16; 1 Cor 10:32; 2 Cor 6:3). Use common courtesies, manners, etc.
- G. Strive to be on time for appointments and keep your schedule. Showing up late (or not at all) impinges on others' schedules and forces others to change their plans. If you commit to something, show up on time. If you can't arrive on time, alert those who will be affected.
- H. In the home, parents must insist on basic courtesies and good manners. Enforce proper behavior and discipline for rudeness. E.g., saying please and thank you, addressing adults respectfully, forbidding harsh language and bickering, insisting that children share possessions without fighting, rebuking bad behavior and language, imposing fair punishment that fits the offense, instructing on etiquette (e.g., table, telephone, door), etc. Teach children to mind their own business and be gracious toward those who are different. Teach good manners and basic etiquette for life at home, when visiting friends, in public, when addressing authorities, etc. Most importantly, set a good example for your kids. Children need to see adults interacting with people in the proper (biblical) way.



Lesson 9:

**Virtue: Dependability/Responsibility/
Faithfulness**

Vice: Inconsistency/Irresponsibility

- I. Texts: Ex 32:22; Deut 10:12, 24:16; Josh 9:18-20; 1 Sam 15:21-22; Psalm 15:4; Mic 6:8; Mt 18:15-17, 25:21; Luke 12:48, 16:10-12; Rom 14:12; 1 Cor 4:2
- II. Definitions
 - A. The virtues²⁰
 1. Dependability: Fulfilling what I consented to do, even if it means unexpected sacrifice; doing what I should do no matter what the cost
 2. Responsibility: Knowing and doing what others expect of me; acknowledging and fulfilling my obligations; completing my tasks to the best of my abilities
 3. Faithfulness: Trustworthiness, reliability, integrity
 - B. The vices
 1. Inconsistency: Untrustworthy, unreliable; unstable; contradictory, fickle, capricious, volatile, erratic, unpredictable, flighty
 2. Irresponsibility: incapable, unqualified; not accountable; failing to meet reasonable expectations; failing to complete tasks

Most people fit into one of three categories when it comes to dependability. Some are absolutely dependable, never let you down, always fulfill their word, and always show up on time to do what they committed to do. Such people earn your absolute trust by their long record of dependability. Others are generally dependable, usually follow through on their commitments, and are often trustworthy, but let you down occasionally. Such people may fulfill their commitments if you provide reminders, encouragement, rewards, etc. A third group is generally unreliable. They seldom follow through on their promises and only rarely show up and do what you hope they'll do. Such

²⁰ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

people let you down, disappoint, and fail, often just when you need them most.

III. Importance

- A. Like the other virtues, dependability/faithfulness is a quality of God that Christians should seek to emulate. God faithfully honors his commitments and makes good his promises.
- B. Dependability should be a most visible trait for Christians; we should be known for reliability. A Christian's integrity should never even be in question. If we say that we'll do something, we are obligated to do it, unless providentially hindered. If we make an agreement, contract, or promise, we follow through.
 - 1. We must be honest. Honesty demands that we tell the truth and do what we say.
 - 2. We must be good stewards (managers of God's resources). If God has given us a responsibility, we are obligated to fulfill it.
 - 3. All Christians should strive to be "good and faithful" servants (Mt 25:21). A good servant is dependable.
 - 4. "unless providentially hindered" – I.e., if, in the providence of God (circumstances of life), I cannot fulfill a legitimate responsibility due to no fault of my own, I have been providentially hindered. E.g., being late because of a car accident, illness, death, weather, etc. In such cases, I must alert those who are counting on me beforehand that I will not be able to fulfill my responsibilities.
- C. God gives people responsibilities and then holds them accountable for how well they complied with God's wishes. Christians should see themselves as stewards (managers) of all the resources God provides. Stewards/managers must be responsible and dependable. Cf. the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:15f). "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:12-13). To whom much is given, much will be required (Lk 12:48).
- D. Those who demonstrate dependability in small things will probably demonstrate dependability in larger things (Lk 16:10). If one cannot successfully discharge small responsibilities, he likely will not successfully discharge larger ones. Don't trust a person who fails or compromises in the small details of life.

- E. One of the key principles in this discussion is: “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 15:22). King Saul’s intent was (apparently) good, but his behavior was bad (disobedient). Simple obedience is more important than heartfelt, sincere intentions. “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

Example: modern churches may sincerely intend to worship God, yet use forms/expressions that are (at best) inappropriate and (at worst) blasphemous. A righteous intent does not sanctify disobedience.

Consider the experiences of Uzzah (2 Sam 6:3-8), Uzziah (2 Chron 26:16f). This principle is especially important in worship.

- F. The virtues make one a good employee. Employers today often find it difficult to find workers who will fulfill even the most basic of work requirements—get to work on time, do the job, don’t fool around, don’t steal materials, follow work policies, get along with others, etc. If you can accept responsibility and fulfill reasonable expectations, you’ll be a valued employee. The vices make it hard to keep a job. No one will retain a worker who fails to fulfill his responsibilities, is unreliable, and/or lacks integrity.
- G. In the contexts of the church and home, dependability or lack of it will have a deep impact on everyone involved. Dependable, reliable people provide stability and strength. Unreliable, erratic people hinder any organization of which they are a part.
- H. Spiritual responsibilities are the most important part of life. Knowing God’s will (through the Bible) and doing it are the most important responsibilities anyone has. Cf. Mt 22:36-37

The main Christian responsibilities

1. Glorify God in all things (Eccl 12:13; 1 Cor 10:31)
2. Manage one’s own spiritual health and growth (Mt 16:24; 2 Pet 3:18)
3. Fulfill family obligations (Eph 5:22f; 1 Tim 5:8)
4. Participate in the life of the local church (1 Cor 12:7; 1 Tim 3:15)
5. Make disciples of Christ (Mt 28:18-20)
6. Fulfill career and civic obligations (Eph 6:5-9; 1 Tim 2:1-2)

Summary/abbreviation of all Christian duties—love God with my whole self and love my neighbor as myself (Mt 22:37); do all things in the name of Christ (Col 3:17); walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6).

We must fulfill these obligations according to the guidelines provided in Scripture. We cannot violate Scripture in order to fulfill any of these goals. Unfortunately, many churches and individuals do exactly that—violate principles of Scripture in their efforts to fulfill what they think of as their Christian duties. E.g., using the methods and sensibilities of the ungodly world to attract unsaved people to church; allowing disorder and mayhem in a worship service.

- I. Spiritual accountability is a biblical reality. Christians must hold one another accountable for their actions. Church members in particular are responsible to watch over one another in Christian love. When necessary, church members must confront an erring brother and restore him to usefulness (Mt 18:15-17; Gal 6:1).
- J. Many people today are averse to commitments. They actively avoid taking on responsibility because they do not want to be tied down with obligations, and they do not want to be held accountable for what they do. They avoid or postpone marriage, refuse to join a church, and run away when confronted. Some do this out of fear, while others do it out of a lack of responsibility.
- K. Consistency in life comes from stability in life. Christianity provides a foundation on which we can develop stability and consistency (see Ps 1:3). When we know who we are, where we came from, and what our purpose in life is, it provides security and strength—dependability.
- L. People's expectations of us may be unrealistic. Sometimes others expect more of us than God does. Expectations should be realistic both physically (i.e., can I really do this?) and spiritually (i.e., is this a biblical requirement?). We are not obligated to fulfill unrealistic or unbiblical expectations. Likewise, we should not hold others to unrealistic expectations. Frustration and resentment result when we do so.
- M. What about high expectations? We must admit that we can usually do better or more than what we normally do. We could accomplish more. We could produce higher quality work. We could improve in many ways. High expectations push us to greater levels of commitment, production, and (sometimes) quality output. However, we must be careful not to cross the line into unrealistic expectations, which only

frustrate and depress those constrained by them. Unrealistically high expectations often engender bitterness and regret for all involved.

IV. Developing the virtues

- A. Devote yourself to these virtues. Recognize the need for them and determine to adopt them. Repent of the vices; forsake them; eradicate them from your life. Make no excuses for them.
- B. Make it a personal priority to fulfill your commitments, to follow through on promises, and to make your word good in every context of life. Don't give your word or make a promise that you cannot reasonably fulfill. Don't obligate yourself unnecessarily or lightly. Make every effort to fulfill your obligations.
- C. Don't allow anything to divert you from discharging your responsibilities in an adequate and timely manner. Do the most important things first. Don't allow distractions (e.g., entertainment, recreation) to prevent you from fulfilling your responsibilities. Make decisions of the will, not the emotions. Do what needs to be done.
- D. Clear expectations and lines of authority make it easier for people to understand their responsibilities. Clearly communicate exactly what you expect. Assign responsibilities in keeping with one's abilities. Hold people accountable for how they discharge their duties.
- E. Consider whether an obligation is realistic and pertinent to you or those you are assigning responsibility. The fact that others may expect you to do something does not obligate you to do it. Refuse to accept responsibilities that are beyond your sphere of obligation. Don't be afraid to turn down new commitments, especially if you are at the edge of what you can currently handle. Don't add responsibilities to those who are failing to fulfill the ones they currently have.
- F. In the spiritual realm, refuse to obligate yourself to unbiblical expectations. What others expect of you may or may not be biblical or binding (e.g., the OT dietary regulations, Sabbath rules, etc.). At times, it may be necessary to limit your freedoms voluntarily so as not to offend others (cf. Rom 14; 1 Cor 8). Additionally, an institution (e.g., church, school) may impose standards that, while not strictly biblical, are helpful for maintaining unity, decorum, good order, etc.
- G. As always, parents must provide an example to their children by being responsible/dependable/faithful. When you give a child a responsibility, insist that the child fulfills it. Systems of rewards and

punishments (carrot and stick) sometimes are appropriate. Children will often try to duck responsibility if parents give them the option. When you expect a child to do something, don't ask the child to comply; tell the child what to do. Ignore invalid complaints. Hold children accountable for doing what you tell them to do—in the right way, in the right time, with the right attitude, etc. Don't expect perfection; be realistic and sensitive to the child's individual strengths and weaknesses. If a child has been faithful in small things, give him/her further responsibilities (and rewards). Encourage children to take on larger projects and help them complete them. Encourage children to fulfill the obligations they have taken upon themselves (e.g., care for a pet). Hold them accountable for what they do or fail to do.



Lesson 10

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Doubt/Presumption

Christianity largely revolves around the word “faith.” What does this word mean? What are its implications? We must carefully consider the biblical data to develop our understanding of this critical topic.

I. Texts: Acts 13:8, 14:22, 16:5; Rom 1:5; 1 Cor 16:13; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 1:23; Col 1:23, 2:7; 1 Tim 1:2, 4:1, 6:10; Titus 1:13; James 2:1; Heb 11:1; Jude 1:3

II. Faith defined

A. The virtue:

1. Faith is belief, trust, and confidence. The object of faith may be valid (e.g., God, Jesus, the Bible) or invalid (a myth, an idol).

Christianity is largely characterized by its emphasis on faith and beliefs. Christians are commonly called “believers,” and a commitment to Christianity typically involves a confession of faith.²¹

2. Jesus began his earthly ministry by calling people to “repent and believe the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). Belief in Christ, or lack of it, determines one’s eternal destiny (Jn 3:16-18).
3. Faith is a virtue in that God calls us to believe in him and his word (cf. John 14:1; 20:31). Those who believe please God (Heb 11:6); those who lack faith do not please God (Heb 10:38).
4. In the OT, the word “faith” occurs only twice (in the KJV)—Deut 32:20 and Hab 2:4. However, the concept of belief/trust is very common in the OT. See Gen 15:6; Ps 26:1, 119:42; Prov 3:5.

²¹ Nijay K. Gupta, “Faith,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

5. In the NT, the word “faith” is very common, being used over 300 times (nouns, verbs, and adjectives included). Faith is usually tied to an object—faith *in* or faith *that*. The object of faith is important.
6. “The” faith is the system of truth contained in the Bible, i.e., the whole body of Christian teaching (Jude 1:3). Christian truth has boundaries or limits. Those who believe the truth of the Gospel are “in the faith” (Acts 14:22, 16:5; 1 Cor 16:13, etc.). Those who hold views contradictory to this system of truth are outside the faith (cf. John 8:24).

B. The vices

1. Doubt: lack of faith; failure to believe; having little faith (“O thou of little faith” Mt 14:31)
Mt 16:8, 28:17; Mark 4:40; Lk 8:25
2. Presumption: unmerited assumption; arrogance; take for granted, assume, suppose; to act or proceed with unwarrantable or impertinent boldness, to go too far in acting unwarrantably or in taking liberties²²
Deut 18:20-22; 2 Pet 2:10

The vices mark two extremes we must avoid. Doubt is lack of faith; presumption is, as it were, too much faith. Presumption assumes too much; doubt assumes too little.

III. Faith explained

A. Saving faith is believing the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ for the salvation of one’s soul. Saving faith consists of

1. Knowledge (intellect): one must know the facts of the Gospel (John 5:24, 8:24). Saving faith assumes that one maintains an accurate doctrine of Christ (2 Jn 1:9). One cannot believe false things about Jesus and still be saved (e.g., Docetism, non-Trinitarianism).
2. Assent (will): personally agreeing/affirming the facts of the Gospel (Acts 8:37)
3. Trust (emotion): belief in the person and work of Christ to save one from sin (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom 10:9)

²² <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/presume>

Faith is the attitude whereby a man abandons all reliance in his own efforts to obtain salvation, be they deeds of piety, of ethical goodness or anything else. It is the attitude of complete trust in Christ, of reliance on him alone for all that salvation means.²³

- B. *Sola Fide* – faith alone. All branches of Christianity teach that faith in Christ is a necessity for salvation. But evangelical Protestantism alone teaches that salvation is by faith *alone*, without any additional good works or earned merit on our part. Any additions to faith as necessary for salvation amount to “another gospel,” i.e., a damnable perversion/corruption of the faith (cf. Gal 1:6-8).
- C. Justification by faith is the biblical doctrine, especially clear in Paul’s writings that sinners are declared righteous in God’s sight (i.e., given a proper standing) by faith alone, without any human works contributing to the outcome (e.g., Rom 3:26, 28; 4:5; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:11, 24).
- D. Our world is turning increasingly secular in its orientation, denying faith as a real category of thought.
 - 1. Some hold that only what is testable and provable is worth of belief (modernism). Knowledge comes only through investigation and sense experience (empiricism). Science provides facts; all else is meaningless speculation. Faith (they claim) is not necessary with such a worldview. They believe only what they can prove scientifically.

Question: Is that viewpoint testable and provable? Is it possible to prove that assertion empirically? Such a worldview is believed by faith.
 - 2. Some hold that faith is fine, but nothing can be known for sure. All religious faiths are basically the same (relativism, pluralism). It doesn’t matter much what faith you hold as long as you are a good person. There is no “true” truth; all we have is our own personal experiences which no one else can share (post modernism).

²³ L. L. Morris, “Faith,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 358.

Questions: How can you define “good” without a standard by which to judge goodness? What happens when different traditions define “good” in opposite ways? E.g., Muslims think of it as a “good” thing to kill Christians in Jihad. Is it true that we cannot know “true” truth?

- E. Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). What does this mean?
1. James is arguing against the idea that one can have faith without works. Christians demonstrate their faith by their works. A faith not accompanied by works is “dead,” that is, powerless, unable to save, worthless.
 2. James is not contradicting Paul, who teaches that faith alone saves (cf. Gal 2:16). Paul shows us that a right relationship with God is established by faith alone without works. James shows us that if that faith relationship exists, it will not be alone; it will be accompanied by good works.
 3. Christians are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. Good works always accompany saving faith. A good tree eventually produces good fruit (Mt 7:17). Without accompanying good works, faith is questionable at best and dead at worst. Genuine saving faith has practical, daily consequences—it produces good fruit. Bad fruit indicates a bad tree in spite of whatever claims one may make to the contrary.

F. Fraudulent faith

1. The Bible repeatedly warns us to examine ourselves, whether we are genuinely “in the faith.”
2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

When one who has publically professed faith in Christ departs from the faith, he has apostatized (from the root word meaning “runaway slave”). Apostasy is the condition of unbelief; an apostate is one who has permanently departed from the faith.

What is the spiritual condition of one who has apostatized (assuming his condition is permanent)? An apostate is confirmed in unbelief and thus has no hope of eternal life. We should consider such a one as “a heathen man and a publican” (Mt 18:17; cf. Rom 16:18; 1 Cor 5:11).

Is everyone who denies the faith an apostate? No. Given the right conditions, even mature believers may deny Christ (e.g., Peter). A verbal renunciation/repudiation of Christ may not be sincere and thus does not actually reflect one’s spiritual condition. In other cases, one may deny the faith because he was never genuinely saved in the first place (cf. 1 John 2:19). His denial was sincere, and thus he proves to be an apostate. Genuine salvation causes the believer to persevere in faith and in good works. Failure to persevere (ultimately) demonstrates that one’s profession of faith was invalid; his faith was “dead.” That kind of faith cannot save.

A note on Easy Believism: Some branches of Christianity teach that any profession of faith, no matter what comes of it, produces salvation for the one making it. Even if a person apostatizes, denies the faith, and becomes a Satan-worshipper, as long as he at some point “asked Jesus into his heart,” he is saved no matter what. We deny this erroneous doctrine.

One is not saved by persevering in the faith. One perseveres in the faith because he is saved (cf. Mark 13:13; Heb 3:6, 14; Rev 2:26). Perseverance is a *result* of saving faith, not a *means* of it.

G. Faith in Hebrews 11, the “hall of fame of faith”

11:1 *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

We affirm that Christianity is a faith commitment; we believe it by faith. One must exercise faith to be a believer in Christ. Belief is not purely the reasonable result of a scientific investigation. The Holy Spirit must convince a sinner to turn from his sin and trust in Jesus to be saved. This is a spiritual experience, one not subject to physical testing.

Faith has both “substance” (foundation, firmness, confidence, assurance) and “evidence” (proof, conviction). Faith is much more than mere hope; it’s a confident assurance in a reasonable object of trust. Faith is being sure and certain.

The reality of what we hope for is confirmed for us in our experience when we live by faith in God’s promises.²⁴

11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Lack of faith displeases God. Failure to trust God is sin. Our faith may be very small yet still be effective (Mt 17:20; Luke 18:17). Lack of confidence in God often leads to disobedience. Why try to obey God if you’re not sure He even exists? Disobedience also stems from doubt whether God’s word is really true. E.g., is God’s way really best regarding marriage, children, money, career, church, etc.

H. What about “blind” faith?

1. A very common belief in our culture is that all we can know for sure are things we can prove and evaluate with our senses (empiricism). All else is speculation and uncertainty. Any remaining faith is “blind” in the sense that one cannot be sure that anything or anybody is really there. We have no knowledge of the unseen world, no way of knowing if God even exists, no access to the spiritual realm (if there is one).
2. Since faith in God is so important for personal well-being, it’s best just to hope that what we think about God is true. Faith is blind in that we don’t really know anything about God, but we hope he’s there and act as if he is, without really knowing for sure. That’s blind faith; its object is uncertain and perhaps nonexistent.
3. If blind faith is true, it’s ridiculous to have any certainty regarding religion. No one should claim that his point of view is “true.” No one should criticize any other religious tradition because all faith is blind, uncertain, and speculative.

²⁴ David G. Peterson, “Hebrews,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1345.

4. We strongly deny the concept of “blind” faith. God revealed Himself to us in nature and in the Scriptures so that our faith would not be blind. God is knowable, as is the spiritual realm. Some things are secret (Deut 29:29), but what God has revealed is a true and valid object of faith. Faith in Christ and in the Bible is reasonable. What we believe is based on “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3; cf. Luke 1:1-4), not idle speculation.

John 20:29 *Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We walk by faith, not by sight.*

IV. Developing faith

- A. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17). Reading the Scriptures and hearing others proclaim it develops confidence/assurance that it is true. The more exposure to the Bible you get, the more your faith grows.
- B. Walk with God.
 1. Faith grows through personal experience. As we obey God and do his will, we grow in our faith. We eventually develop a sincere, deep-seated confidence that God will fulfill his promises. Those who “trust and obey” will find that their faith is not misplaced.
 2. In the hard times, trust that God is working out all things for His glory and for our good (Rom 8:28). Although God’s ways and thoughts are beyond our comprehension (Rom 11:33-35), we can still trust that he has our best interests in mind.
- C. Read apologetics and polemics.
 1. Apologetics seeks to defend Christianity from *external* attacks, e.g., from Muslims, the cults, atheists, etc. Faithful believers have produced mountains of materials defending the Christian faith from those who would destroy it. Such writings can give a doubting believer much comfort that what he believes is true.

2. Polemics seeks to defend Christianity from *internal* attacks, i.e., from professing believers who are heterodox (teaching something unusual or doubtful) or heretical (teaching something that contradicts the faith). We can be well assured that our faith is accurate and true, in contrast to corrupt and perverted forms of the faith.

D. Pray

Mark 9:24 *Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!*

1. A measure of doubt is not unusual, even among mature believers (e.g., “Doubting” Thomas; cf. Mt 28:17). When times are tough and things don’t work out for us, it’s natural to question God’s dealings with us (e.g., Job).
2. Confess your doubts to God and ask Him to develop greater faith within you.

E. Seek answers.

1. Doubt usually arises when we fail to understand something in the Bible or some experience that does not seem to fit with God’s character (e.g., “If God loves me, why is he allowing this hardship/pain/loss?”).
2. The Bible contains the answers to life’s most difficult problems. But sometimes the Bible is rather difficult to understand. Godly authors have written much regarding how Christianity answers the hard problems of life. Seek answers in the Bible and in the writings of Godly believers who have struggled with the same issues of belief and doubt.

F. Modify your expectations.

1. Christians sometimes expect God to fix all their problems and grant them success in all their endeavors. When problems occur and success does not come, they become bitter against God.

2. Christians have the right to expect God to act in ways consistent with his word, character, and nature. God remains faithful; he cannot deny himself (2 Tim 2:13). Problems and failures are part of this sin-cursed, broken, corrupt world. Our expectations of the Christian life must correspond to what God has revealed. Difficulties, pain, sorrow, and loss are all part of normal human life, even for Christians (cf. Rom 8:35-39). The hard providences of life should not weaken our faith. Indeed, the difficulties of life should drive us to a closer walk with God.



Lesson 11

Virtue: Forgiveness

Vice: Unforgiveness/Bitterness

I. Texts: Ex 34:6-7; Ps 103:8; Jonah 4:2; Dan 9:9; Mt 6:12, 26:28; Luke 6:37, 23:34; 2 Cor 2:7, 10; Eph 1:7, 4:32; Col 3:13

II. Definitions

A. The virtue: forgiveness

1. In the OT, forgiveness is based on words meaning “to lift/carry, to pardon, to be indulgent.” The concept is usually associated with the idea of atonement. The guilty party makes a sacrifice, which pacifies/satisfies God and releases/pardons the offender.

God’s forgiveness is portrayed in terms of being removed “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps 103:12), thrown behind God’s back (Is 38:17), blotted out (Is 43:25), not remembered (Jer 31:34), and cast into the sea (Micah 7:19). When God forgives, he completely purges the sin (Isa 1:18) and cleanses the believer.

2. In the NT, forgiveness is based on words meaning “to leave, to give freely, to pardon, to release/set free.”

B. The vices

1. Unforgiveness—failure to forgive; unwillingness to set aside past offenses

Matthew 18:7 *Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come...*

We live in a broken, sinful world where offences are a regular part of life. We offend others and others offend us. Given human depravity, people often refuse to forgive others who have hurt them.

A failure to forgive results in massive problems in the home, the church, and the world. Divorce, abuse, church splits, and the like all stem from unforgiveness. Serious problems of many kinds are directly linked to an unwillingness to forgive.

An unwillingness to forgive is often based on personal pride, an inflated sense of self-importance. Or one may think that the offender

does not deserve to be forgiven, has not suffered enough for his sin, or has caused too much pain to be forgiven. One who causes such pain should not get off “scot free”; it’s not fair for such a person to be forgiven.

Forgiveness doesn’t mean that we ignore, neglect, or condone bad behavior. Jesus was merciful to the woman caught in adultery, but also commanded her “Go and sin no more.” When we forgive someone, it does not necessarily remove the natural consequences of sin. A forgiven person will still reap what he sows (Gal 6:7-8). Personal forgiveness may not remove sin’s earthly consequences.

2. Bitterness—”hurt you hold on to”; resentment over past unfair or abusive treatment

Unforgiveness and bitterness are essentially self-centered. They focus on one’s own condition—the hurt, the unfair treatment, the lack of punishment for the offender, etc.

III. Importance

- A. Forgiveness is important in that God forgives. God’s nature is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy” (Ps 103:8). Because of God’s willingness to forgive, “he has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10). Jonah initially refused to go to Nineveh because he knew that God was “a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm” (Jonah 4:2).
- B. In some cases, God proclaims that he will not forgive (Dt. 29:20; 2 Ki. 24:4; Je. 5:7; La. 3:42). On man’s side, there is the need for repentance if he is to be forgiven. Penitent sinners are forgiven. Impenitent men, who still go on in their wicked way, are not.²⁵ All sins may be forgiven; only blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (i.e., rejection of Jesus) is unforgiveable (Mt 12:31f).
- C. God’s forgiveness of sinners is ultimately based on God being satisfied regarding the sinner’s sin. All sin demands a payment (Ezek 18:4; Rom 6:23a), and God is satisfied when an appropriate payment is made. In the OT, sins were forgiven by means of a blood sacrifice (Lev 17:11). In the NT, we find that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). Jesus’ death on the cross is the final, adequate payment

²⁵ L. L. Morris, “Forgiveness,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 382.

for sin (Eph 1:7). The saving value of Jesus' death is applied only to those who receive him (John 1:12), although it is sufficient to pay for the sins of every person.

- D. The Gospel message includes the promise of forgiveness of sins to those who repent (Luke 24:47). Personal forgiveness requires repentance of sin combined with faith in Jesus Christ. Justification pardons the sinner and grants him a righteous standing before God.
- E. Those forgiven must forgive others; it's a command and an expectation. Here is the Christian virtue in action. Since we have been forgiven much, we must be willing to forgive much. A mark of a true believer is his readiness to forgive when wronged. In fact, we must forgive "as the Lord has forgiven [us]" (Col 3:13). Jesus told a lengthy parable condemning an unjust servant who experienced great forgiveness himself but was unwilling to show even a little forgiveness to others (Mt 18:23-35). Failure to forgive is a mark of an unbeliever (Jn 20:23).
 - 1. Forgive often—seventy times seven (Mt 18:21-22), i.e., continually, without limit.
 - 2. Forgive willingly (Lk 17:3-4). We must forgive when the offender repents and apologizes. Failure to do so is sin.
 - 3. Forgive to the degree that you have been forgiven (Eph 4:32). Those whom God has forgiven much love much (Luke 7:47).
- F. Forgiveness helps both the offender and the offended. Holding on to hurt doesn't punish the offender; it hurts only the one who is bitter. Bitterness is like a poison or a disease. Resentment can kill. Those who learn to forgive are happier and healthier than those who hold on to past hurts.

The offender may have forgotten all about the offense. He may have no regrets, no shame, and no guilt. He has long since moved on. The only one still agitated by the offense is the one who is still holding on to the hurt. Bitter feelings do nothing to punish the offender but have serious harmful consequences for the resentful.

