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OUR MOTIVE DETERMINES OUR PATH

Jim Stauffer

Jesus said, *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 6:1)* He said this principle played out in the lives of hypocrites who gave to the poor and prayed on street corners to be seen of men.

We have all heard the complaints of the world about hypocrites in the church. Of course the same people walk among many more hypocrites in the world and never utter a word about that. The fact is, however, no one respects a hypocrite.

There is an oft quoted principle concerning teamwork and sacrifice; "A man may do an immense deal of good, if he does not care who gets the credit for it." It is ironic that determining who actually initiated this thought is vague at best. Who cares who said it. Rather let us be guided by it.

Jesus said to His disciples after washing their feet, *"You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (John 13:13,14)* Jesus *did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mat. 20:28)* It is imperative we learn to be servants as Jesus was. Anyone who desires to be a disciple of Christ must willingly accept the criteria Jesus enunciated to lose his life here in sacrifice in order to gain the life there through reconciliation to God **(Mat. 16:24,25).**

That leads me to the discussion of the state of religion in the world today. We have religion on the front pages represented by multimillionaires flying around the country in their personal aircraft raking in huge profits

while claiming to be the humble servants of Jesus! The same Jesus who said, *the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. (Luke 9:58).* The same Jesus who said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. (John 13:16)*

These men are then contrasted with the true disciples of Jesus who had no concerns about wealth, but instead gave their lives literally for standing firmly for the message of Jesus. What would Stephen, James the brother of John, Paul, Peter and Andrew think of today's televangelists and their material fortunes? Every one of the twelve with the possible exception of John died a martyr's death in defense of the truth of Christ's message. None of them profited materially by their preaching. They were supported with the necessities of life by their brethren.

They refused to change the message of the gospel to even save their physical lives, let alone pervert it so they could maximize profits as a result.

Listen carefully to the message of such men as Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland and others of such ilk and compare it to what you read from Jesus and His disciples and you will recognize them as those who would *pervert the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:7).*

As one might expect, their followers far outnumber those of Christ. His message is much more rigid as represented by His own quote, *"For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt. 7:14)*

DEVIANT CELEBRITIES

Most folks agree that what we put into our bodies will affect our health. Nicotine, high concentrations of fat, and excessive amounts of food will harm our bodies, according to many studies. Similar studies show that fruits, vegetables, grains, etc. will enhance our physical well-being. Few would disagree with these conclusions.

The same people, however, question whether this principle applies to the mind. Many will contend that man can bombard his mind with indecency, perversion, deviant behavior, and other forms of mental trash and not be affected. We have personally argued for years that those who filter garbage through their minds will ultimately taint their thinking and transform their beliefs about sin. We may now be getting help from a sociologist and an English professor, who recently conducted a study that will soon be published in the *Journal of Popular Culture*.

Vicki Abt, sociologist, and Mel Seesholtz, English professor, both of Penn State University, studied 20 episodes each of the Phil Donahue, Sally Jesse Raphael, and Oprah Winfrey shows. These shows deal with such deviant behavior as a grandmother having sex with her paper boy, a husband committing adultery with his mother-in-law, girls who love to go out with trashy guys, skin-heads who want to kill Jews, and—you get the idea.

The two researchers, as reported in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, concluded: “If you see shows about men who sleep with their mothers-in-law enough, you get used to these things.” And “if you see this all the time, the man who doesn’t sleep with his mother-in-law will eventually become strange.”

Normally, Americans would be incensed by this kind of behavior. But, according to Abt and Seesholtz, in time with enough of these shows TV viewers can be desensitized—hardened and passionless toward such perversions. The same, of course, is true with “soaps,” where it is normal to hop in and out of bed with every man/woman except your husband/wife. Watch it enough and one becomes, in Paul’s words, “past feelings” about the sin of adultery (**see Eph 4:17-19**). Deviants have become instant celebrities and full-time agents comb the country dredging up the scummiest of slime to feature on these talk shows. The shows themselves advertise for the weirdest, wackiest, wildest, “wantonest,” “weaselest,” and “warpest” dregs of the human race. And, lest we forget, they do this because this is what people want to watch.

