



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

August 2017

Godly Sorrow

Tom Moody

Are you overweight? As in my case, the answer may depend on when you ask. I know just what to do in order to get my weight where it ought to be, and sometimes I succeed. You know the secret as well as I. Don't eat "junk" food. Eat the right food moderately. Good eating habits combined with even minimal exercise will, for most people, maintain a reasonable degree of fitness.

Two things are in my favor. I enjoy exercise and I like good food. A meal of peas, greens and carrots, with a little cornbread to "sop it up," appeals to me. Most any kind of fruit is delicious and refreshing. Yet, alas, a major fault besets me. I also like the bad stuff hamburgers, french fries, candy bars and cake!

Now I can truthfully say that I enjoy eating those good healthy things more than the junk. If only I could somehow learn to detest hamburgers, develop a revulsion for ice cream and completely lose my appetite for cookies, chips and chocolate, the battle of the bulge could be won easily.

The same applies to the much more serious matter of sin. Genuine repentance from sin involves more than just wanting to do what is right. We must also learn to hate the wrong!

One of the dangers of the current popularity of emphasizing the "positive" and toning down the "negative" in our preaching is that we may be persuaded to try embracing the good without learning to let go of the worldly. Most can appreciate the attributes of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. This is good fruit, the fruit of the Spirit. There is, after all, no law against

these (Galatians 5:22-23). Oh, yes, I like good things. The hard part is learning to hate, detest and disdain evil. The devil will be very content with our love of the good as long as we retain an appetite for evil. In fact, we might even prefer that which is good, and Satan will be happy as long as we keep a little sin in, just for dessert.

Such a spiritual diet will not please God. For repentance to take effect, there must be a remorse, a grief over sin. When he agonized over sin, the Psalmist offered the "sacrifices" of "a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17). In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul wrote, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." He went on to note the effect that their godly grief for sin had had among the Corinthians: "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what avenging!" (7:11).

Godly sorrow over sin arises from the hatred of sin - hatred of its source, hatred of its end results. When we develop a true revulsion for sin, there will be wrought within us sorrow for our transgressions which will compel us to repent.

How Do We Learn To Hate Sin?

1. We need information. Just as proper nutrition is not determined by our personal tastes, neither is right and wrong determined by our feelings and opinions. We must learn the will of God. David said: "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). Those who diligently study the word of God will "have their senses exercised to discern both and

evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14).

The Bible not only defines sin, but is replete with information about its serious consequences. From the sin of Adam and Eve to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Bible teaches us that every injustice, every slight, all suffering and all death can be traced directly or indirectly to sin. Sin breaks up families, ends friendships, extinguishes the bright promise of youth, reduces the old to hopeless cynicism. Sin damns souls for eternity. The only escape from sin was the price which had to be paid by the sinless Son of God. Surely, any serious contemplation of the cost of sin must make us hate every sinful act with desperation.

2. We need transformation. Romans 12:1-2 concisely states the whole process we are discussing. Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Repentance is a turn-around, a change of heart. There must be, not mere reformation of action, but transformation of mind. When, out of that transformed mind, we learn to hate sin for what it is and what it does, we will come to recoil in penitent grief at its slightest touch. “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Romans 12:9). ■

Reacting to Immorality

Stephen Russell

There have been many words put to print lately about various trends of immorality in the world around us. In particular, our state has recently been involved in the ongoing debate surrounding homosexual marriage and there is a movie recently released that further glorifies other forms of sexual deviancy. What is the Christian to make of all of this? Shall we take up some political campaign or protest to show our dismay? Perhaps we should go along making no comment at all because all of this “really has nothing to do with us.” It is easy to get swept into one extreme reaction or another when such extreme positions are at play but let us not look to the world for our guide but to God’s word.

In the first place, we do want to recognize that the world is always going to be at odds with the will of God. Men of all points in history have believed in their own capacity to “make the world a better

place.” If we are not careful, we can get swept up in the notion that the right leader, the right law, or the right political system can save mankind. When God speaks of the world, He never speaks with the view that it will be saved but always to the view that the majority have always and will always turn away from Him (Matt. 7:13). That is not pessimism, that is reality of the history of God’s word and faith in what He says of the future. So, to some degree we must not allow ourselves too much shock and dismay when the world acts like...the world.