Quote: Forgiveness is the only way to live in an intimate, long-term relationship with another sinner. Forgiveness is the only way to negotiate through the weakness and failure that will daily mark your relationships. It is the only way to deal with hurt and disappointment. Forgiveness is the only way to have hope and confidence restored.²⁶

²⁶ Paul Tripp, Five "Benefits" of Unforgiveness (Then the Better Way)."

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-benefits-of-unforgiveness-then-the-better-way>

- G. Failure to forgive hinders our faith. When our hearts are filled with bitterness and resentment, worship is virtually impossible. We cannot enjoy the Christian life when harboring bitter thoughts (cf. Heb 12:15). We can't treat others right when our own heart is not right.
- H. Marks of the virtue
 1. When you truly forgive someone, you refuse to hold the sin against the offender. You may not actually forget the offense, but you will not allow it to affect your relationship, feelings, choices, etc. Forgiveness is treating the offender as if he had not offended you. You release the offender from further ill feelings.
 2. When you can think on the wrong doing and not have it bother you any longer, then you know that you have truly forgiven.²⁷
- I. How to ask for forgiveness
 1. Admit your guilt—"I am sorry."
 2. Admit your sin—"I did this (whatever)." I.e., admit it, confess it; don't try to excuse it or defend it.
 3. Ask for forgiveness—"Will you forgive me?"
 4. Avoid the common "if" sentences when asking forgiveness—"If I offended you,..."

IV. Developing the virtue

- A. Remember that God is merciful and forgiving, and that he calls his people to have the same characteristic.
- B. You don't have to *feel* merciful and gracious to forgive. Don't base forgiveness on your feelings. Forgive no matter how you feel about the other person or his/her offense. Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling.
- C. Remember that we don't really want to be treated fairly; we want mercy and grace. If we demand to be treated fairly, then God would not forgive our offenses; we would be made to pay for all our sins. Likewise, we should not insist that offenders must suffer the fair penalty for the pain they have caused. Let God take care of punishing the offender. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom 12:19; cf. Heb 10:30). Release the offender to God; let him deal with rewards and penalties.
- D. Remember how much Jesus suffered and yet was willing to say "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). We should

²⁷ <http://www.hopeforthebrokenhearted.com/forgiveness/>

strive to be like Christ in his mercy and grace toward undeserving sinners.

- E. When you hesitate to forgive others, remember how much God has forgiven you. Remember the parable of the unforgiving servant.
- F. Remember that forgiveness is a command. When others repent, we must forgive, even if they sin against us repeatedly.
- G. In some cases, it may be appropriate to confront the offender over his sinful behavior (Mt 18:15). But confronting the other person is often not necessary (and sometimes impossible). You can forgive without involving the offender. You can get free of bitterness and resentment irrespective of the offender and his/her attitude.
- H. Pray for your enemies (i.e., those who have hurt you) (Luke 6:27-28). Pray particularly that the offender would come to his senses and repent.
- I. Refuse to keep a record of wrongs. Never bring up past offenses that you've already forgiven. Refuse to use someone's past failure as a means of gaining advantage or paying back a hurt. Don't threaten to tell on the offender. Don't use your knowledge of previous offenses to cause another's pain (i.e., blackmail).

Note: In some cases, you may have a legal or moral responsibility to report illegal behavior to the authorities. If you knew about certain conduct and did not report it, you may be held liable.

- J. Stop thinking about the offense. Bitterness tends to boil if we allow ourselves to harbor the offense. Let it go; give it to God. Don't tell others about it and don't dwell on it in your own mind. Cf. Phil 4:6-7.
- K. Avoid a "I'll forgive but I won't forget" attitude. If you say this, it's unlikely that you have truly forgiven. If you continually think about an offense, you probably have not forgiven it and will not forget it.
- L. Avoid being overly sensitive and easily offended. Try to develop a "thick skin" whereby you overlook minor slights and oversights. Remember your own failures and personal offenses toward others when you feel inclined to complain about how others are treating you.
- M. Refuse to allow yourself to feel superior to others who have caused offenses. Self-righteousness is a vice. If you have not offended others, thank God; don't take credit for yourself.
- N. In some cases, sincere forgiveness is very difficult to extend toward others. Those who have experienced severe abuse may find it difficult to grant forgiveness, especially if the offender does not seem genuinely repentant.

1. Remember that God commands us to forgive and empowers us to do so. Trust God to give you a forgiving attitude.
2. Remember that God has forgiven you much and he expects you to forgive much.
3. Ask God to allow you to release the offender into God's hands.

O. For children

1. Insist that siblings treat each other with kindness and affection. Teach them to overlook small offenses, insults, and slights. This reduces the amount of forgiveness required.
2. Insist that children admit their offenses and ask forgiveness, both from siblings and from parents.
3. Insist that children express that they are sorry and ask, "Will you forgive me?"
4. Confront bitterness in your children. Insist that the offender apologizes and that the one offended forgive. Facilitate this process.
5. Teach children to forgive even when the offender fails to apologize.
6. Remind the child of his/her previous faults/failures that others have had to forgive.
7. Don't allow children to take revenge. Children are not responsible to discipline one another; that is the parents' job.
8. Discourage tattle-tales. Encourage siblings to work out their differences without tattling to parents.
9. Allow children to feel the negative consequences of their own decisions. Help them to see that they can avoid having to seek forgiveness if they avoid behaviors that require it.

V. Problem passages: Matt 6:14-15, 18:23-35; Mark 11:25-26

- A. Some NT passages seem to condition God's forgiveness of us on our forgiveness of others. These passages assert that if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us.
- B. What is the problem with God basing his forgiveness of us on our forgiveness of others?
 1. God's forgiveness of us is not based on how good or bad we are. God is willing to forgive all sins, no matter how bad (other than rejection of Christ).

2. To say that God's forgiveness of us is based on our forgiveness of others suggests that forgiveness is contingent/conditional, based on human action rather than on God's provision alone.
 3. The basis for God's forgiveness is the adequate payment made for sin by Jesus when he died on the cross. Once that payment has been applied to our account, our sins are gone; God has forgiven all sins. God is satisfied (propitiated) and we are no longer under condemnation (Rom 8:1). Nothing can be charged to those whom God has justified (Rom 8:33).
- C. What is the proper way to understand such passages?
1. An unwillingness to forgive others demonstrates a lack of salvation. Those who are saved know what it means to be forgiven, and they should extend forgiveness to others as God extended forgiveness to them.
 2. Jesus' point seems to be that we cannot claim to be his followers if we are unforgiving. Lack of a forgiving attitude points to a selfish, unrepentant heart.



Lesson 12

Virtue: Generosity/Benevolence

Vice: Stinginess/Covetousness/Greed

I. Texts: Deut 15:10; Prov 19:17, 22:9, 23:4; Luke 6:38, 12:15; Rom 12:13; 2 Cor 9:6-8; Gal 2:10, 6:9-10; Eph 4:28; Phil 4:11; 1 John 3:17

II. Definitions

A. The virtues

1. Generosity: Carefully managing my resources so I can freely give to those in need;²⁸ recognizing that all I have comes from God and being willing, not only to use it for his purposes, but also to go beyond what is required or expected of me in meeting the needs of others and of his work.²⁹ Liberality, altruism, charity, openhandedness.

Generosity would seem to go beyond what would be reasonably required or expected. Generosity provides abundantly and willingly.

2 Cor 8:2-3 ... *in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord.*

2. Benevolence: A disposition to do good; giving to others basic needs without having as my motive personal reward;³⁰ the quality of being well-meaning; kindness, good will, humanitarianism, compassion.

B. The vices

1. Stinginess: reluctant to give or spend; not generous; niggardly; penurious;³¹ unwilling to share, give, or spend; excessive frugality, miserliness
2. Covetousness, greed (covered in Lesson 6): selfish desire, evil craving; intense desire to possess what someone else has; excessive

²⁸ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits>

²⁹ Charles Wood

³⁰ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits>

³¹ "stinginess". *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 7 Jun. 2017. <Dictionary.com <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/stinginess>>.

desire to possess more and more wealth; envy or jealousy over possessions; loving money or the things it can buy; striving for material possessions (materialism)

III. Importance

- A. God is generous. Generosity is an aspect of God's grace, kindness or compassion. God provides abundantly both spiritually and physically. Both sinners and saints benefit from God's generosity (Mt 5:45). God's people should be generous because God is generous.

Psalm 145:15–16 The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

- B. Generosity flows from God's grace. It's a grace-gift and an attitude of benevolence, not expressed out of guilt or pressure (cf. 2 Cor 9:7). Generous people are thankful to God and cheerful as they give to meet the needs of others. Their motivations are pure.

The right motive for giving is that God has mercifully, generously given me eternal life through the sacrifice of His own Son. In response, out of a desire to please God and glorify Him by reflecting His generous nature to others, I give. So ask yourself, "Does my life help others to see that my Heavenly Father is generous?"³²

- C. Almost everyone benefits from the generosity of others. Money, jobs, education, transportation, relationships, time, etc. – almost everyone in all aspects of life experiences generosity in one form or another. Those who have benefitted from the generosity of others should be especially willing to extend generosity to others.

- D. Christians particularly ought to be known for their generosity and good will toward everyone, but especially toward the needy.

Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

- E. Generosity can extend to many areas of life—time, talents, advice, skill, energy, food, etc. Generous people are willing to give what they have to others, especially to those in need.

IV. Dangers/Problems

³² Stephen Cole, "Generous and Hospitable" (Romans 12:13).
<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-85-generous-and-hospitable-romans-1213>

- A. People who by nature are generous tend to be somewhat careless with resources. They see a need and meet it, no matter what the cost. They may neglect their own responsibilities so they can provide for others. Careless generosity, in the extreme, can be a problem. Don't allow a desire to be generous to compromise your responsibility as a good steward. Strive for balance and wisdom in each area.
- B. Unscrupulous people may take advantage of our generosity. Christians must be careful not to support sinful, irresponsible living. Some who appeal to you for help may use your generosity to fund their wickedness. It's unwise to be generous in supporting wicked behavior. However, when giving to the poor, we are "lending to the Lord" (Prov 19:27), and we trust that the Lord will repay us. How a person uses our generosity is a secondary issue.

Further, some people come to rely on the generosity of others instead of finding gainful employment for themselves. They are happy to live off the generosity of those who feel bad for them. Some people specialize in appealing to feelings of guilt and benevolence. Supporting such people is unwise and counterproductive. Sometimes it's best to allow people to experience the consequences of their own bad choices. Don't let your generosity and benevolent spirit prevent someone from learning an important lesson. Don't be too quick to bail out those in a hole of their own making.

- C. Some have mistakenly substituted generosity and benevolence for the Gospel. That is, their understanding of Christianity revolves around doing good and being kind, not around the person and work of Christ. Christianity places a high value on these virtues, but they are not the center of the Christian message. These virtues are the natural result of Christianity; they are not Christianity itself (contra the social gospel).
- D. Frugality or thriftiness is also a virtue. Those who live frugally may find it hard to be generous. Those who scrimp and scratch to save a dollar may find it difficult to give it away freely. Why should those who are wise with their resources bail out those who are foolish? Strive to be both frugal and generous.

V. Measuring generosity

How do you know if you are really generous? Consider the following questions.³³

- A. Do you offer to help a family member when he/she could use a hand, or do you ignore the need or pretend to be busy with something else?
- B. Do you gladly let someone else in the family use the facilities first when you both want it at the same time?
- C. Do you willingly give up the last piece of the dessert?
- D. Do you give up watching your show for someone else to watch what he/she wants? Are you willing to yield the most comfortable spot to someone else?
- E. Will you skip a lunch break to help a co-worker finish a project?
- F. Do you clean up after others in the breakroom at work, offer to do dishes at home, or help clean up or put away chairs after a church potluck?
- G. Do you seek out younger women or men in the church to mentor or encourage?
- H. Do you help if you are needed in the nursery, help someone move, do a car repair or give someone a ride to an appointment?
- I. Do you look for opportunities to have people over for a meal?
- J. Do you willingly loan your vehicles or other valuable things to others?
- K. Do you take interest in children and in older or disabled people?
- L. Do you listen attentively and ask about others in conversation?
- M. Do you do such things when no one else is looking and when there is no thought of reward?

VI. Developing generosity

- A. Recognize that God is the ultimate owner of all things (Ps 24:1). God has allowed us to use some of his resources temporarily. But we actually own nothing.
- B. Recognize that all your assets and resources ultimately come from God. Your job is stewardship—the faithful management of those resources. Part of that responsibility is care for those in need. God will hold you accountable for how well you managed the resources entrusted to you. Use God's resources with God's values in mind.

³³ Sid Litke, "Developing a Giving Heart." <https://bible.org/seriespage/5-developing-giving-heart>

- C. Manage your resources so you have extra to give to those in need. Try to earn enough money through labor so that you have some to share. Never spend money in ways that would violate biblical standards and expectations. Make distinctions between wants and needs. Good stewardship should normally lead to having excess to share with those in need. As your income improves, increase your giving.

Note: Some Christians live in poverty through no fault of their own. Any number of circumstances could result in the loss of virtually all resources. We should not conclude that poverty is the result of sin. Also realize that poor people can also be generous (e.g., Mt 12:41-44, the story of the Widow's Mite). In fact, poor people are often more generous (relatively speaking) than the rich.

- D. Commit yourself to the biblical guidelines regarding money and possessions.
1. Make God your first priority and trust him to meet your basic needs (Mt 6:33). God uses money and material possessions to strengthen our trust in him and to develop trustworthiness in us. God's primary method for earning a living is work.
 2. Don't love money or be materialistic. Being rich should not be a primary goal of life. Put greed to death. Be content with what you have. Find contentment in Christ, not in things.
 3. Provide for the needs of your family first. Failure to do so is a mark of an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:8). Don't sacrifice your family in an effort to help others.
 4. Give of your financial resources generously, cheerfully, and sacrificially to support the work of the ministry. Generous giving results in generous blessing. Giving is an act of worship. Giving reflects your level of faith. As the Lord prospers you, give more.
 5. Save money now for later. It's foolish to spend all your income. Save for future goals, expenses, and emergencies. Don't buy anything on impulse. Always think over and pray about major purchases. Exercise financial self-control/discipline. Live on a budget.
 6. Avoid debt as much as possible. In some cases, debt is almost unavoidable (e.g., mortgage). Get out of debt as quickly as possible. Don't take on more debt if you are already struggling. Pay off your

bills quickly. Live within your means. Spend less than you earn. It's hard to be generous when you are struggling to pay off debt.

7. Share your wealth with needy people. God gives a surplus of funds to some so they can give it to others who need it. Believers ought always to be willing to help those in need, especially other believers (Gal 6:9-10). Give to those in need—don't lend.

- E. Be sensitive to the needs of others. Watch and listen for clues that someone might have a need that you could provide. If approached for help, be willing to give to meet a legitimate need. Don't be miserly; be generous.

The Story of Eddie³⁴

Eddie Ogan is a grandmother from Colville, Washington. She wrote in a denominational newsletter about an experience when she was 14 years old as she and two sisters were living with their widowed mom in 1946:

A month before Easter, the pastor of our church announced that a special Easter offering would be taken to help a poor family. He asked everyone to save and give sacrificially. When we got home, we talked about what we could do. We decided to buy 50 pounds of potatoes and live on them for a month. This would allow us to save \$20 of our grocery money for the offering.

Then we thought that if we kept our electric lights turned out as much as possible and didn't listen to the radio, we'd save money on that month's electric bill. [My sister] Darlene got as many house and yard cleaning jobs as possible, and both of us babysat for everyone we could. That month was one of the best of our lives. Every day we counted the money to see how much we had saved...Every Sunday the pastor had reminded everyone to save for the sacrificial offering. The day before Easter, [my sister] Ocy and I walked to the grocery store and got the manager to give us three crisp \$20 bills and one \$10 bill for all our change. ...We could hardly wait to get to church!

On Sunday morning... I heard some teenagers talking about the Smith girls having on their old dresses. I looked at them in their new clothes, and I felt so rich.

When the sacrificial offering was taken, we were sitting on the second row from the front. Mom put in the \$10 bill, and each of us girls put in a \$20. As we walked home after church, we sang all the way. At lunch Mom had a surprise for us. She had bought a dozen eggs, and we had boiled Easter eggs with our fried potatoes!

³⁴ From Sid Litke

Late that afternoon the minister drove up in his car. Mom went to the door, talked with him for a moment, and then came back with an envelope in her hand. We asked what it was, but she didn't say a word. She opened the envelope and out fell a bunch of money. There were three crisp \$20 bills, one \$10 bill and seventeen \$1 bills. Mom put the money back in the envelope. We didn't talk, just sat and stared at the floor. We had gone from feeling like millionaires to feeling [poor].

...All that week, we girls went to school and came home, and no one talked much. Finally on Saturday, Mom asked us what we wanted to do with the money. What did poor people do with money? We didn't know. We'd never known we were poor.

...[That Sunday] At church we had a missionary speaker. He talked about how churches in Africa made buildings out of sun-dried bricks, but they need money to buy roofs. He said \$100 would put a roof on a church. The minister said, "Can't we all sacrifice to help these poor people?"

We looked at each other and smiled for the first time in a week. Mom reached into her purse and pulled out the envelope. She passed it to Darlene. Darlene gave it to me, and I handed it to Ocy. Ocy put it in the offering. When the offering was counted, the minister announced that it was a little over \$100. The missionary was excited. He hadn't expected such a large offering from our small church. He said, "You must have some rich people in this church." Suddenly it struck us! We had given \$87 of that "little over \$100." We were the rich family in the church! Hadn't the missionary said so? From that day on I've never been poor again...



Lesson 13

Virtue: Gentleness/Meekness

Vice: Harshness/Contentiousness

- I. Texts: Num 12:3; Job 31:29-30; Prov 24:29; Mt 5:5, 39; Rom 12:18; 1 Cor 6:7; Gal 5:22-23; Phil 2:4; Col 3:12; 1 Thes 5:15; Titus 3:2; James 3:17; 1 Pet 2:18, 20, 3:9
- II. Definitions
 - A. The virtues
 1. Gentleness—Showing consideration and personal concern for others;³⁵ sensitivity of disposition and kindness of behavior, founded on strength and prompted by love;³⁶ an expression of compassion, seen in God's dealings with the frail and weak, and expected of believers in their dealings with others;³⁷ moral goodness, integrity, kindness
 2. Meekness—Yielding my personal rights and expectations with a desire to serve;³⁸ yielding my personal rights and expectations to God so that he will be glorified;³⁹ a calm temper of mind, not easily provoked;⁴⁰ agreeable, compliant, willing; mildness, gentleness

The basic meaning from OT words is 'poor and afflicted,' from which comes the spiritual quality of patient submission and humility.⁴¹

In the NT, meekness refers to an inward attitude, whereas gentleness is expressed rather in outward action.⁴²

³⁵ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits>

³⁶ J. Knox Chamblin, "Gentleness," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 286.

³⁷ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

³⁸ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits>

³⁹ Charles Wood

⁴⁰ M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

⁴¹ J. C. Connell, "Meekness," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 747.

⁴² Connell, 747.

Meekness is therefore an active and deliberate acceptance of undesirable circumstances that are wisely seen by the individual as only part of a larger picture.⁴³

The use of the Greek word means “tame” when applied to wild animals. In other words, such animals have not lost their strength but have learned to control the destructive instincts that prevent them from living in harmony with others.⁴⁴ Hence the definition of meekness as “strength under control.”

3. The prevailing attitude regarding these virtues is concern for others. A gentle and meek person is willing to yield his rights so that others might benefit. Gentle, meek people yield, they do not demand. They humbly yield to the will of God and deal kindly with people. Gentleness and meekness are attitudes that foster good relationships.
4. Gentleness and meekness are active, not passive, traits. They do not imply being a “doormat” that others can use and abuse. These virtues require that we actively resist the temptation to promote ourselves and, instead, act in the interests of others.
5. Even authoritative leaders can act with gentleness and meekness. Moses, for example, is described as “very meek, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3). Yet he was a powerful, effective leader.

B. The vices

1. Harshness—unpleasantly rough, cruel, or severe; dictatorial, tyrannical, strident, sharp, coarse⁴⁵
2. Contentiousness—quarrelsome, argumentative, producing strife

While the virtues focus on the needs of others, the vices focus on one’s own personal desires. Those afflicted with these vices think primarily of themselves and rarely yield their privileges for the benefit of others. They aggressively pursue their own agenda no matter how it affects others.

III. Importance

⁴³ Samuel A. Meier, “Meekness,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 519.

⁴⁴ Meier, 519.

⁴⁵ Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/contentious> (accessed: June 16, 2017).

- A. Gentleness is a characteristic of God. In spite of his great authority and majesty, God condescends to meet the needs of his sinful people. Instead of imposing the full penalties of the law, God acts with mercy toward those who have no merit. God lifts up the fallen and cares for the weak.
- The supreme exemplar of gentleness is Israel's God. He cares tenderly for the flock under his care, and "gently leads those that have young" (Isa. 40:11).⁴⁶
- B. Paul describes Christ as both meek and gentle (2 Cor 10:1). Jesus is "meek and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29). Jesus stood before his accusers without argument or defense, perhaps the greatest demonstration of meekness recorded in the Bible.
- C. Some of the greatest characters of the Bible display meekness, including Abraham (Gen 13:9), Moses (Num 12:3), David (2 Sam 16:10, 12), and Paul (1 Cor 9:19).
- D. Meekness is necessary to bear with one another (Eph 4:2). One of the qualifications for pastors is that they are gentle and not quarrelsome (1 Tim 3:3). Instead of arguing with the unsaved, we should answer them "with meekness and fear" (1 Pet 3:15).
- E. Gentleness and meekness are listed among the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). The ministry of the Holy Spirit should be producing these virtues in the life of every believer. They are expected, not optional, for the believer.
- F. These virtues are necessary when dealing with interpersonal conflict. In such circumstances, we are prone to argue, defend ourselves, or attack those on the other side of the issue. Feelings of frustration, bitterness, and anger are common in such conflicts. However, those exhibiting these virtues will attempt to navigate such problems with consideration, kindness, and deference. Christian virtues like gentleness and meekness should help us resolve conflicts without destroying one another.

⁴⁶ J. Knox Chamblin, "Gentleness," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 286.

- G. Given human pride, gentleness and meekness are difficult character traits to adopt and employ. They run contrary to the sinful corruption of our hearts—our inclination toward self-centeredness, our tendency to argue and to defend ourselves, and our preoccupation with personal rights. We may be inclined to intimidate, manipulate, and control others to get our own way. Gentleness/meekness works directly against the sinful tendencies of our own hearts.
- H. These virtues are more like vices to modern, secular people. Our culture tells us to fight for our rights and not allow others to impinge upon our privileges. Today's society rewards those who aggressively press for their rights, not those who defer to others. Our world expects successful people to be assertive, aggressive self-promoters. Even Christians demand their rights in the church and the home. Mild people don't typically rise to positions of influence in our world.
- I. Given that God, Jesus, and the leading figures of the Bible all act with gentleness and meekness, these are important virtues to adopt.
- J. The single most frequently attested context in which the meek are mentioned in the Bible is one in which they are vindicated and rewarded for their patient endurance (Pss. 22:26; 25:9; 37:11; 76:9; 147:6; 149:4; Isa. 11:4; 29:19; 61:1; Zeph. 2:3; Matt. 5:5).⁴⁷

IV. Dangers

- A. People who seem gentle and meek may be merely passive, disinterested, and weak. Lack of interest for some may pass for gentleness.

Although weakness and meekness may look similar, they are not the same. Weakness is due to negative circumstances, such as lack of strength or lack of courage. But meekness is due to a person's conscious choice. It is strength and courage under control, coupled with kindness.⁴⁸

Think of a tamed horse. It is no weaker than a wild horse, but once tamed, it's strength is under control of its master. Likewise, a meek and gentle spirit is "tamed" in the sense of yielding control to the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁷ Meier, 519.

⁴⁸ Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

Meekness is not a resignation to fate, a passive and reluctant submission to events, for there is little virtue in such a response. Nevertheless, the two responses—resignation and meekness—are externally often indistinguishable.⁴⁹

- B. Gentle, meek people may experience abuse and neglect because they tend not to resist others. Aggressive people may easily take advantage of the meek because meek people tend to yield quickly, often without a fight, just to make others happy.
- C. Gentle, meek people may keep quiet when they should speak up, tolerate what they should oppose, and yield when they should fight. They may be tempted to sacrifice truth for peace. They may refuse to employ good judgment and simply defer to the loudest or most obnoxious voice. Since they are used to deferring to others, they may defer when they should resist.

Meekness is not an attitude of mind that is tolerant of anything and everything, even that which is wrong and immoral. Some people are thought of as meek and gentle because they never disagree with anyone. They go to great lengths to avoid any kind of unpleasantness. But meekness does not imply that one indulges evil. To fail to oppose sin and error is not gentleness/meekness.⁵⁰

Tolerance in our culture has become a great virtue. Leading voices demand that we accept all manner of wickedness and dysfunction under the banner of “tolerance.” Gentle people may be tempted to yield to this prevailing attitude. But Christians must stand against both the “wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11) and the wickedness of the culture. Even meek people must maintain a biblical backbone.

- D. We have the biblical responsibility to demand our rights in certain cases. Husbands have the right to lead their homes, pastors have the right to lead their churches, and government officials have the right to lead in their spheres of authority. In some circumstances, obedience to God demands requires that we resist human authority (Acts 5:29). We cannot passively stand by and allow abuse and mistreatment when we could stop it. Compliance in some cases amounts to compromise. Knowing when to “turn the other cheek” (Mt 5:39) and when to actively resist evil takes wisdom.

⁴⁹ Meier, 519.

⁵⁰ <http://beattieroad.net/home/2012/02/20/strength-under-control-matthew-55/>

How do we understand Jesus' words "resist not evil" (Mt 5:39) or Paul's words "give place unto wrath" (Rom 12:19)? Are they teaching that we should tolerate evil? That we should not defend ourselves, our family, or our nation? Should we become pacifists? Does gentleness/meekness require that we never respond to physical threats?

Jesus' words seem to be an application of the principle "love your enemies" (Mt 5:44). Paul is promoting peace among "all men" (Rom 12:18) and prohibiting personal vengeance (Rom 12:17, 19). The context in both cases seems to be personal relationships. Gentleness/meekness is the appropriate response when confronting personal conflict. But the principle of non-resistance to evil would not seem to apply in other situations, e.g., protecting your family, resisting violence.

Remember that Jesus, although meek and mild, did not tolerate the abuse of his Father's house (Mt 21:12). He was fairly aggressive in his opposition to the corrupt religious leaders of his day (cf. Mt 23:13f). Following Jesus' example, we need to know when to tolerate, comply, and yield and when to withstand, oppose, and fight.

V. Developing the virtues

- A. Make God and his purposes the central concern of your life. Commit yourself to doing things God's way, especially when it comes to personal relationships.
- B. Pray for compassion for others and less concern about self. When facing conflict, refuse to use intimidation, aggression, or self-promotion. Defer to others when possible. Determine to act with kindness and compassion no matter what other individuals might do.
- C. Refuse the impulse to demand your own way, especially when it conflicts with others. Practice letting others have their way. Do what is in the best interests of others (Phil 2:4). When faced with the option of serving yourself or serving others, put others first.
- D. Developing meekness in children
 - 1. Teach and demonstrate that children are not the center of your concern. Don't let life revolve around your children and their desires.

