

A photograph of a cluttered workshop. In the foreground, a car is being worked on, with a blue tarp and a white plastic bag covering parts of it. To the left, there is a large metal toolbox with many drawers. In the background, there are various tools, equipment, and a gas cylinder. The overall scene is one of a busy, well-used workspace.

BIBLE STUDY SERIES - VOLUME 4

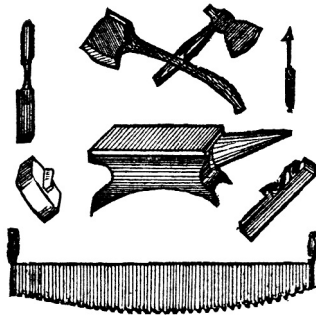
The Devil's Workshop

Sheri Strelecky

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The Church of God, God's Acres
2021

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First Printing: 2021

This book can be ordered by contacting the author or:

The Church of God, God's Acres
675 N. Cedar Street
Newark, Ohio 43055
740-345-1312

www.GodsAcres.org

Printed by Lulu.com

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CHAPTER ONE

AN UNCONTROLLED THOUGHT LIFE

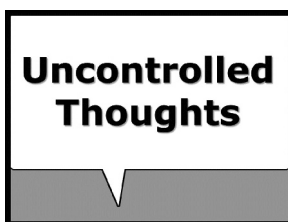
DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Examples of evil thoughts (Genesis 50:15-20; 1 Samuel 18:25; Nehemiah 6:1-2; Esther 3:6).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God knows all your thoughts (1 Chronicles 28:9; Job 42:1-2; Psalm 139:2; Matthew 9:4).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Thoughts become actions (Job 20:2; Psalm 10:4; Proverbs 23:7; Proverbs 4:23).
- ❑ **Thursday:** What should you think about? (Philippians 4:8-9; Psalm 119:113; Isaiah 26:3).
- ❑ **Friday:** What should you do with wrong thoughts? (2 Corinthians 10:5; Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:2).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Ask God to help you (Isaiah 55:6-9; Proverbs 16:1-3).

What Are You Thinking About?

Many experts believe the average person thinks between 50,000 and 70,000 thoughts every day. That is at least one thought for every second that you are awake. What do these thoughts consist of? It is easy to simply let your thoughts wander. Other times you might find yourself day-dreaming. Can either of these be harmful for a Christian? In the devil's workshop, there is a tool that he will do his best to use on every one—an uncontrolled thought life. If you are not in control of your thoughts, you can be sure that the devil will try to fill your mind with what *he* wants you to think about. An uncontrolled thought life is the perfect place for the wrong things to grow: discouragement, depression, anger, anxiety, revenge, and temptation.

Research has shown that as much as 85 percent of all illnesses come about because people have "toxic thoughts" (very negative thoughts), which they habitually think on. Some examples of "toxic thoughts" might be: "I'm so stupid," or "I knew I'd mess that up," or "I'll never be beautiful or popu-

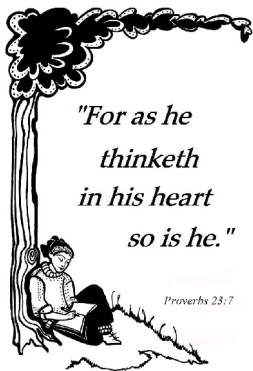


lar." Failing to control your thought life can make you physically sick. What are some other things the devil wants you to be thinking about? Has someone treated you badly or made fun of you? You might be tempted to remember that hurt. Or you might begin to think of ways to get revenge.

Do you imagine yourself looking better, having more money, or being more successful in life? These can be good goals; however, the devil will endeavor to use pride through these thoughts so that they all center around wanting people to notice you. Haman was deceived by pride when he thought, "To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?" (Esther 6:6). Proudful thoughts led to Haman's eventual downfall. The devil also knows the effectiveness of working through daydreams, especially when those thoughts are wishful thinking of things that God is not pleased with.

Sin Begins With Just a Thought

Does it matter what you think about? Whom does it hurt? No one else will know—isn't that true? If so, why is this such a well-used tool of the devil? It is because he knows that one does not just fall into sin: sin begins with a thought. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). The Bible gives many examples of people who thought evil, sinful thoughts first and then committed sin: Joseph's brothers (Genesis 50:20), King Saul (1 Samuel 18:25), Nehemiah's enemies (Nehemiah 6:2), and Haman (Esther 3:6). Just one thought placed in your mind by the devil can grow and grow if you allow it. Permitting that thought to remain in your mind gives life to wrong desires, and soon it will become sin (James 1:15). If you let wrong thoughts occupy your mind, Psalm 66:18 warns that "the Lord will not hear" you. Although you might believe that no one knows what you are thinking, "no thought can be withholden from" God (Job 42:2).



*"For as he
thinketh
in his heart
so is he."*

Proverbs 23:7

Influences on Your Thought Life

Have you ever heard a song and could not get it out of your mind? Perhaps you heard or read something, and you just could not stop thinking about it. Everything you read, listen to, and see has the ability to influence your thought life. That includes books,

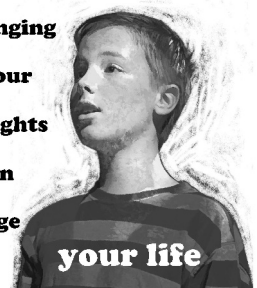
music, movies, video games, texting, and social media. You are being affected by everything that you allow into your mind through your eyes and your ears. A famous writer once said, "The food that enters the mind must be watched as closely as the food that enters the body" (Patrick Buchanan). Can Christians watch or read or listen to all the influences of the world continually without their thought life being affected? Can you watch a movie or read a book that is filled with profanity and not be affected? Can you play video games that promote violence and crime without being affected? Can you read inappropriate messages online and not be affected? An old Indian Christian was explaining to a missionary that the battle inside of him was like a black dog fighting a white dog. "Which dog wins?" asked the missionary. "The one I feed the most," replied the Indian. You cannot continue to be a Christian if you do not control what you allow to come into your mind. Take charge of the influences on your thought life: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

Developing a Healthy Spiritual Thought Life

First, you must realize the importance of having a thought life that God is pleased with. Negative thoughts (revenge, pride, lustfulness, or discouragement), prideful thoughts (feeling superior, conceited, or thinking you know it all), or unthankful thoughts will come into your mind. What are God's thoughts concerning this? Hebrews 4:12 tells us that "the word of God . . . is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Let the Bible be a measuring rod concerning your thought life. How do your thoughts measure up when considered in the light of Scriptures? Philippians 4:8 is a good indicator of what kind of thoughts the Christian should be thinking: things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, of virtue, and of praise.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "A man is what he thinks about all day long." What are the majority of your thoughts about? How many "toxic thoughts" (negative, prideful, unthankful thoughts) do you allow to come into your mind and stay? Now that you realize the importance of a controlled thought life, what can you do about it? How can you develop a healthy thought life?

**Changing
your
thoughts
can
change**



PROTECT YOUR MIND: what are you reading, watching, talking about, and listening to? Use Philippians 4:8 to evaluate the content of the music you listen to, the books you read, the movies you watch, the video games you play, the text messages you send, and your online conversations. Any imaginations that go against biblical principals or morals need to be brought "into captivity" (2 Corinthians 10:5). The best way to do this is to not allow it into your mind by changing your media consumption.

DAILY BIBLE READING: it is not enough to remove things from your life that promote wrong thoughts. You must replace these with something that will develop a healthy thought life. Colossians 3:2 says to "Set your affection [thoughts] on things above." Psalm 119:11 says to hide God's Word in your heart. To do this, you must spend time reading the Bible. Then, think about what you read. "What does that verse mean for me?" In other words, meditate.

PRAYER: you cannot have a healthy thought life without help. God knows your weaknesses and strengths; He understands your thoughts (Psalm 139:2). Ask Him to remove wrong thoughts when they come, and also ask Him to show you what influences might be in your life that are planting wrong thoughts in your mind.

"The ideas and images in men's minds are the invisible powers that constantly govern them."

—Jonathan Edwards

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ What does it mean to let your mind wander?
- ◆ How does the devil use the tool of an uncontrolled thought life?
- ◆ What are some examples of "toxic thoughts" not found in the lesson?
- ◆ What are some of the ways you can improve the quality of your thought life?
- ◆ What does Philippians 4:8 say you should be thinking about?

CHAPTER TWO

AN UNCONTROLLED TONGUE

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The tongue is powerful (Proverbs 6:2; Proverbs 18:21; James 3:2-10).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** There is a danger in excessive talking (Proverbs 10:8, 19; Ecclesiastes 5:3; Ecclesiastes 10:14).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Avoid gossip and talebearing (Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 20:19; Psalm 50:19-20).
- ❑ **Thursday:** There is wisdom in being slow to speak (Proverbs 17:27; Proverbs 21:23; James 1:19).
- ❑ **Friday:** Words come from the heart (Matthew 12:34-37; Matthew 15:18-19; Luke 6:45).
- ❑ **Saturday:** How to have a controlled tongue (Psalm 141:3; Philippians 4:8; Titus 3:1-2).

The Power of Words

Years ago a study was conducted by the University of Arizona to find out how many words people speak daily. The average was 16,000 words per day. (One man was found to be speaking up to 47,000 words per day!) What do those 16,000 words consist of? How do those words affect others? An old story, called *Feathers in the Wind*, tells about a woman who had a terrible problem with gossiping. Once, after discovering she had spread a story that was not true, she went to her pastor and asked for help. He told her to take a feather pillow and cut it open. When she did this, the feathers blew all over the room and out an open window. "Now pick up all the feathers," her pastor told her. "That is impossible!" the woman cried. "So it is with words," her pastor said, "once spoken they cannot be taken back."

What Did
You Say?

In the Bible, James compared the tongue to "a fire" (James 3:6). Just as

an unattended fire can burn down a forest, so a careless word can destroy reputations, friendships, and marriages. Just as a small rudder turns a very large ship and a small rider can turn a large, strong horse, just a few thoughtlessly spoken words could change the entire direction of someone's life. Although we might not realize the tremendous power of words, the devil does, and he uses this tool to destroy, discourage, and deceive many people.

Some Tactics of the Devil

What are some of the ways the devil works through an uncontrolled tongue? Gossip, slander, disrespect, and telling lies about others are some of the obvious ways, and the Christian needs to be careful in these areas.

**"If you think twice
before you speak
once, you will speak
twice as well."
— William Penn**

However, there are other tactics the devil uses that are not as apparent. Proverbs 10:19 warns, "When there are many words, transgression and offense are unavoidable . . ." (AMP). Where there is excessive talking, there is a danger of saying something you should not say. The rest of the verse describes one who is wise: "he who

controls his lips and keeps thoughtful silence is wise" (AMP). There is an old saying, "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." James 1:19 gives similar advice, saying that we should be "swift to hear, [and] slow to speak." Some people talk too much about themselves, boasting of their accomplishments or abilities. Proverbs 27:2 gives this good advice: "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips."

The Source of Our Words

It is often easy to excuse an uncontrolled tongue, saying such things as: "I didn't mean to say that" or "You misunderstood me" or even "The devil made me do it." While it is possible to occasionally misspeak, it is important to realize that words come from the heart. One Christian evangelist said, "The heart is the factory . . . and the tongue is the showcase of the heart" (Leonard Ravenhill). Words reveal what is in the heart. What you think about often will come out through your words. If there is bitterness, hatred, or anger in

your heart toward others, you might be able to hide it for a while, but eventually your words will betray you. James 3:8 says that "the tongue can no man tame." A tongue that is out of control is a sign of a heart that needs God's help. This dangerous tool of the devil is able to work because of "evil thoughts" (Matthew 15:18-19). Whether you speak "good" words or "evil" words depends on "the abundance [the overflow] of the heart" (Luke 6:45).

