

Sour Grapes and Justice

By Robert Turner

Ezekiel 18 is a marvelous chapter on the fairness and justice of God. Its message is in an Old Testament setting, but it portrays an attribute of God which is unchanged; and it should be read today — with care. The Israelites had a proverb: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” —by which they blamed their troubles on an earlier generation. God said, yes, your fathers sinned, but “ye have done evil more than your fathers.” “Every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.” (Jer. 16:10-f. 31:29-30)

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.” The physical and environmental consequences of one generation’s sin may affect generations to come (Ex. 20:5, 34:7) but God categorically denies that the guilt of one is passed to another. By one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and so spiritual death; but all die (spiritually) “for that all have sinned.” (Rom. 5:12) THE death (see Greek) and THE righteousness (the extremes, viewed metaphorically) are through or by Adam and Christ respectively. But we are condemned as individuals, on the basis of individual sins; and made righteous, through forgiveness, as we individually come to Christ. (Rom. 5:17-21, Acts 2:38-41) As Ezekiel records: “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord Jehovah.” (v.30) We have such a God now. (Rom. 2:2-11)

Our text also shows that man can change — from wicked to right-

eous and from righteous to wicked. Free agency is not limited to a one-way street. “If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes...he shall surely live.” “But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness ... None of his righteous deeds...shall be remembered in his trespass...and in his sin... in them shall he die.” (Vs. 21-24)

We are not judged by our past performance. To put it in N.T. words, it is not enough that we once came into: God’s light; we must continue “walking in the light.” The Jew pointed to his ancestry and past glory; and we drag out our baptismal certificate but God says, “What are you now! Are you striving to follow me today?” If you have been tempted to believe some sort of “cloak of righteousness” is spread over the impenitent sinner that his past answers for today, read Ezek. 18: carefully. (And study the subjunctive present “IF” we “walk and “confess” of 1 Jn. 1:7-9.)

God says, through Ezekiel, “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth,— wherefore turn you selves, and live.” (v. 32) This idea is expressed in 2 Pet. 3:9 where are told, “The Lord is... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” The decision, in this life, is ours. We say “Yes” or “No” to God — for a time! But we must meet Him in final judgement, where He will determine our eternal destiny. Are we doomed to repeat the errors of Ezekiel’s day despite our advantage in Christ??



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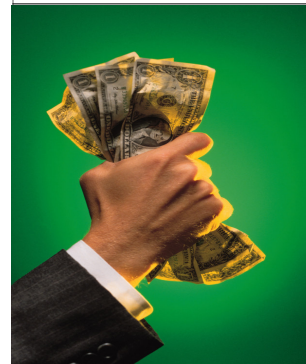
A weekly publication of the North Charlottesville church of Christ

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Volume 4, Issue 18 January 18, 2009

The Folly of Worldliness

By Jere Frost



Thought to Ponder

If we are not nourished by the Bread from heaven, we will satiate ourselves with crumbs from the world.

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God calls upon us to be spiritually minded, to abhor what is evil and to cleave to what is good (Romans 12:1, 2). Yet temptations, both brazen and subtle, seek to steal away our hearts from the beauty and simplicity of divine truth and holy living. It was love for this present world that caused Demas to forsake the right way (2 Timothy 4:10).

Many professing Christ have been similarly enticed and enthralled by worldly desires. John gives us five reasons why it is sheer folly.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2:15-

This is the way of nobility and character. It is attended in life by a peace of mind and renders one useful to God and man in the highest sense. And seeing that it is God who made man, and who best knows man, and whose will is set forth as a guide for man, it naturally and necessarily follows that this is the only way man can attain a full measure of happiness and hope.

17).
1. He alienates himself from God. “If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him.”

It is impossible to love God and the world at the same time for they are utterly incompatible. Though we have the capacity to love either, seeing we have the power of choice, there is no way we can love both. The love of one precludes love of the other. The language can be even stronger.

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When we walk in sin we not only demonstrate a lack of love for God, but we make ourselves an enemy. Note in the following passage that God is not set forth as the enemy of the sinner, but rather the sinner in his own mind is set forth as the enemy of God.

“And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled” (**Colossians 1:21**). “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (**Matthew 6:24**).

2. He is wrong. “For all that is in the world is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

Everything that is “of the world” in the passage is that which appeals to the baser nature of man. It is therefore that which is low, selfish, unworthy and vain. All that it offers can be summarized in the three divinely made points: (1) lust of the flesh, (2) lust of the eyes, and (3) the pride of life.