2. Teach children to bear with and endure the difficulties of life without complaining or displaying a bad attitude. Confront murmuring and complaining (Phil 2:14). Don't allow children to avoid or flee from difficulties. Help them work through their problems.
3. Teach and exemplify concern for others and selflessness. Confront selfishness and pride.



Lesson 14

Virtue: Gratitude/Gratefulness

Vice: Ingratitude/Unthankfulness

I. Texts: Ps 34:1, 100:4, 105:1-3, 147:7; Rom 1:21; 1 Cor 15:57; Eph 5:20; Phil 4:6; Col 2:7, 3:17, 4:2; 1 Thes 5:18; 1 Tim 2:1; 2 Tim 3:2; Heb 13:15; Rev 7:12

II. Definitions

- A. Gratitude: the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness; Letting others know by my words and actions how they have benefitted my life⁵¹

In the OT, the word commonly translated as “thank” or “thanksgiving” at its root means, “to confess, to acknowledge.” In Hebrew, when one is thankful, he recognizes or acknowledges that God has provided the things for which one is thankful.

Some OT scholars say that the Hebrew language does not have a word that is exactly the same as our word “thanks” or “thanksgiving” in English. The word “praise” is normally used for expressing gratitude.

In the New Testament, thanksgiving is tied to the concept of “grace.” Most Greek words related to “thanks” are connected, including the noun “thanksgiving,” the adjective “thankful,” and the verb “to give thanks, be thankful.”⁵²

Thanksgiving is a motive for Christian life and conduct, a general attitude toward both the blessings and trials of life, a central component of prayer, and the context for the proper use of material things.⁵³

- B. Ingratitude/Unthankfulness: Failure to give thanks

Shakespeare called ingratitude a “marble-hearted fiend.”

The great Puritan writer Thomas Watson wrote: “See the odious ingratitude of men who sin against their giver! God feeds them, and they fight against him; he gives them bread, and they give him affronts. How unworthy is this! Should we not cry shame of him who had a friend always feeding him

⁵¹ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

⁵² Chris McKnight, “Thanksgiving,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁵³ Daniel Doriani, “Thankfulness, Thanksgiving,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 769.

with money, and yet he should betray and injure him? Thus ungratefully do sinners deal with God; they not only forget his mercies, but abuse them. ... Oh, how horrid is it to sin against a bountiful God!—to strike the hands that relieve us!”⁵⁴

III. Importance

- A. Gratitude is a basic requirement that God expects from all people. God has revealed basic information about himself to all, and all should recognize that God exists, that he is powerful, and that he is good. The basic response to God should be thankfulness (Rom 1:20-21).
 - 1. Righteous people recognize God’s goodness to them and return thanks. That is, they praise and thank God for the blessings they enjoy.

Christians are to thank God for creating and sustaining the world and for His ongoing redemption of it through Jesus. They are expected to pray to God privately (Matt 5:6) and thank Him for what He has done (Luke 17:12–19). Ultimately, Christians are to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Col 3:17). From this perspective, all of an individual’s life in Christ—whether in worship, at meals, or otherwise—becomes an opportunity to offer thanks.⁵⁵
 - 2. One of the characteristics of the wicked is that they refuse to thank God. Instead of gratitude to God, wicked men corrupt the knowledge of God they have and change the glory of God into an image that they bow down and worship.
- B. Under the OT sacrificial system, one of the offerings was called a thanksgiving or peace offering (Lev 7). One would make this voluntary offering if he were especially grateful for some blessing received from the Lord. An animal would be sacrificed, cakes, wafers, and oil would be added to it, and the offerer and his family would eat the meat.
- C. Giving of thanks is really a means of praising God by recognizing or proclaiming God’s person and work. The Israelites would praise the Lord by proclaiming or declaring God’s attributes and works. Praise is a confession or declaration of who God is and what he does.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *The Lord’s Prayer* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 197. Quoted in John MacArthur, *Drawing Near* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1993), March 25.

⁵⁵ McKnight, “Thanksgiving.”

⁵⁶ Ralph H. Alexander, “847 תָּדַן,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 364.

- D. Jesus expressed thanksgiving to God frequently (cf. Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21; John 11:41–42). The most notable accounts of Jesus giving thanks are during His feeding miracles and at the Last Supper.⁵⁷
- E. Paul commonly began his letters with a word of thanks (cf. Rom 1:8; Col 1:12; 1 Thes 1:2).
- F. Giving thanks for one's food is a common theme in the Bible (cf. Mt 15:36; Acts 27:35; 1 Cor 10:30; 1 Tim 4:3-4). A brief prayer of thanks at meal times is a good way to worship God regularly, to reinforce the idea that God provides our daily bread, and to witness to God's provision to others.
- G. Gratitude for salvation should be at the top of the list of things for which we express thanks. Those who have been forgiven much should show much love and gratitude (cf. Luke 7:40-47; 1 Cor 15:57). Likewise, we should be thankful for all spiritual blessings. Indeed, the Christian must thank God in every situation for all things (Eph 5:20; 1 Thes 5:18). Giving thanks for every circumstance recognizes God's sovereign control over all things.
- H. Giving of thanks to God is a form of worship (cf. 1 Cor 14:16). In Revelation, we often find various figures giving thanks as they worship God (cf. Rev 4:9, 5:9-14, 7:12, 11:17).
- I. Examples of ingratitude to others show us areas in which we should be thankful:
 - 1. Laban to Jacob (Gen 31): We should express our gratitude to those who work for us or who help us in our work.
 - 2. Pharaoh's butler to Joseph (Gen 40:23): We should be thankful when someone does us a good deed. We tend to forget.
 - 3. Israelites to Moses (Ex 16:3; 17:2–4; Num 16:12–14): We should be thankful for godly leadership.
 - 4. Nabal, Abigail, and David (1 Sam 25:21): We should be thankful for those who protect us. E.g., policemen, firemen, etc.
 - 5. 9/10 Lepers (Lu 17:11-19): Perhaps one of the most notable NT examples of ingratitude occurred when only one of those healed returned to thank Jesus.

⁵⁷ McKnight, "Thanksgiving."

- a) The leper “turned back.” He recognized the Lord as the source of the benefit. He focused on the *healer* more than the *healing*. The *giver* is of more value than the *gift*.
- b) He worshipped by glorifying God with a loud voice. Jesus commends the man for returning to “give God glory” (.18). And he did this vocally. He expressed his gratitude; he did not merely feel it.
- c) He fell down at Jesus’ feet—an expression of humble worship.
- d) He worshipped by giving thanks to Jesus for the healing. The man expressed his thanks to Jesus for what he had done.
- e) He returned as soon as he discovered that he’d been healed. He wanted to express his thanks right away and not wait.
- f) Jesus expressed his surprise that of the ten cleansed, only one came back to give thanks. Jesus was surprised by their lack of gratitude. It’s unfortunate when people fail to give God the praise and thanks that he deserves.
- g) Gratitude is a rare thing. Or, ingratitude is a very common sin.

J. Ingratitude may express itself in

- 1. Murmuring/complaining against God and others (cf. Ex 16:8—Israelites murmured against Moses)
- 2. Dissatisfaction (cf. Num 16:3—Korah’s rebellion)
- 3. Failure to recognize the contributions of others
- 4. Viewing blessings as rights
- 5. Expecting extras as obligations
- 6. Selfishness/self-centeredness
- 7. Failing to appreciate God’s blessings

K. Ingratitude may result in chastisement (cf. Deut 28:47-52 and Jer 5:7-11). Lack of thankfulness is a sin of omission—failing to do what ought to be done. God’s goodness toward us is an occasion for thanks and praise to God. We must not neglect our responsibility to return thanks.

IV. Development

- A. Recognize God as the ultimate object of praise and thanksgiving. All good things come from God (James 1:17).
- B. Spend time in personal devotions thanking God for the blessings you receive. Thank God during congregational worship. Sing songs of praise and thanksgiving.
- C. Refuse to murmur and complain about circumstances of life. Thanking God regularly for all the good things we enjoy helps us remain positive and avoid self-pity.
- D. Regularly share with others how God has blessed you.
- E. Thank others for the good things they do for you. Express your thanks verbally and/or with cards, letters, emails, etc.
- F. Try to find things to be thankful for even in difficult circumstances.
- G. For children
 - 1. Remind children to express thanks when they receive a gift, a compliment, etc. Reinforce this as a basic matter of good manners.
 - 2. Express thanks during prayer at meals, family devotions, and bed times. Exemplify gratitude and rebuke ingratitude.
 - 3. Encourage children to appreciate all the good things they have, and remind them of those who do not have all the privileges they enjoy. Expose children to those who are poor, sick, invalid, etc.
 - 4. Direct children to write thankyou cards/notes when they receive gifts.



Lesson 15

Virtue: Hospitality

Vice: Inhospitallity

- I. Texts: Gen 18:1-6, 24:17-18; Judges 19:18-21; Isa 58:7; Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 3:2, 5:10; Titus 1:8; Heb 13:1-2; 1 Pet 4:9; 2 John 10; 3 John 3:5-8

II. Definitions

- A. Hospitality—The friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.⁵⁸ Cheerfully sharing food, shelter, and spiritual refreshment with those God brings into my life.⁵⁹ Caring for travelers and those in need. Synonyms: warmth, cordiality, geniality, friendliness

The word for hospitality in the Greek NT is *philozenia*, literally, the love of strangers. Hospitality is receiving someone into your home (cf. 3 John 8) and treating him or her as a valued guest.

- B. Inhospitallity is obviously just the opposite—failure to welcome guests, visitors or strangers, failure to provide for the needy, etc. Self-centered, materialistic people tend not to care for others and don't want to bother with boarding visitors. Synonyms: inconsideration, neglect

III. Importance

- A. Hospitality is a virtue in that it imitates the character of God. The OT pictures God as a host of sorts, welcoming his needy, sojourning people, the Israelites (Ps 23:5, 39:12; cf. Deut 26:5; Heb 11:13). God graciously received the alienated Israelites and met their needs, redeeming them from Egypt and feeding and clothing them in the wilderness (Exod 16; Deut 8:2–5), bringing them as sojourners into God's own land (Lev 25:23), where God offered them health, long life, peace, and fertility (Deut. 11).⁶⁰
- B. In ancient days, travelers had few options regarding places to stay when traveling. Some inns were available, but they were often disreputable places that decent people avoided. If no one took you into his home, you would have to stay outside and fend for yourself (cf. Jud 19:19-20).

⁵⁸ <https://www.google.com/search?q=hospitality&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>

⁵⁹ Bill Gothard

⁶⁰ Rodney K. Duke, "Hospitality," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 360.

- C. Hospitality for the Jews was rooted in the fact that Abraham and his family were, at times in their history, nomads, travelers, and strangers. Abraham sets the example of hospitality by his welcome of the strangers who show up at his tent (Gen 18:1-8). The OT law stipulates that the Jews should not mistreat strangers or travelers (Ex 22:21; Deut 10:19). They should welcome poor fellow Israelites into their homes (Lev 19:33-34). They should include the strangers and aliens living among them in the celebrations (Deut 16:11, 14). Examples like Job (Job 31:32), Manoah (Jud 13:15) and the Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4:8f) demonstrate that hospitality was a virtue among the Jews. The hungry, the poor, and the naked deserve special protections (Isa 58:7).

The plight of aliens was desperate. They lacked membership in the community, and often needed immediate food and lodging. Widows, orphans, the poor, or sojourners from other lands lacked the familial or community status that provided land, the means of making a living, and protection. In the ancient world the practice of hospitality meant graciously receiving an alienated person into one's land, home, or community and providing directly for that person's needs.⁶¹

- D. Hospitality was especially important for travelers. Typically, travelers would enter a city and wait by the gate for someone to offer them a place to stay. The host would offer to provide bread and water at minimum, but usually better fare was available. The host might also provide food and lodging for one's animals. The host might wash the travelers' feet (or provide means to wash up) and perhaps even anoint his guests with oil. One might offer a welcoming bow or even a kiss. For some guests, a host might prepare the best food in the house. Conversation and merry-making might ensue during the traveler's visit (Judg 19).
- E. Love for one's neighbor was a significant emphasis in Jesus' teaching (cf. Mt 19:19, 22:39) and provides the main motivation for Christian hospitality. Jesus emphasized the importance of caring for "the least of these my brethren" by providing food and drink for the needy, taking the stranger into one's home, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned (Mt 25:35f). Giving or refusing hospitality was an indication of acceptance or rejection of the Gospel (Mt 10:9; Lk 10:4). The kingdom of God will be like a great feast to which all are invited (Mt 22:2f). Some of the most important details of the Christian story are associated with food

⁶¹ Rodney K. Duke, "Hospitality," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 359.

and drink (cf. John 6:54-56; Mt 26: 26f). Jesus scolded Simon the Pharisee for being inhospitable: he provided no water for washing his feet, no greeting of Jesus with a kiss, and no oil for anointing his head (Luke 7:44-46).⁶² Jesus set the example of humble service when he washed the dirty feet of his dinner guests (John 13:4-5).

John 13:14 *If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.*

- F. Christians continued the OT Jewish courtesies of providing a traveler with food, drink, and shelter. Members of the early church sold their possessions and provided resources for the needy (Acts 2:45). Hospitality was especially important for those traveling as missionaries or evangelists. Those spreading the Gospel usually found lodging with other Christians (cf. Act 9:43, 10:6f, 16:15, 17:7).
- G. The letters of the NT commend hospitality. We are to “do good unto all people, especially to those of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). As Christians began experiencing persecution, the only place of refuge for them was in the house of another Christian. Fellow believers should expect one another to extend Christian hospitality (Rom 12:13—lit. “pursuing hospitality”). A biblical qualification for pastors is that they be hospitable (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8). A hospitable person might inadvertently entertain angels without knowing it (Heb 13:2). Hospitality might motivate one to provide a guest room for itinerant travelers/missionaries/preachers (cf. 2 Kings 4:10; Phm 22, a “prophet’s chamber”). If we are called upon to care for the needy, we must do it “without grumbling” (1 Pet 4:9). We should see the opportunity for hospitality as a privilege, a means of serving God’s people, and a means to reaching others for Christ.
- H. In rare cases, Christians must withhold table fellowship/hospitality from unrepentant believers who are under church discipline (1 Cor 5:11). Likewise, Christians must “turn away from” those who teach false doctrine and “reject” those who refuse correction (2 Tim 3:5; Titus 3:10-11). We must not provide for or support false teachers (2 John 11).
- I. Hospitality is an act of righteous, godly behavior that plays a major role in the realm of biblical ethics.⁶³ It’s one of the most practical, concrete expressions of Christian love (read Heb 13:1-2). By virtue of biblical

⁶² Douglas K. Wilson, “Hospitality,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁶³ Rodney K. Duke, “Hospitality,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 360.

examples and the direct teaching of both OT and NT, hospitality is both a Christian virtue and a duty. All believers ought to be expressing hospitality in some form or fashion. This virtue is not an optional gift that one may or may not exercise; it's a Christian duty and privilege. We'll never know on this side of heaven to full impact of extending hospitality toward those in need.

- J. What was the "inn" in biblical times? Guest rooms of some kind, apparently open to all travelers, were available, perhaps on the main roads and in the larger cities (cf. Gen 42:27, 43:21; Ex 4:24; Lk 2:7, 10:34). Some of these may have been available only during special occasions (e.g., the famous inn with no room, Luke 2:7). The Good Samaritan story shows that an inn might provide overnight shelter, food, and even rudimentary health care (for a price, Luke 10:35-35).
- K. Times have changed. Travelers can now rent a decent room for a modest price at a motel in most towns and no longer rely on fellow Christians to open their homes. In some respects, a ministry to travelers has been largely lost, at least in the modern world. But in many places, hospitality to traveling strangers is still widely employed.

IV. Developing hospitality

- A. Be willing to open your home to traveling strangers and/or others who need a temporary place to stay.
- B. Look for opportunities to provide food and shelter for the needy. Students, missionaries and itinerant preachers, military members, the homeless should find a welcome with us.
- C. Have compassion when others suffer. Weep, mourn, pray, and, when appropriate, fast for others. Be willing to provide meals for the sick or those who are grieving the death of loved ones. Encourage the weak and oppressed; assist with the needs of the infirmed⁶⁴
- D. Pay special attention to those who lack family support—singles, widows, orphans.
- E. Invite people into your home. Invite new neighbors over for a meal. Show appreciation for those who have ministered to you by having them over for a meal. Be the "home away from home" for itinerant travelers. Invite new

⁶⁴ Patricia A. Ennis, "Practicing Biblical Hospitality," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 11, no. 2 (2006): 123.

believers over for fellowship. Use your home as an evangelistic base by inviting unbelievers over.

Hospitality is a wonderful gift. We don't need a grand palace, or a dream home—few of us have those. To make others feel truly welcome, we only need an open heart and the greater beauty of love expressed.⁶⁵

Hospitality fleshes out love in a uniquely personal and sacrificial way. Through the ministry of hospitality, we share our most prized possessions. We share our family, home, finances, food, privacy, and time. Indeed, we share our very lives. So, hospitality is always costly. Through the ministry of hospitality, we provide friendship, acceptance, fellowship, refreshment, comfort, and love in one of the richest and deepest ways possible for humans to understand. Unless we open the doors of our homes to one another, the reality of the local church as a close-knit family of loving brothers and sisters is only another theory.⁶⁶

If you want new Christians to grow, open your home and share your love and knowledge with them. Your home is the best tool you have to enhance loving Christian community. Your local church can become a friendlier, more loving community if you—and others you know—will consistently open your homes to one another.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Russell Cronkhite, *A Return to Sunday Dinner* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 195. Quoted in Patricia A. Ennis, "Practicing Biblical Hospitality," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 11, no. 2 (2006): 118.

⁶⁶ *Emmaus Journal* 2, no. 1 (1993): 62.

⁶⁷ *Emmaus Journal* 2, no. 1 (1993): 64.



Lesson 16

Virtue: Humility/Submission to Authority

Vice: Pride/Arrogance/Disrespect

I. Texts: Ps 113:5-6; Prov 3:34, 11:2, 16:18; Isa 57:15; Mic 6:8; Mt 11:29, 18:14; Rom 12:3, 15:17-18; 1 Cor 3:5-7; 2 Cor 3:5; Col 3:12; James 4:10; 1 Pet 5:5

II. Definitions

A. The virtues

1. Humility: acknowledging that God (and others) are largely responsible for anything I achieve in life; a modest or low opinion of oneself, one's accomplishments, one's rank, etc.; freedom from pride or arrogance; not impressive, modest

The words *humility* and *humble* originate from the Latin word for "low, meek" (*humilitas/humilis*).⁶⁸

Humble people don't necessarily think ill of themselves; they don't think much about themselves at all. Humble people are not interested in taking credit for what they achieve. They are more concerned with giving glory to God and recognition to others than they are in receiving any admiration for themselves.

The Bible instructs us to think about ourselves "soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom 12:3). I need not deny who and what I am nor deny the talents, gifts, and abilities God has given me. How can I develop any skills if I deny that I have any? Instead, we should evaluate ourselves reasonably and consider how God has gifted us.

B. The vices

1. Pride/self-esteem/self-love: an inordinate concern for oneself; a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired.⁶⁹ Synonyms: ostentatious, showy, impressive.

⁶⁸ "Humility." Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 19 July 2017.

⁶⁹ <https://www.google.com/search?q=pride&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>

2. Arrogance: having or revealing an exaggerated sense of one's own importance or abilities⁷⁰

III. Importance

- A. Humility is a characteristic of God, who humbles himself to take knowledge of mankind (Ps 8:4). The Bible uniformly promotes the virtue of humility (cf. Prov 15:33, 18:12). Humility is particularly characteristic of Jesus, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:6-8). Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, a demonstration of lowly service which believers should emulate (John 13). Jesus frequently advocates a humble attitude—the poor in spirit and the meek will be rewarded and exalted (cf. Mt 5:3, 5; 23:12).
- B. Other-oriented living is taught consistently throughout the entire Bible.
Matthew 22:37 Jesus [said]: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ... and love your neighbor as yourself.
John 13:34 [Jesus said] Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.
Ephesians 5:21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
Philippians 2:3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others
- C. The Bible teaches that life consists not in looking inward or feeling good, bad or otherwise about ourselves. Rather, it centers on God, who alone is worthy of our love, fear and devotion. Our lives are to be focused on loving God and others, leaving little room for obsessions about self!

IV. Dangers

- A. Self-esteem/self-love (pride) presents a real danger.
 1. The Bible clearly condemns pride, self-love, and self-promotion. The Bible has nothing good to say about pride. In virtually every

⁷⁰ <https://www.google.com/search?q=arrogance&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#dobs=arrogant>

place pride is mentioned, it is described as sin. Having an over-inflated sense of self-importance is clearly unbiblical (cf. Job 35:12; Ps 10:2, 4; Prov 11:2, 13:10; Isa 16:6; Jer 48:29; Dan 5:20; 1 John 2:16).

2. Pride and self-love are symptoms of an underlying problem: selfishness. The Bible presents selfishness as a primary, basic sin, not as a positive, beneficial attitude to seek. People generally love themselves too much, not too little.
3. The Bible clearly condemns the sins associated with pride.
Romans 13:13 Let us behave decently, ... not in dissension and jealousy.
1 Corinthians 3:3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?
2 Corinthians 12:20 I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.
4. Unfortunately, the world has adopted the unbiblical viewpoint that self-esteem is actually a healthy attitude. The church has also largely followed this teaching. Self-esteem is almost universally held to be necessary for good mental health. But the Bible's teaching on humility is hard to square with the world's teaching on self-esteem; they both cannot be true. We must decide whom we will follow—God's word or that of the psychologists.
5. Both self-love and self-hate are self-centered and inward-looking attitudes; the Bible condemns both of them.
6. What about self-confidence?
 - a) Our culture highly values self-confidence and self-reliance. But the emphasis of the Bible seems to be directly contrary to that idea. Time after time, we see God bring people to the absolute end of their own strength and human abilities. Why? So he can show how dependent they are on him and then fill them with his own unlimited resources.
 - b) Many of the great leaders of history had more confidence in God than they did in themselves, even though they achieved remarkable successes.

2 Corinthians 3:5 *Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.*

<u>GOD'S WORD SAYS:</u>	<u>SELF-IMAGE ADVOCATES SAY:</u>
1) Love God & others (Mt. 22:37)	1) Love yourself first
2) Build up others (Heb. 10:24,25)	2) Build up your self-esteem
3) None righteous (Rom. 3:23)	3) You are good
4) Heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9)	4) Believe in yourself
5) Put others first (Phil. 2:1-4)	5) Put yourself first
6) Be humble (Rom. 12:3)	6) Think highly of yourself; be proud
7) We are sinners (Rom. 3:10,11)	7) You are of great value
8) Do what God wants (Ex. 20:3-17)	8) Do what you want to do
9) Deny yourself (Mt. 16:24-26)	9) Express yourself; please yourself
10) Put confidence in God (Phil. 4:13)	10) Have self-confidence

- B. Some may be guilty of a false, sham, faux humility that turns out to be prideful at root (cf. Col 2:18, 23). False teachers may appear to be humble but in reality are puffed up with a sense of their own importance (cf. 1 Tim 1:5-7).⁷¹
- C. Unbiblical forms of humility (self-hatred or self-abuse) present a real danger. This no doubt occurs, but is probably less common than the problems associated with self-esteem/pride.
1. Some people are naturally melancholy and prone to self-loathing/hatred, which may result in depression and self-abuse, even suicide. Thinking unreasonably ill of self, speaking ill of self, criticizing self, believing one can do nothing right, etc. goes beyond biblical humility.
 2. Some forms of self-hatred are actually means of self-promotion. If one enjoys the attention brought from self-abuse (e.g., cutting, eating disorders), it may reveal an inordinate obsession about oneself. Likewise, people may complain about their own weaknesses and failures in order to garner support, sympathy, affirmation, attention, etc. Some think so ill of themselves that they neglect using their gifts for the benefit of others.

⁷¹ F. S. Fitzsimmonds, "Humility," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 491.

3. In rare cases, one may be proud of his humility (see my book “Humility and How I Achieved It”). Such people tend to be obnoxious and phony.

V. Demonstration

- A. How can you tell if someone is humble? Philippians 2:3-11 points us to the example of Christ.
 1. Humble people avoid “vainglory” – empty pride, self-esteem; anything done for show or to impress others.
 2. Humble people demonstrate “lowliness of mind” – all one word in the original; simply means humility, having a humble opinion of oneself
 3. Humble people “esteem other better than” themselves – think of (esteem) others more than self. Others are in reality no better than you (all are equal); but we should treat people with dignity and respect.
 4. Humble people are more concerned with the interests of others than with their own interests. Get your mind off your own concerns and consider the needs of others. Be sensitive to what others need, contribute, and accomplish instead of focusing on self.
 5. Humble people put on the mind of Christ.
 - a) Jesus put aside the glories of heaven to come to earth. Be willing to put aside your privileges and place of honor to serve others.
 - b) Jesus “made himself of no reputation,” literally “emptied himself.” Be willing to suffer embarrassment and possibly lose your good reputation for others (e.g., Jesus was the friend of sinners, accused of being a glutton and drunk [Mt 11:19]).
 - c) Jesus took upon himself the form of a servant and the likeness of man. Be willing to take on the lowliest of tasks to serve others.
 - d) Jesus humbled himself to the point of death on the cross. Be willing to suffer for the benefit of others. Don’t complain when suffering minor inconveniences for the benefit of others.

VI. Developing humility in children

Children enter the world with a raging sense of self-centeredness. They have no consideration for others. They don't care that they are keeping their household from sleep, inconveniencing others, costing lots of money, or being unpleasant and ill-mannered. This self-centeredness will continue throughout life unless the parents train the child otherwise. Snobby, self-centered kids grow up into snobby, self-centered adults.

- A. As with all virtues, children will follow the example of their parents. If parents are humble, modest, serving people, the children will likely pick that up as well (in most cases).
- B. Demonstrate that the children are not the center of attention in the family. Don't allow the family agenda to revolve around them. Be reasonable in how much inconvenience you'll tolerate to satisfy a child. Children should not learn to assume that people will bend over backwards to accommodate them. If their parents do so, they'll assume that others should do so as well.
- C. Don't be a "helicopter" parent. Don't shield them from every little problem or insert yourself into every battle. Don't do too much for them. Don't give them everything they want. Make them work for rewards. Allow them to face trials, obstacles, and challenges. Let them feel uncomfortable and inconvenienced occasionally. Teach them not to complain at such times. Give them opportunities to fail. Avoid creating "snowflake" children—so weak and delicate that they "melt" under even minor pressure.
- D. Don't celebrate and publicize their every accomplishment, talent, brilliant statement, latest award, etc. Don't put too much emphasis on external looks, hair, clothing, etc. Reward high achievement, not merely doing what is expected.
- E. Remind your children about how dependent they are on others. Encourage children to rejoice when other achieve. Expose them to real poverty so they'll be thankful for what they have.
- F. Insist that children use good manners, say "thank you" and "you're welcome," etc. Help them respond modestly to praise. Train them to relate properly to others, speak to adults, and treat other kids appropriately.

