

GRACE & TRUTH



THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

**So if the Son sets you free,
you will be free indeed.**

JOHN 8:36



TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH

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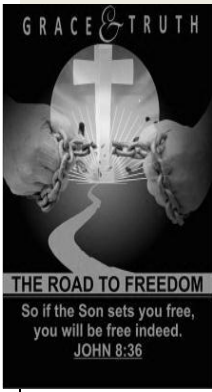
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Editor's Desk

We welcome you to read and profit from 'Grace & Truth', a publication of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi. We believe there is a very great need for serious Biblical literature to be produced in our country of Kenya. We trust your soul will be fed and that you will be challenged from the Word of God. We welcome feedback from you by letter, phone or email. Please also visit us on the web at: www.trinity.or.ke

Keith Underhill

GRACE & TRUTH Magazine



Cover: Jesus declares "*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.*" (John 8:34). *All have sinned* (Romans 3:23) and therefore all are slaves to sin. Only Christ by His death can set us free from guilt and condemnation of sin. For He is the way, the truth and life. He frees from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. "*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*" (John 8:36)

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Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible.

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM *John Muketha*

The Bill of Rights in the Constitution spells out the rights and fundamental freedoms to be enjoyed by the people of Kenya. These include freedom of conscience, religion and opinions; freedom of expression; freedom of the media; freedom of association; freedom of movement and residence and freedom to make political choices and participate in free and fair election; among others. These rights and fundamental freedoms are great, but even if every Kenyan truly enjoyed these rights and freedoms, it would not make us a happier society. This is because each individual is born a slave with no spiritual freedom.

The Bible states that “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin”. (John 8:34). People are blinded to think that they are free to do as they please. They don’t realize that they are under the power of sin as Satan holds them captive. The slaves to sin are not even aware of their bondage and are actually spiritually dead. They are enslaved to a power that is beyond their ability to master. The corruption that is rampant in the country is a result of a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. (Jeremiah 17:9).

True spiritual freedom that lasts forever is what we need. John Piper (DesiringGod.org) states that: “You are fully free when you have the desire, the ability, and the opportunity to do what will leave you with no regrets forever.” This freedom comes from knowing Christ through genuine faith and abiding in His word. (John 8:31). Christ by His death has secured true freedom from the dominion of sin and belonging to the household of God.

Jesus saves us from the power of sin and also the penalty for sin. He was damned on our behalf (Galatians 3:13). He frees us from the dominion of sin by changing our nature and making us a brand new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). When Christ returns, He will save us from the very presence of sin. As we wait for that day, let us remain rooted in His word and sanctifying truth which truly liberates. *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

(John 8: 36)

EPHESIANS 2:2-3

1. A THREEFOLD SLAVERY

The boundaries of our knowledge of God's creation are constantly being pushed back, whether in the area of outer space, the particles in the atom, the DNA structure of the human genome, not to mention the cyber space. But there is one area where it seems no advance is being made – the knowledge of **ourselves** as human beings. Look at our world which is so full of resources, knowledge, good laws, fair speeches, international organizations, but ... there seems to be no end to wars, fighting for power, strife, abuse of the body, selfishness. Have you ever asked the question, 'Why is the world like this?' It is to the God who records the creation and fall of man in the Bible that we look for the true psychology, what we are by nature, and why we live the way we do. The passage before us is designed to show our hopeless condition unless God powerfully intervenes. The basic misunderstanding is to think that we are *free* to do whatever we choose, whenever we choose; that human beings are basically good and reasonable. This is tragic falsehood of the highest order. The Bible is very clear that there are three forces or powers that determine the way we live. We will use the language of slavery to describe them as we cannot free ourselves from them; only the Lord can free us!

1. We Are Slaves To The World

“following the course of this world” (2:2)

“Following” has the idea of walking according to a path that has already been laid out, that is, the course of this world. “This world” is not the inhabitable earth, but the world of men living in opposition to God, having an attitude of refusal that God should rule over them (1 Corinthians 1:20-21, James 1:27, 1 John 2:15-17). “Course” translates the word ‘age’, which refers to this present time in history which is characterized by evil (Romans 12:2, Galatians 1:4). What is the path or example that is followed? People follow their fellows on earth rather than God's heavenly kingdom, the present transient age rather than the eternal age to come (see 2 Corinthians 4:18). By nature all live for what they can see, what they can have in this life. People live for eating and drinking, for entertainment, for possessions, for success, even for education and family. How do we know this is true? It is what they are always talking about, it is what they are spending their time doing. If God is there at all, only lip service is paid to Him, just a formality trying to cover all bases in the hope of future favour.

2. **We Are Slaves To The Devil**

“following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (2:2)

The devil is not taken seriously today. Perhaps it is because he cannot be seen. But is there any real explanation for all the trouble and evil in the world, unless he exists? The Bible explains that it was because of the devil that sin entered the world (Genesis 3), and Job went through such great sufferings (Job 1-2); and it was because of the devil that the Jewish leaders refused to believe in our Lord (John 8:43-44). There is a prince or ruler over all the evil forces in the region of air around us (so Matthew 12:24). Three times Jesus calls him the “ruler” of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). If he is a ruler then he works powerfully in the world, but he is a spirit characterized by disobedience to God. He controls externally as the ruler of all the spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12), and internally in our thoughts, affections and desires. He was behind Peter’s adamant refusal that Jesus should be killed (Matthew 16:23), Judas’ betrayal (Luke 22:3), Ananias and Sapphira’s lies (Acts 5:3), the claims of the false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:14-15), and heretical doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Yet none of them knew this because they were deceived. Let me ask you. You know there is a God in heaven who made you and to whom you are responsible, so why do you not live your life in subjection to Him? One of the answers is that the devil has put thoughts into your mind to excuse you. It could be that the so-called claims of science are true; or God’s warnings of judgement are only scare tactics; that God is love so there will not be any final judgement; you are not as bad a sinner as others who certainly deserve judgement. Although the devil is not divine, but only a created being, let us not doubt his power (the same word used of God in 1:19-20). Now we begin to understand why there is so much killing (of all kinds) and lying, for he was a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (John 8:44).

