

INTRODUCTION: "Where Were You (When The World Stopped Turning)"

"Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day · Out in the yard with your wife and children Working on some stage in LA · Did you stand there in shock at the site of That black smoke rising against that blue sky · Did you shout out in anger In fear for your neighbor Or did you just sit down and cry · Did you weep for the children Who lost their dear loved ones And pray for the ones who don't know · Did you rejoice for the people who walked from the rubble And sob for the ones left below · Did you burst out in pride For the red white and blue The heroes who died just doing what they do · Did you look up to heaven for some kind of answer And look at yourself to what really matters.

I'm just a singer of simple songs I'm not a real political man · I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell you The difference in Iraq and Iran · But I know Jesus and I talk to God And I remember this from when I was young · Faith hope and love are some good things He gave us And the greatest is love.

Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day · Teaching a class full of innocent children Driving down some cold interstate · Did you feel guilty cause you're a survivor In a crowded room did you feel alone · Did you call up your mother and tell her you love her Did you dust off that Bible at home · Did you open your eyes and hope it never happened Close your eyes and not go to sleep · Did you notice the sunset the first time in ages Speak with some stranger on the street · Did you lay down at night and think of tomorrow Go out and buy you a gun · Did you turn off that violent old movie you're watching And turn on "I Love Lucy" reruns · Did you go to a church and hold hands with some stranger Stand in line and give your own blood · Did you just stay home and cling tight to your family Thank God you had somebody to love.

I'm just a singer of simple songs I'm not a real political man · I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell you The difference in Iraq and Iran · But I know Jesus and I talk to God And I remember this from when I was young · Faith hope and love are some good things He gave us And the greatest is love ... The greatest is love ... The greatest is love ... Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day?"

Truly, the greatest is love. Mark 12:28-31; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13; Galatians 5:14; 22A; Colossians 3:14.

In the English language, we call many different things love – infatuation, family bonds, passion, affection. The Greeks had different words for all these things. The most elevated form of love, the kind of love mentioned in the passages we've just read, is what the Greeks called *agape*.

What is *agape* love? How many of us could immediately give an accurate and succinct definition? **Agape love always wants and does what's truly best for God and other people.**

In tonight's sermon let's do two things. First, let's seek to really understand this definition of *agape* love. Second, let's explore why of all the good things God gave us the greatest is *agape* love.

DEFINITION: Agape love ...

1. **Always.** *Agape* love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8. *Agape* love is unconditional. It's a given.

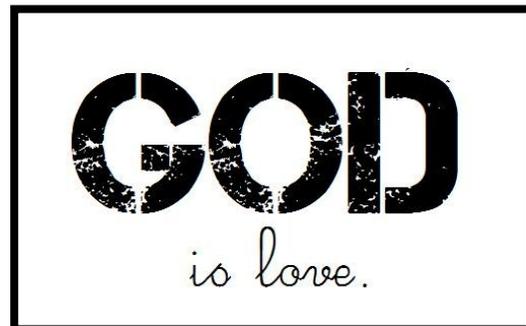
A. **Agape love is not about what people deserve or appreciate. It's about grace and what people need.** Luke 6:27-36; 2 Corinthians 12:15.

B. **Agape love is not about what it prefers to do. It's about what it needs to do.**

"A pioneer woman of long ago was a living example of a mother who loved her children with a sacrificial love, love for the child's sake.

The lady and her husband had settled on the prairie to rear their family and try to make a living. The Lord had so far blessed them with healthy children and they were anxiously awaiting the arrival of another little one. The day came that she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. A neighbor lady had come in a covered wagon to assist with the birth and help in any way she could. It was after everything was taken care of and lady was cleaning the child that she noticed something was wrong with her foot. One little foot was perfect, but the other was turned in a horizontal position.

Several days later the old country doctor was traveling through the area. He knew this woman was expecting a baby; so he made a special stop to see how she was getting along. When she showed him the baby's foot, he told her that if she didn't want the child to be a cripple, there was only one thing she could do. She must start giving therapy treatments immediately. These were the instructions of the doctor: 'Hold her in your lap and force her foot frontward one hundred times daily. Do this without fail.'



While the little bones were pliable, that mother sat down to carry out the doctor's instructions. At the first turn of the foot, the pain was so intense that the baby gave a piercing scream. Bravely, the mother turned the foot again and again and again, counting as she went. As the baby writhed in pain, tears poured down that mother's cheeks, blinding her vision, but she didn't give up. Day after day she administered this painful therapeutic treatment. Weeks and months passed by, and she could gradually see the little foot begin to straighten.

This mother's heart was gladdened and she received the rewards that accompany a sacrificial love when the day came that she looked out her window and saw her child running and playing in the sunshine as normally as the other children. Even though it had been heartbreaking for her to have to give the painful treatment, she accomplished that which was best for her little girl and her future life" (Gwendolyn M. Webb, Training Up A Child).

- C. "We must all be sure that those to whom we are committed in love know that there is no price tag, no admission price on our love. I have given you my love freely. It is my gift to you. There is no fine print in the contract, no hidden agenda. Love is the purest and simplest of gifts. Most people want to be very sure that their love is not taken for granted. Unconditional love says the very opposite: 'Take me, and take my love for granted.' In the words of the contemporary hymn: 'All I ask of you is forever to remember me as loving you'" (John Powell).

2. Wants and does.

- A. *Agape* love is the motivating force of a true Christian's life. 1 Corinthians 16:14; 13:3.
B. To *agape* love, we can't simply *want* what's truly best for God and other people. We must also *do* what's truly best for God and other people. 1 John 3:17-18.