Example of proper biblical humility: George Washington Carver is famous for discovering hundreds of uses for the peanut while he was a professor at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Carver could have become fabulously rich by patenting his discoveries, but he freely passed on his inventions for the betterment of the rural

farming populace of the South, both white and black. And he was careful in it all to give God the glory and credit for his discoveries. Here's a typical quote: "I discover nothing in my laboratory. If I come here of myself I am lost. But I can do all things through Christ. I am God's servant, His agent, for here God and I are alone. I am just the instrument through which He speaks, and I would be able to do more if I were to stay in closer touch with Him. With my prayers I mix my labors, and sometimes God is pleased to bless the results."



Lesson 17

Virtue: Reverence/Fear of the Lord

Vice: Irreverence/Blasphemy/Profane

- I. Texts: Ex 20:20; Deut 6:13, 10:12-13; Jos 4:24; 1 Sam 12:24; Job 6:14; Ps 33:8; 34:9, 11; Prov 1:7, 23:17; Isa 11:2-3; Jer 2:19; Ec 5:7; Mt 21:37; Rom 11:20; Eph 5:21; 1 Tim 5:20; Heb 4:1, 12:21

II. Definitions

A. The virtues

1. Reverence: Fear mingled with respect and esteem; veneration.

The fear of the Lord may be defined reverence mingled with honor and fear.⁷²

The fear acceptable to God is a filial fear, an awful *reverence* of the divine nature, proceeding from a just esteem of his perfections, which produces in us an inclination to his service and an unwillingness to offend him.

We reverence superiors for their age, their authority and their virtues. We ought to reverence parents and upright judges and magistrates. We ought to reverence the Supreme Being, his word and his ordinances.

Reverence is nearly equivalent to veneration, but expresses something less of the same emotion. It differs from awe, which is an emotion compounded of fear, dread or terror, with admiration of something great, but not necessarily implying love or affection. We feel *reverence* for a parent, and for an upright magistrate, but we stand in awe of a tyrant.⁷³

2. The fear of God: Fear is prominent in the OT; correct religion itself is described as “the fear of God” (i.e., the right God, i.e., Yahweh). Although the element of dread may be involved (cf. Ex 23:27; 1Sa 11:7; 2 Chron 20:29; Ps 119:120; Isa 2:10), the proper fear of God is more the feeling of reverent regard for God, tempered with awe and fear of the punishment of disobedience. As such it is a sentiment

⁷² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).

⁷³ “reverence” from the 1828 Webster’s Dictionary—Online Edition.

<http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/reverence>

commanded and to be cherished toward Yahweh. The fear of God is an essential element in the worship and service of Yahweh (2 Ki 17; Ps 2:11, etc.); it is a Divine qualification of the Messiah (Isa 11:2,3). This “fear of God” is demonstrated by keeping God’s commandments, walking in His ways, doing His will, avoiding sin, etc. It is the true wisdom (Job 28:28; Ps 25:14; Pr 1:7; 15:33); it gives life (Pr 10:27, etc.), blessedness (Ps 128:1,4), sufficiency (Ps 34:9), Divine friendship (Ps 25:14), protection (Ps 34:7), deliverance (Ps 85:9), forgiveness (Ps 130:4).⁷⁴

3. In the NT, the fear of God is still an important element of true religion, but it is balanced by God’s love and compassion. “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29), yet we can “come boldly unto the throne of grace” (Heb 4:16). “Fear not” is often on Jesus’ lips (Mt 10:28; Luke 8:50, 12:7, etc.) and often expressed by others (Mt 1:20; Luke 1:13, 30, 2:10, etc.). There remains a fatherly fear and sense of awe regarding the greatness of God and of Christ, but all other fears should be dismissed (Mt 8:26; 10:26-28, 31; Lu 12:32; 2 Tim 1:7). The expression “the fear of God” or “to fear God” is used in the sense of “stand in awe of,” and is sometimes amounts to true religion (Lu 18:4; Ac 10:2, 35; 13:16, 26). The author of Hebrews assures us that “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31), i.e., it is terrible, something well to be feared.⁷⁵
4. The early church walked in the fear of the Lord (Acts 2:43, 5:5, 11, 9:31, 19:17). This attitude led to the disciples being “multiplied” (Acts 9:31).

B. The vices

1. Irreverence: the lack of the proper fear of God; failure to hold God in awe; to have no fear of God is essentially to lack salvation or to be pagan/heathen (Gen 20:11; Ps 36:1).
2. Blasphemy: to speak ill or evil of, particularly when speaking against God; uttering impious words.

Blasphemy is always in word or deed, injury, dishonor and defiance offered to God, and its penalty is death by stoning in the OT.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

⁷⁵ ISBE

⁷⁶ ISBE

3. Profane: the condition of being common, ungodly; irreligious; one who has no concern for what is sacred (based on a root word meaning “threshold,” hence, what one may tread upon); often used to describe one’s language (cf. 1 Tim 4:7, 6:20) but may refer to profane persons (Heb 12:16—Esau, a “profane person”)

III. Importance

- A. God is majestically great and awesome, a consuming fire, a character with which one must not trifle. The word “glory” in the OT is based on a word meaning “heavy, weighty” in the sense of worthiness or honor. God’s glory is his splendor or reputation. Fear and trembling are the appropriate responses for those experiencing God’s weighty presence (Heb 12:21).
- B. As noted above, reverence for God plays a significant role in both the OT and the NT. “The fear of God” is a way to summarize genuine religion. Thus, the concept is part of the very fabric of the Scriptures and of Christianity. It’s the foundation of OT theology.⁷⁷ The fear of God is virtually synonymous with loving, serving, and obeying God (cf. Deut 10:12-13).
- C. Reverence for God is frequently lacking, naturally among pagans (cf. Rom 3:18), but sometimes even among those claiming to know God. God’s identity as “Abba, Father” and Christ as our brother leads some to treat God and the things of God with irreverence. We live in an culture that insists on the casual, informal, relaxed treatment of almost everything. But contrary to what culture teaches us, we should not treat what is sacred as if it were profane/common.
- D. Worship, the central and necessary service of the church, ought to be reverent in its atmosphere and attitude. When God is present among his people, a proper sense of fear should prevail; not in the sense of dread, but in the sense of a high degree of esteem and honor shown to a dignitary. Thus, the services of the church should be conducted with order and decorum out of reverence for the one being worshipped.

The church of Jesus Christ will never be able to fulfill her mission to win men to that Lord Jesus Christ until she is walking in the fear of the Lord. In all our worship and service there must be a manifest sense of the power and presence of the living Lord.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 1 (2009): 12.

⁷⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, “Should a Christian Be Afraid?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 110 (1953): 80–81.

Should we maintain a difference between the sacred and the profane/common? After all, Christians are to do everything to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31) and in the name of Christ (Col 3:17). Doesn't that mean that all of life is sacred and nothing to be considered common or unclean (Acts 10:14-15)? If that is true, perhaps all occasions should be treated equally.

The fact that all of life is sacred doesn't mean that we don't recognize distinctions in what is appropriate (or inappropriate) behavior, attitudes, speech, etc. at different occasions. We often act differently in private than in public (e.g., dress, topics of conversation) and/or at different occasions (e.g., weddings, funerals). Some activities or occasions naturally call for more reverence and respect (e.g., a worship service, a funeral) and perhaps even different dress (e.g., banquet vs. picnic). All of life is sacred and nothing unclean of itself; yet parts of life require different behaviors based on the occasion, purpose, and other factors.

IV. Dangers

A. The virtues:

1. Fear and reverence for God can be pushed to an unbiblical extreme. Unbelievers *should* sense God's anger against them (Ps 7:11), and even backslidden Christians may reasonably fear falling "into the hands of an angry God" (Heb 10:31). But an inordinate fear of God may cause the believer to cower in God's presence or even to avoid it. Thinking of God as an angry, vengeful taskmaster may cause some believers to become defeated and frustrated if not bitter. A sensitive conscience may plague a believer with continuing feelings of guilt and failure, even after he has confessed and forsaken his sin.
2. Christians who are walking obediently with the Lord need experience no sense of dread or apprehension about their relationship with God. They can approach God as "Abba, Father." They can come boldly before God's throne without anxious thoughts and fears. Perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18), including an inordinate sense of dread in approaching God. God delights in showing mercy to his children. Christians may fear God's fatherly displeasure and discipline, but they need not fear God's wrath.

3. The other extreme to avoid is a lack of reverence for God. Some believers become overly familiar with God in the sense that they consider him more of a tolerant, indulgent grandpa than the majestic, transcendent Creator. They inappropriately emphasize the love of God to the exclusion of his other attributes. This leads to a neglectful “anything goes” attitude and set of behaviors. Unbiblical compromise often follows (e.g., tolerance of divorce, homosexuality, feminism, socialism, etc.). A solution to irreverence is to think of God as our Father, one who is both familiar yet highly respected. The image of God as Father, one worthy of both love and respect, prevents irreverence.
4. Christians ought to be especially careful not to treat God or the things of God lightly or flippantly. All of life is sacred because it all belongs to God and all should be done in the name of Jesus (Col 3:17). Thus, we should allow no irreverence in our attitudes or behaviors.
 - a) A sense of propriety and decorum should pertain in every part of life, especially that done in public.
 - b) Even the mundane things of life should be done “to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). We should tolerate nothing in our lives that brings God’s reputation into disrepute.
 - c) We should speak of God only in respectful terms. Reverence for things sacred would prevent us from making jokes about God or the things of God. Christians must not exempt comedy from the need for reverence.
 - d) A desire to be “cool” or acceptable within our corrupt culture has led some Christians to adopt irreverent attitudes, language, behaviors, manners, and even dress. We must be careful not to emulate the profane customs of our pagan neighbors. God admonishes us not to learn “the way of the heathen” (Jer 10:2; cf. Eph 5:11). As culture becomes increasingly corrupt and anti-Christian, reverence for God will marginalize us even more from our irreverent society. We must resist the world’s efforts to press us into its ungodly mold (Rom 12:1-2).

B. The vices:

1. Irreverent people typically are not saved. Those who are indifferent to the things of God don't care about the eternal destiny of their souls or the claims of Christ. Atheists typically don't even believe in the soul or the reality of the spiritual realm, so they have no interest in treating a God they don't believe in reverently.
2. Irreverent people tend to be rather profane. That is, they have no regard for things sacred. They commonly make jokes about sacred things and use inappropriate language to communicate their contempt for all things holy. We should expect this of unbelievers.
3. Blasphemy is especially dangerous because Jesus asserted that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unpardonable sin (Mt 12:31-32). Some of the Jews claimed that Jesus did his miracles through the power of Satan. They thus slandered the genuine work of God, called good evil, and charged Jesus with fraud. No one who thinks of Jesus as an agent of the devil will be saved.

Constant and consummate opposition to the influence of the Holy Spirit, because of a deliberate preference of darkness to light, render repentance and therefore forgiveness morally impossible.⁷⁹

V. Demonstrating the fear of the Lord⁸⁰

- A. Godly fear will motivate Christian service, for all believers will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive appropriate rewards (2 Cor. 5:11).
- B. Godly fear will cause the Christian to examine his whole spiritual life to see if he has entered into all of God's provision for him (Heb 4:1).
- C. Godly fear will cause purity within the church (Acts 2:43, 5:5-11). When the church has a high degree of reverence for God and his work, it will enjoy peace, comfort, and multiplication (Acts 9:31). The fear of the Lord will cause the church to purge itself from evil (Acts 19:19).
- D. Godly fear will keep the believer properly related to others (Eph 5:21).
 1. It should cause the husband, wife, and children to keep their proper positions in the home.
 2. It should cause employees to be reliable workers and employers to treat their workers well (5:21-6:9).

⁷⁹ Plummer, as cited in ISBE.

⁸⁰ Some of this from Charles C. Ryrie, "Should a Christian Be Afraid?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 110 (1953): 79-80.

- E. Godly fear will cause the Christian to be rightly related to and respectful of governmental authorities, since he realizes that they are ordained of God and that part of his responsibility to God is through them (Rom 13:7; 1 Pet 3:14–15).

VI. Developing the fear of the Lord in children

- A. Parents must exemplify the fear of the Lord in their own lives. Children will see the necessity of reverence for God when they see it in the lives of their parents. Insist that children treat God and the things of God (the Bible, church, prayer, God's name, etc.) with respect and honor. Parents who treat God flippantly should expect the same from their kids.
- B. Confront irreverence and profanity whenever you see it in your children. Particularly address irreverent language (e.g., jeeze, Oh my God, etc.). Don't tolerate irreverence in any form; always confront it and correct it.



Lesson 18

Virtue: Joyfulness

Vice: Self-pity

I. Texts: Neh 8:10-12; Ps 16:11, 19:8, 30:5, 66:1, 119:11; Joel 2:23; Gal 5:22; Phil 3:1, 4:4; 1 Thes 5:16; James 1:12

II. Definitions

A. The virtue: joy—maintaining a good attitude, even when faced with unpleasant conditions;⁸¹ the exultation of my inward being that results from the genuine harmony with God and with others;⁸² an attitude that stems from accepting the fact that God is working all things to His good purposes in the life of the believer and believing and acting accordingly;⁸³ Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world.⁸⁴

The idea of joy is expressed in the OT by many synonymous terms. Words like “joy,” “gladness,” “mirth” are common. A word meaning, “to be bright, to shine” is often translated figuratively as “to rejoice, be glad” (Lev 23:40). Words literally meaning “to spring, to leap” are often translated as “rejoice, shout.” One word meaning “to go in a circle” (i.e., dance around with joy) is commonly rendered as “joy.”

In the NT, writers use various words for “joy” and “rejoice.” One word expresses a heightened form of “exuberant joy” or “exultation” (Lu 1:14, 44; Ac 2:46; Jude 1:24; Heb 1:9).⁸⁵ The very beginnings of the Gospel are “good tidings of great joy” (Lk 2:10).

B. The vice: self-pity—excessive, self-absorbed unhappiness over one’s own troubles;⁸⁶ a self-indulgent dwelling on one’s own sorrows or misfortunes⁸⁷

III. Importance

A. Joy is a virtue because God is joyful. God Himself is represented in the OT as “rejoicing in his works” (Ps 104:31), and over His people “for good”

⁸¹ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

⁸² Bill Gothard

⁸³ Charles Wood

⁸⁴ John Piper, “How Do You Define Joy?” <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-do-you-define-joy>

⁸⁵ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

⁸⁶ <https://www.google.com/search?q=self-pity&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>

⁸⁷ “Self-pity.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 9 Aug. 2017.

(Deut 30:9). “He will rejoice over thee (Zion) with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing” (Zech 3:17).

- B. Although Jesus was often sorrowful, he was also joyful. He describes himself as a “bridegroom” who feasts instead of fasting (Mt 2:18-20). His enemies described him as “a gluttonous man and a winebibber” (Mt 11:19). He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21). His disciples gave him joy (John 15:11, 17:13). He faced the cross voluntarily “for the joy that was set before him” (Heb 12:2).
- C. Fellowship with God naturally produces “fullness of joy” (Ps 16:11). God is both the source (Ps 4:7; 51:12) and the object (Ps 35:9; Isa 29:19) of joy. God’s sovereign control over all things gives us a joyous sense of security in life (Ps 93; 96:10; 97:1).⁸⁸
- D. Various biblical writers command us to be joyful (cf. Ps 33:1, 97:12; Joel 2:23; Phil 3:1, 4:4; James 1:12). The phrase “rejoice (be glad) in the Lord” and similar expressions are common (e.g. Ps 97:12; 149:2; Isa 61:10; Zec 10:7).
- E. A deep sense of joy should come from the fact that our “names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Salvation should provide every believer with a profound sense of joy. Jesus gives a full measure of joy to those who follow him faithfully (John 15:11, 16:24, 17:13). Likewise, the fact that “good and faithful” servants may in the end enter into “the joy of thy Lord” should fill us with good hope for the future (Mt 25:21, 23). All disciples of Christ have good reason to be “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” as were the members of the early church (Acts 13:52). Being saved gives believers a sense of “joy unspeakable and full of glory,” even in the midst of fiery trials (1 Pet 1:7-8).
- F. Obedience to God’s commands should produce joy in the believer’s heart. Jesus assures us that a result of abiding in the vine and keeping his commandments is fullness of joy (John 15:10-11).
- G. A joyful attitude is essentially a matter of obedience and spiritual discipline. God commands us to rejoice, gives us good reasons to do so, and enables us to be joyful through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (joy is a fruit of the Spirit—Gal 5:22). The key to rejoicing is the phrase “in the Lord” (Phil 3:1, 4:4). The ultimate source of joy is Christ. Our relationship with Christ and all the accompanying spiritual and temporal benefits provide many reasons to rejoice no matter what our circumstances. The

⁸⁸ ISBE

blessings of salvation (foreknowledge, calling, redemption, justification, sanctification, glorification, etc.) are foundational for Christian joy. Our unity with Christ is present and permanent, giving us an abiding reason for joy. Since God is for us, nothing can be against us (Rom 8:31). We have a “blessed hope” of the return of Christ and a confident expectation of a “mansion” just over the hilltop (John 14:1-3). Given these spiritual realities, we can have a persistent sense of joy in spite of life’s trials. If Christ is always with us (Heb 13:5), we can always have joy, since he is the source. Even in the face of persecution, we can “rejoice, and be exceeding glad” (Mt 5:12).

Over and over again in the pages of the New Testament, the idea of joy is communicated as an imperative, as an obligation. Based on the biblical teaching, I would go so far as to say that it is the Christian’s duty, his moral obligation, to be joyful. That means that the failure of a Christian to be joyful is a sin, that unhappiness and a lack of joy are, in a certain way, manifestations of the flesh.⁸⁹

IV. Dangers

- A. One danger is confusing joy and happiness (or pleasure). Although related, joy is a much deeper and more meaningful concept than is happiness. Circumstances may be a cause for happiness or depression, but our joy should not depend on what happens to us. Joy is independent of circumstances because it is based on God, what he’s done for us, and the promises he’s made to us.
- B. Another danger is the tendency to pursue or extend “mountain top” experiences of joy, those spiritual high points that naturally fill us with good feelings. Some people expect every worship service to charge them up spiritually; they crave the feelings of joy associated with intense worship experiences. But we should realize that even tremendous spiritual feelings inevitably wear off over time. We can treasure those times of spiritual highs without trying to generate new ones all the time.
- C. Another danger is thinking that Christian joy should prevent us from feeling negative emotions like sorrow, grief, frustration, or turmoil. Can we experience both joy and sorrow at the same time? Yes. The presence of Christian joy can occur while also experiencing profound agitation. Jesus himself provides some examples of this. Our Lord was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). Sometimes, Jesus “groaned in the

⁸⁹ R C Sproul, “The Key to the Christian’s Joy” <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/key-christians-joy/>

spirit” because of his inner turmoil (John 11:33). Jesus was often deeply saddened and sometimes even angry. He even conferred a blessing on “those who mourn” (Mt 5:4). Such emotions are not necessarily sinful and may co-exist with a deep-seated sense of joy. James commands us to “count it all joy” when we fall into various kinds of trials (James 1:12). We are not exempt from “tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword” (Rom 8:35; cf. Mt 5:12). From a dismal prison cell, Paul wrote the words “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice” (Phil 4:4). Christians need not feel guilty for feeling natural negative emotions. But underlying all life experiences should be a deep sense of the joy of the Lord (Neh 8:10). Read 2 Cor 6:10.

The heart of the New Testament concept is this: a person can have biblical joy even when he is mourning, suffering, or undergoing difficult circumstances. This is because the person’s mourning is directed toward one concern, but in that same moment, he possesses a measure of joy.⁹⁰

V. Developing joy

- A. Since the source or basis of joy is God and what he has done to save us through the sacrifice of Christ, the best way to recover or enhance our sense of joy is to focus on these spiritual realities. Paul suggests that we focus our attention on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8). We can control our thoughts, indulging in self-pity or rejoicing in Christ. Whether we decide to throw a pity party or dance with joy is our choice.

When we find ourselves depressed, down, irritated, annoyed, or otherwise unhappy, we need to return to the source of our joy, and then we will see those circumstances that are sapping our joy in perspective. The circumstances of this life will pale into insignificance when compared to that which we have received from God.⁹¹

When I see Christ in all that he is doing, and all that he is, then my heart is drawn out in joy towards him.⁹²

- B. Perhaps the greatest enemy of joy is anxiety—worry, inordinate concern, often regarding events over which we have no control. Jesus frequently told his disciples, “Fear not.” He reminded his listeners not to worry about

⁹⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Can I Have Joy in My Life?*, First edition., vol. 12, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2012), 4.

⁹¹ R. C. Sproul, *Can I Have Joy in My Life?*, First edition., vol. 12, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2012), 7–8.

⁹² John Piper, “How Do You Define Joy?” <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-do-you-define-joy>

life but to trust that God will provide what is necessary (Mt 6:25f).

Likewise, Paul exhorts us not to be anxious about things but to bring them to our Lord in prayer (Phil 4:6). Further, believers have the privilege of sharing their burdens with one another and praying for one another (James 5:16). When we keep in close fellowship with God and with fellow believers, we will not be overwhelmed by anxious thoughts.

- C. James' exhortation to "count it all joy" when we encounter various kinds of trials (James 1:12) does not mean that all trials are the source of joy or are joyful in themselves. Trials are by nature not joyful. The idea is to consider trials as joyful because the trial produces beneficial results—"knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (1:3). God has a purpose for the trials that he allows us to endure, namely, to conform us more closely to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29) and to produce spiritual maturity (Rom 5:3-5).

James is exhorting us to count it all joy even when it is not all joy, not because it is joyous to be involved in pain and suffering, but because God can bring good through that pain and suffering. He is working in even the difficult situations for our sanctification.⁹³

- D. Paul assures us that the present sufferings are nothing compared to "the glory that shall be revealed in us" (Rom 8:18). One way to enhance joy and reduce anxiety is to focus on the future glories of heaven. Our life of pain, sorrow, and pity is limited. One day all sorrows and pain will be gone. This world is not our final home, and we have a "blessed hope" regarding a glorious future.
- E. Another way to enhance our experiences of joy is to "rejoice with those who rejoice" (Rom 12:15). Fellowship with others, especially in their times of joy and rejoicing, can help lift our spirits as well. We can and should feel joy when others succeed, achieve, and celebrate. Joy should not be self-centered or so restricted that I feel joy only when good things happen to me. We should even be able to rejoice when others do well at our expense (e.g., a friend beats us in a game). Don't be jealous or covetousness of others' success; instead, rejoice with them.
- F. The children's lesson that joy is spelled "Jesus, others, and you" is simple but profound. When we put Jesus first, others next, and self last, joy is the result.

⁹³ R. C. Sproul, *Can I Have Joy in My Life?*, First edition., vol. 12, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2012), 13.

- G. Ultimately, joy is based on a solid trust in God, that he is working all things together for his glory and for our good (Rom 8:28). Remember that we live by faith (Rom 1:17) and walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). Only a deep-seated trust in God can maintain our joy in the midst of the storms of life.

Habakkuk 3:17–18 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls—Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.



Lesson 19

Virtue: Justice/Righteousness

Vice: Injustice/Corruption/ Unrighteousness

I. Texts: Gen 18:19, 30:33; Deut 16:18, 32:4; 2 Sam 8:15; Ps 7:9, 119:121; Prov 8:15, 21:3; Isa 1:16-17, 9:7, 26:7; Jer 9:24, 22:15-16; Mic 6:8; Mt 23:23; Luke 23:50; Acts 3:14

II. Definitions

A. The virtues

1. Justice: Taking personal responsibility to uphold what is pure, right, and true;⁹⁴ the virtue which consists in giving to everyone what is his due; practical conformity to the laws and to principles of rectitude in the dealings of men with each other; honesty; integrity in commerce or mutual intercourse;⁹⁵ divinely righteous action, whether taken by humanity or God, that promotes equality among humanity;⁹⁶ rendering to everyone that which is his due, doing what the law demands;⁹⁷ treating people fairly

Synonyms: impartiality, equity, fairness

2. Righteousness: the condition of being right or true; conformity to an accepted standard of behavior

In the OT, the terms “righteous” and “just” are nearly synonymous, referring in humans to behavior that is proper in light of a given standard. Those who keep the law are righteous; those who don’t are unrighteous.

Justice refers to divinely ordained actions that promote the well-being and equality of all humanity. Whether justice is served by punishing oppressors or by vindicating the oppressed, there is always the concept of returning humanity to שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*—peace), an equilibrium in which wrongs have been made right and the impoverished have been restored to prosperity.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

⁹⁵ Webster’s 1828 Dictionary <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/justice>

⁹⁶ Jeremiah K. Garrett, “Justice,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁹⁷ M. G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

⁹⁸ Jeremiah K. Garrett, “Justice,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Justice can be defined as *retributive* (i.e., the criminal justice system), *restorative* (i.e., aiding the needy or weak), or *distributive* (i.e., equal distribution of resources; socialism).

In the context of this lesson, *righteous* refers to right behavior, not the righteousness imputed to the Christian through faith in Christ. Saving righteousness is absolute and perfect, not influenced by personal behavior or attitude. Personal righteousness here refers to individual behavior that is right as it corresponds to the character of God and his word.

B. The vices

1. Injustice: failure to act justly; tolerating unfairness and unwarranted discrimination; unscrupulous or unethical conduct
2. Corruption: dishonest or fraudulent conduct, often within government bureaucracy; actions such as bribery or embezzlement
Corruption is the misuse of a public office or a position of authority for private material or social gain at the expense of other people.⁹⁹
3. Unrighteousness: conduct that fails to meet a particular standard; wrong, sinful, or unethical behavior

Sin is the basic reason for social injustice, so that the only cure is to curtail sin; and while this can be done to a certain extent—in its outward manifestations—by laws, a more radical cure is necessary. Men must be brought back to the willing service and enjoyment of God as their Saviour and Lord.¹⁰⁰

III. Importance

- A. As with all the virtues, justice/righteousness is a virtue because it reflects the character of God, who is both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). God himself is the ultimate standard of right. He is “a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deut 32:4). He is “the righteous God” who tries men’s hearts (Ps 7:9). He delights in “judgment and righteousness” (Jer 9:24) and loves justice (Isa 61:8a). Righteousness and justice are the foundation of God’s throne (Ps 89:14). Something is just if it conforms to the standard of his will.

Because God is a God of justice, a God who loves justice and hates injustice, his people are to be people of justice as well. Theirs are to be

⁹⁹ Noel Woodbridge, Semmelink Willem, “The Prophetic Witness of Amos and Its Relevance for Today’s Church in African Countries for Promoting Social Justice, Especially in Democratic South Africa,” *Conspectus* 16 (2014): 83.