If you find that your words are hurtful, bitter, or angry, it is time to examine your heart. Where are these words coming from? Has someone hurt you? Did someone cheat you or tell lies about you? Have you been made fun of or rejected? Does it seem like others always have better things, more money, or an easier life than you do? These things can produce the wrong feelings in your heart. What can you do about it? If you do nothing, these feelings will take root in your heart and soon become a part of you. It is vital that you quickly identify those thoughts and ask for God's help in removing them. Thoughts that are allowed to remain soon become words. Proverbs 23:7 shows that what you allow yourself to think on will define who you are. "What is down in the well comes up in the bucket" (old proverb).

The Power of Words Rightly Spoken

Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Words "fitly spoken" are used carefully, thoughtfully, and at the right time. They are beautiful and often rare. Why is that? Because it is easier to say the first thing that comes to your mind. However, the first thought that comes to mind is not always the kindest thought (the devil will make sure of that). In the original Hebrew, "a word fitly spoken" means "a word spoken on his wheels." In ancient culture, carts did not have wheels. They were pulled along by two long poles. This was hard work, and it often left deep ruts in the ground. In time wheels were added—a significant improvement. "Each of your words should be like a vehicle on easy-going wheels, so smooth and courteous that it would produce no jar or shock to either speaker or hearer; nor . . . leave a painful rut behind in the memory" (*The Biblical Illustrator*).

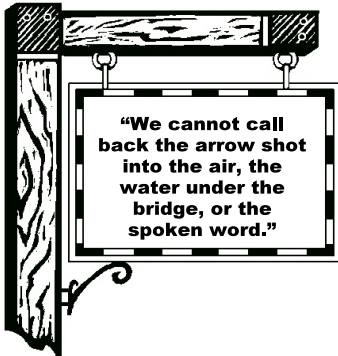
A children's rhyme that says, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me," is sadly untrue. However, just as words have great power to do harm, words also have the ability to do great good. You can combat the tool of the devil (an uncontrolled tongue) with God's help and

develop a controlled tongue, one that encourages, comforts, and positively influences others. Kind, positive words have a greater effect than we will ever know. Not only can they brighten someone's day, they are often contagious. You can encourage others to use words "fitly spoken" as well. The best result is that your kind, thoughtful words can be a light to people who are unsaved, a witness of a better way of living.

How to Have a Controlled Tongue

Ask for God's Help: *"Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).*

Think on Good Things: *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).*



Ask for Forgiveness When Necessary:
"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16a).

Speak Encouraging Words Often: *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).*

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ How are words like feathers?
- ◆ How is the tongue like a fire?
- ◆ How does the devil work through an uncontrolled tongue?
- ◆ What are words "fitly spoken"?
- ◆ What are some things you can do to have a controlled tongue?

CHAPTER THREE

PROFANE LANGUAGE

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Do not use God's name profanely or in vain (Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 5:11; Proverbs 30:8-9).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The Bible condemns vulgar language (Ephesians 4:29; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Colossians 3:8).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Words reveal what is in the heart (Matthew 12:34-35; Luke 6:45; James 3:9-10).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Be careful of idle and evil words (Matthew 12:36-37; 1 Timothy 5:13; Titus 1:10-11).
- ❑ **Friday:** Use words that please God (Psalm 19:14; Proverbs 15:26; 1 Corinthians 10:31).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Use encouraging words that build up others (Proverbs 12:25; Acts 14:21-28; Acts 15:32).

Profane Language Has Become Common

On August 3, 1776, General George Washington issued the following General Orders: "The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish, and wicked practice, of profane cursing and swearing (a Vice heretofore little known in an American Army) is growing into fashion; he hopes the officers will, by example, as well as influence, endeavour to check it, and that both they, and the men will reflect, that we can have little hopes of the blessing of Heaven on our Arms, if we insult it by our impiety, and folly; added to this, it is a vice so mean and low, without any temptation, that every man



of sense, and character, detests and despises it" (*Founders Online*).

Today, profanity has become so common and accepted in many places that it is hard to imagine a time when a gentleman would never curse in the presence of a lady or when one could be heavily fined for using swear words. Profanity (sometimes called swearing or cursing) can now be heard in movies, on the radio, in music, and in video games. No doubt, you have heard it at school, at work, while shopping, or at ball games. Common excuses for using profanity are: "Everybody does it," "It's a way to express anger," "It's just words," or "I didn't mean it that way." Sadly, many people do not realize profane language is another valuable tool in the devil's workshop.

What Is Profane Language?

Many, many years ago, formal education and wealth was available to only a small group of people within the population. The poor, uneducated people often used language that was considered vulgar, crude, and offensive. This included telling dirty jokes and making suggestive or indecent comments. The more educated people found such language to be "profane" (vulgar and coarse). Sadly, today such language has too often become commonplace, with many people finding it socially acceptable. However, the Bible calls this "filthy communication [or foul, vulgar, evil language]" (Colossians 3:8).

Also, the Latin word that *profane* comes from literally means "outside the temple." In the Old Testament, anything that was common or unholy could not be brought into the temple. Likewise, to take anything outside that belonged in the temple would be considered profaning that which was sacred. (What did God think when Belshazzar did this in Daniel, Chapter 5?) The Bible tells us that God's name is holy (or sacred). Many verses warn people to not "profane my holy name" (Leviticus 22:32). In other words, use God's name with abuse, irreverence, or contempt. Deuteronomy 5:11 tells us not to "take the name of the LORD thy God in vain," or use it in a evil, empty, or worthless manner. Yet, both the names of God and Jesus are often used today to express surprise, anger, happiness, and sadness. Others speak lightly of spiritual things, calling God "the man upstairs" or speak in anger, telling people to go to the place of eternal punishment.

Have you ever wondered why the names of other religious gods (such as Buddha, Krishna, or Allah) are rarely, if ever, used as swear words? Yet, the names of God and Jesus are used as curse words worldwide. While it can be

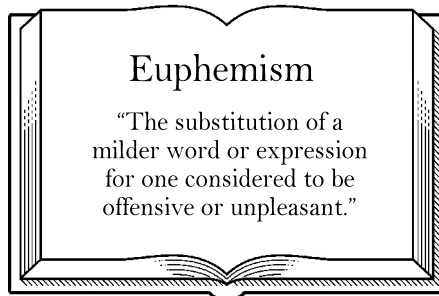
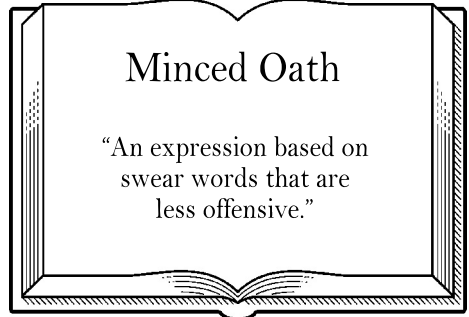
understood that non-Christians do not acknowledge that God's name is holy, what about people who claim to be Christians? Has profane language begun to creep into the conversations of those who claim to be God's people? Some ministers have said cursing is okay if it helps the Christian relate to people. Is this true? Using God's name in such a way makes Him seem commonplace to the speaker and the listener. How can we convince a lost world of the greatness of God if we speak of Him with so little respect?

Substitute Words

One trick the devil uses is to try and convince Christians that substitute words (also called a "minced oath" or "euphemism") are acceptable because they are less offensive. Using these words might make you feel as if you fit in with worldly

friends or co-workers. You might think, "These words are not as bad as the real swear words." However, you need to ask yourself a few questions: "Do the meanings of these words change when I use a substitute word?" "Do I sound like I am saying the actual curse words?" "Why do I want to *sound* like I am cursing?" Words have power and meaning. Changing a few letters to make a curse word into a substitute word does not change its meaning. (For example, the definition of the word *gosh* is "a euphemism for God.")

Most importantly, what does the Bible say about our word choices? Jesus warned that one day we will have to give an account for any idle words we might speak (Matthew 12:36). Idle words are defined as "empty, careless words." According to Matthew 12:37, your words will be used to judge you.



Psalm 19:14 shows the importance of our "words" being "acceptable in [God's] sight." The Bible also reveals the source of our words—the heart (Matthew 12:34-35; Luke 6:45). The Bible stresses the importance of choosing our words carefully and controlling our tongue (Proverbs 13:3; James 1:26). After reading

these Bible verses, can a Christian with a clear conscience use these questionable words?

Do You Need to Clean Up Your Language?

Have questionable words become part of your conversations? Do you claim to be a Christian but your word choices are not much different than those of people who are unsaved? Do you use words that your parents or pastor would be disappointed to hear you speak? What about your witness for Christ? Do your word choices cause people to be confused about whether you are truly a Christian or not? Ask yourself this question, Would Jesus use these words? It has been said that Christians are ambassadors for Christ, and Christians speak His language. Does your language reveal who you represent?

If you are using profane language in any form, ask God to search your heart (Psalm 139:23-24), to help you to "keep the door of [your] lips" (Psalm 141:3), and to help you "put off all . . . filthy communication out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:8). Because curse words are almost always used to tear someone down, change your speech patterns to words that are encouraging, words "that cannot be condemned" (Titus 2:8). Consider the powerful testimony of a "curse-free" Christian!

"The tragedy is that today there are many people who have become so habituated to unclean talk that they are unaware that they are using it" (William Barclay).

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **What are some excuses people give for swearing?**
- ◆ **What are the two definitions of the word *profane*?**
- ◆ **What does it mean to profane God's holy name?**
- ◆ **What is the danger of believing that swearing is acceptable if it helps you to relate to people?**
- ◆ **How are substitute words one of the devil's tricks?**

CHAPTER FOUR

LYING

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The first liar was the devil (Genesis 3:1-5; John 8:42-45).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Lying is against God's nature (Numbers 23:19; Deuteronomy 32:4; Titus 1:2).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** What does the Bible say about lying (Exodus 20:16; Proverbs 6:16-17; Ephesians 4:25)?
- ❑ **Thursday:** Lying comes from the heart (Matthew 12:34; Matthew 15:18-19; Acts 5:1-4).
- ❑ **Friday:** You must speak the truth (Zechariah 8:16-17; Ephesians 4:14-15).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Ask for God's help with lying (Psalm 25:5; Psalm 119:29; Psalm 120:2).

"Everyone Lies"

Studies have shown that the majority of people tell about four lies every day. These studies also reveal that about 60 percent of adults lie at least once during a ten-minute conversation (*Statisticbrain.com/lying-statistics/*). Lying comes so naturally to many people that they do not even realize they are doing it. One expert said: "Lying has long been a part of everyday life. We couldn't get through the day without being deceptive" (Leonard Saxe). The use of lie detector tests, laws against lying (perjury, defamation, false police reports), and punishments for lying are some of the means used to try and stop people from telling lies. Yet, for too many people, lying has become an acceptable way of life.

Sadly, even many Christians believe that sometimes it is acceptable to lie about trivial matters, when in danger, to avoid hurting someone's feelings, or to get out of trouble. Often lying is called something else to make it

"Just as there are no exceptions to the adultery commandment, there is none for the Ninth Commandment" (Daniel Webster).