“Our culture used to give us boundaries,” says Abt. “Today, there are no boundaries. Nothing is forbidden, anymore. Television emphasizes the deviant so that it becomes normal.” And, according to the *Post-Dispatch*, “Abt said the daily dosages of distress and dilemma

have become more acceptable for viewers over time. The results, she said: Television prompts people’s actions rather than vice versa.” In other words, the constant ooze of sleaze from TV into the mind blurs the line between right and wrong. And once the line is blurred or obliterated conduct is affected.

Even as a child I could see that when you pour blackberry juice through cheese cloth to make jelly, the cloth is stained and turns black. So it is with the mind. Filter enough evil thoughts through man’s mind and it will be drenched and blackened with the corrupt and twisted ideas of Satan and the world. Continue the process day after day and that man will either become indifferent to sin, embrace sin, or both. It was our Lord who said that evil thoughts enter a man and defile him (**Matt 15:18-20**).

Do Christians really want the kind of society which deviants produce and in which they are celebrated? Surely not! We, then, must wake up to the corrupting influence of “talk shows,” “soaps,” “tabloid journalism,” “pornography and trash literature,” and the “movies.” Reject these shows and this kind of garbage and think on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, praiseworthy, and virtuous (**Php 4:8**).

L. A. Stauffer, kirkwoodcoc.org,

Reprint from the 1990s

Idiotic Things People Say, V

Last week we began dealing with the statement “I don’t have to go to church to be a good Christian.” We began with the obfuscation that “Sitting in church doesn’t make you Christian any more than sitting in a chicken coup will make you a chicken.” This is true but not the issue at hand. The issue is that you can’t tell the Lord that you’re not going to do what He said to do and still expect to go to heaven. It’s just that simple!

Well, did Jesus (or the Holy Spirit who inspired the New Testament) tell us to go to church? YES! It was the custom of the First Century Christians, **Acts 2:41-47; 4:31; 20:7; James 2:2; 1 Cor. 5:4**. We also read that the writer of Hebrews told the Jewish Christians to whom he wrote, “*not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh*”, **Hebrews 10:25**. He does not single out any particular assembly but refers to all meetings of the congregation of which we are a member by referring to the “assembling”, not the “assembly”. Yes, it seems that some folks just didn’t want to go to church even in the first century.

By forsaking the assembly they miss out on the encouragement of NOT BEING ALONE. Even Luna Lovegood in The Harry Potter series knew that thinking you are alone has a weakening effect on a person (Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix). We who

are dealing with eternal truths ought to be at least that perceptive.

Also, God-fearing and good men also do not get before a crowd of people and rebuke their sin in order to be popular. I'm just saying.

Cleveland Reddinger

The Evidence of Spiritual Life is Love 1 John 3:11-24

God created family to be a blessing, but from the beginning it was a battlefield. The first married couple hindered and blamed each other. Their children hated and killed each other. Their lack of love led to spiritual and physical death.

So, God created a new family in Christ—His church. They are clearly identified, not by size, shape or color, but by the practice of genuine love. “Christ-like love” is the spiritual DNA marker that identifies the true children of God (**Eph. 5:1-2**).

The apostle John wrote to churches who desperately needed a way to identify God's true children. Some of their friends left the local church claiming to have superior knowledge to the apostles (**1 John 2:18-27**). They possessed the “real truth.” They were God's “real children.” Everyone claimed to be in God's family, so how could they distinguish the true from the false?

John provides three markers of the Divine parentage. First, faith is rooted in the sufficient message of the apostles (**1 John 2:18-27—Doctrinal**). Second, behavior is characterized by purity (**1 John 2:28-3:10—Moral**). Third, and the easiest to detect, God's children love each other (**1 John 3:11-24—Social**). Love is the language God's children are taught from birth.

“This is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (**1 John 3:11**) God's love made us His children (**1 John 3:1**), and we continue in the family only so long as we express that love to others. What a wonderful and most challenging truth!