¹⁰⁰ W. Stanford Reid, “The Christian Concept of Social Justice,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 15, no. 1 (1952): 9.

actions, relationships, and communities that reflect the character and values and goals of God. To the extent that they do, they are just or right.¹⁰¹

- B. The OT prophets in particular were very concerned about justice within Israel. For them, justice consisted of treating the downtrodden and vulnerable with compassion. Isaiah condemned those who mistreat and oppress the poor, widows, and orphans (Isa 10:1-2). God's people are expected to "keep justice and do righteousness" (Isa 56:1). Jeremiah shows us that justice consists in caring for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow (Jer 7:5-6). Walking humbly with God requires that we "do justly" (Mic 6:8). God warns that he will not accept the sacrifices from unjust people. What God requires is justice rolling like a river and righteousness like a mighty stream (Amos 5:21-24).
- C. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), Jesus showed the importance of helping those in need. Jesus scolded the Pharisees for neglecting the weightier matters of the law, including justice (Mt 23:23). Jesus claimed to have come to reach the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, and the bound (Luke 4:18-21; cf. Isa 61:1-2). At the last judgment, what matters is whether we demonstrated our faith by caring for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison (Mt 25:31-46). We serve God by serving "the least of these my brethren."
- D. Salvation comes to believers by virtue of God's justice. Because God is just, he cannot allow sin to go unpunished. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek 18:4; cf. Rom 6:23a). When Jesus died on the cross, "he was made sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21) so that we might receive the righteousness of Christ through faith. God's justice required him to pour out his wrath on his Son so that we might escape the condemnation for our sins (Rom 8:1).
- E. We evaluate whether things are just by their conformity to God and his will or lack thereof. Things that conform and just; things that don't conform and unjust/unrighteous. The standard of measurement must be God and his Word, not human opinion or majority rule.

The Christian concept of justice demands that there should be no social discrimination. All men should be treated as the creatures of God, and not as though one is superior to another because he has more money, a better education or something of the sort.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Steven C. Roy, "Embracing Social Justice: Reflections from the Storyline of Scripture," *Trinity Journal* 30, no. 1 (2009): 8.

¹⁰² W. Stanford Reid, "The Christian Concept of Social Justice," *Westminster Theological Journal* 15, no. 1 (1952): 8.

- F. God commands his people to be just in all their dealings, especially with the weak. The law protected the less fortunate and vulnerable (e.g., immigrants, widows, orphans) and required that they be treated with compassion. The law prevented the Jews from oppressing the weakest members of the community (Deut 24:17). The needy and afflicted required justice (Ps 82:3).
- G. Christians have responsibilities toward those both inside and outside of the faith. Jesus teaches us to love even our enemies (Mt 5:43-48). He questions the merit of demonstrating love only within our own community (Mt 5:46-47). We are to do good “to all,” and especially to fellow believers (Gal 6:10). We are to influence our environment as the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Mt 5:13f). Our focus should be on helping fellow believers, but we should also be sensitive to needy non-Christians.
- H. Retributive justice (i.e., punishing those who deserve it) is clearly part of the biblical value system. Those who shed human blood (i.e., commit murder) give up their right to life (Gen 9:6). Humans have special value because they share and reflect the image of God. We treat people with dignity and respect because of God’s image stamped on every human being. People deserve to be treated justly because every human is an image-bearer. We show contempt for our Maker when we treat others badly (cf. Prov 14:31). Those who do so deserve retributive justice.

Human rights really have no meaning in a culture that denies God as the Creator. If humans bear the image of God, they have inherent value and deserve to be treated respectfully. If humans are the result of random, meaningless processes over billions of years, they have no special value and need not be accorded any rights.
- I. Christians should be careful to treat everyone fairly and justly, i.e., in keeping with God’s standards of behavior. Those who violate God’s standards should be allowed to suffer the natural consequences of their sinful behavior. Those who obey God’s guidelines for life should enjoy the benefits of doing so. Compassion for the down-and-out may be counterproductive if it merely enables wicked people to continue their evil behavior (cf. the current uproar over the “opioid epidemic”).

IV. Dangers

- A. In modern culture, social justice has become a significant point of interest. Everyone from politicians to media figures to clergy members speak about the need for a social justice.

1. By “social justice,” many (progressives, liberals) mean that certain victim classes (e.g., minorities, fringe groups) should receive special support, usually in the form of government programs, laws, and regulations (e.g., Affirmative Action). Classes of people need protection from the injustices and inequalities of life. The state insures (theoretically) that advantages and disadvantages are equally distributed among all groups; i.e., everyone is treated fairly. No one enjoys special privileges (except those who have been denied them in the past); the playing field is level.
 2. Modern social justice advocates demand not only equality of opportunity but also equality of outcome. Redistribution of wealth is often a large part of such social justice schemes. The government chooses which groups will be equalized and insures equality irrespective of effort or merit. Today, reproductive rights (i.e., abortion), death with dignity (i.e., medically assisted suicide), the Internet (i.e., “net neutrality”), and even legalizing recreational drugs are elements of social justice in the minds of many.
- B. As should be obvious, governmental attempts to guarantee equality of both opportunity and outcome result in disaster (namely, socialism and eventually totalitarianism/tyranny). Individuals are inherently different in their abilities, attitudes, productivity, skills, desires, and income. The only way to guarantee equal outcomes is if the government uses its power to tip the scales.
- People generally gravitate toward those places in life most suitable to them. To try to force an unnatural equality on all will inevitably require total state control (totalitarianism/tyranny) and will result in universal ruin. It’s much better to allow people the freedom to do what they want with what they have and encourage voluntary cooperation (freedom, capitalism) rather than state-forced equality (socialism).¹⁰³
- C. We certainly see the importance of helping those in need. We all want to follow the example of the Good Samaritan. Problems occur when government uses its power to extract good (i.e., money, in the form of taxes) from its citizens and give it to those whom it deems to be in need. The needy are often in that condition because of their own immoral choices (e.g., unwed mothers, addicts). Problems occur when the state enforces social equality. The state decides what is just or equal and demands that its

¹⁰³ See the very good article “Social Justice: Not What You Think It Is” at <http://www.heritage.org/poverty-and-inequality/report/social-justice-not-what-you-think-it>

citizens support that vision of equality in health care, education, immigration, etc.

- D. What is the responsibility of the church in upholding justice and righteousness in the wider, secular culture?
1. We don't deny that the world is full of injustice and unrighteousness. Since the fall of man, wickedness has prevailed upon the earth and will continue to do so until the Lord returns. Injustice on earth is heartbreaking and we yearn to show compassion to the oppressed.
 2. Remember that the church is not Israel. We are not operating under the theocracy; the state is not a spokesman for God. The church and the state are separate realms with different responsibilities. Requirements for national Israel do not necessarily fall on the church.
 3. The church has social responsibilities primarily to its members (see Acts 6; 1 Tim 5). The church is not responsible to provide for everyone in the society. The church can be a voice and influence for good in the culture, but it cannot impose its will (unlike government). The church can persuade but not compel.
 4. Individual Christians are expected to help their neighbors as the Good Samaritan did. This was an exercise of individual, voluntary compassion, not a government-imposed, tax-supported, bureaucratically regulated activity.
 5. The primary mission of the church is spiritual—proclaim the Gospel, baptize converts, teach the Bible, organize believers into churches, etc. The business of the church is saving souls, not societies. Social justice, as often defined by modern politicians and activists, is outside the purview of the church. Christian compassion, on the other hand, is certainly appropriate in many circumstances, especially when it can be combined with a Gospel witness. The Gospel is powerful enough to change entire societies, as has been seen historically in various revivals and awakenings. When people get saved and start living the Christian life, society improves.
- E. Many modern evangelicals feel that the church is responsible to pursue social justice in the political sense of insuring equality and fair treatment for all. They advocate on behalf of illegal immigrants, the LGBTQ+ “community,” racial minorities and other groups claiming victimization or oppression. They feel that it is their responsibility to end poverty, hunger,

and homelessness. The church must work to end all forms of violence, oppression, and exploitation. God wants all people to be liberated and delivered from inequality, injustice, poverty, oppression, and weakness. Everyone ought to feel fully included in the community of their choosing. Relieving human need (i.e., restorative justice) or restoring the excluded to full acceptance within the human community becomes for some the outworking of the Gospel.

- F. Some professing Christians, in an effort to achieve liberty and equality for all, remove distinctions that should be retained, such as gender roles in the home and in the church. Since all deserve compassion and equality, no distinctions are made among those groups claiming exclusion or oppression. However, Christian equality does not imply uniformity of roles and responsibilities. Christians should not promote those groups that deny the Lordship of Christ over them.
- G. We must recognize that some so-called “oppressed” and excluded groups are immoral in themselves and do not deserve restoration. The LGBTQ+ “community” asserts that it deserves special protections, yet it flagrantly violates God’s character and will for mankind. Likewise for several other groups claiming that they deserve special rights—illegal immigrants, indebted college students, opioid addicts, drunks, those in sexual “transition,” etc. The fact that a group is oppressed or alienated from society does not mean that Christians must advocate on their behalf. Some people are oppressed and downtrodden because of their own sinful choices.
- H. Justice and righteousness will “roll like a river” (Amos 5:24) only when Jesus establishes his kingdom after the Second Coming. At that point, Jesus will “bring forth justice” and “establish justice on earth” (Isa 42:1-4). Until that time, we can expect things to go from bad to worse (2 Tim 3:1f—“perilous times...worse and worse”). The church is not the kingdom; we don’t expect kingdom results in the church age.

Ultimately the new heavens and the new earth is that place where things are fully and finally “right”—right with God, right with one another in human community. In this sense, the new heavens and the new earth is where justice is fully and finally and forever realized.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Steven C. Roy, “Embracing Social Justice: Reflections from the Storyline of Scripture,” *Trinity Journal* 30, no. 1 (2009): 47.



Lesson 20

Virtue: Loyalty

Vice: Disloyalty/Unfaithfulness/Betrayal

I. Texts: 1 Sam 18:1, 20:17; 2 Sam 9:1; 2 Chron 19:2; Ruth 1:16; Ps 55:12-13; Prov 1:10, 18:24; Mt 10:34-37, 15:14; John 15:13

II. Definitions

- A. The virtue: Loyalty—fidelity to a prince or sovereign, or to a spouse;¹⁰⁵ faithfulness to a person, cause, ideal, custom, institution, party, etc.;¹⁰⁶ using adversity to confirm my commitment to those whom God has called me to serve;¹⁰⁷ the quality of supporting and upholding those to whom I am responsible and those who depend upon me;¹⁰⁸ a strong feeling of support, allegiance, or devotion¹⁰⁹

As a working definition, loyalty can be characterized as a practical disposition to persist in an intrinsically valued associational attachment, which involves a potentially costly commitment to pursue the interests or well-being of the object of loyalty.¹¹⁰

Loyalty is largely associated with identification. That is, because we identify with a family, an occupation, an organization, a political party, a religion, a team, etc., we become committed to the wellbeing of those similarly identified. We tend to express our deepest loyalties for the things with which we most deeply identify. If a bond is important, loyalty naturally develops.

Loyalty is not blind, slavish, exaltation of a person merely because he is an authority. Loyalty is not flattery or excessive subservience (i.e., a yes-man, sycophant, toady, bootlicker). To be loyal is not to grovel, to be servile, or to curry favor. Loyalty does not mean that I can never question an authority or appeal to the authority to change his mind. Loyalty is never an excuse to do wrong. I can never justify my sin by appealing to a sense of loyalty to those who want me to do wrong. Loyalty does not allow me to ignore facts that negatively reflect on the object of my loyalty. Loyalty should not

¹⁰⁵ Webster's 1828 Dictionary. <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Loyalty>

¹⁰⁶ "Loyal." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 22 Aug. 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Bill Gothard

¹⁰⁸ Charles Wood

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.google.com/search?q=Loyalty&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>

¹¹⁰ "Loyalty," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/loyalty/>

prevent me from pointing out others' errors, sins, or failures when necessary. I can confront others, disagree with them, even oppose them and still remain loyal ("loyal opposition").

For Christians, loyalty must contradict Christian moral values. Loyalty cannot induce me to violate my conscience or the clear commandments of God. Since true loyalty cares deeply for the wellbeing of others, loyalty seeks the best for the one to whom one is loyal. That may require disagreement, confrontation, and even exposure of sin. Loyalty must be discerning. Loyalty is not primarily an emotion; it's an act of the will.

Arguably, the test of loyalty is conduct rather than intensity of feeling, primarily a certain "stickingness" or perseverance—the loyal person acts for or stays with or remains committed to the object of loyalty even when it is likely to be disadvantageous or costly to the loyal person to do so.¹¹¹

Biblical examples: Abraham, Joshua, Ruth, David and Jonathan, Mary, John, Jesus

B. The vices:

1. Disloyalty—lacking loyalty; absence of allegiance, devotion, obligation, faith, or support¹¹²
2. Unfaithfulness—not adhering to vows, allegiance, or duty; unreliability, lack of integrity
3. Betrayal—to deliver to an enemy by treachery; to fail or desert especially in time of need; to violate confidence by disclosing a secret, or that which was entrusted; to expose¹¹³
4. Disloyalty often results in vocal opposition, antagonism, and hostility toward others. Disloyal people seldom disengage from a concern and quietly withdraw. They typically agitate, criticize, and undermine those with whom they disagree. Disloyalty is especially heartbreaking when former friends/partners/colleagues experience a dispute that permanently breaks their relationship. When a former close friend or supporter suddenly turns and betrays you, it causes significant emotional upset. See Psalm 55:12-13.
5. Disloyalty often results from personal weakness and failure (i.e., sin). We give in to peer pressure when support for an idea or an

¹¹¹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/loyalty/>

¹¹² *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 22 Aug. 2017.

¹¹³ <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/betray>

individual becomes unpopular. Selfishness and pride may cause us to reconsider whether we want to retain our loyalties. Temptation may cause us to violate former commitments (e.g., divorce). The desire for position, promotion, or money may cause us to switch our loyalties.

6. Biblical examples: the butler in the story of Joseph, Aaron and Miriam, Korah, Absalom, Peter (temporarily), Judas

III. Importance

- A. Fidelity, allegiance, and commitment (loyalty) are all characteristics we find in God.

1. God is loyal primarily to himself—"he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim 2:13). God's attributes are self-referential, that is, God is faithful to his own character and being. There is no higher, independent standard to which God conforms. God sets all standards within himself. God's ultimate loyalty is to himself; there can be no higher loyalty, even for God.
2. God is loyal to his people in the sense of being faithful to his promises. Jesus promised to be with his people always (Mt 28:20) and never leave us or forsake us (Heb 13:5).

Jeremiah 30:11 'For I am with you,' says the LORD, 'to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, Yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, And will not let you go altogether unpunished.'

- B. Loyalty to God is faithfulness, i.e., commitment and obedience to God and to his word (cf. John 14:15, 15:14). Persevering loyalty to God, his word, and his purposes in our lives is a mark of Christian maturity. Allegiance to God may make loyalty to others, even family members, difficult if not impossible (cf. Mt 10:34-37, 19:29).
- C. The Old Testament writers were continually occupied with the fickleness of human commitments, whether to God or to each other.¹¹⁴ God often charged his people with unfaithfulness and idolatry.
- D. Loyalty stands in marked contrast to the self-centered individualism of our culture. The humanistic tendency toward self-love works against commitment and allegiance, except to ourselves and those within our close, personal networks. Beyond that, loyalty today is quite rare. Workers are

¹¹⁴ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/loyalty/>

rarely loyal to their jobs or bosses, spouses are often not loyal to their partners, politicians are often not loyal to their constituencies, and leaders are often not loyal to their followers—and vice versa. A general lack of loyalty (i.e., commitment) pervades the culture (except in sports—one arena in which die-hard commitment is highly valued).

- E. Beyond natural loyalties (e.g., family, friends), our loyalties should be devoted to those things worthy of our allegiance (cf. Phil 4:8). Our value system must tell us if and when loyalty is suitable, and we should extend loyalty carefully.
- F. Loyalties naturally cause us to make divisions between what we are loyal to and what we are not loyal to. Sometimes our loyalties or lack of them cause conflicts. Life is largely defined by balancing conflicting loyalties.
- G. Leadership depends on loyalty. Good leaders have loyal followers. As noted above, a loyal follower is not a blind “yes-man,” but he is faithful and committed to the success of the one to whom he is loyal.
 - 1. Every area of life has its chain of command or authority structure. Things work best when we recognize the authority of (i.e., are loyal to) those up the chain from us. Most people will function somewhere in the middle or toward the bottom of the chain. Success in life largely depends on loyalty to others within the chain.
 - 2. God usually grants positions of leadership to those who have learned to be loyal to others. If you can’t be a follower, it’s unlikely that you’d make a good leader. You probably won’t be a leader until you have learned to treat your leader in the way you will want to be treated as a leader someday. If others follow you in the way that you follow your leaders, what would be the result?

Loyalty is recognizing that I can serve God through the ministry or life of another and that I may be called of God to do so.¹¹⁵
 - 3. Loyal team members learn to follow the leader even when they don’t understand his decisions. As long as the decision or direction is not wrong, loyalty demands that followers comply with directions and adapt to others’ decisions.
 - 4. Loyalty recognizes that the leader may have good reasons for decisions, even if he doesn’t explain those reasons.

¹¹⁵ Charles Wood

5. In some cases, those to whom we are loyal forfeit their claim on our loyalty. Even loyal followers come to the place where they can no longer in good conscience support the direction that a leader is moving. In such cases, we must recognize that our loyalty must come to an end. We don't retain our loyalty when the object of our loyalty proves to be irretrievably faulty.
- H. Friendship depends on loyalty—"a friend loves at all times" (Prov 17:17). A loyal friend is one who remains faithful through good times and bad (e.g., David and Jonathan). But even friendship has its limits (e.g., Jehoshaphat and Ahab).
- I. Marriage depends on loyalty. Spouses must remain faithful to their vows. Loyalty in marriage prohibits inappropriate relationships with those who would weaken or threaten the marriage bond. Loyal spouses remain committed to one another "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health ... till death do us part."

IV. Dangers

- A. Loyalty can be pushed to extremes. Unquestioning, blind loyalty often leads to abuse—in the home, workplace, church, government, etc. Feelings of loyalty may cause us to participate in error or support the wicked (e.g., 2 Chron 19:2). Other than God, no one is worthy of unlimited, unswerving allegiance. Patriotism or nationalism is a form of loyalty that may result in conflict. Beware of anyone that appeals to loyalty when asking you for a favor. Don't allow loyalty to set aside your good judgment or your value system. Loyalty to others must never become a higher priority than loyalty to God.
- B. As noted above, the test of loyalty is conduct—what is done out of loyalty. Loyalty is a virtue except when it causes one to sin. Loyalty itself may be sinful when one's allegiance is to that which is sinful (cf. Rom 1:32). We must be able to discern when an object of loyalty has forfeited its claim on our loyalty. Our continued loyalty to a once-worthy object may come to be unjustified.¹¹⁶
- C. As mentioned above, conflicting loyalties can cause division and even harm. Loyalty often expresses itself in terms of competition—if you are loyal to one (e.g., team, party, religion), you naturally feel antipathy against all others. Some are loyal to their race or color and look down on others who are different. Some are loyal to their nation and think badly of those

¹¹⁶ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/loyalty/>

from other nations. Loyalty to one's church may impel one to think negatively about those in other churches. Such negative feelings can be extreme, which can result in abuse or even crime. But under a Christian worldview, extending loyalty to one thing need not result in treating others badly (e.g., loyalty to one's own family doesn't mean that you treat members of other families badly).

- D. Loyalty to others does not guarantee that anyone will be loyal to us. We may develop deep commitments to the well-being of others, only to have them fail to show the same loyalty to us or even betray us (e.g., Judas).

V. Developing loyalty

- A. The top priority and commitment for every Christian is always God, his word, and his church. Loyalty to God and the things of God always comes first. Loyalty to others must never violate biblical expectations and guidelines. Don't allow private loyalties to compromise biblical commitments. Faithfulness to God and to truth is always more important than loyalty to others.
- B. Christianity demands a certain degree of loyalty to all. We are to love everyone, do good to all, and treat all with dignity and respect, even those with whom we disagree, even those who mistreat us. God requires us to show a basic level of human kindness to everyone.
- C. Within biblical limits, be supportive and faithful to those to whom loyalty is due (e.g., boss, spouse, friends, ideals, movements, leaders, pastors, churches, etc.). Don't be a "fair weather friend." Be one of those friends who "loves at all times" (Prov 17:17) and "sticks closer than a brother" (Prov 18:24). Don't let adversity or even conflict weaken your loyalty to those to whom it is due, especially those who have been loyal to you.
- D. Show your loyalty by active support of those who deserve it. Loyalty causes us to speak up for, protect, and encourage those who are under attack. Refuse to speak critically of those who deserve your support. Don't "jump on the bandwagon" when others become disloyal or critical. Even if we have a grievance, loyalty motivates us to hold our tongues, think the best, and give the benefit of the doubt.
- E. Loyalties must come to an end when the evidence demonstrates that we can no longer be supportive. Loyalty demands that we privately intervene to urge those on the wrong path to turn around. But if such efforts are unsuccessful, even loyal supporters must drop their support and perhaps

even oppose what is going on. Loyalty must not motivate us to follow the blind into a ditch (Mt 15:14).

- F. If you can't be loyal and supportive of your church, it's probably best to find another place where you can be. Staying in a place where you can't be loyal (i.e., because of biblical commitments) often causes feeling of unhappiness, contention, and antagonism toward those in charge. It would be best for all involved if you leave quietly and find another place where you can be loyal and supportive.
- G. Developing loyalty in children
 1. As with the other virtues, more is always caught than taught. Parents must demonstrate loyalty and set the example for their kids. Within the family, loyalty ought to develop naturally—"blood is thicker than water." One's own "tribe" tends to attract the highest degree of loyalty. Teach children to support and stick up for one another.
 2. Teach children to have a proper view of themselves. Disloyalty often arises out of an exaggerated estimation of one's own importance. When children think of themselves as the center of the universe, they will expect loyalty from others but not extend it to others. Humility strengthens loyalty; pride weakens it.
 3. Don't criticize others in the presence of the children, especially those who deserve loyalty.
 4. Teach children to be supportive of their friends, even when their friends are behaving badly (within limits). Teach them to ignore petty, minor slights and disagreements. Help them work out their differences without tattling or appealing to an adult. Encourage them to appreciate their friends' strengths and overlook their weaknesses. Discourage tattling and criticism of siblings and friends.



Lesson 21

Virtue: Obedience

Vice: Disobedience/Rebellion

I. Texts: Gen 22:18; Ex 5:2, 19:5; Deut 11:27-28, 13:4; 1 Sam 12:14-15, 15:22; Job 36:11; Prov 30:17; Ecc 12:13; Jer 7:23, 9:13-16; Mt 6:24; Luke 11:28; John 14:21, 23, 15:14; Heb 5:7-9, 13:17; James 1:22; 1 Pet 1:14; 1 John 2:3-4, 5:3; 2 John 1:6

II. Definitions

A. The virtue: obedience—compliance with an order, request, or law or submission to another's authority;¹¹⁷ dutiful or submissive compliance;¹¹⁸ carrying out the word and will of another person, especially the will of God;¹¹⁹ quickly and cheerfully carrying out the direction of those who are responsible for me¹²⁰

The Hebrew word “obey” literally means “hearken to.” Obedience requires hearing God’s voice or his commands and complying with them. In the NT, one of the common words for “obedience” is the combination of the words “hear” and “under.” Another NT word is literally “hear into.” Thus, obedience is a positive response to what one hears—namely, a command.

Obedience implies yielding to persuasion and submitting to authority. The idea of obedience ... is of a hearing that takes place *under* the authority or influence of the speaker, and that leads *into* compliance with his requests.¹²¹

B. The vices

1. Disobedience—failure to comply with an order, request, or law; failure to submit to another’s authority

¹¹⁷ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/obedience>

¹¹⁸ “obedience”. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 6 Sep. 2017. <Dictionary.com <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/obedience>>.

¹¹⁹ Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

¹²⁰ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

¹²¹ J. I. Packer, “Obedience,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 842.

“Disobedience” as used chiefly in the NT has the general meaning of a lack of regard for authority or rulership. The stronger meaning of actual stubbornness or violence is perhaps conveyed in the OT (1Ki 13:26; Ne 9:26; cf. 1Ki 13:21). Disobedience is really an attitude of the mind and finds its essence in a heart of unbelief and unfaithfulness (1Pe 2:7,8; Eph 2:2; 5:6; Col 3:6).¹²²

2. Rebellion—the action or process of resisting authority, control, or convention;¹²³ refusal, contentiousness

III. Importance

- A. God is the ultimate lawgiver and rule maker. By virtue of his authority, he has the right to make demands on his creatures. As soon as he created moral beings, he gave them a rule to obey (don’t eat from a certain tree in the garden). All of God’s commands have inherent authority and are worthy of obedience because of the one who issued them. The potter has the right to impose obligations on the clay (Isa 64:8; Rom 9:21). God requires and expects simple obedience—hear his commands and do them (Ecc 12:13; Mt 7:24-27). No one has the right to violate God’s laws or even say “What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). Failure to obey God’s commands is sin (Rom 2:23; 1 Jn 3:4), and sin separates us from God (Isa 59:1-2).

1 Samuel 15:22 *Samuel said: “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.”*

- B. Jesus “learned obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb 5:8). Jesus willingly submitted to the Father’s will and learned by experience the costs of obedience.

1. Jesus’ “active” obedience—he kept the OT law; perfect law-keeping (John 8:29 “I always do those things that please him.”)
2. Jesus’ “passive” obedience—he was punished as a lawbreaker; he suffered the just penalties of the law. His obedience “even unto death” (Phil 2:8) provided the necessary payment for our sin.

Both aspects of Jesus’ obedience are imputed (credited) to the believer. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins and grants his righteousness to us (2 Cor 5:21).

¹²² ISBE

¹²³ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/obedience>

3. Jesus' obedience, especially in light of Adam's disobedience, is the ultimate basis for salvation (Rom 5:12-19).
 4. Jesus summarized biblical morality under two great commandments: love God and love your neighbor (Mt 22:36-40).
 5. Jesus submitted himself to the Father's will (John 6:38). He was tempted and suffered but never violated a biblical command (Heb 4:15).
- C. Obedience is a basic biblical concept that affects virtually every part of the Christian life.
1. Salvation is described as obeying the gospel (2 Thes 1:8) and the obedience of faith (Acts 6:7; Rom 1:5; 16:26; Heb 5:9; cf. John 3:36). Unbelief is disobedience (Rom 10:16).
 2. Sanctification (i.e., Christian growth) is largely concerned with obedience to biblical commands and principles. In every area of life, mature Christians choose to do things God's way, i.e., they obey biblical guidelines. Pleasing God amounts to keeping his commandments (1 John 3:22). Disciples do what their Master commands (Luke 6:46). God issues a blessing for those who "do his commandments" (Rev 22:14).
John 2:5 Whatever He says to you, do it.
John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.
John 15:10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.
 3. Assurance of salvation is based on an obedient lifestyle (cf. 1 John 2:3). Keeping Christ's commands is a way of demonstrating love for him (John 14:21). Those living in habitual, unrepentant disobedience have no basis to believe that they are saved.
 4. Believers depend on the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives to enable them to obey joyfully and sincerely.
- D. God commands obedience within the basic human institutions.
1. Family: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord..." (Eph 6:4). All members obey God; wife and children obey husband/father; children obey parents.

2. Government: all are to be subject to the “powers that be” because God ordained them (Rom 13).
3. Church: “Obey them that have the rule over you...” (Heb 13:17).
4. Employment: “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh,...” (Eph 6:5).

Failure to obey legitimate authority amounts to disobedience to God (Rom 13:2).