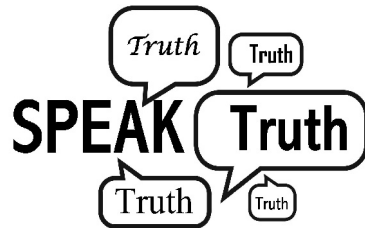
seem less offensive: half-truths, white lies, shading the truth, whoppers, or fibbing. Regardless of what one might call it, this is perhaps the devil's most deceptive tool.

Is Lying Ever Justified?

The very first example of lying is found in the Bible story of Eve speaking with the serpent. When the serpent told Eve, "Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4), he was telling her that what God had said was untrue. This was the devil's first (but not last) lie. According to John 8:44, "he is a liar, and the father of it." Lying can include words or silence; it can include actions or remaining completely still. The definition of lying is "the deliberate act of deviating from the truth." Lying takes in intentional falsehoods and deceptive actions.

Are some lies less serious than others? Is lying acceptable if everything turns out all right in the end? There is an old saying, "The end justifies the means." What does that mean, and is it true? Shouldn't someone tell a lie if the truth hurts? If someone tells a lie and no one knows or gets hurt, is that okay? These questions are often used to justify the desire to lie or to excuse lies if they work for a supposed good. The best source to answer all of these questions is the Word of God. Because lying is such a deceptive tool, it is best to look to the "God of truth" (Deuteronomy 32:4) for the answers.

The ninth commandment, found in Exodus 20:16, says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." In other words, do not tell lies or accuse anyone falsely. According to the Bible, lies come from the heart (Matthew 15:19; Acts 5:4), and God hates "a lying tongue" (Proverbs 6:16-17). God wants His people to speak the truth. The importance of the truth is stated many, many times in the Bible. Proverbs 30:5 says that "Every word of God is pure [or tried and true]." Jesus said that not only was God's Word the truth, but He was "the truth" (John 14:6) as well. This is quite a contrast to how Jesus described the devil: "He . . . does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him" (John 8:44 AMP). With such emphasis placed on truth in the Bible, can the Christian ever be justified in telling a lie?



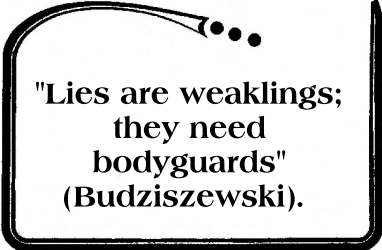
Forms of Lying

The devil will try to convince you that a half-truth is sometimes necessary. What should you do if telling the truth will get you into trouble? How should you answer a question when the truth will most likely offend? Is it considered lying to deceive someone by shrugging your shoulders or changing your expression? Wouldn't it be better to pretend to agree with people to avoid an argument? Some people believe in "situational ethics": whether or not something is a lie depends on the outcome of the situation. However, this could change from one person to the next, with some believing that certain untruths are acceptable and others determining that they are not. This takes the standard for what is lying out of God's hands and places it in the hands of people. (Read Judges 21:25.)

If any form of lying is acceptable, when does it become unacceptable in God's eyes? How many white lies can you tell before you get in trouble with God? God is a God of "moral absolutes." His standards do not change based on your circumstances, the outcome, who you are, or your good intentions. He will not tell one person to obey His commandments (Deuteronomy 27:10), while allowing someone else to slip by. God is unchanging (Malachi 3:6), and His Word is unchanging (Isaiah 40:8). Regardless of the reason or what you might call it, a lie is still a lie.

Consequences of Lying and How to Overcome It

The article *Small Fibs Lead to Big Whoppers* describes a study that shows how the brain becomes "desensitized with each successive falsehood. The more we lie, the less the brain responds." Lies have a way of multiplying. Soon one lie requires another to prop it up, and it becomes difficult to keep track of all the lies. Truth needs no propping up. However, telling lies can



**"Lies are weaklings;
they need
bodyguards"
(Budziszewski).**

result in greater difficulties than keeping your story straight. The Bible is full of examples of the serious consequences of lying. Consider the reaping of Jacob, Jezebel, Gehazi, Peter, the old prophet in Bethel, Ananias, and Sapphira. Lying destroys reputations, influences others to do wrong, causes people to lose respect and

confidence in someone, and (most serious of all) separates you from God.

If you find that you are telling lies (by whatever name you might call them), is it because you want people to think the best of you or to try and make yourself feel better or to keep out of trouble or out of loyalty to friends or out of habit? Do you tell lies to yourself, saying, "I'll do that later" with no intentions of actually doing it? To understand your motives for lying, it is best to evaluate what is entering into your heart, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34). Fill your heart with God's truth (Psalm 119:11), learn to hate lying as God does (Psalm 119:104, 128, 163), guard your lips (Proverbs 13:3), and refuse to take part in lying (Exodus 23:7; Proverbs 4:24). Most important, ask God for help. There will be times when telling the truth is very difficult; there will be times when you are asked questions and you cannot tell everything you know. There is a "time to keep silence" (Ecclesiastes 3:7). You need God's help to know how to handle these situations.

Lies destroy friendships, marriages, and families. Lies also destroy the influence of the Christian. It has been said that perhaps so many people reject salvation because they are confused by its salesmen. While the world justifies white lies, half-truths, and fibs, Christians are held to a higher standard. Being truthful honors God. "Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight" (Proverbs 12:22).

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **What are some of the methods used to stop people from lying?**
- ◆ **What are some other names for lying (that sound less offensive)?**
- ◆ **What was the devil's first lie?**
- ◆ **What are "situational ethics"?**
- ◆ **What is the danger of considering some forms of lying as acceptable?**

CHAPTER FIVE

STEALING

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** What does God say about stealing (Exodus 20:15; Leviticus 19:11; Mark 10:19)?
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Read about the consequences of Achan's theft (Joshua 7:1-26).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God warns against stealing what is rightfully His (Malachi 3:8-9; Jeremiah 23:30).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Stealing begins in the heart (Matthew 15:18-20; Mark 7:21-23).
- ❑ **Friday:** Bible examples of restitution (Exodus 22:1-15; Luke 19:1-10).
- ❑ **Saturday:** How to overcome the sin of stealing (Psalm 51:10; Ephesians 4:28; Hebrews 13:16).

Is Stealing Always Wrong?



A children's story portrays a hero (Robin Hood) stealing from the rich and giving it to the poor. In this story, the rich people are corrupt and cruel, and the poor people are oppressed and starving. Robin Hood comes to the rescue of the common people by giving them stolen money. A poem says, "He was a good outlaw, And did poor men much good" (*Robin Hood Ballad*). Today songs, videos, and movies often depict stealing as a good thing, especially if everything works out in the end. When the justice system convicts and punishes people for embezzlement while the entertainment industry makes stealing look necessary and appealing, it is sending a mixed message to society. It is no wonder that too many people believe stealing is not always wrong.

There are many words used to replace the word "stealing," which do not sound as harsh, such as: divert, keep, swipe, misappropriate, pinch, petty theft, borrow, and pilfer. Too often when you hear the word "stealing," you think of someone wearing a mask and holding a gun while demanding money

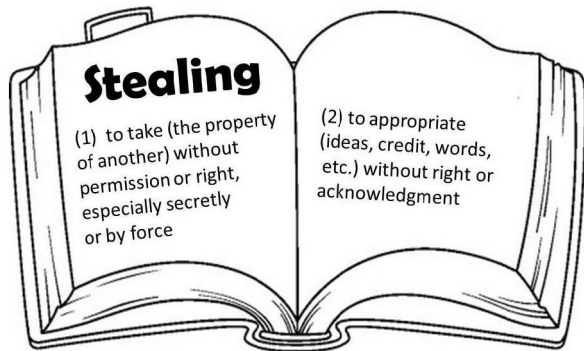
from a bank teller. However, some types of stealing are much less obvious than the bank robber. People who would never consider shoplifting or taking someone's wallet or purse do not give a second thought to other forms of stealing. This tool of the devil is used in a sly and crafty manner.

What Is Stealing?

Many retail stores have posted signs that state, "Shoplifting is stealing" or "Shoplifting is a crime." Has society come to the place where people must be reminded of this basic truth? Perhaps it is because too often stealing is lessened or made acceptable by excuses, such as: "I need it more than they do" or "I am underpaid" or "The prices are too high" or "They will never miss it." Also, today stealing has become more complicated. In Bible times, stealing usually involved cattle, property, and people. Now stealing can involve less obvious things like ideas, digital files, and electronic funds. The best source to understand the truth about stealing is God's Word.

God's will concerning stealing is found in the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15). Ephesians 4:28 tells us God's will concerning the thief: "Let him that stole steal no more." The Bible gives serious examples of people who stole. Achan stole from the city of Jericho (Joshua 7:20-21). Judas, who was in charge of the money bag, was called a "thief" (John 12:6). The two men who were crucified with Jesus were both called "thieves" (Matthew 27:38).

If you read these Bible stories, you will learn that every one of these people paid a high price as a result of stealing. God is also displeased with people who steal from Him by failing to give God what is rightfully His (Malachi 3:8-9). God's Word warns against what is perhaps the most serious form of theft—false ministers who rob the people of hearing the truth (Jeremiah 23:30).



Stealing Takes Many Forms

**“A thief is
a thief,
whether he
steals a
diamond
or a
cucumber.”**

—Indian Proverb

Why did Paul tell the Christians in Ephesus to "steal no more" (Ephesians 4:28)? Stealing would seem to be a problem only for sinners, not God's people. However, the devil knows just how to tempt the Christian to steal in ways that are not obviously wrong. Keeping the definition of stealing in mind, ask yourself who is being stolen from and what is being stolen in the following examples: continually showing up late for work; not paying back money you borrowed; damaging or losing someone's property and not making it right; downloading music without paying for it; receiving too much change at the store and keeping it; lying about your age to get a discounted ticket; and plagiarism ("to steal and pass off the ideas or words of another as one's own"; *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*). Ruining someone's good reputation by telling lies or gossiping about them is another form of theft. Reputations take years to build but can be ruined (stolen) by careless, thoughtless words.

Stealing often involves covetousness, greediness, laziness, and lying. An old proverb says, "Lying and stealing are next door neighbors." It is often difficult to have one without the other. All of these sinful traits are the opposite of what God desires for His people. God does not consider stealing to be a small thing. In Jeremiah 7:9 He groups it with terrible sins, such as murder, adultery, and idol worship. Regardless of how small the theft, if others say it is acceptable, if it goes unnoticed, or if you never get caught, God is against it!

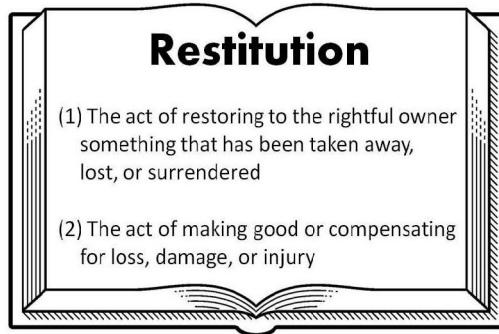
How to Overcome Stealing

Mark 7:21-23 lists "thefts" as one of the evil things that come from the heart. If God is showing you areas in your life where some "thefts" have been taking place, first you need to understand that stealing is prompted by wrong spirits (greediness and selfishness). Then you need to ask God to "create in [you] a clean heart" and "renew a right spirit" (Psalm 51:10). When you are tempted to steal, look to the Bible for the strength to resist the devil. If you

are tempted to steal things you cannot afford, read verses about being content with what you have (Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 13:5) and read verses about trusting God to supply all your needs (Philippians 4:19). If you are tempted to steal because you have failed to work for what you need, read verses about being lazy (Proverbs 6:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:10). If you are tempted to steal by failing to take responsibility for your actions (such as paying back a debt or replacing something you broke), read verses about being accountable (2 Corinthians 5:10) and about making things right (Exodus 22:14; Ezekiel 33:15-16).

