



The Reflector

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Abstain from Every Form of Evil

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Christians are to walk in the light even as their Lord is in the light. (1 John 1:7). Thus their lives are to be spent in practicing and promoting good, while refraining from and denouncing evil. They are called upon to abhor evil, (Romans 12:9) and to abstain from “every form” of it (1 Thessalonians 5:22 NKJ). Evil comes in many forms, some are very subtle, others are more blatant. As a Christian, one wants to please the Lord and keep his conduct above reproach. When he sins he corrects it as soon as he becomes aware of it – by repenting, confessing, and asking God’s forgiveness in prayer. (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-9). There are three basic forms of evil that we need to be aware of and seek to avoid.

Unconditional Evil

There are things that are inherently “unlawful” or “unclean” (2 Corinthians 6:17). Such things are evil, anywhere, anytime, for anyone.

Yes, I am aware that Paul wrote that there is “nothing unclean of itself” (Romans 14:14) and “all things are lawful.” (1 Corinthians 10:23). In these two verses, the “nothing” and “all” are limited by the context. In both cases, he was discussing the eating of certain meats. Because of the context, he is effectively saying “none of *these* things are unclean” and “all of *these* things are lawful.

It was inherently sinful (“not lawful”) for King Herod to have been married to his brother’s wife. (Matthew 14:4).

The “works of the flesh” and “such like” are

unconditionally evil. (Galatians 5:19-21). It is never right to steal (Ephesians 4:28). It is never right to lie (Revelation 21:8). It is never right to be a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a busybody. (1 Peter 4:15). There are no circumstances under which these things can be done without sinning.

It is unconditionally evil to teach a false doctrine or teach “for doctrine and commandments of men.” (Matthew 15:9, 13). John declares that those teachers who “abide not in the doctrine of Christ” have not God. And that we cannot facilitate nor encourage them in anyway without sinning. (2 John. 9, 10).

To be unconditionally evil, a thing does not have to be condemned by name in the Scriptures. It may be condemned by general biblical principles. Gambling, cheating on tests, embezzlement, mixed swimming, prom dancing and most other dancing are a few examples of such things.

Circumstantial Evil

If a thing is inherently evil, there are no circumstances that can make it good. However, if a thing is inherently good, it can be made evil by the circumstances. Unfortunately most of us only concern ourselves with avoiding just those things that can be proven to be sinful of themselves. There is more to consider than just whether a thing is lawful. One must consider whether the thing is expedient and edifying. (Romans 14:14; 1 Corinthians 10:23). Some things lawful within themselves can be so inexpedient under certain circumstances that they become sinful. For

example, Paul, after declaring that generally speaking it was lawful to eat meats that have been offered to idols, described circumstances under which such eating would be sinful (1 Corinthians 8:10-12).

One needs to be aware that he cannot indiscriminately practice such authorized liberties. Sure, these liberties are lawful, good, and right within themselves. However, if they are done at a time and place that causes another to be offended (stumble into sin) they become sinful to the one practicing them (Romans 14:15-21; 1 Corinthians 8:8-13). Also, unless one can do the thing with full assurance of faith rather than doubt it becomes sinful (Romans 14:14, 23). The apostle further indicates that if such lawful liberties destroy peace or hinder edification among brethren they should be avoided (Romans 14:19-20).

A thing can be good in one setting and evil in another. Paul said so much on the subject of eating meats offered to idols. It was good to buy it at the marketplace and take it home and eat it (1 Corinthians 10:25). It was also lawful to attend a neighbor's feast and eat whatever meat was served unless the neighbor states that the meat was offered to the idol – which would indicate that he was eating out of deference to the idol (1 Corinthians 10:27, 28). But what if the feast is in the idols temple? Paul indicates that this would be a circumstance where the probability of offense would be so great that the Christian could not attend and sit at the idol's table without sin (1 Corinthians 8:9-12; 10:16-22).

Then there are things that are morally good and beneficial, but religiously evil. Is a good practice for one to wash his hands before eating. It is not a good practice to do it as a religious act (Matthew 15:1-9). Cornbread and milk make a great and morally right supper. But they do not belong on the Lord's table. In fact, they would be evil there. Instrumental music can be culturally beneficial. But as an act of worship it is without divine sanction, and therefore sinful.