3. What's truly best.

- A. People may disagree about what's truly best but the popular idea that love is unconditional because it accepts or tolerates anything anybody does is patently absurd. *Agape* love is unconditional because it does what's truly best regardless of what people may do.
B. Illustrations: a parent and a child who is about to put a key in an electric outlet; a friend & someone who is about to drive drunk.
C. Who knows what's truly best? God! Isaiah 55:8-9. We must never presume to know better than God what's truly best.
D. Since God knows and wants what's truly best, we *agape* love when we treat God and other people the way He commands. John 14:15; 1 John 5:2.

4. For God and other people. There is no "I" in *agape* love. *Agape* love does not seek its own. 1 Corinthians 13:5.

- A. *Agape* love is from God. 1 John 4:7A.
B. What does God need from us? Absolutely nothing. Acts 17:24-25; Romans 11:35-36A. So why does God love us? He's seeking our good, not His own.
C. Unlike God, we often seek our own in love.
1) Sometimes children tell parents how much they love them and the parents' reaction is, "All right, what do you want?" The parents desperately wish their children would say such things when they didn't want something, when they would just be doing it for the parents and not for themselves.
2) Prior to marriage, many people act lovingly for self-seeking reasons— they want a spouse not that they might live for the spouse, but that a spouse might live for them. This is why many tokens of love – opening doors, sending flowers, dressing to please, and the like – often disappear once the honeymoon is over. It's thought that they have served their purpose. No, their purpose is service.
3) Some parents live vicariously through their children. They convince themselves that their children's welfare is the only reason they push them so hard to succeed when it's really about the parents' selfish ambitions and not the best interests of their children.
D. To adapt John F. Kennedy's famous phrase, people who *agape* love don't ask what's in people for them. Rather, they ask what's in them for people. "Whatever else can and should be said of love, it is quite evident that true love demands self-forgetfulness" (John Powell).
E. Jesus clearly expressed the self-forgetful nature of *agape* love in John 15:13. Jesus clearly demonstrated the self-forgetful nature of *agape* love on Calvary. Matthew 26:39, 42, 44.
F. Truly, "love is the doorway through which the human soul passes from selfishness to service" (Unknown).

WHY IS THE GREATEST OF THESE AGAPE LOVE?

1. **Agape love is the essence of God and the Christian life.**

- A. 1 John 4:7-8. Consider the phrase, “God is love.” “God *is* love ... means more than God is loving; it means that love is of the essence of his being ... The statement ‘God loves’ ... might stand alongside other statements, such as ‘God creates,’ ‘God rules,’ ‘God judges’; that is to say, it means that love is one of His activities. But to say ‘God is love’ implies that all His activity is loving activity. If He creates, He creates in love; if He rules, He rules in love; if He judges, He judges in love. All that He does is the expression of His nature, which is—to love” (Morris).
- B. If I can’t say, “Tim Norman is love,” then Tim Norman is nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2.

2. **Agape love is the ultimate challenge God gives the Christian in life.**

- A. “If you don’t want to –
break the fixation with self and give up your self-centeredness,
learn how to care about and be sincerely dedicated to the satisfaction of another,
become a sensitive listener, who hears what is said and some things that are not able to be said,
postpone personal gratification to meet the needs of another,
get in touch with your deepest feelings and most hidden thoughts,
share your most vulnerable self as an act of love,
get honest feedback from someone who really knows you through your own self-disclosure,
give up you pan-scales and be prepared to give 100 percent,
take on the added responsibilities for a ‘we,’
work at the delicate art of dialogue and shared decision making,
... if you don’t want to do these things, then obviously you don’t want to love” (John Powell).
- B. Rainer Maria Rilke, “For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks.”
- C. William Barclay, “Christian love is not something which simply happens; it is something which has to be sought, desired, pursued, something into which a man must pray and discipline himself. So far from being an automatic possession, it is the supreme achievement of life.”
- D. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, “The ultimate lesson all of us have to learn is unconditional love.”

3. **Agape love is the greatest gift we can give other people.**

- A. Washington Irving wrote the following about maternal love: “The love of a mother is never exhausted; it never changes; it never tires. A father may turn his back on his child; brothers and sisters may become inveterate enemies; husbands may desert their wives; wives their husbands. But a mother’s love endures through all: in good repute, in bad repute, in the face of the world’s condemnation, a mother still loves on, and still hopes that her child may turn from his evil ways, and repent. Still she remembers the infant smiles that once filled her bosom with rapture, the merry laugh, the joyful shot of childhood, the opening promise of his youth; and she can never be brought to think him unworthy.”
- B. What’s true of a mother’s love for her children is perfectly true of God’s love for His children. Isaiah 49:15.
- C. Every human being needs unconditional love.
- D. Those who deserve love the least are the ones who need it the most.
- E. I once watched a television show where a law enforcement officer said that she always tried to remind herself whenever she made arrests that she was arresting people who had mothers that loved them. Why did she do this? To remind herself that even criminals need love.
- F. Eleanor Roosevelt put it well when she said, “A mature person is one who has learned that there is both good and bad in all people and in all things, and who ... deals charitably with the circumstances of life, knowing that ... all of us need both love and charity.”
- G. Erich Fromm put it well in his book, The Art Of Loving. “Unconditional love corresponds to one of the deepest longings, not only of the child, but of every human being; on the other hand, to be loved because of one’s merit, because one deserves it, always leaves doubt; maybe I did not please the person whom I want to love me, maybe this, or that – there is always a fear that love could disappear. Furthermore, ‘deserved’ love easily leaves a bitter feeling that one is not loved for oneself, that one is loved only because one pleases, that one is, in the last analysis, not loved at all but used.”