By “lust of the flesh” we see the craving desire to indulge in sensuality and pleasure. It is low, disgraceful living. “Lust of the eyes” depicts essentially greed and covetousness, the eager desire to possess for the sake of possessing. The “pride of life” is the love of status and glory in the eyes of others. It is concerned with image, not character or usefulness. These three pictures show not only the vileness of our conduct, but the corruption of our hearts, when we let sin seize our souls.

3. It is temporary. “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof.”

This plainly declares that there is no lasting gain or advantage in sin. The pleasures of sin, as Moses wisely discerned, are “for a season” (**Hebrews 11:25**). But the consequences are eternal, and they must be forever suffered in hell's agonies. An eternity lost! And for what? -- a moment's pleasure, a bauble that glitters, or a puffed-up pride.

4. There is a better way. “But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

This is the way of nobility and character. It is attended in life by a peace of mind and renders one useful to God and man in the highest sense. And seeing that it is God who made man, and who best knows man, and whose will is set forth as a guide for man, it naturally and necessarily follows that this is the only way man can attain a full measure of happiness and hope. Is it not the height of folly for a man to disdain and reject the privilege and pleasure of “walking in the light” with his God? Righteousness is infinitely better than a life of sin.

5. Eternal life. “He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

What a glorious triumph! This old earth, and all that pertains to it, is destroyed. The pleasures and lust of sinful society, “the world,” and now without attraction or appeal. The glitter is gone. But he that did the will of God abides, and his treasures survive the world, and he himself is clothed with a new body, like His, “for we shall see him as he is” and “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (**I John 3:2; I Thess. 4:15-18**).

Wherefore, brethren, love not the world, but rather love God with all your heart, soul and mind. You will be glad--both here and hereafter.



Setting Your Spiritual Clock

By Steve Klein

Several years ago it was reported that the telephone operator in a town in Cape Cod received a call every morning asking for the correct time. Finally, overcome with curiosity, she asked the inquirer, “Would you mind telling me why you call about this time every day and ask for the correct time?” “Sure, I’ll tell you,” the man said. “I want to get the exact time because I’m the man who blows the whistle at twelve o’clock.” “Well, that’s funny, that is,” said the operator, “because every day at the stroke of noon I set our clock by your whistle.”

How often do we set standards for ourselves based on what others are doing without considering what standard they are following? The examples of others are worthy of emulation ONLY IF those setting the examples are following the ONE TRUE standard or rule. This seems to be Paul’s point in Philippians 3:16-17 when he states, “let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” To follow the example of others without being aware of what standard they themselves are following is the height of folly. The scriptures speak of those who, “measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (**2 Corinthians 10:12**).

Setting Your Watch

Every individual has a personal standard which he takes with him everywhere. He may either choose to follow it or ignore it. This inner standard is his conscience. Like a wrist watch which we may check through the day to keep us “on time,” the conscience can be used to keep us on the right track if it has been correctly set. But the conscience can be set by a false standard. Saul of Tarsus lived “in all good conscience” when he was a blasphemer and perse-

This careless conscience setting is seen, for example, in a Christian whose conscience allows him or her to wear immodest attire because “it is not as immodest as what others wear” or “other Christians dress like this.”

cutor of Christians (**Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:13**). The individual who sets his watch by asking a stranger on the street for “the correct time” is a lot like a man who sets his moral standards and religious beliefs by others.

This careless conscience setting is seen, for example, in a Christian whose conscience allows him or her to wear immodest attire because “it is not as immodest as what others wear” or “other Christians dress like this.” It is seen in

the person who believes that they can be saved by “faith only,” not because they ever read it in the scriptures (see James 2:24), but because that’s what their parents or grandparents believed.

Setting the “Church Clock”

Groups of people sometimes also set their collective conscience by an uncertain standard. In the days of the judges, Israel pled for a king; they wanted to be “like all the nations” (**1 Samuel 8:5**). As a group of people, they had set their clock by the surrounding nations. In doing so, they rejected the Lord as their standard of authority (**1 Samuel 8:7**).

Even so, many churches today set their programs of work according to what surrounding churches (denominations) are doing. Children’s church, Easter observances, and “rallies” to entertain the young people are just a few of the practices adopted by some churches of Christ (so-called) which illustrate this point. Each of these things have been done among denominations for decades, and now some churches of Christ are setting their clocks accordingly. Not one of these practices can be found in scripture, either by command, statement, apostolic example or necessary conclusion. These practices are of human origin.

Jesus said, “in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (**Matthew 15:9**).