God might ask you to make restitution. In the Old Testament an animal was to be repaid at least double (Exodus 22:3-4). Stolen pastures and vineyards were to be repaid (Exodus 22:5), as were borrowed animals that died (Exodus 22:14). Perhaps the best example is found in the story of Zacchaeus, a tax collector, who promised to repay his debts "fourfold [four times more]" (Luke 19:8).

After Paul told the Ephesian Christians to "steal no more," he gave them advice on overcoming stealing—work and give. Instead of getting, God's people should have a spirit of giving. Instead of taking advantage of others, God's people should want to help the disadvantaged. "But to do good and to communicate [share with others] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **What are some of the ways that stealing is made glamorous or acceptable in movies, books, songs, and videos?**
- ◆ **There is an old saying, "Finders keepers, losers weepers." What does this mean and is it a form of stealing?**
- ◆ **What are some excuses often made for stealing?**
- ◆ **What are some less obvious forms of stealing?**

CHAPTER SIX

CHEATING

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Cheating with balances was wrong (Deuteronomy 25:13; Proverbs 11:1; Hosea 12:7; Amos 8:5).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Jacob cheated and then was cheated (Genesis 27:34-41; Genesis 31:4-7).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Jesus called the moneychangers "thieves" (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17).
- ❑ **Thursday:** You will not get away with cheating (Proverbs 10:9; Luke 8:17; Galatians 6:7).
- ❑ **Friday:** God wants you to live an honest life (Exodus 20:15; 1 Timothy 2:2; Romans 12:17b).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Consider others when you are tempted to cheat (Luke 6:31; Matthew 5:16).

Cheating Is a Serious Problem

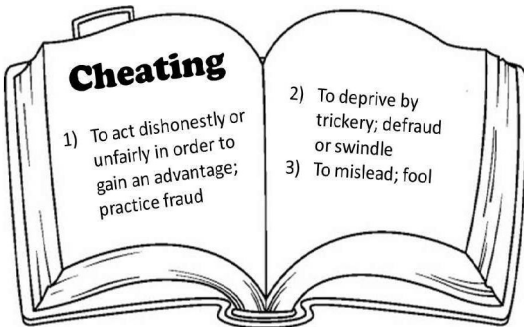
Have you ever heard someone say, "I was ripped off"? What does that mean? If you buy something and it is not what it was advertised to be, you might feel that you were ripped off, or cheated. In Solomon's day cheating had become a serious problem. In the marketplace, scales were used in the business of buying and selling. On one side was the item being sold, and on the other side a set of weights was placed. This determined the weight and price of the item being sold. Many merchants had two sets of weights: one that was accurate ("a just weight") and one that was not ("a false balance"). This made it easy to cheat unsuspecting people who had come to the market to do business. (Read Deuteronomy 25:13.)

Today cheating comes in many forms, and too often it is considered acceptable. Excuses often heard are: "Everybody does it"; "Cheating never hurts anyone"; "I'd be stupid not to cheat"; "I'll never pass if I don't cheat"; and "Ten years from now, what will it matter?" In a survey of *Who's Who Among American High School Students*, 80 percent of them admitted to cheating. Pressure on students for high performance academically and

athletically often creates an atmosphere where cheating is seen as the only way to succeed. Students who do not cheat find themselves at a disadvantage. Also, cheating is widespread throughout the business world, politics, professional sports, and in many marriages. What message is this sending to today's youth about this tool of the devil?

What Is Cheating?

When the word *cheating* is used, you might think of copying someone's answers for a test. However, cheating is much more widespread than that. One definition of cheating is this: "Cheating is essentially acting dishonestly or unfairly in order to gain a personal advantage. Cheating



disregards set rules in favor of personal success" (*GotQuestions.org*). Examples of cheating include: presenting work that is not your own without giving the proper credit, bribery, falsifying records, unauthorized copying (including copying someone's homework or allowing someone to copy your work), sneaking notes into a test, taking performance-enhancing drugs, filing false tax information, and being unfaithful to one's husband or wife.

Technology has made cheating much easier and more tempting. Websites have been created for the sole purpose of helping students cheat; file sharing websites have made it easy to copy music and movie files without paying for them; and students have learned how to hide test answers in cellphones and calculators or take pictures of tests to share with other students. For many students cheating is widespread, accepted, and expected. Because of this, education for many students is not as much about learning as it is about obtaining high test scores, getting accepted into prestigious colleges, and receiving a degree.



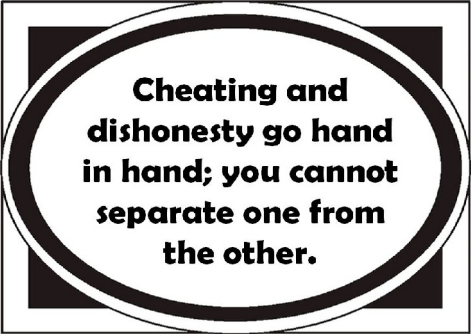
The Consequences of Cheating

There is an old saying, "Once a cheater, always a cheater." What do you think that means? Every time you cheat, it becomes easier to cheat the next time, and soon it becomes a habit. Someone who is willing to cheat in the small things will soon cheat in the bigger things as well (Luke 16:10). Cheating does not end with graduation. Once that sinful habit is firmly established, it follows the graduate on into adulthood. Resume fraud ("Padding Your Resume") will seem like a good idea. Cutting corners on the job will not be considered dishonest. Taking unauthorized shortcuts will be viewed as the smart thing to do. Studies show that students who cheated on high school exams are more likely to cheat on their taxes, lie to their spouses and also to their customers, and to inflate insurance or expense claims (*Josephson Institute of Ethics*).

Sometimes there are immediate consequences to cheating, such as: receiving a failing grade, suspension from school, or negative notes on the student's transcript. However, there are often more serious results of cheating that are less obvious. These can include: cheating yourself out of a good education (having the grades but not knowing the material), losing the respect of others, and lacking in moral and ethical standards of honesty and integrity. One's willingness to cheat will not go unnoticed, and it will cause people to not trust you.

The Bible gives several examples of people who cheated and had to face the consequences for their cheating. Jacob cheated his brother Esau out of the birthright, but later Jacob was cheated by his father-in-law Laban. Cheating among tax collectors was common, and they were often shunned by their neighbors. The money-

changers in the temple were known for taking advantage of people who came to purchase animals for the sacrifice. Jesus was so angry at them that He overturned their tables and cast them out, saying, "My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:13).



**Cheating and
dishonesty go hand
in hand; you cannot
separate one from
the other.**

Resist the Temptation to Cheat

If you have cheated and seemingly gotten away with it, do not be deceived. God's Word promises, "For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad" (Luke 8:17). Cheating might seem to be the easier way and the smarter way, but Proverbs 10:9 warns, ". . . he that perverteth his ways [walks in crooked ways] shall be known." To resist the temptation to cheat, learn what God thinks about cheating and living honestly by reading Scriptures, such as: Proverbs 11:1; 1 Timothy 2:2; and Romans 12:17b. Read the eighth commandment in Exodus 20:15. Cheating is a form of stealing. Do not let the opinions of others convince you that cheating is necessary. Romans 12:2 says, "And be not conformed to this world . . ." In other words, do not be shaped by this world.

Consider how cheating affects more than just you, and heed the advice of Luke 6:31, which reads, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." Finally, ask God to help you. Are you procrastinating or failing to study for tests? Are you looking for shortcuts because you are too tired, too busy, or too lazy? Ask God to help you in these areas. It is His will that you not only live an honest life but that you also are a witness to others. When you are asked to cheat and you refuse, you are letting "your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **How were merchants cheating people in the marketplace in Solomon's day?**
- ◆ **What are some common excuses given for cheating?**
- ◆ **What does the saying "Once a cheater, always a cheater" mean?**
- ◆ **What are some long-term consequences of cheating?**
- ◆ **What are a "false balance" and a "just weight"?**

CHAPTER SEVEN

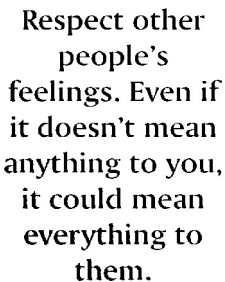
DISRESPECT

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Adam and Eve showed disrespect for God's commandment (Genesis 3:1-6).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Read the end results of disrespect (2 Kings 2:23-24; Daniel 5:2-3, 30; Numbers 12:1-2, 10, 15).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Jehoiakim showed disrespect for God's words (Jeremiah 36:1-23).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Disrespect was shown toward God's house (Ezekiel 25:3-7).
- ❑ **Friday:** Who are we to respect? (Leviticus 19:32; Ephesians 6:2; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 2:17).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God expects respect (Deuteronomy 12:32; Psalm 29:2; Ecclesiastes 5:1).

Is Disrespect a Way of Life?

A famous man once said: "Children now love luxury, they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs and tyrannize over their teachers." Although this quote



Respect other people's feelings. Even if it doesn't mean anything to you, it could mean everything to them.

is credited to Socrates, who lived a long time ago (469-399 B.C.), this could well be describing the children of today's society. No doubt, Isaiah noticed a similar problem in his day when he wrote that "the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient" (Isaiah 3:5). Another translation says, "Young people will not respect those who are older."

Have you ever been asked to take out the trash, clean your room, do the dishes, or feed the dog and you did not feel like doing it? What was

your response? Did you roll your eyes, mutter something under your breath, complain about how much work you have to do, ignore your parents, argue, or talk back? These are some of the different forms of showing disrespect. Sadly, these behaviors are very common in children and teens. In fact, slang words often show the trends of the current culture, and the slang word "dis," which means "to treat with disrespect or contempt," has recently been added to the dictionary (*Merriam-Webster*).

Today you do not have to look very far to find examples of disrespect. It is common in movies, music, the news, politics, the classroom, and the workplace. This tool of the devil is very contagious! It can be seen almost everywhere (children with parents, students with teachers, employees with employers, people with the police and those in authority). Because of this, the devil is convincing people, this is just the way it is today; everybody acts that way. But what does God's Word have to say about disrespect?

Examples of Disrespect in the Bible

One definition of disrespect is failing to place the proper value on some one or some thing. When you read Bible stories about disrespect, you will learn that disobedience soon follows disrespect. Adam and Eve failed to place a high value on the commandment given in the Garden of Eden, and they soon disobeyed. When Cain showed disrespect concerning his sacrifice, it was not long until he showed disrespect for his brother's life as well, becoming the world's first murderer. When God asked Cain, "Where is Abel," Cain lied and said, "I know not" (Genesis 4:9). Consider the reaping of others who showed disrespect: the young men toward Elisha (2 Kings 2:23-24); Belshazzar toward the sacred vessels (Daniel 5:2-3, 30); Miriam and Aaron toward Moses (Numbers 12:1-2, 10, 15); and Jonah's disrespect concerning God's command (Jonah 1:1-4, 17).