4. **Agape love is the greatest gift we can give ourselves.**

- A. Matthew 16:24-25; Acts 20:35B. The Christian paradox is that the abundant life, the life of inexpressible joy and peace that surpasses all understanding, the life that Jesus came to earth to give us, is not found in its pursuit, but in forgetting about our own desires and losing ourselves in the service of God and other people.

- B. Why is this so? Michael Novak explains it well in the context of the unconditional love of family. “Being married and having children has impressed on my mind certain lessons, and most of what I am forced to learn about myself is not pleasant. The quantity of sheer impenetrable selfishness in the human breast (in *my* breast) is a never-failing source of wonderment. I do not want to be disturbed, challenged, troubled. Huge regions of myself belong only to me. Seeing myself through the unblinking eyes of an intelligent, honest spouse is humiliating. Trying to act fairly to children, each of whom is temperamentally different from myself and from each other, is baffling. My family bonds hold me back from many opportunities. And yet these bonds are, I know, my liberation. They force me to be a different sort of human being in a way I want and need.”
- C. The challenges of *agape* love make up the bridge to human maturity and ultimate human fulfillment. “Weathering the storms of the love process is the only way to find the rainbows of life. The comforts that one finds on the ‘less-traveled road’ of love are found nowhere else. Life has a much deeper meaning when I truly love another” (John Powell).
- D. “Giving the gift of myself in love leaves me with a deep and lasting satisfaction of having done something good with my life. I live with the sweet memory of having contributed a gift of love to the lives of others. Likewise I am left with a sense of having used well the gifts which God has invested in me. Love takes time, demands a history of giving and receiving, laughing and crying, living and dying. It never promises instant gratification, only ultimate fulfillment. Love means believing in someone, in something. It supposes a willingness to struggle, to work, to suffer, and to join in the rejoicing. I doubt that there has even been one recorded case of deep and lasting fulfillment reported by a person whose basic mind-set and only question was: What am I getting out of this?” (John Powell).
- E. “One of two brothers fighting in the same company in France, fell in battle. The one who escaped asked permission of his officer to go and bring his brother in. ‘He is probably dead,’ said the officer, ‘and there is no use in risking your life to bring in his body.’ But after further pleading the officer consented. Just as the soldier reached the lined with his brother on his shoulders, the wounded man died. ‘There, you see,’ replied the officer, ‘you have risked your life for nothing.’ ‘No,’ replied Tom, ‘I did what he expected of me and I have my reward. When I crept up to him, and took him in my arms, he said, “Tom, I knew you would come. I just felt sure you would come.”’”
- F. There are many unhappy people in the world. Most people who count themselves happy are only happy in the shallowest possible way. To whatever extent people are truly happy, it’s the result of *agape* love and since we can always love more, we can always be happier. Let’s do ourselves the greatest possible favor and give ourselves a gift of incalculable worth – a life of *agape* love, a life in which we are fully striving to always want and do what’s truly best for God and other people.

CONCLUSION:

1 John 4:7-8

“It is of this John that the story is told that, in the evening of his long life, he would sit for hours with his younger disciples gathered at his feet. One day, as it is related in the well established tradition, one of his disciples complained: ‘John, you always talk about love, about God’s love for us and about our love for one another. Why don’t you tell us about something besides love?’ The disciple ... is said to have replied: ‘Because there is nothing else, just love ... love ... love.’ It is a long and hard road; it is an altar of sacrifice; it asks an enormous price in self-forgetfulness; it must seek nothing for itself. Love is the only way to our human destiny and to the feet of God, who is Love” (John Powell).

“On 9-11-01, hundreds of people who were not killed by the initial impact at the World Trade Center were trapped, but they still had access to cell phones. Others were passengers on what they knew to be a doomed flight over Pennsylvania. What was the message repeated again and again from those who were able to make connections with home? Was it directions about where to find wills or life insurance papers? Did they tell their husbands and wives what to do about selling the houses? No, those were the last things on their minds. Instead, they said again and again, ‘Honey, remember I love you,’ or ‘Please tell the kids over and over how much I love them.’ And if there was time, some said, ‘Please call Mom and tell her I love her.’ When one distills the essence of our existence, it has almost nothing to do with houses or bank accounts or business achievements. It is all about love” (Alan Loy McGinnis).

INTRODUCTION:

1. **What is anger?** Anger is a God given emotion.

2. **What are some characteristics of anger?**

- A. People use many different words to describe it.
- B. It is something everyone feels.
- C. It affects us physically.
- D. It varies in intensity.
- E. It varies in duration.
- F. It is aroused in various ways.
- G. It can be held inside or openly expressed.
- H. We can be angry and not even know it.
- I. We can express it in various ways.
- J. It can lead us to do various things.
- K. It can be misdirected.
- L. We can control it or let it control us.
- M. It can be constructive or destructive.
- N. It can be a greater blessing and/or curse for some people than for other people.