There is nothing inherently wrong with moving pictures, with or without sound, either on TV or the big

screen – but they can be made wrong by their content. The truth of the business is that most of these today have been made sinful due to their immoral, vulgar, profanity laced and licentious content. There is nothing sinful about a card game or spitting at a crack in the floor, but they can be made sinful by injecting gambling into the mix.

There is certainly nothing inherently wrong with brothers and sisters in Christ eating a common meal together unless they do it “as a church.” (1 Corinthians 11:18 NKJ). Such meals belong in the realm of the home (1 Corinthians 11:22, 34).

So, you see there are some things that are perfectly good that can be made wrong by the circumstances under which they are done. There is more to consider than just if a thing is lawful or morally upright of itself. One must consider the circumstances under which they are done.

Potential Evil

There are things that one would do well to avoid because of their potential for evil. There are actions that we take and relationships that we form that seem innocent enough in their initial stages that ultimately lead to very evil consequences. Sometimes these consequences may not be foreseeable. But quite often, they are foreseeable if one will take a good honest and objective look at their potential or propensity for evil.

I am not convinced that the Bible teaches that a Christian's marrying a non-Christian is inherently sinful. I have not found the passage or principle that definitely forbids it. Having said that, I cannot recommend or encourage the practice because of the high probability that it will likely lead to evil down the road. Because they do not share the same values there will likely be problems rearing their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”, budgeting their finances to include scriptural giving, choosing their recreation and entertainment, and how they spend their weekends. There are certain biblical standards that the Christian must appeal to in such matters that mean little to a non-Christian.

When Lot made his decision to “pitch his tent” toward Sodom, it may have seemed to him to have been an innocent move and a good business decision to choose those well watered plains of the Jordan (Genesis 13). No one could say that the move of itself was sinful. But given the reputation of those cities it should have been easy enough for him to see the potential for evil in such a move. He paid a dear price for his miscalculation.

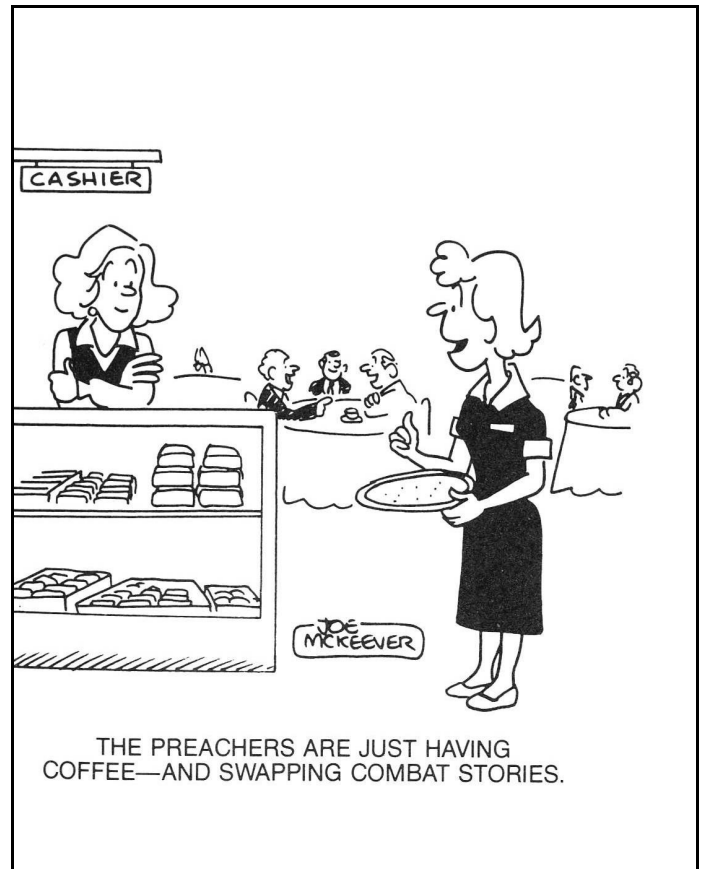
When we as individual Christians or as local churches are contemplating some project or course of action we would do well to take the long view. We need to ask, not only is this thing in its present form scriptural, but what is its potential for evil down the road? What is the track record of similar projects in the past? Are there any built-in potentials for abuse leading to evil? – edbragwell@gmail.com

Causing the Church to Grow

Thomas Thornhill

If you are interested in learning some methods that will guarantee an increase in church membership then continue to read this article, especially to the end. These methods will stir up interest and attract people of the community. I know they will work because the denominational world has been using them for years. Look at the results. These churches have seen their membership roles increase to the point that newer and larger buildings have to be built to accommodate the crowds. At the same times their leaders are also smart enough to realize that they must often change their methods in order to adapt to the changing world.