3. **We Are Slaves To The Flesh**

“among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of body and mind” (2:3)

Someone says, ‘Maybe this is true of pagans, idolaters, the poor and illiterate who know no better.’ But Paul confesses that it is equally true of him and his fellow Jews. The most wicked things were done by the Pharisees in the name of God, and they were most religious people. Yet they were proud, hypocritical, unjust and murderers! This flesh within is an ally of the devil and world without. The “flesh” is my human nature as a sinner (Romans 7:18, 8:4-8) as opposed to the Spirit of God indwelling and controlling me. The

works of the flesh include anything that I can do without the Spirit of God (Philippians 3:3-6, Galatians 5:19-21).

- The flesh has “passions” (lusts), here things contrary to God’s will.
- These passions give rise to “desires” (wills), a determination and plan to fulfil them. They can be for the baser appetites of the “body”, or the more refined ones of the “mind”. For example, one person finds life fulfilled in entertainment, another in incessant study, but both are of the flesh.
- The desires are “carried out” in practice (see James 1:14-15). For example, King Ahab had a passion for Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kings 21). When it was refused him he sulked and did not eat. With his wife he made plans, and when they were fulfilled he got possession of the coveted thing.

The flesh, sometimes called Original Sin, or the sin with which we are born, is our problem. It is the source from which life flows, and so determines the character of our life (Matthew 12:33-35). Because the source is sinful, everything coming forth from it is also sinful. If there is going to be change the source must be changed. We can no more change our nature (the flesh) than we can make ourselves alive. This is why conversion is a work of God’s immeasurable power, changing our nature, taking out the heart of stone and putting in a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), giving a new birth (John 3:1-8). Are you such a Christian? Can you say, ‘Once I was a slave to sin, now I have been set free’? And do you give all the credit to God’s work in Jesus Christ and nothing to yourself?

2. CONDEMNED!

“and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (2:3)

It is an awful moment when the Judge bangs the table for silence, a hush descends over the courtroom, the sentence is pronounced, the accused is found guilty and sentenced to death. The audience groans. Ephesians 2:3 is such a pronouncement: You may not think your condition is very serious, that God will not punish you because your good deeds are more than your bad ones, or because you are religious unlike many others. But it does not matter what you think about yourself; the attitude of the Judge is the only thing to take into account. We shall ask three questions.

(1) **What Is God’s Attitude Towards Us?**

You have heard it so many times, everyone is told, ‘God loves you, God is good all the time’. This is wonderfully true for the Christian; otherwise we are described as *“children of wrath”*. Wrath is anger. In God it is a constant, unvarying opposition to all evil, that must result in punishment (Exodus 34:6-7, Romans 1:18, 2:8-9, Colossians 3:6, Revelation 19:15). See how terrible is

God's wrath in the great Flood, the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the extermination of the Canaanites. It is no different under the New Testament, for there is predicted the great tribulation at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; and above all the cross of our Lord. Don't try to soften it by responding, 'God hates the sin but loves the sinner'. It is the person who sins and, as the one responsible, receives the judgement (see John 3:36, Ephesians 5:6). "Children of wrath" is a Hebraism, a strong Hebrew way of saying, this is true, the person surely deserves wrath and it will come (see 2 Samuel 12:5, where "deserves to die" literally is 'son of death'). This is the awful truth of Scripture from beginning to end, that God is so opposed to the sinner that eternal judgement shall surely fall on all who do not repent. You may think God is not angry with you because life is proceeding quite well, but so it was in the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:26-30), like the calf fattened for the slaughter.

(2) For How Long Has God Had This Attitude?

Did it develop as we grew up passing out of the so-called innocence of childhood? Is it as we have grown up into adulthood and have deliberately chosen our way instead of God's way? No! It is "*by nature*", at birth, naturally as we came out of the womb (see Galatians 2:15). That beautiful bundle of flesh over which we rejoice at birth is actually a 'child of wrath', liable to punishment from the beginning of its existence. Consider Psalm 51:5, 58:3, Romans 5:12 that God's wrath is the result of Adam's one act of disobedience. Think about it: If death is the wages of sin then why do little children die (see Romans 5:13-14)? When Adam fell and was condemned, the whole human race fell in and with him, and all are born guilty. Any child born into a royal family is automatically a royal person. We do not become sinners because we make a practice of sin; but we are born sinners by nature, and so are under God's wrath. Contrary to what so many think today, children are not born innocent and then shaped by their environment. The best education and good governance will never produce a super human race, otherwise graduates and citizens from democracies would be the most moral persons.

(3) Towards Whom Does God Have This Attitude?

- **First**, Paul writes "*we*", so especially including Jews, the very people God had chosen. Do not think that such condemnation before God is only true of pagan idolaters who bow down to wood and stone, and who practice unmentionable wicked deeds, such as the Canaanites. It is true of the very Jews who had all the privileges of the law, the covenant, the promises and the temple. At best they were only outwardly righteous; in reality they

were hypocrites and full of pride. If there is anything that calls down the wrath of God it is false religion.

- **Second**, Paul includes “*the rest of mankind*”, so especially including Gentiles. None are left out, all are included, wherever and whenever they may be. (Romans 3:9,23). This attitude of wrath is how God looks upon the whole human race, all descended from Adam. We may be proud of our development, and there is much for which to be thankful. But God sees the ways that such development is use for increasing sin – use of our new roads, alcohol and tobacco become more accessible, new resources are used for self-aggrandizement.

Why is it so necessary to understand these things?

1. It shows up the many false philosophies of this world. Children are not innocent, basically good and improving. The environment does not make all the difference. Universal education and a better constitution will not solve all problems. Salvation by works is impossible.

2. Until you have some understanding you will not put all your trust in Jesus Christ as you will not see your helplessness and great need. It is as if you just have a headache and you only need a few panadols of religion. But your need is so great because you are spiritually dead, not free but a slave, and under God’s condemnation.

3. Only then will you begin to see the wonder of God’s love in Christ, why the Son of God had to come and die if there was to be any hope of salvation, for God’s wrath is what we deserve. One had to come, born of woman, to live the life of perfect obedience which we cannot, and to die in our place for our sins. So Paul moves on in v. 4 to “But God...!”.

THE LIFE OF DAVID (3) Keith Underhill

DAVID AND JONATHAN: CHRISTIAN LOVE (1 Samuel 18-23)

David returned from the great victory over Goliath the Philistine and spoke with King Saul. Jonathan, Saul’s son, had seen the great victory, and heard the conversation. From that very day they became the deepest friends (18:3). This friendship is a wonderful Old Testament example of Christian love. Before describing the friendship, there are two observations to be made.