In addition to the recognition that the world is lost and dying, we also need to recognize the limitations of our place in this world. God has not called Christians to become political world leaders but to become quiet and consistent influences wherever they are. We influence by living lives that glorify God not ones that glorify a political party (Matt. 5:16). Our authority over those who defy God’s will is limited to those who are of our number and even that is only a matter of limiting our own contact with those persons (1 Cor. 5:9-12). So, while we may want to take some forceful action, that is simply not what God has called for. In fact, in a world that was at least as immoral as our own time, Paul called for Christians to pray for leaders to the end that we may live a “tranquil and quiet life” (1 Tim. 2:2).

Yet, while we should recognize the world for what it is and our limited capacity to bring about change, we don’t want to fall into the trap of thinking that such digressions in morality as we have seen in the last several decades are of no consequence to the Christian. In the first place, it is and should be a sorrowful thing to see immorality exalted. Some might say, “I am not surprised to see this.” Do you suppose the Lord was shocked to see the world digress into the state in which we find it in Genesis 6? The omniscient God is not shocked, but He is filled with sorrow (Gen. 6:6). We don’t need to become so calloused to sin that it fails to cause in us the reaction that it causes in God who has seen all the sin that has ever been committed and yet grieves. Many will mock us for our sorrow and even view our sorrow as another form of judgment. And yet like “righteous Lot” we are increasingly living in a world surrounded by sin and therefore our souls will be “tormented day after day by their lawless deeds” (2

Pet. 2:8). But take heart, God has promised that those who mourn are blessed, “for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4).

The other thing that we must do in the face of such tremendous opposition is keep the faith. When we look at the numbers we can begin to question the rightness of our beliefs or the effectiveness of our efforts to influence. But consider the influence of men of God in other ages of debauchery. Noah is said to have been a “preacher of righteousness” and would have been so for at least 100 years. Yet the result of his preaching was the preservation of only eight souls (2 Pet. 2:5). Isaiah is told to prophesy to the people not so that they would listen and change their hearts, but to, “Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed” (Isa. 6:10). Can you imagine being told that no one would listen but that you must go and preach anyway. The response to truth may not be what we would wish it to be in a world so full of sin. But if Isaiah could continue to proclaim the truth in the face of such opposition as that, then surely we can continue to proclaim it in face of what we see today.

It is a sinful world we live in. Let it break your heart, but let God also lift it back up. Don’t get carried away with the tactics of the world in trying to fight the world. But take up the armor of God and keep fighting on God’s terms (Eph. 6:12-18). And if you will do that, you will not win the world, but you and all those blessed few who will do likewise will most assuredly win the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8). ■

Majoring and Minor

Connie W. Adams

More and more we are hearing that “we need to major in the gospels and minor in the epistles.” What is that all about? What it is about is the so-called “new hermeneutic.” It places greater importance on what Jesus said and did than on what the apostles said and did. It is a part of the scheme to rid ourselves of the restraining influences of finding a direct statement, approved apostolic ex-ample or necessary inference to authorize our teaching and practice.

We have some among us who are terrorized by the ghost of tradition. Never mind that traditions

are sometimes approved and other times condemned. Paul wrote, “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (Phil. 3:17). He also said, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thess. 2:15). The church at Thessalonica was charged to “withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 Thess. 3:6). So, all traditions are not to be rejected.

The Source of Apostolic Teaching

Those who worry about putting too much emphasis on the epistles need to be reminded of the source of the message in the epistles. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth, bringing to their remembrance what Jesus had taught them, and revealing to them truth which Jesus had not expressed while with them in person. Read John 16:7-14. Paul said, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches” and then added, “But we have the mind of Christ”

(1 Cor. 2:13,16). “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord”

(I Cor. 14:37).

Now, if the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit, had the mind of Christ, and what they wrote were the words of Christ, how say some among us that we need to minor in the epistles?