Disrespect took many forms in these Bible stories—disrespect for God's leaders, God's holy vessels, and the Word of God—yet in the end, a high price was paid by all. Pharaoh showed disrespect for God, saying: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). Absalom showed disrespect for his father David by swaying the hearts of the people and trying to steal the kingdom. The people in Ezekiel's day showed disrespect for the house of God, saying, "Aha [or laughing, celebrating], against [God's] sanctuary, when it

was profaned [degraded]" (Ezekiel 25:3). Jehoiakim burned the scroll containing the words of God that was given to the Prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:1-23). Consider the ends of Pharaoh (Exodus 14:27-28), Absalom (2 Samuel 18:10, 14), and Jehoiakim (killed and his body was "to be thrown before the walls, without any burial"; *Josephus*). Read the words of Ezekiel concerning the people who disrespected God's house (Ezekiel 25:6-7). These (and many more) Bible stories should leave no doubt how seriously God feels about disrespect.

Are You Being Disrespectful?

There will be many times in your life when you will not like or agree with decisions made by your parents, teachers, or others in authority. You might become irritated or even angry. The problem begins when you let those feelings affect your attitude, words, or actions. Some young people are obviously disrespectful, saying things like, "Don't tell me what to do" or "You can't make me do it." However, disrespect is not always so obvious. Too often, because words are not used, young people feel that they are being treated unfairly when their disrespect is corrected. Facial expressions (such as rolling your eyes), body language (ignoring someone), making fun of someone (laughing), and walking away when someone is talking to you are nonverbal forms of disrespect.



Disrespect in the classroom can include: talking while the teacher is teaching, not paying attention, causing distractions, bullying or making fun of others, glaring at the teacher, or not following directions. Disrespect in the workplace can include: being continually late for work, being lazy, spending time on your phone instead of working, interrupting others' conversation, gossiping about other coworkers, or dressing sloppily. Disrespect for the house of God can include: unnecessary talking during service, leaving a mess, failing to close your eyes during prayer, laughing or criticiz-

ing others, unnecessary texting or being on the internet during the church service, or failing to dress appropriately.

Living a Life of Respect

The importance of showing respect and honoring others is woven throughout the verses of the Bible. God expects respect for His Word (Deuteronomy 12:32), for His name (Psalm 29:2), and for His house of worship (Ecclesiastes 5:1). The Bible also teaches us who else should receive respect: (1) elders, (2) parents, (3) those in authority, and (4) every person. Have you ever felt disrespected or looked down on? Society often differentiates between groups of people, elevating some people and putting down others. Respect is often given based on one's talents, money, accomplishments, or friends. Is this true respect? Because Peter was very prejudiced, God taught him an important lesson. Later, Peter wrote, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). James 2:1 warns against showing favoritism (determining who is worthy of respect and who is not).

Albert Einstein said, "I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he is the garbage man or the president of the university." How do you treat people you look up to compared to people who seem to have little value? What is your reaction when people have opinions that differ from yours? We all want to be treated with respect but how do we treat others? Learn to esteem others—everyone has value! Peter summed it up well when he wrote: "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17).



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ What soon follows disrespect?
- ◆ What are some examples of nonverbal forms of disrespect?
- ◆ What are some examples of showing disrespect in God's house?
- ◆ What is "respect of persons" (James 2:1). Check the Amplified Bible.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GOSSIP

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Gossips are whisperers (Psalm 41:7; Proverbs 16:28; Romans 1:21, 28-32).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Gossips are talebearers (Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 18:8; Proverbs 26:20).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Gossips are called busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:11; 1 Timothy 5:13; 1 Peter 4:15).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Gossiping is damaging and hurtful (Proverbs 11:9; Proverbs 17:9; Proverbs 26:22).
- ❑ **Friday:** Gossips carry tales both ways (Psalm 41:5-6; Proverbs 11:13).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Avoid listening to gossip or passing it on (Exodus 23:1; Psalm 34:13; Proverbs 20:19).

The Triple Filter Test

A story has often been told of a famous philosopher who lived hundreds of years ago (Socrates). One day a young man asked if he wanted to hear news about an old friend. His answer was to ask if this news passed what he called The Triple Filter Test. "What is that?" the young man asked. The philosopher said: "Is it absolutely true? Is it good or kind? Is it useful or necessary for me to know?" The answer to these questions was: "I'm not sure if it is completely true; no, it is not kind; and there is actually no reason for you to know." The philosopher then asked, "If you're going to tell me something that is possibly not true, not good, and not necessary for me to know, then why tell me at all?" Filtering the information through those three questions is a good way yet today to prevent gossip from occurring.

Winston Churchill said, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to put its pants on." What is it about gossip that we often feel compelled to listen to it? Why is it so easy to believe the worst about people? Why do we feel tempted to repeat gossip to others? This tool of the devil is not always



easily recognizable, often hiding itself in seemingly innocent conversations. However, gossip is very powerful. It has hurt many feelings, broken friendships, and ruined reputations.

What Is Gossip?

Gossip is defined as "idle talk or rumor, especially about the personal and private affairs of others" (*Dictionary.com*). Gossip can include things that are true, things that are partially true, and things that are completely untrue. Gossip is sharing negative personal information with other people who do not need to know and cannot do anything to make the situation better. Gossip is often called "spreading dirt," "having a chat," or "getting the scoop." Gossip is not interested in *solving* problems as much as *sharing* them.

Many newspapers and magazines have made room for entire columns, which are plainly called "Gossip Columns." It is not unusual for these columns to have false information. Some websites proudly state, "Check back for the most up-to-date gossip." A famous song says: "You'll never hear one of us repeating gossip. So, you'd better be sure and listen close the first time." Social media has proved to be a faster way to share gossip and rumors. In a matter of hours, gossip can "go viral" (spreading rapidly).

Gossip Often Begins With:

"Don't tell anyone, but I heard . . ."
"I shouldn't be telling you, but . . ."
"It's none of my business, but . . ."
"I'm just sharing a prayer burden."
"I'm concerned about . . ."
"I don't mean to gossip, but . . ."
"Have you heard the latest?"
"I just need to vent to someone."

What Does the Bible Say?

The word *gossip* is not found in the Bible (KJV). However, there are many other words that let us know what God thinks of this topic. The word *whisperer* is used to describe gossip. (Have you ever noticed that gossip is often shared by whispering? Why do you think that is?) David wrote, "All that hate me whisper together against me" (Psalm 41:7). Solomon wrote that "a whisperer separateth chief friends" (Proverbs 16:28). Look at the list of words included with *whisperers* and *whisperings* in Romans 1:29 and 2 Corinthians 12:20 to get a better understanding of how seriously God looks at

gossiping.

Other terms used in the Bible to describe gossip include "slander" (Proverbs 10:18), "repeateth a matter" (Proverbs 17:9), and "meddler" (Proverbs 26:17). People who gossip are called "a talebearer" (Proverbs 20:19), "a busybody" (1 Peter 4:15), "tattlers" (1 Timothy 5:13), "a prating fool" (Proverbs 10:8), and "a babbler" (Ecclesiastes 10:11). God warned His people in Leviticus 19:16 to "not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people." When there is no "talebearer" (or gossip) to spread stories, Proverbs 26:20 says that "the strife ceaseth."

Gossip Takes Many Forms

Everybody loves to hear a good story, and people enjoy being the first to tell others something new. However, gossip is much more than just sharing stories. Gossip rarely comes with a warning label, and it can be very addictive. For some, having knowledge is powerful, and they can use that information to influence others to act (avoid someone, pass the story on to others, or make hurtful comments). Some people enjoy telling or hearing that things are not going well for others. It causes feelings of "I'm better than them" or "At least I didn't do that." When people have been hurt by someone, gossip is often a common method of getting revenge. Still others will gossip because of jealousy. And lastly, some people gossip because it is fun. It has become a form of entertainment for them.

Gossip often has just enough truth in it to be believable, but most of the time that truth is distorted and exaggerated. Gossip and secrets often go hand in hand. Gossip often brings approval and acceptance from others. Some people excuse their gossip by saying, "I was just kidding" or "I didn't know that wasn't true" or "I didn't mean to hurt anyone." Gossips often say they are truly concerned about others, but do their words work to solve the problem?

What Should You Do About Gossip?

Consider the Hurt: an old English proverb says, "A dog that will fetch a bone will carry a bone." Ask yourself how you would feel if negative

**"Some people
will believe
anything if it
is whispered
to them."
Pierre de
Marivaux**

information is being told about you or the people you care about. Is it different when the gossip is about someone you do not care for? Consider the warning of another proverb: "He who gossips with you will gossip of you."

Consider Your Heart: do you enjoy hearing or sharing gossip? This indicates a spiritual heart problem. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34).

Consider the Source: is this someone who is known for gossiping? Proverbs 20:19 (AMP) warns about spending time with people who gossip (reveal secrets).

Consider the Truth: it has been said that there are three sides to every story—his side, her side, and the truth. Keep in mind that you are only getting part of the story.

Refuse Gossip: let it be known ahead of time that you do not want to hear gossip. If gossip starts, use the Triple Filter test, change the subject, or just walk away.

Be a Peacemaker: admit that we all have faults and this person might have been having a bad day. Offer to go with the gossiper to the one being talked about and work it out.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ What is one of the definitions of the word *gossip*?
- ◆ What are some of the words in the Bible used to describe people who gossip?
- ◆ According to Proverbs 26:20, how can you stop gossip?
- ◆ How is gossip different from just telling stories?
- ◆ What does the proverb "A dog that will carry a bone will fetch a bone" mean?
- ◆ When it comes to gossip, what four things should you consider?

CHAPTER NINE

ADDICTIONS

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Do not make room for fleshly lusts (Romans 13:14; Ephesians 2:2-3; 1 Peter 2:11).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Do not be under the influence of alcohol (Proverbs 20:1; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:19-21).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Be careful of what you look at (Job 31:1; Psalm 101:2-4; Matthew 5:28).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Your body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- ❑ **Friday:** Replace old habits and friends with new (Proverbs 14:7; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Colossians 3:7-10).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Do you need a spiritual heart checkup (Psalm 139:23-24; Proverbs 4:23; Luke 6:45)?

Addictive Behaviors

Can you imagine a world without computers, cellphones, or the internet? These examples of technology can often be found almost everywhere in our culture (stores, schools, homes, cars, etc.). Many people are calling this time period the Information Age. Information is collected, stored, and shared to educate, improve living conditions, and prevent disasters. By looking at some collections of important information (statistics), perhaps we can be alerted to another very dangerous tool of the devil (*Sources: NSDUH, CDC, Baylor University*).

- teenagers check their cellphones at least 60 times per day
- nearly 90 percent of all smokers began smoking in their teens
- 33 percent of 15-year-olds have had at least one alcoholic drink
- the average age young people are exposed to pornography is 12
- 90 percent of boys and 62 percent of girls have viewed pornography before the age of 18
- more than 80 percent of teens, ages 12 to 17, reported gambling at least once in the last year
- approximately 50 percent of high school seniors do not think it is

harmful to try crack or cocaine

All of these statistics are describing addictive behaviors. The word *addiction* is not limited to substance abuse (drugs, tobacco, and alcohol) but also includes behaviors such as gambling, viewing pornography, playing video



games, and even internet usage. Studies have shown that many people are addicted to social media or cell phones. The costs of treating all these addictions are in the billions of dollars. Yet, the devil tells the Christian: "This will not happen to you." Is that true?