- Observe God’s providence in bringing about this fellowship of friendship. David’s very successes were about to bring upon him the wrath of Saul (18:8-9). How much David would need a true friend, and especially one from the

household of Saul, to enable him to escape his wrath. Let us learn to discern God's hand at work in those God brings into our lives as true friends.

- Jonathan was the heir apparent and he could easily have seen in David just a rival for the throne. Yet he never turned away from David in unfaithfulness even when it became obvious to him that David would be the next king, and not himself. This is what makes it such a graphic example of love.

1. Why did Jonathan love David?

Jonathan saw and heard something in David which knit his soul together with David's. Friendship can only start with a common bond; the deeper the bond, the deeper the friendship. He observed that same courage and faith in David that he himself had displayed, as in 1 Samuel 14:6ff. He would have felt the need of David to be further strengthened in courage and faith in the Lord. What blessings he hoped to receive by being his close friend. Note that Jonathan had nothing to gain by way of earthly advantage; indeed it would be to his disadvantage (see 1 Samuel 20:30-31). He coveted spiritual blessings through David to bring him to the Lord. It is this spiritual bond that you ought to look for, that young people ought to look for in one another, and that one should seek in a marriage partner. So seek close fellowship with one who will benefit you spiritually. Don't look for that material advantage that the world seeks for in friendship which tends to self-destruction.

2. How did Jonathan love David?

(1) *Sharing personal belongings* (18:4). David needed to look the part of a warrior not of a shepherd in order to fight the battles that lay ahead of him. True love will always give what the other needs, where it is possible (see 1 John 3:17).

(2) *Protecting from danger* (19:1-3). Jonathan warned David of his mortal danger, and that from his own father (Saul). Love always considers the interests of others and so acts (see Philippians 2:4).

(3) *Reconciling with an enemy* (19:4-7). Jonathan spoke such good words about David to his father, reminding him of the debt he and all Israel owed to David, and that it would be sin to kill him. This is the great character of a Christian, a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9).

(4) *Being trustworthy* (20:12-13). David was forced to be on the run from King Saul. Jonathan assured David that he would always tell him the truth about his father's attitude, whether positive or negative. Deep friendship cannot exist where such important things are hidden, especially in adversity (Proverbs 17:17, 18:24). Do you have the character of utter dependability in which friendship can grow? Is your 'yes' yes, and your 'no' really no?

(5) *Continuing loyalty* (20:14-15). David promised not to cut off his steadfast love from the descendants of Jonathan forever, and Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, and not just David himself. See also 20:23,42, and

see Proverbs 27:10. True friendship is not an on and off thing; it even seeks to include friends of friends. David actually did this to Mephibosheth, a surviving son of Jonathan (2 Samuel 9).

(6) *Never being jealous* (20:13-16, 23:17). God had appointed David as the next king, and not Jonathan. He was willing to take this lesser place. True friendship is when we can rejoice in the blessings and success of the other from the heart.

(7) *Showing sacrifice* (20:33). Jonathan was ready to endanger his own life. By defending David before his father he almost lost his own life, but he was willing to do this to protect his friend David (see 20:4, and 1 John 3:16).

(8) *Encouraging in difficulties* (23:16-17). This is the last time it is recorded that they met in the flesh. Jonathan actually sought out his friend and “strengthened his hand in God”. He assured him that God promise that he should be king would come to pass despite Saul’s hatred. A true friend is a great encourager.

Conclusions

1. As a Christian, you need to actively seek out such friendships. Do not just wait for them to fall into your lap. Depend upon divine providence (18:1ff., 23:16-17). Maybe you complain of lack of fellowship. What are you doing about it? Do you see more clearly now how great are our responsibilities towards each other as we are commanded to love one another?

2. The ultimate pattern for our relationships is Christ’s great love for us. He gains nothing from loving us; He only sacrifices Himself. All He does is for our good. He gave His life for us, He protects us from being destroyed by evil, He is faithful to the end, He draws near with special grace in our times of peculiar need.

Such friendships are only possible in Christ who so loved us. Do you see how everything always comes directly back and centres in Christ? Until you first humble yourself and receive God’s love in Jesus Christ as your only hope, you will never learn to love others in return (see 1 John 4:11). We proclaim to you the mutual love of David and Jonathan, but more than that, the infinitely greater love of God in Christ to sinners. Jonathan loved David because of his courage and faith; God loves us though we are rebel sinners. What possible reason can there be to refuse such love?

What made you become a member of the church where you are? Is it because of the faithful preaching of the word of God? I hope that is a great part of it. Or could it be just because of the tantalizing music? I hope it is because of a godly, faithful pastoral care.

But what do you expect from your pastor? The pastor factor plays a big role in the choice of a church. A pastor is first and foremost expected to be scripturally qualified, according to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. You cannot separate the work of the pastor and his qualifications. Simply put your pastor should be a holy man: above reproach in his personal conduct, above reproach with his relation to his family, and above reproach in his ministry. Unless the pastor is a godly man, he will not do you much good, even if he is an excellent teacher and preacher.

What is his work? Peter, exhorts the elders (this is the most common term in Scripture referring to the pastors), to *shepherd the flock of God by exercising oversight* (1 Peter 5:2). They are to do this *not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have them*. They are not to do it *for shameful gain* or for money, *but eagerly*. They must not be *domineering over those in their charge, but being examples to the flock*.

What is shepherding the flock of God?

Shepherding is the same as pastoring – it is the same word. We can discern the work of a shepherd from the rest of the Scripture. In Psalm 23 David, who was himself a shepherd, writes about the Lord as his Shepherd. He says the following:

The shepherd makes sure that the sheep are not lacking anything (v. 1). This is the general statement and it plays out in the following areas:

- a) He feeds the flock (v. 2)
- b) He leads them in righteousness (v. 3)
- c) He protects the flock from danger (v. 4)
- d) He keeps, cares or tends the flock (vv. 5-6)

Ezekiel spoke against the elders of Israel because they had failed in caring for the flock of God that was among them (chapter 34). It must be said that there are too many pastors who should face this indictment for the way they have dealt with the flock of God. They devour, destroy and kill the flock. Shame on them!