New Testament congregations which received and obeyed apostolic instruction in the epistles were following the will of Christ. That is why Jude wrote, “But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 17). Those words were a pattern to shape our thinking and practice.

A “Better” Way?

Some of those who are weary of precept, approved apostolic example and necessary inference, tell us that this is not all bad but they have found a “better way,” that in addition to these means of establishing divine authority, we may add the three “P’s”, principle, purpose and perception. Older brethren will recall the time when E.R. Harper was trying to find divine authority for the Herald of Truth sponsoring church arrangement

and came up with “principle eternal.” He had no precept, no approved apostolic example and no necessary inference from the word of God, so he found it in “principle eternal.” But how do we know what principle to follow except in terms of what the word of God actually says? How do we know what purpose is to be served apart from divine instruction? How do we know what perception or perspective was present except from what is said in the text?

It is being argued that the only pattern for us is what we think Jesus would do. That is a subjective approach to religion. We “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith rests upon solid evidence, not subjective feelings and perceptions. The truth of the matter is that Jesus taught by the use of commands and precepts. What do you make of the Great Commission if that is not so? He “left us an example that we should follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). He also drew necessary conclusions (Matt. 22:23-33) or left it so that his hearers would do so.

There seems to be a terrible dread among some (especially some younger men) that they will do something which brethren have done before and therefore will fall into some theological rut from which they will not be able to extricate themselves. So they tinker with the order of the worship until it borders on disorder. They fear that worship will not be exciting enough. But exciting to whom? To us, or to our God? They must deliver us from boredom. But who is bored? Are we bored, or is God? Certainly worship ought to be offered from the whole heart. We ought not to go through empty rituals. But God has ordained certain acts of worship and who am I to say that he is bored when his children perform these acts in harmony with what God himself instructed us to do?

These are dangerous times. The only safe guide to see us through these times is the inerrant, eternal word of God. It is a perfect guide. Our eternal destiny is too important to entrust to the shifting sands of human opinion and subjective religion. “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psa. 11:3) Let’s hear what Jesus said in the gospels but let’s not minimize what he said in the epistles through Holy Spirit-guided apostles. That is also a part of the word that will judge us in the last day (Jn. 12:48-49).

Guardian of Truth - October 7, 1993 ■

Where Is the Pharmacy?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

The sign on the large building down the street says, “Pharmacy.” They are listed in the yellow pages under “Pharmacies.” I walk in the door and there is a huge soft drink and chips display. But, where is the pharmacy? Next there is a nice electronics and small appliance display. But, where is the pharmacy? There are shelves filled with cosmetics for both men and women? But, where is the pharmacy? Next I see the toys display. But, where is the pharmacy? After passing display after display I am getting desperate. Then I remember seeing a young lady behind a counter back up front. I go back up there and ask, “Miss, where is the pharmacy?” She says, “I will show you” and directs me to a very small area way back in the back corner of the building just behind the hardware display.

No, that did not really happen to me, but everyone knows it very well could have given the nature of the modern multi-product pharmacy. Now what about the following parallel situation?

The sign on the large building down the street says, “Church.” They are listed in the yellow pages under “Churches .” I need Bible knowledge on salvation and the Christian life. I walk in the door and there is an arrow pointing to the dining hall. But, where is the church? Next there is a nice poster with a picture of a sweat suit clad young man with an arrow pointing to the gym. But, where is the church? Then across the lobby is a door that says, “Youth Services” and another saying, “Singles Ministry” and still another saying, “Marriage Counseling” But, where is the church? Next I see the kindergarten display. But, where is the church? After passing several posters and door plaques I am getting desperate. Then I remember seeing a much smaller building at the side attached to this larger one by a walk way. I go check it out and sure enough there is a poster that reads “Contemporary Worship at 9 am, Traditional Worship at 11 am and Christian Rock Concert and 6 pm.” – I am still wondering “where is the church.”

I know I have taken some liberty with the word “church” by using it like many folks do by having it refer to the building. I know the church is not the building but the people. But, I think you can get the point of the parallel. ■