What Is Addiction?

One definition of addiction is, to become dependent on a habit-forming substance or activity. With time these substances or activities have a bad effect on the



user's health, relationships, education, job, and finances. There are many different reasons why people are tempted with these things. Some people try because of peer pressure, others because of curiosity, some out of boredom, and others to escape pain (physical or emotional). Some addictions begin because few limits are set on things that are enjoyable (such as, electronic devices). Teenagers are especially vulnerable to addictions, since the decision-making part of the brain is not fully developed until they are at least 25. Because of this, teenagers are more likely to be impulsive and risk-takers and are less likely to think things through. Many addictive behaviors begin during the teen years.

Addictions are progressive. They first begin as desires, but desires work like this: the more you feed them, the stronger they grow. These desires can never be satisfied for very long; they always want more. Soon attitudes of "it's no problem" and "I can quit anytime" become "I must have it" and "I can't stop." In a very short time, addictive substances or activities become a regular part of one's life. What began as just a desire has become an addiction. Addiction becomes the master, and you become its slave.

What Does the Bible Say?

Does the Bible forbid specific addictive substances or behaviors? Although you will not find a verse that says, "Do not smoke tobacco" or "Do

not view pornography" or "Do not gamble," God's Word has many principles that fit all these addictions (and more). The best way to withstand this tool of the devil is to use the Word of God. Romans 13:14 warns us to "make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." There is a danger in making "provision" (giving a place) to these desires. Ephesians 2:2-3 tells us that giving in to those desires was how we lived before giving our hearts to Christ. First Peter 2:11 warns to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." Philippians 3:18-19 describes the "enemies of . . . Christ" as people "whose God is their belly ['appetites'; AMPC]."

The Bible also says "be not drunk" (Ephesians 5:18). Any substance (not just alcohol) or activity that weakens your ability to hear God's voice or your conscience, that impairs your self-control, and makes you more likely to commit other sins MUST be completely avoided! Proverbs 23:29-33 talks about people who are under the influence of alcohol. Their "heart" (or mind) is not thinking clearly. One version says, "Your mind will play tricks on you." To be under the influence of any addiction is contrary to the way God wants His people to live. Your body is God's temple (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and He expects you to keep your temple undefiled (1 Corinthians 3:17); in other words, free of dirt of pollution. Because addictions affect your thinking, you will become less and less interested in reading your Bible, praying, meditating, and attending church services. Your ability to think clearly about spiritual things will become impaired. God will no longer have first place in your heart.

What Should You Do?

Just Say No → In the 1980s and 1990s this popular slogan was promoted by First Lady Nancy Reagan as part of the United States' War on Drugs: "Just Say No!" Likewise, 1 Corinthians 10:14 tells us to "flee from idolatry" (idolatry is anything that you want more than God). The best way to prevent addictions is to never give in to those desires, not even once! Yet, it is not only a matter of self-control. You need God's help to withstand these temptations. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14). It is only through daily contact with Him that you can be strong enough to resist this

← **Flee From Evil**

tool of the devil.

What if you have given in to temptation and tried some of the habit-forming substances or activities described in this lesson? What should you do about it? First, it is most important that you ask God to forgive you and give you the strength to resist temptations in the future. It might be necessary to include fasting with prayer (Matthew 17:21). Second, talk to someone who can pray with you and give you good spiritual advice. Do not try to handle this by yourself. Third, recognize and remove triggers. Are there certain friends, places, songs, movies, or videos that make you more likely to give in? Do you have certain thought patterns that enable your addictions? If so, it is time to replace old friends and old habits with new ones. Last, but not least, identify and begin to work on the reason you gave in to the temptation. What is in the heart will come out. Someone with a godly heart desires to "glorify God" in his or her body and spirit (1 Corinthians 6:20). However, a weak spiritual heart will have little or no resistance to temptations.

When it comes to addictions, many people feel that there is no hope, but Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

If you want to get rid of an appetite:

- **you must starve it, not feed it**
- **you must be intentional, not accidental**
- **you must replace it, not ignore it**

– Tim Elmore

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **What is the definition of addiction given in the lesson?**
- ◆ **What are some of the reasons people are tempted with addictive substances or behaviors?**
- ◆ **What does "make not provision for the flesh" (Romans 13:14) mean?**
- ◆ **What is the best way to prevent becoming addicted to something?**
- ◆ **What does "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14) mean?**

Overcoming Addictions

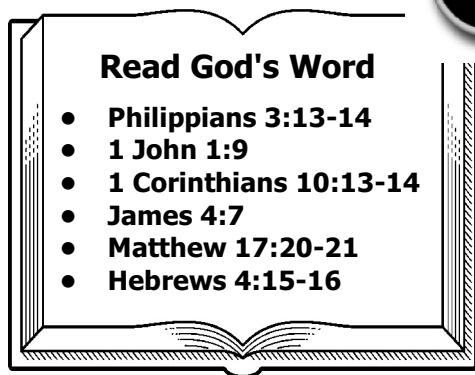
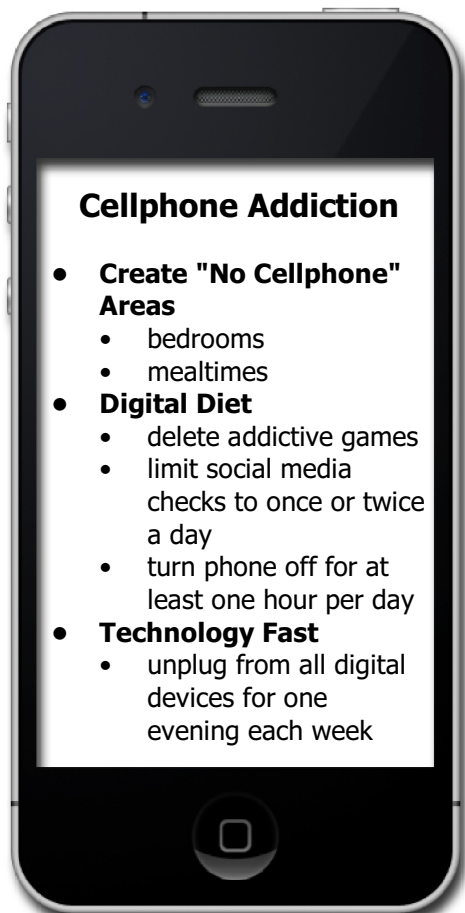
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Pornography Addiction

- **Be aware: porn is no longer limited to certain magazines**
 - Porn can be found in movies, videos, social media, texting, apps, etc.
- **Be honest: admit you have a problem**
- **Accountability: ask for help**
- **Seek God's help: prayer & fasting**
- **Create new thought habits**
- **Exchange smartphone for a flip phone**
- **Identify & avoid triggers**



Create New Habits



Starve the Addiction

CHAPTER TEN

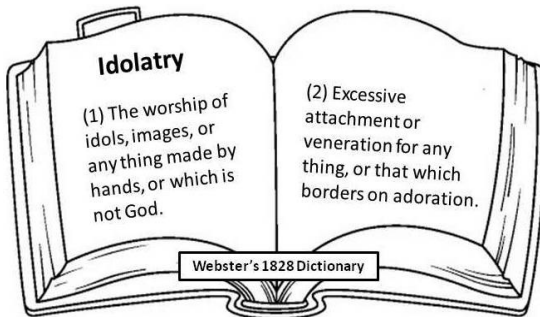
IDOLATRY

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The Bible warns against idolatry (Exodus 20:3; 1 Corinthians 10:14; 1 John 5:21).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Idolatry is trading truth for a lie (Isaiah 44:17-20; Jeremiah 13:25; Romans 1:25).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Rachel and Michal had household idols (Genesis 31:19, 34-35; 1 Samuel 19:13).
- ❑ **Thursday:** How serious is the sin of idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-6)?
- ❑ **Friday:** You will become like what you are worshiping (Psalm 115:1-8; 2 Kings 17:15; Colossians 3:10).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Do you have a divided heart (1 Kings 18:21; Hosea 10:2; Hosea 7:8; Luke 16:13)?

What Is Idolatry?

What do you think of when you read the words *idols* or *idolatry*? While the Bible is full of stories about idols, is this something that a Christian might be tempted with today? Do you personally know anyone who bows down and worships idols? Dwight L. Moody said: "You don't have to go to heathen lands today to find false gods. America is full of them. Whatever you love more than God is your idol." Today's idols are more deceptive and more difficult



to recognize than the false gods of wood and stone described in the Bible. John warned in 1 John 5:21, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." This is another deceptive tool that the devil has in his workshop.

To understand how idol-

atry is so dangerous, it is necessary to understand why people want to worship. God created us with a desire to worship (Revelation 4:11), to give glory (praise and worship) to God. It has been said that "worshiping is a part of your spiritual DNA." Worship is more than something that happens in a church service. It is a part of your everyday life. Worship includes deep admiration, love, and devotion for someone or something. Whether someone is a Christian or not, saved or unsaved, he or she is worshiping something. The question is not, *do* you worship but *what* are you worshiping? If you are worshiping anything other than God, that is idolatry.

Idol Worship in the Bible

In Romans 1:25 Paul described how idolatry begins: people trade truth for a lie and worship the creation "more than the Creator." When people rejected God, you can read that they worshiped idols representing the sun, the moon, trees, animals, and even people. God continually warned His people to not be a part of idolatry. The first of the Ten Commandments says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Yet, time after time God's people disobeyed. You can read of household idols in the stories of Rachel (Genesis 31:19, 34-35) and Michal (1 Samuel 19:13). You can read of idols shaped like a calf (Exodus 32:4). Jeremiah and Paul challenged people who did not even know what they were worshiping (Jeremiah 44:3; Acts 17:23).



Idol worship often involved many gods (polytheistic) and included prayer, burning incense, dancing, immorality, prostitution, and sacrifices (sometimes human). People worshiped idols to have better crops, better health, more children, and victory in battle. The Israelites often fell into idol worship, wanting to be like the neighboring tribes. Notice how all these desires begin with self. True worship is doing what makes God happy, but false worship centers around you (what makes you happy). No doubt, this may very well be why the Apostle Paul compared idolatry with covetousness (greedy or wrong desires for what belongs to another). Not only does idolatry steal worship that belongs to God, but it also encourages a selfish, sinful way of living. Is it any

wonder that Galatians 5:19-21 lists it with terrible sins, such as witchcraft and murder?

What Are You Worshiping?

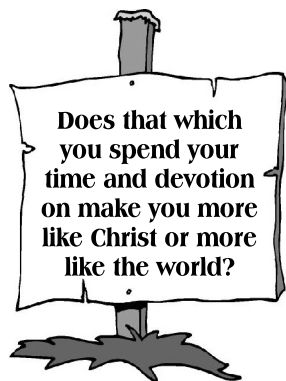
Today's culture has replaced the idols of the Old Testament (such as, Baal, Ashtoreth, and Molech) with new idols to be worshiped. The word *idol* no longer has a negative meaning in the minds of many of today's youth. The word *idol* is found in television shows (*American Idol*, *Pop Idol*, and *Canadian Idol*), song titles (*I Idolize You*), and book titles. A *teen idol* is defined as "a celebrity with a large teenage fan-base" (*Wikipedia*). Urban dictionaries have included the term *my idol*, defining it as "someone you admire so much it is unexplainable." Could it be that such common usage of this word is blinding us to the dangers of true idolatry?