But we learn from this indictment what God expects the elders to do:

- a) Feed the sheep (vv. 2,3)
- b) Strengthen the weak (v. 4)
- c) Heal the sick (v. 4)
- d) Bind up the injured (v. 4)
- e) Bring back the straying ones (v. 4)
- f) Seek the lost (v. 4)
- g) Rule with gentleness (v. 4)

The Lord called Himself the Good Shepherd in John 10:11. We can understand the work of a shepherd from His example. He said, “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*” The shepherd should be willing to *lay down his own life*, and suffer for the sake of his sheep, to protect them from wolves. This is what Christ did – He laid down His life even to the point of death. He died to purchase the flock with His own blood!

How many of the under-shepherds are willing to do this for the blood-bought flock of God? Unless the pastor is willing to sacrifice his comforts, and sometimes personal cares to tend the flock, he will not be a faithful shepherd. How much is your pastor willing to give in terms of time to serve the church? Pastoral ministry is a 24/7 service. There may be no time to rest. Unless one is prepared to count the cost, and give his all, he cannot be a faithful and effective pastor.

Paul set this example of shepherding in Ephesus. Speaking to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-38, he explained how his ministry was among them as the paradigm for theirs. He said:

1. He served the Lord with all humility and tears and with trials.
2. He did not withhold anything that was profitable to them, but declared the whole counsel of God. A true pastor must be committed to preaching through the whole Bible – Genesis to Revelation!
3. He taught them in public and from house to house.
4. He did not discriminate, but testified both to Jews and to Greeks.
5. He urged a response of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
6. He was not afraid of sufferings and persecutions such as imprisonments and other forms of affliction.
7. He did not account his life of any value or precious to himself.
8. He was interested in finishing his course and ministry that he received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
9. He pleaded innocence of anyone’s blood, and very clearly says that he coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel.
10. He worked hard both in ministry and with his own hands (in tent-making) to cater for his own needs and those of his companions.

Any pastor who is committed to this level of faithfulness will fulfil his ministry. It is on the basis of this pattern that Paul exhorts these pastors to do the following in their own ministry:

1. Pay careful attention to themselves and to all the flock.
2. As overseers appointed by the Holy Spirit, they are to care for the church of God.
3. To be alert and so protect the church from the wolves (false teachers/prophets) who were to come both from within and without.
4. To admonish people, even with tears.
5. To commend them to God and to His Word of grace which is able to build them up and to give them inheritance.
6. To work hard and so help the weak.

Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus in the pastoral letters are instructive to us on the work of the pastor. This work can be classified as follows:

Personal conduct:

- a) Paul gave his own testimony of conversion (1 Timothy 1:12-17). The point is that every single pastor should be one who has been truly saved from his sins, and has been made alive in Christ.
- b) Men who exercise oversight must themselves be godly in their conduct. They *must keep a close watch on themselves and their teaching* (1 Timothy 4:16).
- c) Private discipline to godliness and study (1 Timothy 4:7).

Care for the flock:

- a) Teaching and preaching.
- b) Prayer.
- c) Visitation.
- d) Comforting the grieving and the bereaved.
- e) Interviewing new applicants for membership.
- f) Private counselling.
- g) Providing forum for accountability and discipline.
- h) Recommending excommunication to unrepentant members.

The teaching ministry:

- a) **Discipleship** – *And what you have heard from me ... entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also* (2 Timothy 2:2).
- b) **Hermeneutics** – *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15). A pastor is expected to be careful and scientific (use proven interpretation principles) in his exegesis of

passages of the Bible that he teaches. Knowledge of original languages is an added advantage, which must be sought. A serious pastor should own such Bible commentaries that have been tested over the years as faithful.

- c) **Homiletics** – Preaching ministry. *I charge you... preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching* (2 Timothy 4:1-2).
- d) **Apologetics and polemics** – Defending the faith. *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil* (2 Timothy 2:24). A Pastor should be prepared to refute error, rebuking those who contradict sound teaching. It is the work of pastors to charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to fairy tales.
- e) **Evangelism** – Making the gospel known. *Do the work of an evangelist* (2 Timothy 4:5).
- f) **Public reading of Scripture** (1 Timothy 4:13).

The church should do everything possible to relieve their pastors from material responsibilities such as mercy, property management, administration, etc. so that they can devote themselves to preaching and prayer (Acts 6:4).

During this electioneering year in Kenya, too many pastors may be attracted to politics. Pastors need to realize that this may compromise their position as they take sides.

Various observations:

1. A church should be shepherded by saved men.
2. A church should be shepherded by male pastors. *Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, rather she is to remain quiet... Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife...* (1 Timothy 2:11-12, 3:2). This is an important qualification and it does foster the fatherly care, a caring manly leadership able to admonish, refute error and rebuke those who contradict sound teaching.
3. A church should be shepherded by multiple pastors, whether it is small or large. It is in the multiplicity of counsel of the elders that the church will be helped. Be very suspicious of a church where it is a one-man-show. This is an important and vital check and balance for a faithful pastoral ministry. Many pastors watch over each other, even as they watch over the flock.

Find more info about the subject on the author's blog:

www.pastormurungi.blogspot.com

COMMON QUESTION NO. 8

MUST CHRISTIANS KEEP THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

Keith Underhill

Sadly, there is much controversy around the Ten Commandments. There are those who insist that the Christian is no longer under these commandments because they were given to Moses under the old covenant and we are no longer under law but grace. Others allow Christians should keep them as long as they are repeated in the New Testament. We wish to show that the Ten Commandments as a whole continue as a rule of life to be obeyed by Christians.

1. **The Ten Commandments are very special.** Everything surrounding the giving of the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai marks them out as very special, and as being far more significant. This separates them from other laws given through Moses.

- They were written with the very finger of God Himself, and on durable tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18, Deuteronomy 9:10).
- From the first day they were to be kept inside the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 10:1-5, see 1 Kings 8:9, Hebrews 9:4).
- The Commandments are 10 symbolizing the full number, the complete will of God. They are sometimes called the “covenant” (Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13). So in his commentary Calvin sought to put all other laws under one or other of the Ten Commandments.

2. **The Ten Commandments were in force from creation.** Sinai was only a formal republication of these laws as the heart of the covenant. They are a revelation of the very nature of God. For example, He is the only true God, so He alone is to be worshipped. Because He does not have a physical form He is not to be worshipped using any physical likeness. The 4th. Commandment is grounded in God’s creation week (Genesis 2:1-3, see also Exodus 16:22-30). Cain was wrong to murder his brother, and so capital punishment was instituted for murder (Genesis 9:6). So these Commandments are for all people, and not for the nation of Israel alone.