- E. Obedience boils down to a matter of authority—who had the authority to claim my obedience? Who can legitimately obligate me to obey? God has the ultimate authority to issue commands, and God has delegated degrees of authority to various institutions and people. Good order (i.e., civilization) results when people recognize their responsibilities to obey those with legitimate authority and when those in authority employ their power in legitimate ways. Unfortunately, because of sin, power tends to corrupt both those who have it and those who suffer under it.
- F. The ultimate motivation for obeying God’s commandments is love (cf. Deut 6:4-5, 10:12; John 14:15). We may obey out of a sense of fear or duty, but a higher reason for obedience is love. We demonstrate our love for God by obeying his commandments.
- G. Obedience leads to freedom and blessing (Ex 19:5; Deut 12:28). When you play by the rules, you get to play the game. Rule-breakers tend to sit in the penalty box or on the sidelines. Disobedience, if significant enough, may lead to severe penalties or consequences (e.g., divorce, prison, death).

IV. Dangers

- A. Disobedience to God or to legitimate authority constitutes sin. Sin creates a barrier between the sinner and God (Isa 59:1-2). Disobedience leads to all manner of negative consequences, both temporal and eternal. Reward and/or lack of reward are based on obedience to God’s commands (1 Cor 3:11f).
- B. Modern culture is flagrant in its disobedience and rebellion against authority. God’s commands have very little weight in our culture, and protests against immorality (as defined by the Bible) change few minds. Many people feel no obligation to obey anyone or anything, other than their own passions, emotions, and feelings.

- C. A common error within religion is assigning saving merit to human obedience. All those religions based on human works put a high premium on obedience, teaching that obedience to God's commands is a necessary condition of salvation. True Christianity, on the other hand, does not mix human achievement with saving faith (see Galatians). No act of obedience has the power to make one acceptable to God. If one is seeking to gain merit or justification before God through law keeping, he has denied the Gospel (Gal 1:6-7).
- D. Obedience to God's commands is necessary except when God's commands and/or expectations change. For example, Christians are not under the OT law as a rule of life. We do not obey the commands to bring animals to be sacrificed, appear at the temple regularly, wear certain garments, eat only certain foods, etc. We are expected to obey those commands that legitimately pertain to us—i.e., those contained in the NT.
- E. Some people willingly obligate themselves to obey rules that they need not obey. E.g., the issue of eating meat offered to idols (Rom 14; 1 Cor 8, 10). The weaker brother, whose conscience was overly sensitive, needlessly obeyed rules that prevented him from eating food that had been previously offered at a pagan temple. Some rules simply do not pertain to us and have no authority over us (e.g., Col 2:20-23).
- F. Our obligation to obey humans and human institutions is always conditional. If an authority commands us to do something immoral, we are not obligated to obey (cf. Acts 5:29). Obedience to God always trumps obedience to man. Biblical examples show us that disobedience, in rare cases, may be justified (e.g., the Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh [Ex 1:17]).
- G. Some people use duty (i.e., one's obligation to obey an authority) as an excuse for immoral conduct. They argue that obedience to a command excuses them from accountability regarding the moral consequences of that action. E.g., WWII Nazi war criminals argued that they should not be held accountable for their actions because they were merely carrying out orders from legitimate authorities. "I was only doing my job." Is this a valid excuse? *No. We are accountable for our actions no matter what the motivation is for them.*

- H. We must not separate salvation and sanctification in the Christian life. While we are not saved by obedience to God's commands, we grow in grace and maturity through following God's commands. Human effort is not contradictory to God's grace (see Phil 2:13 and 2 Thes 1:11). Obedience to God's commands is still "the whole duty of man" (Ecc 12:13).
 - I. Abusive people commonly use their authority to demand obedience from the weak and powerless (e.g. Amnon over Tamar). Those in power can easily abuse their position and often do.
 - J. An unwillingness to obey rightful human authorities reflects an unwillingness to obey God. If one will not obey the "powers that be," he likely will not obey the one who put that authority in place.
- V. Developing obedience
- A. In the Christian life
 - 1. Submit yourself to God's commands. God's commands are ultimately for our good, and we both please God and help ourselves when we obey God's word. We should find joy and satisfaction if doing what our Master wants us to do.
 - 2. Submit to legitimate authorities in the various realms of life—home, church, civil government, and employment.
 - 3. If you choose not to submit to an authority, make sure you have solid biblical principles backing up that decision.
 - B. For Christian parents
 - 1. Parents must provide the example of obedience for their children. Children should be able to see that their parents obey those in authority over them. If parents are leading a rebellious life, they should not be surprised when their children rebel against them.
 - 2. Teach your children how you want them to obey. What are your expectations? Must they obey immediately? Must they do exactly as they are told? Must they display a certain attitude when obeying? Are they allowed to appeal the command? What consequences will follow?

3. Generally speaking, children ought to obey right away, without delay, without a bad attitude, and according to the parents' expectations. Allowing children to disregard a command or obey in his own way or his own time merely creates more problems. Parents must insure that the children know exactly what is expected of them. Explain what you want and then hold the child accountable for obeying the command. E.g., "clean your room" – what exactly do you mean by that?
4. Reward obedience and discipline for disobedience. Make your children understand the consequences for both obedience and disobedience.



Lesson 22

Virtue: Orderliness

Vice: Disorder/Confusion/Chaos/Anarchy

I. Texts: Gen 1:4-5, 8:2; Ex 25:9; Num 2:1-2, 17; 1 Chron 28:12; Prov 24:27; Isa 40:26; Luke 1:3; John 9:4; Acts 7:44, 17:26; 1 Cor 12:28, 14:33, 40; Eph 5:16; Col 2:5, 4:5; 1 Tim 3:4; Titus 1:5, 3:1

II. Definitions

A. The virtue: orderliness is intentional symmetry and arrangement; arranging or disposing of things in a neat, tidy manner or in a regular sequence;¹²⁴ preparing myself and my surroundings so that I will achieve the greatest efficiency.¹²⁵ Synonyms: regulated, methodical, well-behaved living; governed by law;

B. The vices

1. Disorder, confusion, and chaos occur when order is absent. Failure to organize and arrange things results in these vices.
2. Anarchy: literally, “without leader”; absence of law or government; non-recognition of authority or hierarchy

Is disorder always a sinful vice? Probably not in many cases (e.g., a disorderly room, car, fridge, basement, yard, etc.). Order and disorder operate on a scale or spectrum. Few human activities are as orderly as they could be. Some things resist order or quickly lose their order, and some things stubbornly refuse to have order imposed on them. Lack of order does not *necessarily* signal lack of holiness, but it may.

In some areas, lack of order could be considered sinful, especially in the church where all things are to be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40). Likewise, in the home, lack of order (i.e., regarding family relationships) could signal a sinful condition. In some extreme cases, lack of order leads to truly dangerous and disgusting living conditions (e.g., hoarders). If disorder is the result of sinful attitudes (e.g., laziness/sloth, rebellion, vengeance), then it's sin.

III. Importance

¹²⁴ “orderliness.” Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. 12 Sep. 2017. <Dictionary.com <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/orderliness>>.

¹²⁵ Bill Gothard

- A. God is orderly by nature; he is “not the author of confusion” (1 Cor 14:33). Everything about God is consistent with his being and nature. Nothing about God contradicts anything else about God. All of God’s attributes are consistent and balanced.
1. God created the world to be an orderly place. God separated the light from the dark, the water from the land, and man from the animals. Things in the world have a God-ordained place, purpose, and rank.
 2. Disorder was introduced into the world when Adam sinned. Any failure of the created order to fulfill God’s original intent can be attributed to sin. Sin is the ultimate cause of disorder, confusion, and chaos. Disorder in humanity often can be traced to sinful behaviors, attitudes, and failures.
- B. The God of order is best served in an orderly manner. Every aspect of our vocations (i.e., home, church, employment, society) may benefit from orderly, regulated, self-disciplined behavior. Civilization itself depends on a basic degree of order among citizens.
- C. People fall short of their potential because of disorder and lack of self-discipline. They lose opportunities because they tolerate disorder and/or refuse to regulate their lives. Disorganization may be a sign of laziness/sloth.
- D. Order in life often depends on one’s control (or ability to cope with) constraints of time. The ability to manage events within a limited amount of time is one way to define orderliness. The better we are organized, the more effective we become at using the opportunities we have. We may lose time because we are not well organized (e.g., lost keys, tools, papers, etc.). Greater organization often leads to greater accomplishment. Life simply works better when we take the time and effort to get organized.
- E. Order in the church: 1 Cor 14:33, 40
- God is particularly concerned that his people worship him according to the forms and patterns he has established. God told Israel exactly how they were to worship him, and those who failed to follow this pattern experienced God’s disapproval (e.g., Saul, Uzziah). God established an order for worship and expects his people to approach him in an orderly way.

The acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.¹²⁶

1. “decently” – honestly, in an appropriate manner, fitting, proper
 - a) literally “well-formed, well-designed”; we get our word “scheme” from the second part of this word. What is a scheme? A plan, a design, an intent. So the word “decently” suggests a well-formed plan or design.
 - b) “Let all things be done decently...” Everything in the church should be intentionally designed and planned.
2. “in order” – arranged in an orderly condition; due or right ranking or position.
 - a) Literally, the words are “according to (an) order or arrangement.” It’s a military term describing order and regularity.
 - b) This teaches us that the church must be orderly, not haphazard, casual, by chance, careless, offhanded.
3. Church ministry must be orderly and well-planned, not chaotic or confused. Why is this important?
 - a) The church should reflect the character of God—orderly, intentional, planned, and not confused or chaotic.
 - b) Chaos and disorder hinder the ministry. Chaos and confusion hinder prayer, listening, concentration, and participation.
 - c) We want to be a good testimony to the community.

All the events of the church should edify and should be done according to a well-formed plan and according to an order or an arrangement.

¹²⁶ 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith

Most churches operate according to a set of governing documents (in addition to the Bible and hopefully in keeping with the Bible), usually a constitution and/or bylaws or policies. While some might resist using any documents other than the Bible to regulate the church, good order demands that a church put down in writing exactly what it believes (doctrinal statement/confession of faith) and how it intends to operate (constitution). Doing so aids the church in operating according to a well-formed plan. It's in the church's best interests to follow the guidelines of its governing documents.

These principles apply primarily to the church but may have broader general applications to the Christian life. If God is pleased by order in the church, would he not also be pleased by order in the home, at work, and in society?

IV. Dangers

- A. Like almost any virtue, orderliness can be pushed to an extreme. "Neat freaks," for example, are obsessed with organizing their environments and are dissatisfied with lack of order. They often put an inordinate value on order, often at the cost of other values (e.g., human relationships, career, God). Further, those obsessing about order may be over-reacting to some area of life that is out of control or beyond their control. Since they cannot control one area of life, they over-compensate by seeking minute control over those areas that they have control. Control-freaks and perfectionists may succeed in achieving a high degree of orderliness, but they are usually hard to live with and may have trouble maintaining relationships.
- B. Some churches intentionally refuse to impose order on their worship services, believing that the Holy Spirit must control the proceedings. Planning, in their minds, hinders the Spirit from moving within the congregation, so they refuse to plan and allow virtually anything to happen.

Churches within the Pentecostal and/or Charismatic tradition commonly allow their worship services to degenerate to near chaos where they tolerate all manner of ridiculous behavior. In the most extreme conditions, worshippers are so overcome (supposedly) by the Spirit that they laugh uncontrollably, fall on the floor, run, shout, or faint. Obviously, such churches violate the command to conduct themselves in an orderly way.

- C. Anarchy is both lack of order and a political philosophy that resists authority of any kind. Modern anarchist philosophy became a prominent political movement that tried to bring equality to all by tearing down authoritarian institutions. Today there are many political/social forms of anarchy (feminist, environmental/green, pacifist); they all want as little authority as possible.

Although human institutions are often guilty of abuse and corruption, human life thrives most successfully when authorities exist and do their job. The Bible states that “the powers that be are ordained by God” (Rom 13:1). The answer to abuse and corruption is not anarchy.

Anarchy is a philosophy that upholds the absolute freedom of the individual. It’s extreme individualism, to the degree that one refuses to recognize virtually any authority outside oneself. If everyone is a law unto himself, order is impossible.

- D. Given the church’s history of corruption and abuse, many today refuse to join a church or participate in “organized religion.” They may participate in various expressions of Christianity (Bible studies, prayer groups, seminars) but refuse to attend church or submit themselves to any religious authority. This is both unbiblical and unfortunate, because good order in the church requires religion to be organized and authority to be recognized. The church cannot operate in a decent and orderly way without organization and authority. Those who refuse to associate with a church bring their profession of faith into question (cf. Heb 10:25; 1 John 2:19).

V. Developing order

- A. Orderliness is an aspect of self-discipline. The first thing one must regulate is oneself. Nothing else will be orderly if one refuses to organize himself. Disciplined people generally take the required steps to organize their lives. Those lacking self-discipline often live in chaos. Without self-discipline, order is impossible.
- B. Orderliness consists of bringing structure to life. We must use a well-formed plan to bring regularity and proper arrangement to life.
- C. Perfect order is impossible. The pursuit of perfection leads to frustration and regret. Don’t become obsessed with cleanliness or orderliness. Life is messy in many ways, and we cannot expect total order at all times. Be realistic.

Note the Quote: Clean your room at home or your desk at work. Train yourself to put things where they belong when they are out of place. Make the old adage “A place for everything and everything in its place” your motto. After you’ve cleaned your room or desk, extend that discipline of neatness to the rest of your house and workplace. Get yourself to the point where orderliness matters. Learn how to keep your environment clean and clear so you can function without a myriad of distractions. Such neatness will further develop self-discipline by forcing you to make decisions about what is important and what is not.¹²⁷

D. Developing order with children

1. Parents must set the example of orderliness for their kids. Disorderly parents tend to raise disorderly children. Take care of the home and property. Maintain a general expectancy that the home will be a well-ordered place.
2. Insist that children maintain some order over their things—clothes, toys, bedroom, etc. Provide a means for children to organize their stuff—storage space, shelves, bins, boxes, etc. Make sure kids know where their stuff goes, when it is appropriate to get it out, and when they need to put it away. Parents may require that their children do a general clean up every day and a more thorough job periodically.
3. Maintain a realistic attitude and expectations. Children are by nature messy creatures (usually). Parents must train them to value good order.

¹²⁷ John MacArthur, “Learning Self-Discipline.” <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A197/learning-selfdiscipline>



Lesson 23

Virtue: Patience/Perseverance

Vice: Impatience/Restlessness

I. Texts: Ex 34:6; Prov 19:11; Luke 8:15, 21:19; Rom 8:24-25, 15:5; Gal 5:22; Eph 6:18; Col 1:11; Heb 10:36; James 1:3, 5:7-8; 2 Pet 3:9

II. Definitions

A. The virtues

1. Patience is the will or ability to endure pain or trials calmly or without complaint; the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset;¹²⁸ accepting a difficult situation from God without giving Him a deadline to remove it;¹²⁹ the ability to recognize that results do not always follow actions immediately and to wait for them, continuing to perform while waiting;¹³⁰ recognizing that God has a divine timetable for things and waiting on that timetable while continuing to perform the assigned task; synonyms—fornearance, long-suffering, stoic, tolerant, steadfast

Biblical patience is a God-exercised, or God-given, restraint in face of opposition or oppression. It is not passivity.¹³¹

OT words for the virtue signify bringing something forth through labor, awaiting with hope, or being indulgent. The word “long” is often involved; God is long or slow to anger. The NT words suggest endurance under a burden, long-suffering, steadfastness, and tolerance. Patience allows one to hold on for a long time before responding.

Patience is energetic resistance, steadfastness under pressure, and endurance in the face of trials.¹³²

¹²⁸ <https://www.google.com/search?q=patience&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>

¹²⁹ Bill Gothard

¹³⁰ Charles Wood

¹³¹ J. W. L. Hoad, “Patience,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 873.

¹³² Walter M. Dunnnett, “Perseverance,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 600.

The main point about patience is steadfast endurance while experiencing discomfort, pain, or persecution. Waiting while comfortable is no virtue; waiting while uncomfortable without complaint is the virtue. Doing so demonstrates patience and the accompanying virtues of self-control and humility.

2. Perseverance is steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success;¹³³ steady persistence in a course of action, a purpose, a state, etc., especially in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement¹³⁴

Perseverance pertains to steadfastness, patience, and persistence; we persevere by attending constantly, continuing unswervingly, adhering firmly, and holding fast to whatever we are persevering in.¹³⁵

In theology, perseverance of the saints is considered a mark of genuine salvation. Genuine Christians demonstrate their spiritual life by persisting in faith (belief) and in good works (behavior). Those who fail to persist in faith and in good works may have no assurance of their salvation and indeed may prove themselves to be “shipwrecked” (1 Tim 1:19), i.e., apostate.

B. The vices

1. Impatience—failure to endure pain or trials calmly or without complaint
2. Restlessness—eager desire for release or change; intolerance of anything that thwarts, delays, or hinders¹³⁶

III. Importance

¹³³ <https://www.google.com/search?q=perseverance&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>

¹³⁴ "perseverance". *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 20 Sep. 2017. <[Dictionary.com http://www.dictionary.com/browse/perseverance](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/perseverance)>.

¹³⁵ A. S. Wood, “Perseverance,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 903.

¹³⁶ "impatience". *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 21 Sep. 2017. <[Dictionary.com http://www.dictionary.com/browse/impatience](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/impatience)>.

- A. As with all the virtues, patience is rooted in the character of God. God is permanent and unchangeable, in contrast to man who is temporal and constantly changing. God is long-suffering or slow to anger (Ex 34:6; Neh 9:17; Ps 103:8; Isa 48:9). Where God would be perfectly justified in pouring out his wrath on sinful people immediately, he restrains himself and tolerates their rebellion for a long time before finally giving people what they deserve. God's patience provides sinners time to repent (Rom 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9).
- B. Jesus showed great patience in dealing with his disciples, notorious sinners, and with most people with whom he came into contact. Jesus exercised great self-control when dealing with irritating, unbelieving, contradictory people.
- C. God functions according to his own plan and purpose for the world. He has a timetable that he is implementing and nothing can change that agenda. Some of this plan we know; much of it we don't know. We normally do not know the reasons for God's timing of events. We may become frustrated when God's timeline and our desires do not correspond. But we must remember that God's ways and plans are far beyond our ability to comprehend (Isa 55:8-9; Rom 11:33-34).
- D. The Bible frequently commands and commends patience for God's people. Love "suffers long" (1 Cor 13:4a) and the fruit of the Spirit is "longsuffering" (Gal 5:22). Christians must bear with one another in humility and "longsuffering" (Eph 4:2). We must "be patient with all" (1 Thes 5:14). We must bear patiently the frailties of people and the trials of our lives. We must patiently await the coming of the Lord like a farmer awaiting the harvest (James 5:7). We must endure trials like the prophets and like Job who endured great pain (James 5:10-11). We receive the promise only after enduring (Heb 10:36). We must run the race before us with steadfast endurance or perseverance (Heb 12:1). Enduring to the end patiently is a mark of a genuine believer (Mk 13:13; Lk 21:19; Rev 3:10). So patience is a Christian obligation, not merely a suggestion.
- E. Various images of the Christian life suggest the necessity of patience/endurance.
 - 1. The Christian life is like a marathon race that we must run "with patience" (Heb 12:1; cf. 1 Cor 9:24).
 - 2. The Christian life is like a boxing match in which one must use self-discipline (1 Cor 9:26-27).

3. The Christian is like a tree bearing fruit (Mk 4:20). It takes time for plants to produce “much fruit” (John 15:5, 8).
 4. The new Christian is like a baby (1 Cor 3:1; Heb 5:12). Babies require considerable supervision, nourishment, and love for significant growth to happen.
- F. Patience is particularly important in prayer. We must remember that God knows the right timing for answering, delaying, or denying our requests. He knows what we need and when we need it. Sometimes our job is simply to “take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is” (Mark 13:33). Pray and don’t faint (Luke 18:1).
- G. Varieties of patience¹³⁷
1. Quietly enduring minor nuisances or irritations is a virtue. Holding your tongue when you’d like to vent about petty grievances requires patience.
 2. Quietly enduring boredom or drab routine without complaint is a virtue.
 3. Quietly enduring suffering, whether physical or emotional, without complaint is a virtue. Enduring pain requires patience. (further remarks about this below)
 4. Quietly enduring difficult people is a virtue. We must often bear with the discomfort caused by others (as others bear with the discomfort caused by us).
 5. Quietly enduring our own weaknesses and failures is a virtue. Sometimes our biggest annoyance is ourselves.
 6. Quietly enduring while waiting upon God is a virtue. Waiting for God to provide for us is often difficult. Sometimes we must be patient with God.

IV. Dangers

¹³⁷ James S. Spiegel, “The Virtue of Patience: Waiting without complaining.”
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/spiritualformation/virtue-of-patience.html?start=2>

- A. God is long-suffering and tolerant, but his patience has limits. He will tolerate the iniquity of the Amorites for only so long (Gen 15:16). He will “endure with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” (Rom 9:22), but eventually those vessels will experience the promised wrath. One should not think that because God has been patient in the past, he will continue to tolerate bad behavior in the present and future. Don’t confuse God’s patience with approval of sin.
- B. We must not confuse patience with passivity. They may look the same at times, but patience is active while passivity is (obviously) passive. Patient people endure the difficulties of life while accomplishing as much as possible. Passive people wait for things to happen and accomplish little (e.g., Prov 22:13).
- C. A very strong tendency for humans is to be self-centered and see things only from our own point of view. We think about ourselves most of the time. We are intimately familiar with our own needs and feelings. Thus, our focus becomes meeting our own needs or desires. When anything or anyone stands in the way of self-gratification, we become annoyed and impatient. We may be ignorant to the fact that others are working hard not to annoy us.
- D. Impatience is based on the feeling that I have the right to a better experience than the one that I am now having. I should not have to be annoyed, suffer pain, or be delayed. But this is not true. God is obligated to meet my needs but not remove every annoyance from my life. The world is a broken, dangerous, corrupt place; and human life will be filled with annoyance, pain, and suffering. We should not deceive ourselves into thinking that we are exempt from them (contra the health and prosperity gospel).
- E. Our culture values instant gratification, not steadfast endurance. We typically expect things to happen very quickly or when we want them, and when those expectations are not fulfilled, we may become frustrated or infuriated. We may tend to rush things that should be approached slowly and with deliberation. Our expectations for quick relief may work against an attitude of patient endurance, especially when suffering.

- F. Some may think of themselves as weak or sinful if they mention their discomfort or pain to others. They stoically endure without sharing their burden with anyone else. They never raise objections because they don't want to complain. But it's no sin to admit your pain or even to voice your disagreement. Biblical characters frequently cried out to God and others regarding their trials and problems, and we should not hesitate to bring our needs to God in prayer and to others when appropriate. We should avoid complaining about the petty discomforts of life, but we should express our concerns over significant issues. Severe suffering should be shared.
- G. On the other hand, some complain loudly and repeatedly about everything that upsets them. If they don't express it verbally, non-verbal cues and sounds make it clear that they are uncomfortable or dissatisfied. A sigh, a tapping of the foot, a roll of the head or of the eyes lets everyone know how they feel. Some are quick to communicate their irritation and happy to let others know what is bothering them. Murmuring and grumbling display our impatience and are vices to avoid (Phil 2:14).
- H. Instead of responding to pain and trials with patient endurance and trust in God, some become bitter and resentful. Serious chronic pain without the hope of relief is admittedly hard to bear. It takes a great deal of Christian maturity to endure such affliction patiently (even Job complained about his situation).
- I. Theologically, some confuse the perseverance of the saints with works salvation. That is, they think that because we expect true believers to continue in faith and good works, we are teaching that salvation comes through faith plus works. But that is not what the doctrine of perseverance teaches; we are not adding works to the Gospel. Perseverance is a result, not a means, of salvation. Those who are genuinely saved persevere in faith and good works. Those who fail to persevere bring their profession of faith into question.

V. Producing patience

- A. Recognize that "trials worketh patience" (Rom 5:3; cf. James 1:3). The "school of hard knocks" provides effective instruction. Like those listed in the Hall of Fame of Faith (Heb 11), we patiently endure our trials "by faith."

Misfortunes are designed to build virtue in us, and among the virtues gained through difficulty is patience. ... Each nuisance, long wait, and affliction, every mosquito bite, traffic jam, and body ache in the life of the Christian raises [one's] threshold of tolerance ever so much. Even tedious sermons and difficult reading (perhaps including what you are enduring right now!) can make you a more patient person.¹³⁸

- B. Commit yourself to spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, and Scripture memorization. Involvement in spiritual disciplines naturally develops patience and endurance. Moreover, these disciplines expose us to truth, which helps us understand God and ourselves better.

Cultivating a patient spirit by focusing on the promises of God in His Word and the work of the Spirit of the Lord will lessen frustration and reduce the anger that is the mark of the foolish heart. This is a vital task, for unrighteous anger is the root of many other sins. May we seek the Lord's face in our suffering, trusting in the promises of God that we might endure in patience and love.¹³⁹

- C. Try to see things from God's perspective. Accept the timetable that God has implemented. Don't try to understand the secret ways and means of God. Fix your eyes on Christ and trust that he will provide what is needed at the right time. Follow Jesus' example of patiently enduring discomforts (Isa 53:7).
- D. Try to see things from others' perspectives. Everyone has a different set of circumstances to deal with. You probably annoy others as much as they annoy you. God may be at work in others with whom we experience conflict and disagreement. We must treat others with humility and sympathy even when they stretch and test our patience.

We must respond to fellow believers as those who, like ourselves, are sinners saved by grace. Thus, we must show grace to one another, and the integrity of our Christian professions must be demonstrated by true patience.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Spiegel, "The Virtue of Patience."

¹³⁹ "The Virtue of Patience" <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/virtue-patience/>

¹⁴⁰ Albert Mohloer, "Patience Is Not Optional for the Christian."

- E. Evaluate whether what you are waiting for is legitimate. That is, do you have good reason to expect a particular outcome? Do biblical principles give you the right to have this expectation? Does common sense give you the right to expect this? Our expectations should be reasonable and biblical.
- F. Look for reasons that the result may be delayed. Focus on the task rather than the results or the rewards. Make a commitment to do the right thing no matter what the outcome or the timeframe involved. Make sure that your own actions or sins are not hindering the result you are hoping for.
- G. Make your best decision and stick with it, even if you end up enduring some negative consequences. Patience calls us to bear up under the difficulties of life, even those of our own making. Don't quit, run away, or reverse course unless absolutely required.
- H. Persist in prayer (Lk 18:1-8). In spite of discouragements or delays, keep on making bold petitions before God. Pouring out your heart to God is biblical (cf. Ps 10:1, 44:24, 142:2). Expressing your needs to God in prayer is a demonstration of faith; it's not a petty complaint. Persevere in your hopes if they are based on valid biblical principles.
- I. In children
 - 1. Teach kids that God has a timetable and it is usually different from ours. Teach about sowing and reaping and the time between the two. Help them see the value of waiting for rewards.
 - 2. Prevent children from expecting instant gratification of their desires. Make them work to achieve their goals. Help them see the value of self-discipline and steadfast endurance in achieving success.
 - 3. Insist that children persevere in a task until it is completed. Remind them that success often comes to those who work and persist, not to quitters. Help them develop a persevering attitude for all tasks (i.e., a Christian work ethic).
 - 4. Don't allow kids to complain about timing issues, e.g., as they await the arrival of an anticipated event or visitor. Try to reduce the "are we there yet" and "how much longer" questions. Try to develop within children an ability to entertain themselves while they wait.