Cain: The Lack of Brotherly Love (3:12-15)

However, sometimes love is lost between brothers. This is more than a tragedy. It is the work of *“the evil one”* (**3:12**). It aligns us with Cain who murdered his brother, was cursed by God, and cast out of society. At the root of this hostility is a hatred of righteousness. The truth of God is offensive to those who want to practice sin (**3:12; John 3:19-20**), and they seek to destroy God's family with hatred and violence (**1 Pet. 4:3-4**). John's readers personally experienced this sting of persecution (**3:13; John 15:18-19; 17:14; 16:1-4**).

God's children should respond to such hatred with deeper love, especially for each other. Love is the evidence of our spiritual life. *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the*

brothers” (**3:14**). No one can rightly claim God as their Father when they fail to love His children! Conversely, each act of love deepens our confidence that we have *“eternal life abiding”* in us (**3:15**).

Jesus: The Definition of Brotherly Love (3:16-18)

Cain is an example of the world's hatred for God's children, but Jesus is our model of how to love God's children. Love is more than sweet sentimentality. Love is exquisitely defined by Jesus. Like a line out of a dictionary, John writes, *“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us”* (**3:16**). Love is about laying down “self” for others. And we expect John to continue with, “So lay down your life for Jesus,” but he does not! He says, we respond to the love of Jesus by *“laying down our lives for the brothers”* (**3:16**). Love is the daily act of laying down our time, money and ambitions, to do what is spiritually best for others.

John wants us to see how practical this love must be. Love must go beyond “word and talk” into practical “deeds” (**3:18**). We must open our eyes to see the needs of our spiritual family. These needs must then move our hearts to use all the varied resources God gives us to help them. This is how we know *“God's love abides in us”* (**3:17**). Expressing genuine, practical love for God's family is what identifies you as God's child.

Confidence: The Blessing of Brotherly Love (3:19-24)

Once the mind understands Christ-like love, the conscience begins to wrestle with it. “Do I really love my spiritual family with the sacrificial intimacy of Jesus?” If Jesus worshiped with my church, how would He love the family of God? Am I loving them like that? Call your conscience to bear witness: “Do your actions demonstrate that you love God's family?” Be honest. Your conscience stands before the Judge who knows the truth. Ultimately, His verdict is all that matters (**see 3:19-21**).

When our conscience gives evidence of brotherly love it results in a tremendous confidence that we are God's child! *“We have confidence before God”* that *“we abide in God and God in us”* (**3:21,24**), because we love His family.

Armed with the love of Jesus we can pray powerful prayers (**3:22**) that Jesus will answer (**John 15:7**). Our prayers will not be selfish or worldly. They will be filled with the needs of others for their eternal good and God's glory.

It is often said, “The breakdown of the family results in the ruin of a nation.” However, when there is a breakdown of love in God's family the consequences are more than tragic. Some churches live in a post-war rubble because of a lack of love. However, every sacrificial service, every kind act, every forgiving word, every generous gift builds up the family of God so the world can see our Father. So, go ahead. Be His child and love His family...He does!

Tim Jennings; timj.theway@hotmail.com Taken from focusmagazine.org

Eph. 2:19 *So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord;*

1 Pet. 2:9 *But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

Psa. 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

HOURS OF WORSHIP

Sunday A.M. 9:30 Bible Study

Sunday A.M. 10:20 Assembled Worship

Sunday P.M. 5:00 Assembled Worship

Wednesday P.M. 7:00 Bible Study and Worship

Visitors welcome

We conduct in home Bible Studies

We offer Correspondence Courses

Evangelist and Editor Jim Stauffer

Elders Ron Peck and Jim Stauffer

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JAN PATRICK, STEPHEN KIMKER,
CHRISTIE CARTER, J.T. PECK AND
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VICKIE TOMLINSON, MCALLEN, TX. IS
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SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE CLASS:
RELIGIOUS CONFUSION - JIM
STAUFFER

WEDNESDAY BIBLE CLASS:
ECCLESIASTES - BYRON TAYLOR

SUNDAY SERMON: LABORERS IN THE
VINEYARD



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10