3. **The Problem of the Old Covenant.** There was nothing wrong with the Ten Commandments, but as written on stone they gave no power to obey. Laws can only condemn because all have sinned (Romans 3:20, 7:7-11). Christ came to deal with the curse the broken law brings upon sinners. So the new covenant promises to put this very same law in the heart as a guarantee of

obedience (Jeremiah 31:33, see Ezekiel 36:27). There is the clear contrast between the law written on tablets of stone, or in a book, and on the human heart. But in each case it is God's law. Hebrews 8:6-12 uses these words of Jeremiah and shows the superiority of the new over the old covenant. In the same way, Romans 8:3ff. shows that the inability of the law to save is because of sin, and so God sent His Son and Spirit. But God's law does not change, because God Himself does not change.

4. The Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament.

(1) Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17-48) teaches about the standard of righteousness in His kingdom. Will it be different from the Old Testament? No, He came to fulfil them and not to abolish them. The standard must exceed that of scribes and Pharisees. And Jesus goes on to show how, by illustrating from the 6th and 7th. Commandments, and then other laws. Jesus expects His followers to be more strict in obedience, especially by paying attention to their inner life that the Commandments address.

(2) Some of the Ten Commandments are clearly listed for Christians to keep, as in Romans 13:8-10, James 2:8-13. Ephesians 4:25ff. refers by implication to the 9th., 6th., 8th. Commandments. It is possible that 1 Timothy 1:8-11 follows the Ten Commandments.

(3) Some say that the 4th. Commandment is not repeated in the New Testament, yet Jesus spoke about it more than any other! And He never abolished it, as He did the food laws (Mark 2:27-28, 7:19). We shall deal with the 4th. Commandment in more detail in another 'Answer'.

5. The teaching of Romans – Objection 1: “*New Testament Christians are under grace and not law*” (Romans 6:14-15, Galatians 5:18). The objection assumes that not to be under law means that the Christian does not have the law as a standard for living. But in the context of the letter “under law” means to be under its condemning power. The following passages in Romans show that the law does remain for the Christian:

- **3:31** Romans makes it abundantly clear that justification cannot be by “works of the law”. But also in justification God's law is not set aside but is kept by Christ on our behalf. The law is therefore not “overthrown” but “upheld”.
- **7:12ff.** Although the law can neither save nor sanctify, the problem is not with the law but with sin. The law remains “holy and righteous and good” (v. 12). Paul as a Christian “delights in the law of God, in my inner being” (v. 22).

- **8:4** The purpose of God’s way of salvation by grace in Christ is so that “the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk...”. This is about our Christian lives, lives that fulfil what the law requires.
- **13:8-10** Paul appeals to some of the Ten Commandments to show what love for one’s neighbour means. The law remains to be “fulfilled” and love to the neighbour does that.

6. The teaching of Galatians – Objection 2: *“The Christian life should be guided by love and not law”*. The objection assumes that ‘love’ and ‘law’ are against each other. Yet we are **commanded** to love (for example, John 13:34, 2 John 5-6). The following passages in Galatians show that the law remains for the Christian:

- **5:13-14** The emphasis of this letter is to proclaim that Christians are redeemed from being “under the law” (4:5), that is, from being under the “curse of the law” (3:13). But Paul goes on to appeal to that very law, as found in Leviticus 19:18, so that the idea of freedom is not abused. As a Christian I am not free to fail to love my neighbour. I must fulfil the law in this regard.
- **5:23** “There is no law” against the fruit of the Spirit. The law pronounces no condemnation on displaying such fruit. The implication is that the fruit, the first of which is “love”, is according to the law of God. The lifestyle God requires of His people has not changed because we are justified by faith and not “works of the law”. Indeed, the law was never given as a means of justification. The Ten Commandments were given to a people already redeemed (Exodus 20:1-2).

In conclusion, let us not think that giving careful obedience to the Ten Commandments is unworthy of a Christian. Jesus said, “Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46); and, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). John makes it very clear that one of the essential marks of a true Christian is to keep His commandments (1 John 2:3-6). It is the very way our Saviour Himself walked. His life was totally devoted to doing the “will of God” even when that conflicted with His own will (see Matthew 26:42, John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38, 17:4). May we be given grace to be like Christ!

Oh how I love your **law**! It is my meditation all the day. Your **commandment** makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your **testimonies** are my meditation. (**Psalm 119:97-99**).

THE DEATH OF FAITH IN THE WORD OF FAITH (1)

Barnabas Olare

1. WHAT IS THE WORD OF FAITH MOVEMENT?

This is also known as health and wealth, name it and claim it, or prosperity gospel. This is a body of teaching which basically says that material prosperity and happiness should and can be yours, as long as you have enough faith and use your words to claim the things you want. From passages like Mark 11:22 they argue that if you have the faith that God has (they believe that God is able to do everything because He has mastered the laws of faith), then you can speak to any situation and it will yield to your desires. Although names like Kenneth Copeland, Crefflo Dollar, John Avanzini, Benny Hinn, and Joyce Meyer among others are the global face of the movement, the teaching has infected much of the professing Christian church today. It is difficult to think of any Pentecostal or Charismatic Church in Kenya which has not imbibed it in some measure.

Its basic claims

The Word of Faith movement has many shades, so its proponents may even differ on certain details and vary in the severity of their error. But most agree on the following claims:

- 1) That it is the will of God for His people to be healthy, wealthy and happy at all times. Put another way, it is never God's will for people to suffer.
- 2) That through the atonement, and the principles laid out in scripture, God has made it possible for us to attain a life of material prosperity, free from all forms of suffering. Many Word of Faith preachers assert that the main reason Christ came was to defeat material poverty and sickness!
- 3) That the way to actualize these things is by releasing "the force of faith" through positive confession.

The concept of 'faith' in the movement

The movement teaches that faith is a force, much like gravity, to which everything and everyone, including God is subject. Faith, they claim, can be generated and operated by certain laws, which include:

- **Visualization:** Creating mental pictures of whatever you want, a car, a house, health or any other thing. They say this way you 'conceive and incubate your miracle'.
- **Sowing seed:** This means giving money to successful preachers. They believe that by associating closely and giving to those who

‘have made it’, you are ‘tapping into their anointing’ which will then be transferred to you.