5. Dissuade children from an attitude of entitlement, the feeling that they deserve special treatment or that they don't deserve to experience the common problems of life. They must endure, not avoid, life's annoyances with patience.

Patience begins with the affirmation that God is sovereign and in control of human history, working in human lives. With eternity on the horizon, time takes on an entirely new significance. The Christian understands that full satisfaction will never be achieved in this life, but he looks to the consummation of all things in the age to come. Furthermore, we know that our sanctification will be incomplete in this life, and thus Christians must look to each other as fellow sinners saved by grace, in whom the Holy Spirit is at work calling us unto Christlikeness.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Albert Mohler, "Patience is Not Optional for the Christian." *Tabletalk Magazine*, Nov 11, 2015.
<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/patience-not-optional-christian/>



Lesson 24

Virtues: Thoroughness

Vice: Carelessness

I. Texts: Jer 50:34; Mt 3:12; Luke 14:28-30; 2 Cor 8:11; 2 Tim 3:17

II. Definitions

- A. Thoroughness—completeness or fullness; attentiveness to accuracy and detail; performed with care and completeness; working through a task until it is finished; knowing what factors will diminish the effectiveness of my work or words if neglected¹⁴²

Synonyms: total, uncompromised, painstaking, comprehensive, exhaustive

Thoroughness involves working on a task until it is complete, doing the task with quality, care, and with special attention to detail, and cleaning up when the task is finished.

- B. Carelessness—failure to complete a task with care; doing a task partially or superficially

Synonyms: wasteful, mediocre, negligent, superficial, partial, cursory

III. Importance

- A. As with all the virtues, thoroughness is rooted in the character of God. God is thorough in the sense of exercising great care and attention to detail in what he says and does. He finishes what he starts. No project of God is done in a careless, superficial way. God is uncompromised, comprehensive, and exhaustive in his person and work.
- B. Several biblical characters exemplify thoroughness—Moses in building the tabernacle, Solomon in building the temple, Nehemiah in rebuilding the wall in Jerusalem and the temple, Jesus in making full atonement for sin, and Paul in fulfilling the ministry given to him by God.

¹⁴² <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

- C. In the Christian life, thoroughness compels us to strive for doctrinal consistency. That is, we should embrace a biblical worldview that provides a way for us to integrate all our experiences and values. Our beliefs and behaviors should fit into a non-contradictory system that covers all of life. Our value system should be cohesive and comprehensive. We should want to apply biblical principles to every area of life.
- D. We should desire thoroughness in understanding the Bible. We should want our preachers to proclaim “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), not just parts or topics that suit them or that tickle the ears of their audience. Exegetical preaching, in particular, is valuable in that it focuses on verse-by-verse exposition of Scripture.
- E. God inspired the Scripture so that the man of God might be “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” The words “thoroughly furnished” come from a single word in the original language, meaning “complete, finished, fitted-out, or accomplished.” Scripture provides the essential tools that allow a Christian to be fully equipped for every good work. God enables Christians to meet the demands of righteous living through the understanding and application of the Bible.

Our supreme and sufficient resource is God’s Word. It not only gives us the information to teach but also shapes us into living examples of that truth.¹⁴³
- F. Thoroughness is often a factor in success. Employers appreciate workers who can see a task through from beginning to end with care and attention. Spouses appreciate partners who fulfill their responsibilities completely. Thoroughness leads to work well done, gives a sense of achievement, and ultimately is honorable to the Lord.

IV. Dangers

- A. Carelessness is often the cause of fraud, waste, and abuse. Jobs done carelessly or incompletely often must be re-done or finished by others. Failure to complete tasks may lead to interpersonal problems. No one likes to finish tasks that others failed to complete. A poorly done job leaves one with a sense of dissatisfaction. No one enjoys mediocrity.

¹⁴³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *2 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 162.

- B. As with most of the other virtues, this one may become a liability if pushed to extremes. Some tasks don't demand absolute accuracy or completion (e.g., raking leaves, sweeping a sidewalk). It's okay to leave some jobs incomplete, at least temporarily. Those who demand detailed accuracy in all areas of life (i.e., perfectionists) are rather annoying. No one can really live up to a perfect standard, and those who obsess about it often experience frustration and disappointment.
- C. Carelessness is a symptom of larger problems such as self-centeredness and laziness. One way to demonstrate love for our neighbor is to complete tasks in careful and caring way. Others benefit when we don't leave a trail of unfinished business in our wake. Only those who don't care about others do things in a careless, partial, cursory manner.
- D. Carelessness often hinders success and results in failure. Employers tend to get rid of careless workers. Relationships fail when one or both partners continually leave tasks unfinished. Lack of careful attention often requires one to repeat tasks and fix projects. Doing things properly and completely the first time saves time and money.

V. Developing thoroughness

- A. Prepare for tasks before you start them. Be sure you have the capacity to finish a job before you start it. Count the cost before beginning the job (Luke 14:28-30).
- B. Finish tasks already started or in progress before beginning any new ones. Starting a project is easy; completing a project takes self-control and commitment.
- C. Take the time and effort necessary to do the job right the first time. It often makes sense to use higher quality materials, which will (hopefully) last longer and give better service than cheaper, lower quality items. Spending a bit more initially may save you time, money, and frustration in the long term. Do a good job the first time using quality materials and workmanship.
- D. Employ experts and find qualified helpers, especially if you are unsure about how to do the job. These days, you can learn about almost any kind of project through information found on the Internet. Take time to educate yourself first, set a budget, get the required tools and materials, and know what you're getting yourself into before you start. If the job is too complicated or if you have no experience in the field, it may be wise to hire a professional.

E. In children

1. Young children, in particular, have little appreciation for thoroughness—except when making messes. They have little consideration for others and tend not to love their neighbors as themselves. We expect this weakness in little children but should work toward helping them to overcome it.
2. Provide step-by-step procedures for completing the assigned task. Make sure children know what you expect of them. Careful repetition and clear directions help in this regard. Close supervision may be necessary.
3. Encourage children to think before they act. Use accidents as occasions to instill this value.
4. Have children put away one set of things before getting out another set.
5. Insist that children complete the tasks given them. Expect children to do their work carefully and properly. Remind them that the job is not finished until everything is put away in its proper place.



Lesson 25

Virtues: Self-Control/Self-Discipline (Temperance)

Vice: Indulgence

I. Texts: Prov 16:32, 24:10, 25:28; Mt 16:24; Acts 24:25; 1 Cor 7:5, 8–9, 9:25–27; Gal 5:22–23; 2 Tim 1:6–7; Titus 1:7–8, 2:2; Heb 5:14; 1 Pet 4:7; 2 Pet 1:5–7

II. Definitions

- A. Temperance is self-discipline, i.e., the ability to control one's inner impulses, feeling, and appetites. A temperate person fulfills his appetites in proper, limited ways, i.e., according to God's will.

Self-control is using my will and mind to control my actions and my emotions. From a Christian perspective, self-control is drawing upon the power of the Holy Spirit to enable me to conform my actions and my emotions to a biblical norm.¹⁴⁴

1. In the OT, the concept of self-control is present but not prominent, as there are no Hebrew words that convey the same idea. However, the concept is present in a few passages (e.g., Gen 43:31; 1 Sam 13:12; Est 5:10). Proverbs warns us to avoid those who have no rule over themselves (Prov 25:28) and commends those who do (Prov 16:32). So the Hebrews understood the idea of containing one's emotions or restraining one's desires.
2. The concept of self-control/temperance is primarily a NT teaching. Six different words in Greek convey the sense of controlling oneself. In Greek and Roman culture, temperance was a highly valued virtue.

The primary Greek word for self-control/temperance is based on a root meaning "power, lordship," and expresses the control one has over oneself or over others.¹⁴⁵ One controls that over which he has power. Thus, the biblical expectation is that, since we have power to control ourselves, we must do so.

Synonyms: sober-minded, moderate, constraint, discretion, prudence

¹⁴⁴ Charles Wood

¹⁴⁵ Walter Grundmann, "Ἐγκράτεια (ἀκρασία), Ἐγκρατής (ἀκρατής), Ἐγκρατεύομαι," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 339.

3. Self-discipline is the commitment to force yourself to do the right thing, the best thing, and the proper thing. It's not taking the easy road when the hard road is the better way. It's a refusal to do less than your best. It's dedication to duty, and the result of a desire to live an honorable, meaningful life.
 4. From a Christian perspective, discipline is the result of a commitment to honor and glorify God in everything you do. Discipline is the ability to regulate your behavior and attitudes by the principles of Scripture rather than by feelings, impulses, pressure, or tradition.
- B. Indulgence—lack of self-control, lack of restraint, failure to control oneself; giving in to one's appetites, desires, and instincts without restriction or limitation. Indulgence is usually emotionally driven ("I feel like it") and habitual (i.e., done without much thought). Those controlled by impulses and feelings seldom accomplish much and typically create many problems for themselves and for others.
- Synonyms: yield, satisfy, coddle, cater to, give rein to, pamper, go along with, spoil

III. Importance

- A. Jesus called his followers "disciples." Discipline implies instruction and correction, the training that improves, molds, strengthens, and perfects character. It is the moral education obtained by the enforcement of obedience through supervision and control. Discipline is associated with correction, chastening, and instruction.¹⁴⁶
- B. Self-discipline suggests that one voluntarily and intentionally participates in those habits and practices that strengthen a disciple. Just as practicing scales on an instrument helps the musician develop his talent, so participation in various practices helps the believer develop and grow in his Christian life.

The Christian life requires believers to practice various disciplines, such as Bible reading, prayer, corporate worship, service, evangelism, stewardship, and (potentially) fasting.

Self-discipline/control means that no one is imposing these behaviors on you. You engage in these disciplines and control yourself because you see the benefits of doing so.

¹⁴⁶ V. R. Edman, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 320.

- C. Paul compares the Christian life to that of the athlete, asserting that the Christian must “keep under” his body and “bring it into subjection” (1 Cor 9:27). Failure to exercise strict self-control may result in one being “castaway,” that is, disqualified for further service.

For the sake of the goal towards which he strives, the commission which he has been given and the task which he must fulfil, he refrains from all the things which might offend or hamper. It is not for his own sake, or for the sake of any necessity to salvation, but for the sake of his brethren that he practices self-control.¹⁴⁷

- D. Temperance/self-control pertains to “all things” (1 Cor 9:25). In virtually every area of life, choices exist on the spectrum between self-indulgence and self-control. The mature believer chooses to control himself rather than indulge himself in order to be of greater service to his Lord.
- E. The Christian life is not an occasion for revelry and drunkenness, lewdness and lust, or strife and envy (Rom 13:13). Instead, we must make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. We must “exercise” ourselves toward godliness (1 Tim 4:7).
- F. The author of Hebrews compares the Christian life to a marathon race in which the believer must “lay aside every weight” and the besetting sins in order to “run the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1).
- G. Self-discipline is the key to success and achievement in the Christian life as well as in many other areas of human experience. Practically speaking, almost anything worth doing takes discipline to master. Any professional career requires training, study, commitment, and work. To play a sport on a high level takes hours of practice and self-denial. Those who excel in the arts (music, painting, sculpture, writing.) must spend years in preparation. In any field of endeavor, those who wish to succeed must exercise self-discipline, restraint, practice, and commitment to the goal.

IV. Aspects of life to impose self-discipline

- A. Appetites and urges: God made the human body with certain desires, and we can fulfill them within biblical limitations. Indulging physical appetites outside or beyond God’s will often results in disaster.
- B. Emotions: Feelings must be subordinate to the intellect. Those who allow themselves to follow their feelings will likely not accomplish much. A

¹⁴⁷ Walter Grundmann, “Ἐγκράτεια (ἀκρασία), Ἐγκρατής (ἀκρατής), Ἐγκρατεύομαι,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 342.

mind submitted to God (2 Cor 10:5), not one's fickle emotional moods, must rule.

- C. Speech: James tells us (3:2) that if a man can control his tongue, he can control his whole body. Read Psalm 39:1 and Proverbs 17:27-28 .
- D. Priorities: The essence of discipline is the ability to subordinate the lesser to the greater. Many things cry out for our attention. It takes discipline to do those things that are necessary and important first. Make sure those things that assume first place in your life are worthy of that position. Put first things first, and do what needs to be done. Good intentions are worthless.

V. Dangers/misuse

- A. We live in an undisciplined age. Our culture tells us to indulge our appetites and give in to our feelings. Modern people put themselves first, and anything that hinders their pursuit of "happiness" must go. Such people often evidence little or no commitment, restraint, or loyalty. Self-indulgence, rather than self-discipline, is a very common philosophy.

In a few areas (e.g., athletics, military, art), culture praises those who exercise strong self-discipline. But when it comes to one's personal life, culture tells us to indulge ourselves and not restrict our desires.

- B. Christians are often undisciplined when it comes to the Christian life. They don't take time for personal devotions, they fail to prioritize corporate worship (church), and they refuse exercise biblical stewardship over their finances. Their choices are often based on inner feelings and popular examples (i.e., celebrities) instead of on biblical principles and godly wisdom. Lack of self-control leads to worldliness and selfishness even for those claiming to be Christians.

- C. On the other end of the spectrum, a zealous application of self-discipline may lead to asceticism, i.e., an overly strict lifestyle that denies or avoids physical pleasure.¹⁴⁸ Ascetic restraint has no particular spiritual merit, except for rare occasions (e.g., 1 Cor 7:5). Christians need not restrict themselves unnecessarily and should not submit to false teachers who demand abstinence from things God allows (e.g., 1 Tim 4:3). Everything God provides for us is good and to be received with thanksgiving, being sanctified by the word of God and by prayer (1 Tim 4:4-5). We can satisfy our appetites, desires, and passions within the framework God has established for human flourishing.

VI. Developing self-control

- A. Exercising self-control is not strictly a personal achievement; it is a spiritual discipline. Since temperance/self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), believers must yield to the Spirit's influence as a means of bringing themselves under control. Ephesians 5:18 prohibits us to be "drunk with wine" (i.e., indulging the flesh) but "be filled with the Spirit" (i.e., under the Spirit's control). God gives believers a "spirit of power and of love and of self-control" (2 Tim 1:7). Self-control for the Christian is really Spirit-control. Yielding control of oneself to the Spirit amounts to obedience to God's will as expressed in the Bible.
- B. Avoid the victim mentality that says, "I can't help it." Admit that you can control your thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Only you can change you, and if you are unwilling to change, no one can help you. You can control yourself if the motivation is strong enough and if you submit yourself to God's control. Failure to control yourself is your own fault; don't blame others.
- C. Accept discipline as the route to success. Undisciplined people are forever seeking quick and easy shortcuts. They carefully avoid the grind of hard work, self-denial, and commitment. But those who achieve great things do so by discipline and work.
- D. Start with the little things. Keep your schedule. Arrive early for appointments. Make punctuality a high priority. Keep your things neat and clean. Put things away after you use them. Organize yourself and your things. Don't live in a pigsty. Make sure you look presentable.

¹⁴⁸ Another word for "ascetic" is "enkratite," based on the word for temperance, *egkrateia*, (lit. "in/with power")..

- E. Exercise foresight, carefulness, and thoughtfulness. Plan your work, and then work your plan. Try to be well organized in everything you do. Don't approach things haphazardly. Instead, plan for the future. Avoid the "fly by the seat of your pants" approach.
- F. Control your body. Exercise and eat right. Lose excess weight. Get enough sleep. Make your body into a strong and effective tool in the Lord's service.
- G. Get your priorities right. Do the hard things first. Don't procrastinate. Seek to complete one job before moving on to the next. Don't waste time needed to do important work. Get right at it, complete it, and rest when you're done.
- H. Accept the goal of Christlikeness rather than happiness. Although rest, refreshment, and recreation do have a proper place in a believer's life, they should not be top priorities. Christians must never become preoccupied with the frantic quest for pleasure for its own sake. When amusement becomes central, accomplishments dwindle.
- I. Refuse to indulge your desires for ease, comfort, and fun. Don't allow your flesh to dictate your agenda. Make your body subservient to your mind and will, and then determine to do the right things irrespective of how you feel. "Keep under" your body and make it your tool.
- J. Developing self-control within children
 - 1. Like the other virtues, self-control is both caught and taught. Children often pick up the habits of their parents. Parents are most effective in producing self-controlled children if they are self-controlled, disciplined people themselves. Provide an example of self-control for the children to follow.
 - 2. Impose limits and restrictions. Provide structure, routine, and tradition (e.g., morning, bedtime). Explain the reasons for your rules. Be the parent; don't allow children to have the authority within the home.
 - 3. Don't allow children to develop the expectation that things will always go their way. Insist that children cope with inconveniences and discomfort without (too much) complaint.
 - 4. Don't indulge your child's every whim, fancy, and demand. Try to dissuade impulse behavior. Don't allow your child to make demands; insist that they make respectful requests.

5. Give children appropriate levels of responsibility and privilege. Encourage them to learn a sport, take up a musical instrument, care for a pet, etc. Set high expectations and make them earn their rewards.
6. Consistently apply appropriate consequences for behaviors. Let the child feel the results of his decisions. Clearly communicate rules, expectations, and consequences, and then follow through. Teach children to respond appropriately to discipline/correction.
7. Praise and reward good behavior and discipline for bad behavior in age-appropriate ways. Show them the benefits of good behavior, self-control, and planning. Attach privilege to responsibility.
8. Help children with social skills—listening without interruption, anger management, coming when called, completing tasks, using proper manners, being polite no matter how you feel, etc.

One might think that commitment to self-discipline would take all the joy and spontaneity out of living. But remember that fun (self-gratification, amusement) is not the primary goal for a Christian. Our chief end is to glorify God; and the best way to achieve that goal is to control ourselves and do our duty. A disciplined life is a joyful, productive, meaningful life. In fact, those who seek to live a disciplined life are most free to serve God and enjoy His blessings. Those who won't control themselves often find themselves "shipwrecked," disqualified for service, enslaved to their evil desires, and living with all the negative consequences of their bad decisions.



Lesson 26

**Virtues: Honesty/Sincerity/Truthfulness/
Fairness**

Vice: Hypocrisy/Deception/Unfairness

I. Texts: Gen 31:27; Ex 20:16; Deut 3:24; Ps 24:4, 51:6, 58:3, 100:5; Luke 6:31; Rom 3:4; 2 Cor 4:1-2, 7:2, 8:21; Eph 4:25; 1 Thes 4:12; Titus 1:2; Heb 13:18; 1 Pet 2:12

II. Definitions

A. The virtues

1. Honesty: the state of being honorable or truthful, upright and fair in dealing with others;¹⁴⁹ behavior, in action and words that aims to convey truth;¹⁵⁰ commitment to the truth
2. Sincerity: freedom from hypocrisy; purity of motive; genuineness;¹⁵¹ cf. the word “unfeigned” (“without hypocrisy” 2 Cor 6:6; 1 Tim 1:5)
3. Truthfulness: that which conforms to reality; factual; the absence of falsehood; the biblical words for “truth” convey the sense of “firmness, stability, faithfulness.”
4. Fairness: impartiality, free from bias; looking at things from all pertinent points of view; trying to understand the different sides of a story before making a decision; giving people what they deserve

Fairness is not necessarily giving everyone the same thing or insuring the same outcome for all. Fairness is not striving to make everyone happy. It's not necessarily equal reward or equal punishment. Fairness is an effort to let truth and facts determine the outcome. Fairness gives what is right. Cf. the Parable of the Laborers (Mt 20).

Synonyms: integrity, rectitude, veracity, fidelity, scrupulousness, legitimate

¹⁴⁹ Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

¹⁵⁰ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

¹⁵¹ Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

B. The vices

1. Lying/deception: failure to tell the truth; to deceive or mislead with false appearance or statement¹⁵²
2. Hypocrisy: in the OT, the word means, “to cover, hide,” and thus to pollute or defile, make profane. A hypocrite is a godless man. In the NT era, a hypocrite was a stage actor, one who played a part. Hypocrisy is play-acting, pretending to have the virtuous character or religious convictions one does not actually possess.

A hypocrite is formally and outwardly religious and good, but inwardly insincere and unrighteous; the hypocrite may come to deceive himself as well as others, but “the hypocrite’s hope shall perish” (Job 8:13). On no class did our Lord pronounce such severe condemnation as on the hypocrites of His day.¹⁵³

3. Unfairness: favoritism; not conforming to standards of justice, honesty, or ethics¹⁵⁴
4. Flattery: to try to please by complimentary remarks or attention; to praise or compliment insincerely, effusively, or excessively; to represent favorably; gratify by falsification; to play upon the vanity or susceptibilities of; cajole, wheedle, or beguile¹⁵⁵

The OT word for “flattery” means “slippery, smooth” and often applies to food that is easy to swallow. Thus, people use flattery to make themselves smoother or their ideas easier to accept. Flattery often encourages sinful behavior (Ps 5:10; Prov 2:16). Generally, people use flattery to get something they want.

Synonyms: cheat, pretense, delude, defraud, swindle, guile, buffalo

¹⁵² deceive. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved November 20, 2017 from Dictionary.com website
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/deceive>

¹⁵³ ISBE

¹⁵⁴ unfair. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved November 20, 2017 from Dictionary.com website
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/unfair>

¹⁵⁵ flatter. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved November 21, 2017 from Dictionary.com website
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/flatter>

III. Importance

- A. Like all the other virtues, this set finds its basis in the character and person of God. God is perfectly true and honest. God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2, literally “the unlying God”; cf. Heb 6:18); he is the “God of truth” (Deut 32:4). “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25).
- B. Jesus is known as “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Everyone “of the truth” hears the voice of Jesus (John 18:37). The Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13). The word of God is truth (John 17:17). Paul commands us, “speak every man truth with his neighbor” (Eph 4:25). The truth makes believers free (John 8:40). God hates injustice (Isa 59:15). Satan is “a liar and the father of it” (John 8:45). All liars will have their place in the lake of fire (21:8).
- C. Christians must conscientiously gird themselves with truth (Eph 6:14) and avoid deceit and guile (1 Thes 2:3). We should say what we mean and mean what we say (Mt 5:37). For Christians, every form of expression (speech, writing, art) ought to be in keeping with the truth. Only very rarely and in restricted situations (e.g., war, risk of life) might intentional deception be allowed (other than in games, jokes, etc.).
- D. As the old saying goes, “honesty is the best policy.” Life works better when we are truthful and trustworthy. We enjoy more freedom and success when we are honest. When people are trustworthy and reliable, everything goes better. On the other hand, dishonesty and lack of integrity create problems. We can avoid many problems in life simply by being honest. So, from a practical point of view, honesty simply makes sense. But is personal happiness and success the ultimate reason to be honest? No. There are more important reasons to be honest.
 - 1. God is truthful.
 - 2. God commands his people to be truthful.
 - 3. God holds people accountable for truthfulness or lack of it. Failure to be truthful is sin. Those who practice habitual, unrepentant deception “shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev 21:8).
- E. We must also admit that, for some people, dishonesty is the “best policy” because it seems to work quite well for them. Many dishonest people who lack personal integrity are nonetheless quite happy and “successful” from a worldly point of view. We cannot judge the value of honesty merely by

evaluating how well honesty “works” (i.e., pragmatism). For some people, dishonesty “works” equally well. Thus, we must have a higher motivation to be honest and live with integrity than merely personal happiness and success. We must pursue honesty/integrity because God himself is honest and because he requires it from us.

F. What kind of honesty does the Lord require?

1. Deuteronomy 16:20 be honest in all things.
 - a) weights and measures—business (Lev 19:35-36; Prov 11:1)
 - b) behavior, speech (Isa 33:15)
 - c) small, insignificant things (Parable of the Talents; Mt 25:14-30)
2. Psalm 24:4 clean hands and a pure heart
3. 2 Corinthians 4:1-2 renounce dishonesty and deceit
4. 2 Corinthians 7:2 wrong, corrupt, defraud no one
5. 2 Corinthians 8:21 things honest in the sight of all
6. 1 Thessalonians 4:12 honest toward outsiders/unbelievers
7. Hebrews 13:18 good conscience, live honestly
8. James 5:12 speech (yea, nay)
9. 1 Peter 2:12 honest among the gentiles

IV. Dangers

- A. Humans are by nature deceitful: “All men are liars” (Psalm 116:11). Because of human depravity, honesty does not come easily to us. The sinful nature causes us to lie, deceive, and mislead. People “go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (Ps 58:3). Telling the truth, especially when it would be easier to tell a lie, can be difficult.
- B. The truth sometimes hurts. We must often use a little diplomacy and tact when communicating the truth. Truth is not a tool to tear people down. We don’t have to say everything we know or feel (transparency). Sometimes the best strategy is to say little or nothing, especially if you don’t have anything good to say (cf. Prov 17:28). Speak the truth “in love” (Eph 4:15).
- C. These virtues can cause trouble in a culture committed to the vices. If one works in a career field where deception is common (e.g., lawyer), a commitment to the truth might be problematic.

- D. The biggest lie/deception is to deny that “Jesus is the Christ” (1 Jn 1:22). “Trusting in lies” is consistent with forgetting God (Jeremiah 13:25). And those who claim to know God but contradict Him, add to His words, or refuse to follow or accept His commands are also called liars (1 John 2:4; 5:10; Proverbs 30:6).¹⁵⁶
- E. Flattery plays upon human weakness, particularly pride and a desire for recognition and appreciation. People use flattery to get what they want. Some people are susceptible to flattery because they enjoy hearing how good they are. We can easily show favoritism if doing so will be to our benefit. “Flattery will get you nowhere” is often untrue; flattery can be very productive. But Christians should avoid flattery because it is deceitful. We should be quick to complement others and show our appreciation, but in doing so, we must avoid flattery (which is ultimately aimed at getting something for ourselves).

V. Developing the virtues

- A. Salvation enables believers to overcome our natural bent toward deceitfulness. God requires that we speak the truth in all things. Commit yourself to expressing only what you are convinced is true. If you are unsure whether something is true, express your doubts before saying what you think.
- B. Honesty demands that we know what we are talking about before we make any claims. Our speech and behavior must correspond to the truth. If we give an opinion, we should clearly state such—“I think..., In my opinion,...” Don’t give the impression that you are stating the facts if you are unsure what the facts are. Don’t be among those who speak authoritatively without knowing the facts. Never put much stock in rumors and gossip, and never pass along such information. Think critically and don’t be gullible.
- C. Consider the source before you speak (or write, tweet, blog, etc.). Unless we are eyewitnesses to the events, we rely on what others tell us. Some sources are reliable and some are not. Many media sources are biased in one way or another. Don’t assume that what you’ve heard in the media is the absolute truth; often it is not. News outlets often conceal information that could change our understanding of the “facts.”