3. **Comprehensive definitions.**

A. "Anger is an emotional state, experienced by everyone, but impossible to define precisely. It occurs in varying degrees of intensity, from mild annoyance or aggravation to violent rage. It begins in infancy and continues to the later years. It may be hidden and held inside or expressed openly and freely. It can be of short duration, coming and going quickly, or it may persist for decades in the form of bitterness, resentment, or hatred. Anger may be destructive, especially when it persists in the form of aggression or revenge, but it can also be constructive if it motivates us to correct injustice or to think creatively. Anger is aroused when we feel threatened, demeaned, or blocked in our progress toward some desired goal. Usually we know when we are angry, and others know as well. Sometimes, however, anger is kept hidden behind a calm and smiling façade, or buried someplace in the recesses of our brains. It always involves a physiological arousal that the angry person may not recognize consciously" (Dr. Gary R. Collins, licensed psychologist with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Purdue University, Christian Counseling – A Comprehensive Guide).

B. "Anger is a normal emotion with a wide range of intensity, from mild irritation and frustration to rage. It is a reaction to a perceived threat to ourselves, our loved ones, our property, our self-image, or some part of our identity. Anger is a warning bell that tells us that something is wrong. Anger has three components:

Physical reactions, usually starting with a rush of adrenaline and responses such as an increased heart rate, blood pressure, and tightening muscles; often known as the 'fight or flight' response.

The cognitive experience of anger, or how we perceive and think about what is making us angry. For example, we might think something that happened to us is wrong, unfair, and undeserved.

Behavior, or the way we express our anger. There is a wide range of behavior that signals anger. We may look and sound angry, turn red, raise our voices, clam up, slam doors, storm away, or otherwise signal to others that we are angry. We may also state that we are angry and why, ask for a time-out, request an apology, or ask for something to change.

Everyone experiences anger, and it can be healthy. It can motivate us to stand up for ourselves and correct injustices. When we manage anger well, it prompts us to make positive changes in our lives and situations. Mismanaged anger, on the other hand, is counterproductive and can be unhealthy. When anger is too intense, out of control, misdirected, and overly aggressive, it can lead to poor decision making and problem solving, create problems with relationships and at work, and can even affect your health" (PBS.Org, Sources: Anger Research Consortium; American Psychological Association).

4. **Can anger be good?**

A. Mark 3:1-5; Psalm 119:53.

B. "*Thumos* is a word with an almost unlimited potentiality for good... It can describe a quality without which no good character can flourish" (Barclay). "In the LXX *thumos* can be used of men in a good sense ... There the word means righteous indignation in face of that which is wrong ... In secular Greek ... *Thumos* can be a noble word ... It is the capacity of the soul whereby men ... are righteously indignant at the sight of wrong ... No soul, writes Plato, can stand against wrong without noble passion (*thumos*) ... In the NT, especially in the Revelation, *thumos* is used of the wrath of God. Sinners will be compelled to drink the cup of the fury (*thumos*) of God's wrath (Rev. 19:15; 16:19; 15:1; 16:1)" (Barclay). "If we could get angry only at what Jesus got angry at, we would make a wonderful world" (Archibald Hart).

5. Can anger be evil?

- A. Galatians 5:19-21.
 - B. “Anger has enormous costs. The impulse that felt so right at the moment, so justified, becomes in the quiet hours another source of guilt and regret. What seemed so worthy of blame passes. What remains are the scars, the hurt, the alienation. If you are often angry, every one of your relationships may be affected. Marriage can become a minefield. Distance grows. Walls thicken. Children may become hardened, resistant, while carrying deep feelings of worthlessness. Co-workers may withdraw or sabotage you, bosses become critical. A bitterness may grow with certain friends. And anger affects your health. A 25-year follow up study of law students who had taken a test measuring hostility revealed a startling fact. Twenty percent of those who had scored in the top quarter of the hostility scale had died, compared to a death rate of only five percent in students who had scored in the lowest quarter of the same test (New York Times, 1989). Frequent anger is damaging to your body and increases the death rate from nearly every cause” (When Anger Hurts – How To Change Painful Feelings Into Positive Action, McKay, Ph.D., Rogers, Ph.D., and McKay, R.N.).
6. **We must learn to be angry, and yet do not sin.** Ephesians 4:26A. In this lesson, let’s study what the Bible says about this God given emotion so it’s the blessing God intends and not the curse it often ends up being. We will discuss three things. First, when is it wrong to be angry? Second, what must we do to keep ourselves from sinning in anger? Third, what can we do to help other people be angry, and yet not sin? I strongly suspect that almost everyone, if not everyone, will find this study to be an extremely practical use of our time.

DISCUSSION:

1. WHEN ARE WE ANGRY, AND YET DO SIN?

- A. **When we are too easily angered.** We must be slow to anger. Psalm 86:15; Proverbs 14:29; 19:11.
- B. **When we are too quickly angered.** We must think before we become angry. Proverbs 12:16A; James 1:19-20. Example: 1 Samuel 17:17-19, 26, 28.
- C. **When we are too intensely angered.** Our anger must be proportionate to the offense. Psalm 78:38-39; Isaiah 64:9. Example: Esther 3:5-6.
- D. **When we are angry because of sinful attitudes.**
 - 1) **Selfishness.** Luke 15:25-32.
 - 2) **Pride.** Isaiah 16:6.
 - a. Pride is often the root of anger with God. Isaiah 37:28-29.
 - b. Pride is often the root of anger with other people. 2 Kings 5:9-14 (see also 2 Chron. 26:16-21; Esther 3:5).
 - 3) **Low self-esteem.** I used to think that 1 Corinthians 13:4, “Love does not brag and is not arrogant” was somewhat redundant, simply effect and cause. But I’ve come to understand that some people brag, not because they think too highly of themselves, but because they think too little of themselves. What has this got to do with anger? Some people get angry because they think less highly of themselves than they ought. People with low self-esteem often see criticism, not as an attack on their behavior, but as an attack on their worth as a human being. In other words, they hear critics saying they are bad people instead of good people who’ve done something bad. They get angry at criticism because they see it as a threat to what little self-esteem they have, some amount of which they need to carry on from day to day.
 - 4) **Self-righteousness, i.e. looking at others without also looking at ourselves.** Isaiah 8:19-22. Examples: 2 Samuel 12:1-7A; 2 Chronicles 28:8-15.
 - 5) **Insecurity.**
 - 6) **Unfair and unrealistic expectations.** Psalm 78:38-39.
 - 7) **Hatred.** Jonah 3:10-4:4, 9-11.
 - 8) **Ingratitude.** Esther 5:9-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.
 - 9) **Evil jealousy or rivalry.** 1 Samuel 18:6-9.
 - 10) **Others?**
- E. **When we don’t control our anger.**
 - 1) Galatians 5:19-21. “Outbursts of anger” is *thumos*.
 - 2) “In Greek there are two words for anger. There is *thumos*, which was described as being like the flame which comes from dried straw. It is the anger which quickly blazes up and which just as quickly dies down. It is an anger which rises speedily and which just as speedily passes. There is *orge*, which was described as anger become inveterate (“a feeling ... long established and unlikely to change”). It is the long-lived anger; it is the anger of the man who nurses his wrath to keep it warm; it is the anger over which a person broods, and which he will not allow to die” (Barclay).
 - 3) **When we don’t control our anger, we:**
 - a. **Yell.** Ephesians 4:31. Clamor is “a loud and confused noise, especially of vehement shouting ... a vehement protest or demand” (Oxford). “One of the greatest and most destructive myths about anger is the view that we need to get it out of our systems, let off steam, swear, holler, scream, pound a pillow, or find some other way to vent hostility in an effort to decrease feelings of anger. This idea is never suggested in

scripture and neither is it supported by psychological research. In contrast, there is evidence that ventilation, expressions of rage, tantrums, and continual talking about our anger all tend to *increase* anger instead of reducing it" (Collins).

- b. **Mock.** Nehemiah 4:1.
- c. **Call people names.** 1 Samuel 20:30A.
- d. **Are physically violent.** Numbers 22:27; 1 Samuel 20:30A, 33A; Jeremiah 37:15.
- e. **Harm innocent bystanders.** "Transference." 2 Chronicles 16:10.

F. **When we don't let go of our anger.**

- 1) Psalm 103:9; 30:5; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Ephesians 4:26, 31. In the latter verses "angry" is from *orge* and "anger" is *orge*. See the last Barclay definition in DISCUSSION 1. E. 2) immediately above.
- 2) Example: Amos 1:11.
- 3) If we don't let go of our anger we can become hateful, bitter (Hosea 12:14), and/or resentful; we can bear grudges (Psalm 55:3B); take vengeance; etc.
- 4) Passive aggression. "Some people are pleasant and apparently cooperating in face-to-face situations, but they give vent to their anger in subtle ways ... Passive aggressive people may gossip and spread damaging stories, 'forget' to do what they promised, refuse to cooperate, make 'put down' or embarrassing comments when others can't respond, or leave another person's property where it 'just happens' to be damaged or stolen. Drinking, failing in school, or an extramarital affair are examples of subtle ways that people use to attack or get even with parents, a mate, or some other person who has made us angry. The passive-aggressive person seems to have an exquisite talent for doing what hurts the most, but often these actions can be excused, justified, or explained. This is an indirect form of aggression aimed at the source of one's anger" (Collins).
- 5) We can be angry, and not even be aware of it. This is called repression. I strongly suspect that many people are unaware of the fact that they do have anger issues.

G. **When our anger bears bad fruit.** Matthew 7:18.

- 1) **Further anger.** Proverbs 15:1; Ephesians 6:4.
- 2) **Strife.** Proverbs 15:18; 30:33; 1 Timothy 2:8.
- 3) **Misery.** Proverbs 21:19 (NKJV, "contentious and angry woman").
- 4) **Discouragement.** Isaiah 12:1; 57:16; Colossians 3:21.
- 5) **Injustice.** Isaiah 14:3-6.
- 6) **Disqualification for service.** Titus 1:7.
- 7) **Etc.**

2. **WHAT MUST WE DO TO BE ANGRY, AND YET NOT SIN?**

A. **We must understand anger.**

- 1) In general.
- 2) In ourselves.
- 3) In others.
- 4) In God.

B. **We must acknowledge our anger.** *What must we acknowledge about our anger?*

- 1) **The presence of sinful anger.** 2 Corinthians 13:5. We must confess our sins to repent of our sins. We must confess our sinful anger to ourselves, God, and other people.
- 2) **The futility of our sinful anger.** "Anger resides in the bosom of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:9B).
 - a. No matter what we may think, anger just isn't worth it. James 1:20.
 - b. It isn't our anger that commands respect. It's just that we've taught people they don't have to take us seriously until we are angry.
- 3) **The devastating consequences of sinful anger.** Proverbs 29:22B. To God, other people, and ourselves.
- 4) **The weakness of our sinful anger.** Proverbs 16:32.

C. **We must not make excuses for our sinful anger.**

- 1) **We can control our anger.** Genesis 4:5B-7. God does not command the impossible.
- 2) **We control our anger when we think the price of not controlling our anger is too high.**
 - a. The Elihu illustration. Job 32:1-10.
 - b. The boss calls while the husband and wife are fighting illustration.
 - c. The forgiving the spouse but not another person illustration.
- 3) **Nature, nurture, and environment influence behavior, they don't dictate behavior.**
- 4) **We need to own our anger.** Instead of saying, "You make me so mad when you do that," we should say, "I get so mad when you do that." This is a subtle but significant difference. It accepts responsibility for our anger and is far less inflammatory.