- **Confession:** This means you start speaking as if you already have the things you want. If it is healing, you confess that you are already healed. To confess the negative will produce a counter force which is fear, and defeat is the inevitable result. Faith released through words activates God and manipulates circumstances to create the realities we desire. So essentially through the force of faith we can impose our will on God who will have no choice but to fulfil it.

2. WHY THE MOVEMENT IS ATTRACTIVE

- False teachers historically hide behind what is good and attractive, often conscripting scriptural words in their evil course, “...even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). Few words in the Christian vocabulary equal in importance the word FAITH. The Bible teaches that all blessings from God are received by faith, salvation is by grace through faith, without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith is so central that God fearing people are normally called ‘men of faith’, so whenever faith is mentioned, people pay attention. The movement under review has been called many things, but its proponents would like it to be called the “word of FAITH”, a phrase lifted from Romans 10:8, “the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (the WORD OF FAITH which we proclaim)...” The movement has quite cleverly leveraged on this very important Biblical phrase to gain acceptance among ‘people of faith’.
- The allure of the movement has been enhanced by the fact that it doesn’t seem to threaten or compete with any of the established denominations or their doctrines. The movement claims to teach universal principles of faith which will work for everyone, even pagans! Indeed the movement’s influence can be seen across denominations as it blends in with anything and everything.
- Another critical pillar that has helped the movement spread so fast is its adept use of the mass media. The movement dominates much of the ‘Christian mass media’. TBN, Daystar, God TV, CBN, etc. are all controlled by die hard Word of Faith adherents, singing the Word of Faith tune.
- Inadequate Biblical knowledge is another factor. Many Christians lend an unquestioning ear to anyone who comes to them holding a Bible or quoting verses. Few are willing or even equipped to interrogate whether the verses are properly exegeted, or are just taken out of context and twisted to mean something different, something Word of Faith teachers do a lot.
- But perhaps the most important factor in the rapid spread of the movement is that its promise of wealth, health and happiness appeals readily to the carnal

appetites of our sinful nature (1 John 2:17). We naturally crave for material comfort and detest suffering and pain. It is no wonder that the movement is recording fastest growth in parts of the world where poverty and disease are widespread.

These factors in my view have played the biggest role in the rapid advance of the Word of Faith movement as we know it.

3. THE MOVEMENT EXAMINED

There is a lot that can be said about this movement but here I will seek to do the following:

- Interrogate whether the faith of the movement merits the title FAITH which they so proudly claim. We will seek to show that the ‘faith’ of this movement is not consistent with the Biblical idea of faith, and poses mortal danger to souls.
- Seek to show that the basic propositions of this movement are not only utterly unbiblical, but are injurious to the prospects of sound Christian conduct.
- While doing this, we will seek to bring the correct Biblical perspectives to bear on some of the false teachings of this movement.

Is there true faith in the Word of Faith scheme of doctrine?

Three things are essential to true Biblical faith: faith must have a foundation, an object and must produce a certain character. We will now examine the Word of Faith theology against each of these three to see if the movement really merits the title it claims.

(1) The Word of Faith assault on the foundation of faith (the Bible)

True Christian faith is founded on the Bible, the word of God written. It reveals the way of salvation, upon it the Christian life is built, and by it Christian service is directed. Simply put, the Bible tells us everything we need to know, believe and practice in order to be saved and live in a manner that pleases God and to serve God rightly. All true faith must necessarily be rooted in what God has said in the scriptures. Romans 10:13-17 teaches two things essentially, first, that faith is essential for salvation, and secondly that true faith is built on God’s word. Faith is inextricably connected to God’s word and so to undermine God’s word, the Bible, is to destroy the foundation of faith itself. It is my contention that word of faith teachers, by their attitude, words and actions undermine the scriptures, the foundation of faith, and here is why:

- Since Word of Faith teachers believe in the ‘power of words’, we must take their words seriously, and consider them reflective of their true attitudes.

Jesse Duplantis, a key figure in the movement, says he is sure that when he meets David in heaven, the man after God's heart will look back at some of the Psalms he wrote and say, 'Oh, I shouldn't have written that one'. Benny Hinn and others openly castigate many of the 'negative statements' in the book of Job, which they deem inconsistent with the laws of faith and they often blame Job for bringing misfortune upon himself by his negative speech. This without regard to the commentary of scripture itself on Job's conduct and words, "Job did not sin against God with his lips" (Job 2:10). It is clear that they consider their opinion on Job and his words more authentic than God's! This attitude undermines the truth that "all scripture is breathed out by God", that the authors were "moved by the Spirit" as they wrote. This attitude is the root of many of the movement's errors as its proponents feel quite competent to modify words of scripture to serve their scheme of doctrine.

- Another way they undermine the scriptures is through the so-called "new revelations". The Word of Faith teachers claim to have special access to God. Jesse Duplantis claims to have had a number of visits to heaven, and that Jesus frequently visits and has tea with him in his house. During these encounters God 'speaks to them new words'. These often conflict with scripture, which they then use to modify or even supplant what is written. These new revelations extend to new and strange interpretations of scripture passages. Benny Hinn, for example, claims to have received a new interpretation of Genesis 2:26, to the effect that when Adam was created, he could actually fly, even to outer space. 'How can you have dominion over something...' he poses, '...if you cannot do the things it does. For Adam to really have dominion over birds, he must have been able to fly". Two Word of Faith teachers can arrive at conflicting interpretations of a verse and then resolve that both are right because both interpretations came by a 'fresh revelation from God'. The question must then be asked, are we to build our faith on the word of God written, or on these tenuous new revelations?

- This special access to extra revelations by these 'special men' confers on them an authority deemed equal to the apostles. It is quite common to find certain men in the Word of Faith circles who have a special revelation in a certain area of doctrine or life being referred to as apostles. Benny Hinn is recognized as the apostle of healing, and the late Myles Munroe the apostle of wisdom, etc. Such men are revered and large offerings given to them so that they can transfer their anointing to the faithful. No one is ever willing to challenge these people even when their 'revelations' offend the scriptures. They, like the Pope, are an authority beside, even above the Bible.

All true believers agree that the Bible alone, and the entire Bible, is the all-sufficient, final and absolutely trustworthy word of God. It is our complete, objective and reliable foundation and rule of faith. So we must conclude that

to the extent that Word of Faith teachers have moved from this conviction, they have moved from the foundation of true Biblical faith.