¹⁵⁶ “What Does the Bible Say About Honesty?” www.GotQuestions.org

- D. The study of how we know what we (think) we know is called epistemology. Studying this subject should lead us to be far more humble in our assertions than we typically are. Ultimately, there are only a small group of things we can know with absolute certainty.
1. The Bible is true in everything it affirms. The Bible records lies (e.g., “Thou shall not surely die....”), but even the record of those lies is accurate. So we can have absolute faith in the truthfulness of God’s Word.
 2. Our own experiences are (generally) true. We cannot help but affirm the reality of our own experiences (“cogito ergo sum”). We know what happened to us, what we experienced. It’s hard to deny what we’ve seen, heard, or touched for ourselves. However, we should maintain humility in this area as well. Research shows that human memory is quite faulty.
 3. Some sources provide an accurate account of the facts. We generally trust what we hear from reputable news sources. Video from the scene of an event is fairly objective. But we should maintain a healthy attitude of skepticism and not glibly accept everything we hear. A report may not be true even if it appeared in the newspaper or on TV. Reporters and media outlets are prone to error and often biased. Internet resources should be thoroughly vetted before you believe what is posted. “Fake news” is everywhere.
- E. We should strive to be fair, especially when we have to make decisions that affect others.
1. Our sinful nature makes it hard to be fair. We tend to see things only from our own perspective. We have a natural bias toward certain things and against others. It’s easy to show favoritism toward our friends and loved ones. Impartial objectivity is difficult to maintain.
 2. There are usually at least two sides to every story. Until we know the pertinent data from all sides, we cannot make an unbiased decision.
 3. Human judgment is always going to be flawed. Life isn’t fair, and we should expect some unfair treatment occasionally (e.g., referees are bound to make a few bad calls in spite of their best efforts). Human expressions of fairness will always be somewhat tainted.

F. Teaching honesty to children

1. Model honesty in the home. Honest parents tend to produce honest children. But don't assume that your children are honest; almost all kids are dishonest and must be taught to tell the truth. Sternly confront any hint of dishonesty—lying, cheating, stealing, etc. Children must know that their parents demand honesty from them, even in the small details of life. Parents should avoid hypocrisy at all costs.
2. Teach children that dishonesty is a serious sin against God. Lying and cheating are sinful even if the outcome is “good” (i.e., they fulfill a goal or avert trouble). There is no such thing as a “little white lie.” Parents should impose stern discipline when children are caught lying/deceiving.
3. Teach children to play fair. Don't bend the rules. Don't cheat, even in games and recreation. If you allow dishonesty in one area, you encourage it everywhere.
4. Teach children how dishonesty has negative consequences both for themselves and for others.



Lesson 26

Virtues: Thrift

Vice: Prodigality/Extravagance

I. Texts: Prov 6:6-8, 10:5, 12:27, 21:17, 20, 23:20-21, 27:23-27, 30:25; Mt 6:25-27; Lk 15:13

II. Definitions

- A. Thrift—saving by the careful use of resources;¹⁵⁷ economical management; economy; frugality;¹⁵⁸ Allowing myself and others to spend only what is necessary;¹⁵⁹ careful usage of everything that God has given me;¹⁶⁰ the prudent use of money and goods¹⁶¹

“Economical in the use or appropriation of money, goods or provisions of any kind; saving unnecessary expense, either of money or any thing else which is to be used or consumed; sparing; not profuse, prodigal or lavish. Prudent economy; good husbandry or housewifery; a sparing use or appropriation of money or commodities; a judicious use of any thing to be expended or employed; that careful management which expends nothing unnecessarily, and applies what is used to a profitable purpose; nothing is wasted. It is not equivalent to parsimony, the latter being an excess to a fault. Thrift is always a virtue.”¹⁶²

Thrifty people generally try to get the most for their money, the best deals, and make their money go as far as possible. They want the best “bang for their buck.” This makes them quite annoying to their non-thrifty friends ☺.

¹⁵⁷ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

¹⁵⁸ thrift. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved November 30, 2017 from Dictionary.com website <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/thrift>

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.character-training.com/blog/list-of-character-traits/>

¹⁶⁰ Charles Wood

¹⁶¹ S. Michael Craven, “The Financial Crisis: Lessons on the virtue of Thrift.” *The Christian Post*, Oct 13, 2008.

¹⁶² Webster’s Dictionary, 1st. Edition, 1828. Quoted in Malloch.

“Thrift is not so much a matter of how much we have, but of how we appreciate, value, and use what we have. Everyone, regardless of income level, has opportunities to exercise the virtue of thrift. We practice thrift by monitoring how we spend our time and money and then by making better decisions.”¹⁶³

The Latin root (from Old Norse) of the verb *thrift* is, “to thrive.” This excludes both poverty and excess. The thrifty person, as a thriving person, has a reasonable concern with both the present, as well as the future.¹⁶⁴

- B. Prodigality—wasteful, reckless extravagance, especially involving the use of money; squander; lavish unsparingly

III. Importance

- A. Like all the other virtues, thrift originates in the character of God. God does not have to be thrifty because he has no lack of resources; he owns all things and has all power. God has all things in abundance but does not squander his resources or employ them recklessly. He expects his people to exercise self-control and use the resources he provides prudently.
- B. Jesus told the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14f) which encourages the appropriate use of what God has given us. We want to be profitable servants and not squander or neglect our talents. Hard work and wise investment are the keys to pleasing our Lord and hearing him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”
- C. Biblical examples of thrift¹⁶⁵
 - 1. Noah gathered the resources for the ark (Gen 6:21).
 - 2. Joseph developed a plan to collect resources during productive years to provide for the upcoming famine (Gen 41:28-36, 48, 53).
 - 3. Solomon built storage cities (1Kings 9:17-19).
 - 4. Jehoshaphat built fortresses and storage cities (2 Ch 17:12).
 - 5. Hezekiah built treasuries and storehouses to secure all the riches that God granted him (2 Ch 32:27-29)
 - 6. The virtuous woman works hard to provide for her household (Pr 31:13-16).

¹⁶³ John Templeton, Jr., MD, *Thrift and Generosity: The Joy of Giving*, Philadelphia: The Templeton Foundation Press, 2004. Quoted in Malloch.

¹⁶⁴ Theodore R. Malloch, “Thrift and Generosity.” Dinner Talk, March 2005

¹⁶⁵ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

7. Jesus urged his disciples to gather up the remnants of the feast so that they not be wasted (Jn 6:12-13).

John Wesley (founder of the Methodist Church): “Make all you can; save all you can; give all you can.”

- D. Thrift fits under the biblical category of stewardship, i.e., careful management of the resources God gives us. Stewards are required to be “faithful” (1 Cor 4:2), and part of faithful management, at least for many people, is being thrifty. Wealthy people perhaps have less concern about careful money management, especially if they can afford to spend lavishly. But rich people must be good stewards even if they don’t have to be thrifty. Middle-class Americans may not think of themselves as wealthy, but compared to many others in the world, they are very well-off.

The theology where *worth* is determined less by the amount one spends, and more by the wisdom with which one discharges responsibilities as a *steward* over God’s creation, is ingrained in the Reformation.¹⁶⁶

Do not sell thrift short, for thrift, as a Victorian virtue ... ultimately made possible *both* capitalism and democracy.¹⁶⁷

IV. Dangers

- A. We live in a materialistic, self-centered culture that tells us to follow our desires and spend what we have (or what we can borrow) to gain what we want. And the more quickly we spend our money, the better. The USA has one of the lowest rates of savings among the developed world (4% in 2015, compared to 11.5% in Sweden). The economy is largely driven by consumer spending, so many voices tell us to get out there and spend our money. Thrift and self-denial are not virtues in such a system.
- B. Human pride tends to drive us to “keep up with the Joneses” and acquire the things most others have. We want to look good and enjoy modern conveniences. We don’t want others to think of us as cheap, so we buy brand names and status symbols.

¹⁶⁶ Theodore R. Malloch, “Thrift and Generosity.” *Dinner Talk*, March 2005

¹⁶⁷ Malloch. The Victorian era (1837-1901—Queen Victoria’s reign in England) emphasized the virtues of work, thrift, temperance, and respectability. Modern culture regards Victorian values as prudish and repressive.

In former years, American culture rewarded working and saving. But things have changed. Today, the market is flooded with predatory institutions and parasites who prey on the naïve, desperate, and irresponsible. Our culture discourages savings and promotes impulsive, often foolish, spending, contributing to the highest level of consumer debt in history.¹⁶⁸

- C. Thus, one extreme of thrift might be materialism, i.e., a preoccupation with money and what it can buy. One exercises thrift because he has a high regard for money and material possessions. Jesus warns us that life consists of more than the abundance of things we possess. The rich man who builds large storage facilities may find that his life comes to an end before he has the chance to enjoy what he has accumulated (Lk 12:16-21). Solomon warns us to avoid laboring for and storing up material wealth because it never satisfies (Ecc 4:8). Being “rich toward God” is far more important than storing up treasure for yourself.
- D. Another extreme of thrift might be miserliness/stinginess, hoarding goods for oneself (what the old timers called parsimony or niggardliness). Judas was more concerned about money than he was for the needs of the poor (Jn 12:4-6). The disciples were more troubled about the supposed waste of valuable oil than a woman’s expression of worship (Mt 26:8-9). In Proverbs, we are warned against failing to pay when we have the resources to do so (Prov 3:27-28). Wisdom also warns us against “withholding more than is right” (Prov 11:24). Instead of selling an item at a reasonable price, a miser might hold on to it until the price rises. Misers “hasten after riches” (Prov 28:22) and keep them to their own destruction (Ecc 5:13). Thrift should not lead us to be cheap, stingy misers.
- E. A further danger possibly associated with thrift is anxiety, i.e., worry about money or material possessions. Thrifty people tend to watch their pennies very closely, perhaps too closely. Jesus teaches that disciples should not worry about things like food, clothing, and shelter (Mt 6:25-33). If we “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” God will provide “all these things.” Worry over material objects or money shows a skewed set of priorities. Security in life is dependent on God, not material goods. Money may provide a sense of security, but money has “wings” and can fly away quite easily (Prov 23:5). God is able to give and to take away (Job 1:21). He may allow us to live in poverty or in wealth (Phil 4:11-12), and our duty is to be content with whatever God provides.

¹⁶⁸ Craven. Total American consumer debt is almost \$4 trillion.

Calvin: Beware those who are never at ease, but when they have before their eyes an abundance of provisions; and who, not admitting that the protection of the world belongs to God, fret and tease themselves with perpetual uneasiness.¹⁶⁹

- F. Another potential danger with thrifty people is an impoverished attitude that tolerates all things junky and shoddy. Their homes are messy and unkempt. Their yards are filled with junk—old cars, parts, half-finished projects, etc. Their clothes are dirty and tattered, or maybe terribly out of fashion (frumpy, shabby, scraggly, etc.). Some extremists become hoarders, living in absolute filth in an effort to save money. Poverty is no excuse for sloppy neglect.
 - G. Some perhaps think that all God requires is 10%, and if we give that much, we can do what we want to with the rest. That attitude fails to recognize that God owns everything (Ps 24:1) and only entrusts money and goods to us temporarily. We must strive to be good stewards over everything God gives us, whether that's a lot or a little. If you are a good steward over little things, perhaps God will entrust to you "true riches" (Luke 16:11).
 - H. A prudent degree of thrift would lead us to avoid cheapness on one hand the extravagance on the other. Thrift is really a means to generosity. We can save a few dollars here and there so we can afford to support worthy causes generously.
- V. Developing thrift
- A. Recognize that everything you have comes from God and that he requires you to be a good steward over those resources. Refuse to develop an owner mentality. God owns it all; we use it temporarily.
 - B. Part of our resources must be invested in the Lord's work, especially the church and Gospel missions. The remaining resources must be carefully shepherded to meet the needs of our families and others we can help.
 - C. Income is not really the issue; use of the money is the main concern. Thrifty people live within their means. Thrifty people often follow a spending plan (a budget). They think seriously about income and expenses and make prudent decisions based on economic reality.

¹⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary* on Matthew 6:31-43. Quoted in Malloch.

- D. Thrifty people tend to avoid debt as much as possible. If you can't manage the careful use of credit cards, it's best to get rid of them. Don't borrow for things you don't really need (recreation, amusement, vacations, some furniture). Buy when necessary, when you can get a good deal, when the item is on sale or cheap, and when most appropriate. Avoid impulse buying. Consider the actual price, not the mark down or discount. You don't really save money when you buy something; you save when you don't buy.
- E. Thrifty people tend not to be on the cutting edge of trends or fashions. They don't feel obligated to buy the latest and greatest of anything. They make do with used and second-hand items. They care for what they have so as to make it last longer. They repair things instead of replacing them.
- F. Practical ideas for being thrifty
1. Use a budget/spending plan. Spend only what you plan to spend. Don't spend accidentally or impulsively. Track your spending; account for every penny that comes in and goes out. Don't buy things you don't need.
 2. Build an emergency fund. People often get into trouble because they have no savings set aside for a "rainy day." Stash away 3-6 months' worth of expenses you can draw from when calamity strikes.
 3. Save automatically. Make deposits into a savings account automatic by setting up a program with your bank.
 4. Pay off debt. Pay off credit cards and high-interest loans.¹⁷⁰ Better yet, avoid debt as much as possible.
 5. Automate your bills. Make regular payments through ETFs.
 6. Save up for large purchases. Pay cash when possible. Don't buy unless you have the money in hand. Use debt only in rare cases, e.g., mortgage, automobile.
 7. Cut out unneeded spending—eating out, cable/satellite TV, high dollar phone plans, professional service contracts, etc.
 8. Shop for sales. Use coupons. Buy off-brands and generics. Seek discounts. Buy what you need at a thrift store or online.
 9. If you use credit cards, use the ones that include cash back rewards.

¹⁷⁰ Average family credit card debt is nearly \$17,000 per household. Average credit card interest rate is 15%. Total American credit card debt is almost \$800 billion. Student loans are at \$1.34 trillion (about \$30,000 per student).

10. Try to use less heat in the winter and less air conditioning in the summer.

G. Developing thrift in children

1. Don't allow them to have everything they want. Make them carefully weigh spending options. Make them work and save for things.
2. Don't give children large sums of money. Children are notorious for bad financial decisions.
3. Make children give a portion of their income to the Lord's work (the church, missions, needy people, etc.). Help them see the value in investing in things eternal. They must seek to honor the Lord in their saving, spending, and giving. Encourage regular, generous, and sacrificial giving.
4. Have your children establish a bank account or savings plan, even a piggy bank. Encourage saving for spending goals. Help them set goals for saving and spending.
5. Ask your children about how they are spending their money. Until they are well into their upper teens, be very watchful over your children's spending habits.
6. The goal is to develop self-discipline and economic wisdom within your children. Instruct them regarding how to earn and manage money. Give them some pocket money and encourage them to make wise choices. Help them live within their means. Help them to see that hard work and wise choices will allow them to achieve their goals.



Lesson 27

Virtues: Purity/Virtue

Vice: Impurity/Immorality/Defilement

Note: Because of the theme, some of this material may not be suitable for younger children.

I. Texts: Lev 10:10-11; Mt 15:10-11; Rom 1:21-32, 14:14; 2 Cor 7:1; Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 4:12, 5:22; Titus 1:15-16; Heb 10:22; James 1:27; 1 Pet 1:15, 3:2; 1 John 1:9

II. Definitions

A. Purity: moral excellence; the condition of being free from any physical, moral, or ritual contamination;¹⁷¹ an absence of blemish or stain, especially sin; the state of being morally and spiritually pure, which is seen by Scripture as the result of being the people of God and also as an expected distinguishing mark of the church¹⁷²

1. External purity: Purity in the original OT sense had much to do with ritual or ceremonial cleansing. One could become impure by contact with a corpse, some dead animals, various diseases, unclean foods, bodily fluids, even mildew. Certain objects and actions were impure/defiled, while others were pure/clean. The worshipper would purify (consecrate, sanctify) himself by means of various ceremonies so that he could worship God properly. Cf. Gen 35:2; Ex 19:14; Lev 15:16; Num 31:23.

2. Internal purity: Purity also has to do with sincerity and pure devotion to God. Like pure water or gold, the pure heart is the undivided heart where there is no conflict of loyalties, no division of interests, no mixture of motives, no hypocrisy and no insecurity. It is whole-hearted commitment to God.¹⁷³ Cf. Psalm 51:6-10.

¹⁷¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 843.

¹⁷² Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

¹⁷³ R.A.F., "Purity," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 991.

3. In the NT, purity refers mostly to moral behavior, i.e., chastity, freedom from sexual corruption/pollution (Titus 2:5, where “chaste” means “pure”). The Bible never implies that human intimacy is sinful in and of itself (Heb 13:4), but such behavior can be easily defiled. Impurity of the heart leads to impurity of behavior.
4. More broadly speaking, all sin is moral defilement, and all sinners are in need of cleansing/purifying. Believers are cleansed/purified through the merits of the sacrificial death of Christ (i.e., the blood of Christ) applied to them. The blood of Christ is the agent of purification; it cleanses the believer from sin at the point of salvation and continues to cleanse from sin throughout one’s life (1 John 1:7). There is no further need of elaborate purification rituals to cleanse the believer from sin. Salvation brings initial purification, and abiding in Christ guarantees continuing purification (cf. 1 John 1:9). The “pure in heart” (Mt 5:8) will “see God” because of their true, sincere faith.

Purity is thus the spirit of renunciation and of the obedience which brings every thought and feeling and action into subjection to Christ. It begins within and extends outwards to the entire life, cleansing all the centers of living and controlling all the movements of body and spirit.¹⁷⁴

Virtue is a bit broader concept, referring to moral worth or excellency. The virtuous woman (Prov 31:10; cf. Ruth 3:11; Prov 12:4) is worthy of honor. Virtue can describe a person or thing as excellent in various ways. We must strive to add virtue/moral excellence to our faith (2 Pet 1:3, 5).

Virtue, traditionally understood, belonged to the individual who performed the inner work required to overcome unjust desires and shape his temperament according to something higher in his own nature. A person of character must subject impulse to self-control.¹⁷⁵

- B. Impurity/immorality: violating biblical standards of human behavior in the sexual realm; licentious, lascivious

¹⁷⁴ R.A.F., “Purity,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 991.

¹⁷⁵ William S. Smith, “Phony Virtue is Ruining Western Society.” www.theamericanconservative.com

III. Importance

- A. As with all the virtues, purity stems from the character of God. God is morally excellent, wholly light, without a shadow of defilement (1 John 1:5). Because man is made in the image of his Creator, he has a sense of morality/virtue. Unlike animals, who behave mostly by instinct, mankind has an inner moral sense, and God expects those made in his image to behave themselves according to the moral guidelines God has provided in Scripture.
- B. God, as Creator, has the right to regulate human interaction on all levels. Some behaviors are within the will of God, while others are clearly out of bounds. Virtue/purity consists of conforming oneself and one's behaviors to God's will.
- C. James tells us that "pure religion and undefiled before God" consists of, among other things, keeping ourselves "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Purity especially in the NT sense has much to do with proper sexual behavior. God created human physical union, and the marriage bed is "undefiled" (Heb 13:4). Those who "burn" with passion should get married (1 Cor 7:9) to avoid fornication. Christians must "flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim 2:22; cf. 1 Pet 2:11 "flee fleshly lusts") and "flee fornication" (1 Cor 6:18). God's will is that we "abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thes 4:3). Jesus asserted that even looking on a woman "to lust after her" would defile a man (Mt 5:28; cf. 1 Thes 4:5). Those pursuing relationships outside of biblical parameters face the judgment of God—"whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb 13:4). Any kind of sexual behavior outside of heterosexual, monogamous, permanent marriage is sinful and defiling. This would include pornography, sex before marriage (fornication), sex with anyone other than your spouse (adultery), prostitution, incest, etc.
- D. Although "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses [believers] from all sin" (1 John 1:7), believers are still responsible to "cleanse [themselves] from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1). God cleanses us from sin, yet we must still strive to purify ourselves from sinful conduct and attitudes.

- E. A pure heart is both sincere in its devotion to God as well as undefiled from sinful thoughts and motives. Purity demands that we bring every thought into the captivity of Christ (2 Cor 10:5). Purity of mind leads to purity of behavior. This is particularly true of immoral thoughts; lust in one's heart amounts to the very act (Mt 5:28). If we want to control our behavior, we must control our thoughts. That means that we must be very careful about the kind of things we read, look at, and listen to—TV, Internet, movies, music, etc. We cannot maintain pure minds if we are filling them with dirt.

IV. Dangers

- A. The Jews of Jesus' day focused more on ritual/external purity than they did on internal/spiritual purity. For many of them, internal sincerity of heart was not necessary as long as they fulfilled the traditional expectations. Likewise today, people may lead externally blameless lives, yet be full of all manner of inner defilement (Luke 11:39-41; cf. Mark 7:3-4).
- B. In previous generations, virtue was conformity to widely-accepted social standards, like thrift, generosity, moderation, respectability, and self-control/ temperance and civility. These virtues were Christian in nature; they came from a Christian worldview. Christianity was the dominant cultural influence, and most people recognized and appreciated biblical standards of behavior. Virtuous people behaved themselves in the proper way because of their reverence for God and their respect for propriety. The good life consisted, partly, in proper behavior, especially in relation to other people. Inner virtue led to transformed living, particularly demonstrated as common human decency and respect for others. Such thinking is all but extinct in modern culture today.
- C. Virtue today is virtually the opposite of what it used to be. Instead of denying one's own inner sinful impulses and bringing oneself into conformity to objective (biblical) standards, modern "virtue" amounts to expressing one's inner desires, acting on one's instincts, and living according to one's emotions. Impulse and desire are virtues for modern people. Rules and cultural expectations must not prevent one from doing his own thing or going his own way. Restraint, refinement, and civility are mere hypocrisy. Personal character doesn't matter as long as one is changing society for the better (e.g., Bill Clinton's personal behavior). Today's form of virtue does not require that one restrains himself or feels guilty for indulging in sinful pleasures.

- D. Western culture is becoming increasingly estranged from God's will for human relationships. Nearly all indicators tell us that most people no longer consider God's will when making their behavioral choices. And that trend away from biblical guidelines is increasing as people do not want to be restricted by external norms. Most western cultures now embrace the kinds of behaviors that were forbidden for centuries—promiscuity, living together without the benefit of marriage, having children outside of marriage, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, easy divorce, polygamy, etc. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s stemmed from a widespread rejection of previous cultural (Christian) norms and ushered in a tolerance for all manner of immorality. Thus, what the Bible labels as impurity and immorality is now widely considered to be normal behavior. Alternative (really, perverted) lifestyles are now mainstream, normal—and those who object are bigots or haters. Those upholding biblical morality now stand in opposition to the flow of the culture (where in previous times, the culture supported and encouraged biblical morality).
- E. Modern culture now holds that virtue consists of supporting the right (progressive-liberal) causes. Behavior is not as important as is endorsing the popular political or social positions. Virtue consists not in conforming oneself to objective standards; it consists of reforming society to reflect liberal values. One signals his virtue ("virtue signaling") by supporting the approved causes—feminism, Black Lives Matter, reproductive rights/abortion, same-sex marriage, redistribution of wealth, environmentalism, etc. Recent revelations regarding various celebrities have shown that many of the most "virtuous" are really quite the opposite. Society may have adopted many anti-Christian behaviors, but some basic standards of human behavior still matter (e.g., aggressive non-consensual sexual contact is still "wrong"). This is highly hypocritical.
- F. Modern professing Christians often demonstrate little more purity/virtue than the unsaved world does. Appealing to the fact that we are "under grace" and not "under the law," many no longer feel obligated to follow the biblical guidelines for behavior. Emphasis on emotions, experiences, and sentimentality instead of belief and behavior has led to the tolerance of immorality. Various studies have shown that Evangelicals are only slightly less engaged in the kind of defiling behaviors that non-Christians are. There is not much difference in lifestyle between Evangelicals and atheists. Today's professing Christians are often more conformed to the world (Rom 12:2) and less conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).

- G. Continuous, unrepentant moral defilement is a mark of an unbeliever (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; 1 Thes 4:3-8). No one living in habitual impurity has any reason to think of himself as a Christian.

V. Developing purity/moral excellence

- A. The first step in developing purity is salvation. Without a radical change of heart, one's depraved nature will not change. Only a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17) has experienced the cleansing blood of Christ.
- B. Since true virtue is conformity to God's will, we must intentionally submit ourselves to biblical standards of proper behavior, especially as we relate to others. We must exercise self-control and seek to live decently, respectfully, and humbly.
- C. Psalm 119:9 *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.* A steady diet of Bible reading can help us maintain pure behavior. We must submit ourselves to God's guidelines as revealed in Scripture. Instead of being conformed to this world, be transformed "by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2).
- D. If a couple "cannot contain" (1 Cor 7:9) themselves because of their passion, they should get married. Only in that context is a couple free to satisfy their physical appetites in a pure, undefiling way.
- E. Every Christian must "keep under" his body and "bring it into subjection" (1 Cor 9:27). One must control his physical appetites and impulses, lest he become a "castaway" (i.e., disqualified). One must "possess his vessel in sanctification and honor," not in "lust and passion" (1 Thes 4:4-5). Spouses must "render due benevolence" to one another and not "defraud" one another (1 Cor 7:3, 5). Don't allow sin to "reign in your mortal body" by following impure emotions, passions, desires, and impulses. Avoid developing emotional attachments to people of the opposite sex beside your spouse. Be willing to take radical measures if necessary to prevent indulging your lusts (Mt 5:29-30).
- F. Instead of indulging your sinful appetites, "yield yourselves unto God...as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom 6:13). Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus (Mark 8:34). Sin does not have dominion over believers, and we must not yield to/indulge our sinful inclinations. Purify your heart (James 4:8) and "cleanse [yourself] from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor 7:1).

- G. Think on the right kinds of things (Phil 4:8). “Garbage in, garbage out” is a true saying. Refuse to allow defiling materials into your mind, whether through print, picture, or sound. Refuse to entertain impure thoughts. Force yourself to think on what is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, and praise-worthy. Replace the bad with the good.
- H. All Christians should dress modestly, especially Christian women. Men are certainly responsible for their own thoughts, but men may find it hard to maintain pure thoughts when sensually-clad women parade in front of them.
- I. For Christians, the solution to moral defilement is repentance, confession, and forsaking of sin (1 John 1:9). Although the blood of Christ continually cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7), Christians must still acknowledge their sin, turn from it, and leave it behind (Ps 28:7). Upon our confession, God cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Our sense of purity is restored.
- J. Developing purity within children
 - 1. As always, parents must set the example of purity and virtue for their kids. If children don’t see virtues in their own parents, it’s unlikely that they will pursue them for themselves. Of course, true virtue begins with salvation, so parents must seek the salvation of their children.
 - 2. Help children to see the value of living according to God’s standards rather than according to their own personal feelings and impulses. Help children control themselves.
 - 3. Help children to see the value of good manners, decency, and politeness.
 - 4. Ignorance of worldly defilement and ungodly activity is a blessing. Children don’t need to know about what wicked people do. Try to maintain childhood innocence until the child is ready to face reality. Slow, partial education regarding such things is likely best.
 - 5. Closely monitor what children are watching, reading, and listening to. The average age for exposure to pornography is around 11 years old, with many being exposed years before that. With internet porn a mere click or two away, parents must be very vigilant about this. Likewise, closely monitor the friends your child/children interact with. Friends are often the source of exposure to ungodly materials and ideas.

6. Prevent teenagers from developing romantic relationship before they are ready for marriage. The earlier teens begin dating, the more likely they are to engage in immoral activities. It's best to restrict dating relationships until the child is prepared for marriage—"if you are not ready to mate, you're not ready to date."