- 5) **It just doesn't matter who sinned in anger first.** Proverbs 15:1.
- D. **We must repent of our sinful anger.**
- 1) "The first step in learning how to deal with your anger is wanting to change. Until a person really wants to do something about the problem, little will be accomplished" (LeHaye).
 - 2) Repent as early as possible. Life is too precious to waste being angry. Ecclesiastes 11:9-10.
 - 3) Truly repent. Proverbs 19:19.
 - 4) Continue to repent. Be patient. Don't give up. We must focus on progress we've made, not on how far we've yet to go.
- E. **We must avoid temptation whenever possible.**
- 1) **Whenever possible, we must anticipate and avoid tempting situations.** Refereeing basketball illustration.
 - 2) **We must pray.** Matthew 6:13.
 - 3) **We must grow spiritually.** Ecclesiastes 5:16-17. As we grow spiritually, fewer things we will upset us. "It has been said that we can no more insulate ourselves from irritating remarks, attitudes, and actions than we can hide from germs. We can, however, protect ourselves by maintaining the resistance that comes from healthy self-respect. Anger is less destructive and more easily controlled when a person is secure as an individual and not plagued by excessive feelings of inferiority and self-doubt ... When Christians have realistic pictures of themselves as persons of value, there is less need or inclination to get angry" (Collins).
 - 4) **We must take care of our bodies.** Eat properly, exercise, get plenty of rest, etc.
 - 5) **We must solve the problems that tempt us to sin in anger.** In the aftermath of sinful anger, don't stop at feeling better. Find the underlying cause and don't stop until the temptation is eliminated.
 - 6) **We must not needlessly associate with angry people.** Proverbs 22:24-25. Apply to mass media.
- F. **We must face temptation properly.**
- 1) **When we are tempted to sin in anger, before we do anything else, we must first:**
 - a. **Pray.**
 - b. **Calm down.** Genesis 27:41-45; Esther 2:1. It is very difficult to act justly when we are inflamed with anger. Deuteronomy 19:4-7.
 - c. **Think things through.**
 - i. Psalm 4:4; Nehemiah 5:6-7A NKJV, "And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers;" James 1:19-20.
 - ii. When we are tempted to sin in anger, there are several important questions we must ask and answer. Here are just a few examples: Why am I angry? Should I be angry? In other words, am I already sinning because I am angry? What should I do about the situation? Can I do it without sinning in anger? In other words, would I control my anger or would I let it control me? Should I still be angry? Etc.
 - d. **Go someplace else when possible to pray, calm down, and think things through.** Esther 7:7A.
 - i. Proximity often hinders praying, calming down, and thinking things through.
 - ii. We must take whatever time it takes.
 - iii. We must repeat as often as needed.
 - 2) **If a person's behavior is tempting us to sin in anger, we must forget or confront.** It is *either* Proverbs 19:11 *or* Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3-4.
 - 3) **If it's something beyond our control that's tempting us to sin in anger, we must give it to God and trust Him to take care of it.** Psalm 37:7-9.
 - 4) **Even if we resist the temptation to sin in anger, we must still quickly let our anger go.** Mark 11:25-26; Ephesians 4:26.
- G. **We must work very, very hard and without ceasing.**
- H. **We must get all the help we can possibly get.**
- 1) From God. Pray, study.
 - 2) From other people. James 5:16; etc.
3. **HOW CAN WE HELP OTHER PEOPLE BE ANGRY, AND YET NOT SIN?** Proverbs 29:8.
- A. **We must not needlessly provoke or irritate.** Psalm 106:29, 32; 1 Samuel 1:4-7; Ephesians 6:4.
 - B. **We must anticipate when we might provoke people to anger and before we do it ask them not to be angry.** Genesis 18:30, 32; 44:18.
 - C. **We must remain calm in the face of anger.** Proverbs 15:1.
 - D. **We must give people the time and space they need to calm down.** Genesis 27:44-45.
 - E. **We must reason with those who are reasonable.** Exodus 32:11-14; Psalm 106:23; Judges 8:1-3.
 - F. **We must not reason with fools.** Proverbs 29:9.
 - G. **We must pray for people who are angry.**

INTRODUCTION: James 3:6-10.

DISCUSSION:

1. **Slander is sinful.** Leviticus 19:16A (NKJV “talebearer”); Psalm 15:1-3 (NKJV “backbite”); Proverbs 10:18B; Matthew 15:19-20A; Colossians 3:8; etc.
2. **Gossip is sinful.** Romans 1:28-30A, 32 (NKJV “whisperers, backbiters”).
3. **Slander and gossip are real problems for us.** Jeremiah 9:4; 2 Timothy 3:1-2, 3, 5 (NKJV “slanderers”).
4. **What is slander?** “Slander is the open, intentional sharing of damaging information” (C. Mayhall, *Words That Hurt Words That Heal*).
 - A. **Damaging information.** Slander is destructive, it tears down, curses. Psalms 50:20.
 - B. **Damaging information, not just negative information.** The open, intentional sharing of negative information doesn’t necessarily result in harm. Sometimes the open, intentional sharing of negative information is the most edifying thing we can possibly do. Matthew 18:15-17.
 - C. **Damaging information, but not necessarily false information.**
 - 1) Proverbs 20:19 (NKJV “talebearer ... one who flatters with his lips;” literally the latter is “one who opens his lips”).
 - 2) “Usually we think of slander as a false statement made about someone with malicious intent. The dictionary backs this up by defining slander as ‘the utterance in the presence of another person of a false statement or statements, damaging to a third person’s character or reputation: usually distinguished from *libel*, which is written.’ However, in the Bible, the definition of slander goes beyond making false statements ... Based on the Old and New Testaments, slander is the *open, intentional sharing of damaging information* and is characterized by bad reports that blemish or defame a person’s reputation *whether they are true or not!* (C. Mayhall).
 - 3) Just because something is true, doesn’t mean we can tell it. “Truth is not the only standard we need to consider. While truth is certainly one issue, so are confidentiality and potential harm. Scripture provides more complete standards for our speech. ‘Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another’ (Romans 14:19), and ‘Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it will give grace to those who hear’ (Ephesians 4:29)” (J. M. Stowell, *The Weight Of Your Words, Measuring The Impact Of What You Say*).
 - 4) Genesis 9:22.
 - D. **Open sharing, but not necessarily open sharing with everyone.** Psalms 101:5A.
5. **What is gossip?**
 - A. In God’s word, there are two primary categories of damaging speech. “The first is *idle chatter demeaning another’s integrity and reputation* (1 Tim. 5:13; 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16). This category of verbal misuse is not always malicious in its intent, but it is always damaging. The concept is frequently translated in Scripture as *whisper* or *gossip* (Psalm 41:7; Proverbs 20:19). The second category includes the *intentional, malicious communication of bad reports*. This concept is normally translated *slander* (Psalm 31:13; Jeremiah 9:4; 2 Corinthians 2:20)” (J. M. Stowell).
 - B. Clearly, gossip and slander are very closely related. J. M. Stowell calls them “catastrophic cousins.” The difference, if any, is intent – in other words, *why* damaging information is being shared.
 - 1) Slander is born out of malice. In 1 Timothy 3:11; 2 Timothy 3:3; and Titus 2:3 the NASB has “malicious gossips” where the NKJV has “slanderers.”
 - 2) Gossip shares damaging information, not out of malice, but for other equally unacceptable reasons. J. M. Stowell suggests six possible motives for gossip:
 - a. **Curiosity.** “It’s not by accident that 1 Timothy 5:13 links busybodies (people whose curiosity has gone wild) with gossips (those who share what their unchecked curiosity has discovered) in the same negative context” (J. M. Stowell).



- b. **Idleness.** I Timothy 5:13-14.
 - c. **A desire to be the center of attention.**
 - d. **The opportunity to elevate ourselves over others or to feel better about ourselves.** “It is when we feel insecure and threatened that we are most likely to spread ugly gossip about others. By rubbing some of the glitter from someone else’s crown, we believe our own will shine more brightly. By cutting others down, we think we will feel taller” (L. Koopman, *Beauty Care For The Tongue*).
 - e. **Bitterness, wrath, anger.** Ephesians 4:31. “In nine times out of ten, the slanderous tongue belongs to a disappointed person” (George Bancroft). “Malicious words are often spawned by *bitterness* ... The slander we pour out against those who have hurt us is the natural vent of our hostile spirit” (J. M. Stowell).
 - f. **A desire to sooth our own anxieties.** Misery loves company.
6. **Why are slander and gossip sinful?** Because they are so damaging!
- A. “The Jews of the intertestamental period called the source of slander ‘the third tongue’ because it is fatal to three sets of people: those who *speak* the slander, those who *listen* to it, and those *about* whom it is spoken” (J. M. Stowell).
 - B. **Slander and gossip damages:**
 - 1) **Souls.** 2 Corinthians 12:20 (NKJV “backbitings, whisperings”).
 - 2) **Reputations.** “To murder character is as truly a crime as to murder the body: the tongue of the slanderer is brother to the dagger of the assassin” (Tryon Edwards).
 - 3) **Relationships.** Proverbs 16:28 (NKJV “whisperer”). “Gossip separates the closest of friends ... When you hear gossip about a friend, it begins to drive a wedge between the two of you. It builds a barrier of suspicion and doubt. Conversely, if your friend gossips to you about someone else, you begin to doubt his or her loyalty. After all, if he gossips *to* you, maybe he will gossip *about* you” (J. M. Stowell). See also Proverbs 26:20; Ecclesiastes 10:20.
 - C. **The damage is often irreversible.**
 - 1) **To the speakers.** Proverbs 25:9-10.
 - 2) **To the listeners.** Slanderers share “bits of information that are difficult to ignore or forget (Proverbs 18:8; 26:22). The ‘juicy morsels’ stay with us, permanently staining our perceptions of and appreciation for those about whom we are hearing” (J. M. Stowell).
 - 3) **To those about whom it is spoken.** Deuteronomy 22:13-19. Joseph M. Stowell tells the story of a young man during the Middle Ages who confessed, “I’ve sinned by telling slanderous tales about someone. What should I do?” His confidant told him to go and put a feather on every doorstep in town. After doing so, he asked if there was anything else he should do. His confidant told him to go back and pick up all those feathers. The young man excitedly replied, “That’s impossible! By now the wind will have blown them all over town!” The confidant said, “So have your slanderous words become impossible to retrieve!” (J. M. Stowell).