(2) **The Word of Faith assault on the object of faith**

True Biblical faith is not an ‘independent force’, an all governing monarch or tyrant which answers to no one. True faith has an object. The Bible reveals to us God, and urges us to look to Him, to live for and by Him; that is what faith is. True faith is directed to God, “have faith in God...” (Mark 11:22). The rudimentary principles of Christianity include among other things, “... faith toward God...” (Hebrews 6:2). It is to God we must come; faith points us to Him; we believe that He is (Hebrews 1:6). True faith is not a reservoir of mystical power, mustered through some secret formula, and used to manipulate things. It is a response of deference and reliance on One far greater, God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. Faith that *has no object*, which is an end in itself, is no faith and faith that has the *wrong object* is no true faith either.

We will now show how the movement undermines the object of faith (God):

- Proponents of the movement argue that faith is an independent force, to which all things are subject. They aver that God Himself needs faith and is subject to its laws. From Hebrews 1:3, “by faith we know that the worlds were made by the word of God”, they argue that God ‘unleashed His faith’ through positive confession to create the world. But faith here is not exercised by God when He makes the worlds, but by us when we know that the worlds were made by the word of God. This is a clear case of twisting the scripture to suit the Word of Faith theology. They argue that when God “calls things that are not as though they are” (Romans 4:17), He is releasing His faith through positive confession and therefore following the dictates of the law of faith. The passage properly understood means that God, by His sovereign authority and unlimited power, subject to no law or authority, by sheer fiat brings things out of nothing. The passage intends to show God’s sovereign, limitless power, not paint Him as one dependent on or subject to some other higher law or principle. Faith is exercised by the lesser towards the higher, God has none greater in who to exercise faith (Hebrews 6:13). Word of Faith teachers deify faith and subject God to it. In effect they teach not faith in God but that faith is God.

- A more direct way in which the movement undermines the God of the Bible as the object of faith is by stripping Him of the essential qualities, without which God would not be God. Their God is a strange one indeed. I just watched a video clip of Jesse Duplantis explaining Genesis 2:19-20, “the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens *and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever*

the man called every living creature, that was its name". From this passage, he outrageously claims that even though God made the animals, He had no idea what they were, or what their names should be, and is actually 'shocked and wowed by Adam's genius in giving appropriate names to each. This is as ridiculous as it is blasphemous, but is not an isolated case. Kenneth Copeland says that God was amazed by the capacities of the man He had created. He had no idea that man would turn out as he did. Myles Munroe, revered in the movement as an authority on wisdom, defines prayer as 'earthly license for heavenly interference'. He teaches that God 'cannot interfere on earth without the consent of human beings'. Commenting on Genesis 18 he argues that God had to negotiate with, and give concessions to, Abraham for the permission to carry out the destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Myles' understanding of the incarnation is equally strange; that God being a Spirit, could not legally operate in the material world without a body, and so He had to 'borrow Mary's womb', through which He could enter earth legally. These are just a few examples which paint a pitiful picture of a helpless, hapless god who is a far cry from the omniscient (all knowing), sovereign Lord of the universe, who "does what He pleases in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Daniel 4:35). He is needed by all and Himself needs no one. Clearly, the object of the movement's faith is not the great and terrible Jehovah of the scriptures. Their 'god' is *the wrong object of faith*.

- Besides lowering God by subjecting Him to the law of faith, and painting a picture of an emasculated God who does not merit the title, the movement maintains that Christians are gods. They claim that man was created to be 'god down here', just like 'God is God in heaven'. Kenneth Copeland braggingly declares, 'When I hear God say 'I am', I say well, I am too'. What Christian fails to acknowledge the plain text of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me...", or "...I am God and there is none before me"? We acknowledge that we are created in the image of God not to inflate our pride or to imagine that we are identical to Him; rather it should draw us to humble worship and adoration to Him who has made us. For, yes, we are made and He is unmade, and that will never change. But these false teachers insist that when God created man, His intention was 'to duplicate Himself'. They wrench Psalm 82:6 out of context to suggest that God Himself endorses the idea that we are gods. Looked at in context, "gods" here does not mean all powerful deities, or even "little gods". It simply refers to rulers or magistrates who exercise authority among men. Here, they are castigated for misusing that power (v. 2), are commanded to use it justly (vv. 3-4) knowing that the Lord rules over them (v. 1), and will ultimately visit judgment and punishment upon them (vv. 7-8). The supremacy of God is the theme here, not the godhood of man.

A faith which is an end in itself (without an object), or which has the wrong object (a strange god), and which installs man as god, utterly undermines the supreme object of faith, the God of the scriptures, and does not therefore qualify as true faith.

(3) The Word of Faith assault on the character of faith

One cannot talk about faith without at the same time talking about obedience, submission, dependence and trust. Faith agrees with, defers to and follows its object. Such is the character of faith. A system of doctrine which does not produce these qualities undermines the very idea of faith. The Word of Faith teaching tends towards independence from, rather than cultivating dependence on God. It humanizes God and deifies man, and subjects both to the same law of faith. This diabolic system is not training men to submit, obey and depend on God; rather it is sharpening and readying them to declare independence from Him. It re-enacts the tempter's words in the garden, "Ye shall be as gods". I was taught in a Word of Faith College that 'as you grow in faith, you rely less on prayer, and operate more by decreeing things into existence'. They may not directly attack prayer, but they present it as a lower level, an elementary stage in the operations of faith. We are to aspire to a higher dimension where we command things. Listen to the faith teachers on radio or TV and you will notice that they seldom pray for members. Instead, they 'decree and declare' things over their lives. The phrase "God willing" is dismissed as doubt and should not be in our mouths. Fred Price thinks it is stupid and an insult to God if we pray and say, 'Lord if it is your will'. Well, James insists that "*you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live..."*" (James 4:14). Prayer is given to us, among other things, to remind us of our need of and utter reliance on God. Why and how can we outgrow that posture, unless we are seeking autonomy from God? It is noteworthy that most of these teachers are not known for their humility. They do not have kind words for anyone who disagrees with their heresies and are utterly inaccessible even to their own flock. It is fair to say that having rejected the rule of God, they have become a law unto themselves. Is this the character that true faith produces?

Having examined the claim of this movement to the title of 'faith' against the three pillars of true faith (the foundation, object and character of faith), we can fairly say that there is no true Biblical faith in the Word of Faith movement. It is a *faithless* movement which does not merit the title it claims!