Many churches of Christ, who in time past, at least claimed to follow “The Old Paths” all the way back to Jerusalem are now using these same schemes with great success. You can know they are increasing by observing their large ornate buildings and multi-purpose centers. They have learned that in order to compete with the world, they must adapt to worldly standards. Following are some of the methods being currently practiced to increase their attendance and membership.



1. Let People Remain as They Are. This method tells people they do not have to change their lives very much. It would be great if they do so, but if not, accept them anyway. Ignore their sins. Let them remain in a sinful, sexually immoral relationship (either living together outside of wedlock, or an adulterous marriage). Let them continue to practice social drinking, swearing and so forth. Make sure no emphasis is placed on the demands of Jesus found in Lk.13:3, 5, “But unless you repent you will all likewise perish” or “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” Acts 17:30.

2. Let People Have Fun. The world loves entertainment and recreation, so the church needs to get involved in activities that will promote such activities. This will satisfy the physical cravings and at same time provide some type of religious atmosphere. It must work, for many churches have already or are presently building family life centers (multi-purpose buildings) which combine social and recreational activities. They cater to the physical side of man, but also offer

something to those who seem to profess an interest in saving the soul. This country club atmosphere, combined with the glitter of Hollywood techniques will bring in the crowd. Evidently Paul did not know that this method would work when he wrote; “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” Rom.14:17, and “many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is their shame – who set their mind on earthly things” Phil.3:18-19.

3. Appeal to Greed. Another method that can work to bring in the crowds is to tape \$10, \$20 bills under the seats of the church bus to be found by the one lucky enough to sit in those seats. Others offer door prizes, or have a contest to see who can bring the most new people in a set period of time, with the prize being a trip to some amusement park or ball game or some current video game, etc. Of course this method does away with the Biblical method of using the gospel of Christ as “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘the just shall live by faith’” Rom.1:16-17.

4. Believe What You Want. Don’t worry about having firm convictions. Don’t attempt to understand the Bible. Just believe in Jesus. Besides, you and I don’t have to understand the Bible alike. Everyone knows the book is too difficult to read so don’t read Eph.3:3-5 which teaches otherwise. People who believe this won’t have to be concerned with such scriptures as Jude 3; Eph.4:5 that teach there is only “one faith” which must be followed and defended as well as obeyed. Exhortations such as 2.Cor.13:5; 2.Tim.2:15 teaching people to search the scriptures to learn how to be approved of God are ignored.

By now you may be inclined to say, “But these methods are unscriptural.” You’re right, they are! Yet, you will have to admit they will stir up interest and bring in the crowds. Making the church secular like the

world does draw crowds and increase membership but it won’t get people into heaven. One might as well join some country club or some other similar organization, for membership in them will be just as effective before God as being a member of a church that ignores God’s will.

The only way to build up the Lord’s church in a scriptural, God-pleasing way is to follow the methods laid down in the book of Acts. Beginning with Pentecost, the early church enjoyed great growth, first 3000, then 5000, then a great multitude. This growth was no accident. Read Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 11:24; 16:5; 19:20. One thing is evident from these scriptures, when the preaching of the Word increased, so did the church. The early Christians utilized the true power of God, “The Gospel of Christ” Rom.1:16. The solution to church growth is not new and updated human schemes, but a concerted effort to scatter the seed (the word of God – Lk.11:8) into honest hearts. Increase the scattering of the seed and the membership will also increase.

The early church was possessed of no “magic” that made people listen. But, the members were totally committed to that which they believed, Jesus Christ the only true hope for mankind. They preached Jesus as the only way to God. They were dedicated to this task. They were bold as they spoke. Yet, in the midst of all this also found time to serve God with gladness of heart. They rejoiced even while they suffered, yet, never developed the “martyr’s complex.” They knew they were not perfect people, but they still tried to truly “practice what they preached.” The world understood then, as it does now, that people are not perfect. They despise the hypocrite, but respect those who recognize their own imperfections and are consistently trying to do better. So, Christian, be consistent in your life. Remember, following the truth will not make the church like the world, it will make it different. This is what the Lord requires. Scatter the seed. Be committed and concerned. Preach the gospel to others.

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— The Buckhorn Teacher