What are some of the idols being worshiped today? Let us name just a few. There is the god of approval, the god of entertainment, the god of technology, the god of good appearances, the god of possessions, the god of self, the god of money, the god of success, the god of fashion, and the god of knowledge. Often things that are necessary can become idols. For instance, a computer, tablet, or smartphone might be required for school or work. However, when too much time is wasted on it, when it causes you to neglect Bible reading and prayer, it has pushed God out of first place in your heart.

What are some symptoms of idol worship? How can you know if something or someone is replacing God in your life? Do you think about it and talk about it often? Is it the first thing you think of in the morning? Do you spend too much time and money on it? Is it influencing your core beliefs, your decisions, and your thinking? Whether your idol is a person, thing, or idea, in time you will become more and more like that which you are worshiping. Psalm 115:8 says, "They that make them [idols] are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them."

Do You Have a Divided Heart?

King Solomon was greatly blessed by God. First Kings 3:3 says, "And Solomon loved the



LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father." However, 1 Kings 11:4 tells us that "when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods." Solomon tried to love the Lord and please his wives; he had a divided heart. Israel, too, often had a divided heart (Hosea 10:2), trying to serve God and Baal. Hosea described them as a "cake not turned" (Hosea 7:8), burnt on one side and doughy on the other. Elijah asked Israel, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). Jesus said in Luke 16:13, "No servant can serve two masters." If you say you are a Christian, yet other things or people have taken first place in your heart (Ezekiel 14:3), you have a divided heart. God will not share His praise and worship with idols (Isaiah 42:8).

In Ezekiel 36:24-27 God promised the idolatrous Israelites that He would wash them clean and put a new heart and a new spirit within. When you repent of your sins (and idolatry is a sin), God will become first in your heart and life. In the song, *O, For a Closer Walk With Thee*, William Cowper wrote, "The dearest idol I have known, what'er that idol be, help me to tear it from Thy throne and worship only Thee." Is there an idol in your heart, something that has replaced God in your love and time? If so, pray and ask God to forgive you and to help you recognize the dangers of idol worship. Make prayer and Bible reading a high priority in your daily life. Putting God first in everything you do (Proverbs 3:6) is the best way to prevent idolatry!

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **What is idolatry?**
- ◆ **How did Paul say that idolatry begins?**
- ◆ **Look up Matthew 10:37. How could this become an idol?**
- ◆ **How can something necessary become an idol?**
- ◆ **What is the warning found in Psalm 115:8?**

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FALSE RELIGION

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The devil creates a substitute for the true (Genesis 3:1-5; Exodus 7:8-12; 1 Kings 13:1-19).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The false prophets tried to convince Israel that Baal was the true God (1 Kings 18:21-26).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The scribes and Pharisees were religious but vain (Luke 18:10-14; Luke 20:46-47).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Teachers of false religion are called false and evil (Matthew 7:15; 2 Peter 2:1-2; Philippians 3:2).
- ❑ **Friday:** Some descriptions of false teachings (2 Corinthians 11:4; Hebrews 13:9; 1 Timothy 4:1-3).
- ❑ **Saturday:** How to detect false religion (Psalm 119:104; James 1:27; 1 Timothy 4:7).

A Form of Religion

Have you ever known anyone who received counterfeit money? That fake money was created by making a copy of real money. Although it may have looked almost exactly like the real thing, that money was actually only a copy and worthless. These bills are sometimes called Funny Money, although there is nothing humorous about it when you are the one left with a piece of paper that you thought was real money. The devil has been referred to as the Master Counterfeiter. He has created many substitutes for the one true religion. Because these substitutes (false religion) are so convincing, the devil has

deceived countless millions into thinking that they are right with God when they are not. This, perhaps, is the most deceptive of all the devil's tools.

It has been estimated that approximately 85 percent of all the people in the world consider themselves to be religious. Some people say that there are many roads

A FORM OF GODLINESS



to God and it does not matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. Other people believe all religions basically teach the same thing. Some people tell you that no religion is wrong; different cultures just have different ways of identifying God. A popular saying of the religious world has been, "Go to the church of your choice." Then there are people who say that their religion is the only one that is right. With so many differing opinions, how can you know what is the truth? Are there religions that are only a form (or a substitute) of the true? Most important, what does God's Word say?

False Religion Is a Substitute

When Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, he presented her with a substitute for the command of God. God said if Adam or Eve ate of the tree, they would die. But Satan said if they ate it they would "be as gods" (Genesis 3:5). When Moses stood before Pharaoh, showing him the mighty works of God, the "magicians of Egypt" worked to imitate the miracles with "their enchantments" (Exodus 7:11). When the true prophet of God was commanded by God to not eat or drink until he returned home, a false prophet tricked him by saying that an angel had given him a different command (1 Kings 13:18). When the Prophet Elijah was trying to persuade Israel to worship the one true God on Mount Carmel, the prophets of Baal did their best to convince Israel that their god was the better god (1 Kings, Chapter 18). Time after time, we can read in God's Word where the devil tried to substitute a false religion for the one true religion.

This deception continued in the New Testament. Many people claimed to be right with God, having a "form of godliness" (2 Timothy 3:5). The Jewish scribes were men who spent much time studying the Law of Moses. They were very religious. Jesus said that they loved to "walk in long robes,"

receive "greetings in the markets," pray "long prayers," and have the "highest [best] seats in the synagogues" (Luke 20:46-47). By only looking at their outward appearance, one could be deceived into thinking that they had true



religion, but it was only a form. When the Pharisee went up to the temple to pray, he was proud that he was not like the publican (a tax collector) who was praying nearby. However, in Luke 18:14 Jesus made it clear which man had true religion and which man did not. When Paul visited Mars' Hill, he saw so many idols (forms of religion) that he said, "I observe that you are very religious" (Acts 17:22 AMP). Yet, they were ignorant of the one true God.

False Teachers

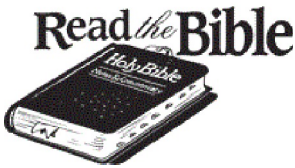
How can you tell what is true religion and what is false? Many people have been completely deceived. Jesus warned that some people falsely believe that their good works are what will get them into Heaven (Matthew 7:21-23). Often there are "false prophets" who preach false teachings and doctrines; Jesus described them as "ravening wolves" wearing "sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15). These men claimed to be Christians. They were very convincing, but Paul wrote that they "pervert [distort or change] the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:7). Instead of preaching the doctrines (the teachings of Christ), they were "teaching . . . the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). Men's ideas, which were often wrong or unnecessary teachings, replaced the truth of God's Word. Paul described it as "another Jesus" or "another gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:4).

Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:17 that we must "beware" of "being led away with the error of the wicked." This is anything that causes you to leave the path of righteousness. It is trading the truth for a lie. Some of the lies being taught today include: it does not matter which church you attend; no one can live free from sin; a loving God would not send anyone to hell; once saved, always saved; the devil was once an angel in Heaven; and the dress standard does not matter because God looks at the heart. Many people believe that these teachings are "right," but the truth is they are "the ways of [spiritual] death" (Proverbs 14:12).

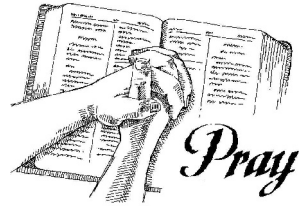
What Is True Religion?

Many people are being deceived, thinking that they are right with God when they are not. It is vital to know what is true religion and what is not. Just as the best way to recognize a counterfeit bill is to know what a real one

looks like, so it is with religion. It must begin with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It has been said that false religion is facing inward (what makes me happy), but true religion is facing upward (what makes God happy). Daily Bible reading, prayer, and meditation are necessary if you do not want to be deceived. Psalm 119:104 tells us that learning God's "precepts" (laws) will give us understanding of the true way, and we will "hate every false way."



James 1:27 says that "pure religion" is "to keep himself unspotted from the world" (holy living) and "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (love and care for others). James also warned in verse 26 that if one seems "to be religious" but does not control his tongue, his religion is "vain" (or useless). If you claim to be a Christian, but it does not show in your talk, in your attitude, and in how you treat others, you are deceived. If this happens, ask God to forgive you. Be more faithful in your Bible reading and study. This is considered spiritual "exercise" (1 Timothy 4:7) and will help you to identify and avoid "profane and vain babblings" (1 Timothy 6:20), or doctrines and ideas that are worthless and untrue. Developing a "love of the truth" is the best way to avoid being deceived by a "strong delusion" or "a lie" (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11).



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ What was the counterfeit (substitute) Satan presented to Eve?
- ◆ How did the false prophet deceive the man of God in 1 Kings 13:18?
- ◆ Why might the Jews believe that the scribes had true religion?
- ◆ According to Matthew 15:9, what was being taught instead of the doctrines of Christ?
- ◆ What are the two things that make up "pure religion," according to James 1:27?
- ◆ How does spiritual exercising protect you from false religion?

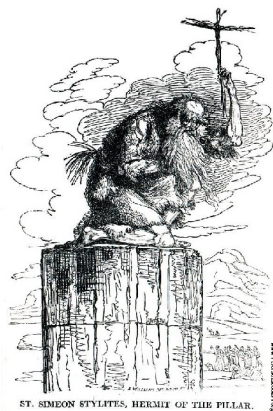
CHAPTER TWELVE

WORLDLINESS

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Three different worlds are described in the Bible (Acts 17:24; John 3:16; John 7:7).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Ways the spirit of the world works (Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 2:15-16).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The spirit of the world is against God's people (John 15:19; James 4:4; 1 John 3:1).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Examples of people who loved the world (Matthew 19:16-22; 2 Timothy 4:10).
- ❑ **Friday:** How should the Christian resist worldliness (Colossians 2:8; Colossians 3:2; Titus 2:12)?
- ❑ **Saturday:** God's people must become spiritually minded (Romans 8:5-8; Romans 12:2; Romans 13:14).

Separating From the World



In the fifth century, a young man named Simeon became a Christian. He decided to escape from the world by living on a platform placed on a tall pillar. In time this pillar was reported to have been more than fifty feet above the ground. For thirty-seven years Simeon lived this way. He was the first of many *stylites* (pillar hermits). However, this method of withdrawing from the world did not work as thousands of people traveled to see Simeon and hear what he had to say.

There have been many people who have sought to escape the world and its influences by separating themselves and their followers, often living secluded in compounds or communes. Some extreme examples of this include: Charles Manson, Jim Jones, and David Koresh. Others have sought to separate themselves from the world by only wearing certain styles of clothing and not owning worldly things. For many people, avoiding worldliness consists of a long list of do's

and don'ts that must be followed. The Pharisees lived a very strict lifestyle, following many rules and being very careful to avoid all contact with sinners.

How is the Christian to avoid worldliness? What exactly is worldliness? Is it only certain choices, clothing, or attitudes? What does it mean when people say, "Worldliness is creeping in"? Is it possible to dress right, go only to the right places, say all the right things, and still be worldly? With so many differing opinions on what worldliness is, how can you know for sure?

Love Not the World

In 1 John 2:15 we read: "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." To understand what John was writing about, we must first understand that there are three different worlds spoken of in the Bible: God's creation (Acts 17:24), people (John 3:16), and a system that opposes God (John 7:7). The last world is the one John was referring to. One author described this as "a system of values . . . which makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange" (David Wells). Ephesians 2:2 describes it as "the course [or the ways and fashions] of this world." The world (or worldliness) is not limited to one place, but it is composed of ungodly thoughts, ideas, attitudes, values, and expectations. It is placing greater emphasis on the things of the world than on the things of God. One example of this is the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22). It was love for his worldly riches that prevented him from following Jesus.