[Pastor Barnabas Olare spent 17 years as a leader of the Word of Faith movement in Kenya, and is now serving the Lord in the Gospel Missions Agency in Maweni, Mombasa]

THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Huston Malande

PART 2: PERSONAL DANGERS

In *Part 1* of this series, we began by defining the term *media*, an exercise that enabled us to rightly think of *social* media simply as one more lane along the highway of human interaction; it is just another avenue to connect, to convey, to communicate, to express. We reminded ourselves that since our lives are to be governed by the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, our use of social media ought to accurately reflect that. It was pointed out that multiple gospel opportunities undeniably exist online. Therefore, as true Christians – who as Jesus prayed in John 17 are not to be taken out of the world but are instead to remain in it whilst being sanctified by the truth – we ought to take full advantage of these God-given opportunities for His glory and for the benefit of men lost and found.

That said, we must now carefully consider the personal dangers that believers face if they are not absolutely deliberate about how they use social media. A scalpel in the hands of a skilful surgeon could extract a tumour and save the life of a cancer patient. But we all know that the same razor blade in the hands of a man in despair could slowly drain his lifeblood through self-inflicted cuts to his wrists.

The dangers are real and manifold. It would probably take an entire book to exhaust the subject, but let us briefly consider 5 of the most insidious threats in hope that by being forewarned as we reflect on Scripture and experience, we will thereby be sufficiently forearmed.

1. Lust & Pornography

Ever since Adam took a bite of the forbidden fruit, it is a precarious world we live in. Yes, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of lights ... but it is almost as if for every good gift there are 10 other gift-wrapped explosives waiting for the unsuspecting child of God to stumble upon them to his ruin.

Need I describe the innumerable ways in which our lusts can be kindled? Our flesh resuscitated? There is no need to. The statistics alone are enough to paint the grim picture without getting into too much detail. Apparently, 34% of internet users have experienced unwanted exposure to pornographic content through ads, pop up ads, misdirected links or emails. That could be you amongst the 34%. Guess what the ultimate goal is? Enslavement to worldly passions and lust. It is therefore no surprise that 35% of all internet downloads are porn-related. And did you know that every second 28,258 people are watching pornography on the internet? Every second! And believe it or not, 1/3 of them are women.

The world wide web truly is ... a world wide web! As the writer of Proverbs rightly asks in the 28th verse of chapter 6, "... *can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?*" The sad truth is that if we are not careful every minute we are online, we risk slowly giving up more and more of ourselves to

this monster that so easily entangles. The result is that we will be on fire alright; but it won't be the fire that burns with zeal to glorify God and to reach the lost with the gospel. It will be a raging fire of lust.

Look, if you have to gouge out your eye, do it. Now! Better to live a monkish but holy life offline than to be on social media under the guise of 'ministry' only to end up burning in hell.

2. Bible Reading & Prayer

John Piper is famously quoted for having tweeted that, 'One of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove at the Last Day that prayerlessness was not from lack of time.'

Think about it. Psalm 1 tells us that, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord ..." Are you delighting in the law of the Lord, or sitting in the seat of scoffers? Are you being salt and light, or has your salt become so tasteless on social media that it is only good for the rubbish pile? Are you pulling people up to Christ, or are they pulling you down to worldliness? Christian maturity is not achieved simply through the passing of time, but it absolutely is a function of time. Time that is spent in active communion with God through His word and in prayer.

How much time are you spending on social media? How does it compare with the time you spend on God's word and prayer? Only a wayward son prefers constant socialization with his peers away from home, only surfacing once in a while to ask his perfect Father for something he covets among his friends.

3. Meditation

I think one of the most concerning things about our times is that Christians have almost completely lost the discipline of meditation. It is unbelievable! It seems as though every aspect of our lives has been designed to keep us from being left alone in our own heads; there is no time to just sit or walk quietly and think. There's always some music to listen to; something to watch; an email to reply to; a link to read and share; a Facebook face-off to show up to; a politician to criticize; a radio talk show to debate about; a shocking news bulletin to stream; a call to pick; a customer care agent to vent to; a meme to LOL to. We are fully engaged, all the time. With nothing eternal!

When was the last time you spent half an hour just pondering the weight of 2 Corinthians 5:21? Or Psalm 73? Or some other weighty passage? Psalm 1 continues to say of the blessed man, "... but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night."

You may watch all the online sermons you want, but unless you give yourself time to let the word drop from your head to your heart in solemn, Spirit-led self-examination, you might as well be listening to chirping crickets.

4. Hypocrisy & Covetousness

Social media is the dance floor upon which hypocrites and the covetous tango. Hypocrites thrive on social media because it maximizes the benefits of 'putting one's best foot forward,' and 'faking it till you make it. Most people

will not post a picture of their ordinary plate of githeri at home, but wait until they go to a pizza joint. The photographer inside comes out, featuring everything from selfies to macro shots.

Meanwhile, the Christian is looking at all this ‘fabulousness’ and beginning to wish that he had those things too. Kent Hughes has said in his book, called *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, that Satan does not fill us with a hatred of God, but rather with a forgetfulness of God. What better way to corrupt the human heart than with covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5)?

We would be wise to heed Christ’s words in Luke 12:15: “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

5. Idolatry

Perhaps more dangerous than plain covetousness is idolatry in disguise. Examine yourself. When you are sad, who do you want to talk to first? Is it God? Do you say like the Psalmist, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.” Or do you quickly post something sad and draw strength and relief from the *likes* and responses you get? When you are happy, do you first thank God, or do you quickly post it online with an appended, ‘Praise the Lord’? Is God your refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble? Or is it your virtual online audience from which you constantly seek affirmation, support, applause, and encouragement?

If we are truly born again, as we are bought with a price, we will set apart Christ as holy in our hearts, and count Him as precious above everything else and anyone else. We will not believe the lie that the online ‘community’ can take the place of the omnipresent Emmanuel, God with us.

Conclusion

Fellow fishers of men, as we set out to cast nets into the sea of social media, we must be careful not to make shipwreck of our faith. We must be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil (Romans 16:19). Let us not seek the salvation of others at the expense of our own by falling into the traps mentioned above.

Please ponder Philippians 2:12-16 — “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain.”

Amen. May the Lord help us to live this way.

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