How do you know when things of the world become sinful? It has been said that "worldly people move horizontally rather than vertically" (*Worldliness* by C. J. Mahaney). The things of the world tend to drive one *forward* (selfish desires) instead of *upward* (godly desires). First John 2:16 describes three ways the world works in one's life: "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." The word *lust* means "having a strong desire, craving, or desiring what is forbidden." The "pride of life" includes boasting about what you have accomplished or accumulated. All of these are endeavoring to make you become like the world. These things are "not of the Father." In other words, these are not part of His plan and are completely opposite to His will for His people.

The Snare of Worldliness

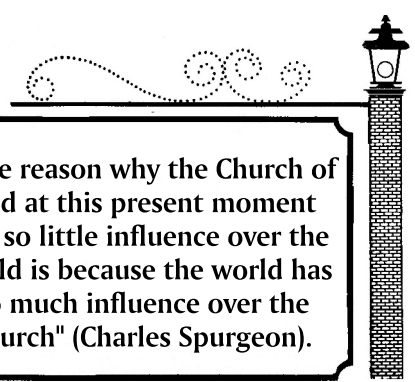


Demas From
Pilgrim's Progress

In the New Testament, Paul wrote of Demas sending greetings to the Christians in Colosse (Colossians 4:14) and also called him a *fellowlabourer* (Philemon 1:24). Demas was actively involved in the work of God. However, something happened to Demas. Four years later, Paul wrote to Timothy that "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). What happened? How did a love for the world creep into the heart of one who had worked with the Apostle Paul? In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Demas tried to tempt Christian and Hopeful away from the path with hopes of gaining great riches. Christian told him, "Demas, thou art an enemy to the right ways of the Lord."

When the word *worldliness* is mentioned, people often think of someone who is wearing the world's fashions, going to questionable places of entertainment, and adopting the language and mannerisms of the world. However, people can love the world without ever leaving the church seats. Many people attend church services and seem to dress right, act right, and talk right, but their heart is not right. Worldliness begins as a heart condition; it is not always noticeable at first. As one's love for God grows cold, it will not be long until the snare of worldliness catches him or her. It might be an attraction to worldly riches, fame, dress, or goals. Worldliness also works when persecution comes, making fitting in with the world look very appealing.

How does one's love for God grow cold? Becoming careless about daily reading and praying and not making attending church services a priority are often the first signs. The less time you spend with God, the more time you begin to spend thinking about things that make you happy. Soon things of the world begin



"One reason why the Church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church" (Charles Spurgeon).

to come first in your heart and your life. You become concerned with worldly affairs to the point that you neglect spending time with God and desiring to do His will. As you let down your spiritual guard, your affections begin to change, and a love for the world creeps in.

Avoiding Worldliness

When James wrote about "friendship of the world," he said that "a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). But how can you live, work, and go to school with worldly people and not become affected by worldliness? Jesus prayed in John 17:16 that His people be "not *of* the world." Worldliness might be all around us, but it is God's will that it not be *within* us. It is through salvation, daily prayer, and Bible reading that God's people are set apart from the ways of the world. They become spiritually minded (Romans 8:5-8), and it shows in their talk, clothing, attitudes, and in the places they go and do not go. Is there anything in your life that is affecting your love for God? Have you become lazy in your personal devotions, have you become irritable and rebellious toward your parents and spiritual leaders? Have the values (morals and standards) of the world begun to become yours? If so, the spirit of worldliness is working on you. Romans 12:2 says, "And be not conformed [fashioned or molded] to this world: but be ye transformed [changed] by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Resisting the spirit of worldliness will require effort on your part. Start every day by putting "on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14): put on His thoughts and His values through reading His Word and talking to Him.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **What are some ways people have tried to avoid worldliness?**
- ◆ **What are the three ways the world works (described in 1 John 2:16)?**
- ◆ **How does worldliness begin?**
- ◆ **What causes your love for God to grow cold?**
- ◆ **How can you be in the world but not of the world?**

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

REBELLION

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Rebellion begins in the heart (Jeremiah 5:23; Matthew 15:18).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The teen years are a time of preparation for adulthood (Lamentations 3:27; 1 Corinthians 13:11).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** What did God say about King Saul's rebellion (1 Samuel 15:1-23)?
- ❑ **Thursday:** Korah rebelled against God's leader (Numbers 16:1-34).
- ❑ **Friday:** Warnings against rebellion (Numbers 14:9; 1 Samuel 12:15; Psalm 68:6; Isaiah 30:1).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God's plan for youth includes submission (Colossians 3:20; Proverbs 1:8; Hebrews 13:17).

A Generation in Rebellion

The April 8, 1966, issue of *Time* magazine shocked many of its readers with a headline that read: "Is God Dead?" During this same time period, a slogan began to be seen on bumper stickers, T-shirts, and graffiti-painted walls that said, "Question Authority!" This slogan was made popular as a way to oppose the Vietnam War. However, this challenging of government authority soon grew into questioning the authority of parents, teachers, pastors, and even God. It could be seen in rock music, drug use, sex outside of marriage, and riots. It has been said that many of the youth of the 1960s and the 1970s considered themselves a generation in rebellion. The *Rolling Stone* magazine defined the rock music of that time as "the music of rebellion." Other slogans made popular during this time were: "Do your own thing," "There are no absolutes," and "There is no God." What made these young people so angry and rebellious that they would completely reject God and His Word? Is there a lesson to be learned from this?

The teen years can be difficult. They are the years between being a dependent child (parent



makes all the decisions) and becoming an independent adult (you make all the decisions). This in-between time becomes a time of questioning: "How do my parents know this is right or this is wrong? How do they know they are making the right decisions? What do I truly believe?" Things that were taken for granted in childhood now become less certain. These feelings, doubts, and questions are a normal part of becoming an adult. However, the devil has become very good at using his tool of rebellion during those years. How can you know when this is working on you?

What Is Rebellion?

Rebellion is defined as "open resistance to lawful authority" (*KJV Dictionary*). During the teen years, it is common to feel you know what is best for you or desire to make your own choices and have your own way. What do you do with these feelings? Do you say things like, "You don't trust me" or "You don't understand me" or "You're not listening to me"? Rebellion begins by allowing feelings that are a part of the growing up process to develop into feelings of anger or bitterness. This could be because one resents the rules created by their parents, teachers, or other authority figures. It could be because a teen does not have a good emotional support system (people to listen and advise them through these years). Or it could be a result of not wanting to meet expectations ("Don't tell me what to do!").

It is important to understand that regardless of the reason, rebellion begins in the heart (Matthew 15:18). Perhaps you have been misunderstood, ignored, talked down to, given harsh consequences, or even ridiculed by ones in authority. This is difficult at any age but especially during the teen years. Even the best parents and teachers can sometimes misunderstand you or misread a situation. The question is, What will you do about it? Will you let feelings of disappointment and hurt grow into bitterness, anger, and then rebellion? What can you do to prevent rebellion from taking over your life?

Bible Examples of Rebellion

Rebellion is not just a teen problem. The Bible is full of stories about people who rebelled against God or God's man and suffered the consequences. King Saul had a lack of confidence when he was first made king, but in time he became overconfident. At first he greatly desired the guidance

of the Prophet Samuel, but later King Saul disobeyed, doing what he wanted to do. In 1 Samuel, Chapter 15, you can read where he disobeyed God's commands and did things his way. Then he made excuses, not seeing the seriousness of his rebellion. In the end, God completely rejected Saul, and Saul committed suicide on the battlefield. Korah and others rebelled against Moses. The ground opened up and swallowed him and his followers. When Absalom rebelled against his father and tried to steal the kingdom, his end was having his hair caught in a tree, making it easier for David's men to kill him. Look up these stories and others. Read of the dangers of allowing rebellious feelings to work in one's heart (such as: "Don't tell me what to do. I'm as good as you are. I will do it my way").



Symptoms and Warning Signs

God has promised that we do not have to be "ignorant of [Satan's] devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11). There are some warning signs you can be on the watch for. Here are just a few:

Peer Pressure: when everyone else is doing it, it can be very difficult to take a stand and be different.

Cannot Talk to Parents: some teens find it very difficult to talk to their parents about their problems and concerns. In many families, both parents work, making it harder to find the time and energy needed for their teens. Some parents do not know how to be good listeners, finding it easier to say, "Just do it because I told you to."

Spiritual Laziness: do you skip Bible reading and prayer on a regular basis? A weak Christian is vulnerable to all the devil's tools, but especially to the tool of rebellion.

A Weak Relationship With God: young people who do not develop a strong personal faith, but instead rely on the faith of their parents, are also more likely to become rebellious. Do you say things like, "I do this because my parents make me or the church teaches it"?

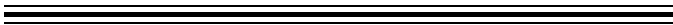
Difficult Life Situations: when serious problems, such as divorce, neglect, or abuse, are part of a teen's life, the feelings of depression, anger, and frustration can quickly lead to a life of rebellion.

What to Do About Rebellion



Begin to make a habit of praying about every feeling of hurt, anger, and disappointment. When you are misunderstood or feeling depressed, ask God for help. To allow these feelings to become a regular part of your thought life is a recipe for disaster. Take them captive by giving them to God (2 Corinthians 10:5). Develop a deeper relationship with God. Faith is not prepackaged nor can it be handed down to you by your parents. You must develop your own faith. You must understand God's Word for yourself. Questions and doubts will work for your good if they are handled in the right way. You will become an adult with deeply-held convictions and morals, and you will be less affected by popular opinions.

Lamentations 3:27 says, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." The teen years are a time for developing submission and self-discipline, character traits you will need the rest of your life. Do not try to handle these years (with all the feelings, doubts, and questions) by yourself. You need the prayers and guidance of godly people (parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, or pastor). Talk to them; let them know what you are struggling with; ask them to pray with you. Submitting to the authority of leaders (Hebrews 13:17; Colossians 3:20) and to God (James 4:7) will, in time, bring greater understanding of what is right, what is wrong, and what decisions you should make for your future..



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **What do you think the slogan "Question Authority" meant?**
- ◆ **What kind of feelings might possibly lead to rebellion?**
- ◆ **Where does rebellion begin?**
- ◆ **How did the rebellion of King Saul and of Korah begin?**
- ◆ **How can you take captive thoughts that might lead to rebellion?**

OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

Bible Study Series #1: The Bible

Bible Study Series #2: Frequently Asked Questions

Bible Study Series #3: The Christian's Toolbox

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It has been said, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." In reality, there are many tools in the devil's workshop, such as an uncontrolled thought life, profanity, lying, stealing, gossip, and disrespect. These may seem like obvious tools, yet, many are deceived by them. "Lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6) gives the devil a great advantage over the Christian.

The thirteen lessons in this book warn of the dangers of some of the devil's most useful tools. Through Bible study and daily prayer, we do not have to be "ignorant of [Satan's] devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11), but we can be overcomers "through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).



Sheri Strelecky is a Sunday school teacher, book editor, wife, mother, and grandmother. In addition to this Bible Study Series, she has written primary and youth Sunday school lessons. Sheri and her husband Steve are the youth leaders at The Church of God, God's Acres.