APPLICATIONS:

- 1. **We must understand slander and gossip.** Their sinfulness, prevalence, meaning, and damaging effects.
- 2. **We must have no fellowship with slander or gossip.** 1 Peter 2:1.
 - A. **We must not speak slander or gossip.** Ephesians 4:31 (Greek, *blasphemia*; NKJV “evil speaking”).
 - 1) **Before we say anything, we must go down the anti-slander/gossip checklist.** Is what I’m thinking about saying negative? Do I know it to be true (two or three witnesses)? Will it serve a constructive purpose? Am I saying it to the right person? Am I saying it in the right way?
 - 2) **We must be so busy doing right that we have as little time or inclination as possible to slander or gossip.** 1 Timothy 5:13-14; 1 Peter 2:1-3.
 - 3) **We must be very careful what we say about rulers.** Acts 23:1-5; Titus 3:1-2.
 - B. **We must not listen to slander or gossip.** Proverbs 20:19.
 - 1) **It is just as sinful to listen to slander or gossip as it is to speak slander or gossip.** “There would not be so many open mouths if there were not so many open ears” (Joseph Hall). “Slander-mongers and those who listen to slander, if I had my way, would all be strung up, the talkers by the tongue, the listeners by the ears” (Titus Maccius Plautus). “Listen not to a tale-bearer or slanderer, for he tells thee nothing out of good-will; but as he discovereth of the secrets of others, so he will of thine in turn” (Socrates).

- 2) **Listening often leads to speaking.** “Hearing gossip adds unneeded information to our mental notebooks. These negative thoughts give Satan a foothold in our lives. Hearing often results in telling—for some people, ‘gossip in’ soon becomes ‘gossip out’” (J. M. Stowell).
- 3) **We must lovingly oppose slander and gossip.**
 - a. “What if you are caught in the middle of a group that is tearing someone down? Recently in a Bible study, one woman who works constantly with professional women said, ‘When I find myself in a group that is tearing someone to shreds, I smile sweetly and say, “You know, I’m getting very uncomfortable about this.”’ When asked what the response usually was to her statement, she said, ‘They change the subject’ ... Another suggestion was to respond softly, ‘That would really hurt her if she knew what we were saying’” (C. Mayhall).
 - b. “When you defend those who are absent, you retain the trust of those present” (S. R. Covey, *Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People*). Confronting gossips “takes considerable courage, and many people would prefer to take the course of least resistance, belittling and criticizing, betraying confidences, or participating in gossip about others behind their backs. But in the long run, people will trust and respect you if you are honest and open and kind with them. You care enough to confront. And to be trusted, it is said, is greater than to be loved. In the long run, I am convinced, to be trusted will be also to be loved” (S. R. Covey).
- 4) **If we hear damaging information we must not believe it unless we confirm it to be true.** 1 Corinthians 13:7; Matthew 18:15, 16.
3. **We must not justify slander or gossip.** “We all know we shouldn’t gossip. Yet our thirst for ‘news’ (both hearing and telling) at times seems insatiable. Consequently, we devise ways of sharing it that salve our consciences. Will Rogers quipped, ‘The only time people dislike gossip is when you gossip about them’” (J. M. Stowell). “Bless his/her heart” does not sanctify slander or gossip!
4. **We must respond as God commands if we think we are being victimized by slander or gossip.**
 - A. **Be humble.** Ecclesiastes 7:20-22.
 - B. **Take responsibility.** “Pay the stupid tax.”
 - C. **Confront or forget.** 1 Corinthians 4:13A (NKJV “being defamed, we entreat). *Conciliate*, “stop (someone) from being angry or discontented; placate; pacify ... reconcile; make compatible ... *Conciliate* implies the use of arbitration or compromise to settle a dispute or to win someone over” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*).
 - D. **Let our light shine/give no place to the devil.** 1 Peter 2:12 (NKJV “speak against”); 3:16 (NKJV “defame you as evildoers”).
 - E. **Take comfort.** Luke 6:26. “The slander of some people is as great a recommendation as the praise of others” (Henry Fielding).
 - F. **Repay good for evil.** Psalm 35:12-16.
 - G. **Accept that we might not be able to make it stop.** Psalm 35:15.
 - H. **Give the situation to God in prayer and trust Him to take care of the problem.** Psalm 35:17 ff; 140:11A, 12-13. “When we are victims of gossip, we need to realize that God knows, that He cares, and that He can deal with the situation. We can find peace only when we leave the situation to ‘Him who judges righteously’ (1 Peter 2:23)” (J. M. Stowell). “The surest method against scandal is to live it down by perseverance in well-doing, and by prayer to God that He would cure the distempered mind of those who traduce and injure us” (Herman Boerhaave).

CONCLUSION: Psalm 141:3.

THE THREE KEYS TO DRESSING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

God wants “women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness” (1 Timothy 2:9-10 NASB).

Why does God care about the way we dress? Simple. Our clothing, or lack thereof, affects other people, sometimes profoundly. God wants to make sure our clothing affects people for good, not evil.

In 1 Timothy 2:9-10, God gives us three keys to dressing for spiritual success.

1. **MODESTY IS THE FIRST KEY TO DRESSING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS (1 Timothy 2:9).**

- A. Dressing “modestly” means “dressing or behaving so as to avoid impropriety or indecency, esp. to avoid attracting sexual attention.”
- B. The original Greek word is *aidos*. It means to dress with a “sense of shame,” i.e. with a keen awareness of and sensitivity to the importance of dressing with propriety or decency.
- C. There are two different senses of shame. Some people would be ashamed to get caught doing wrong. Some people would be ashamed to do wrong regardless of whether they got caught doing it. *Aidos* is the latter sense of shame.
- D. Modesty or *aidos* “implies an innate moral repugnance to the performance of dishonorable acts ... *Aidos* ... is self-motivated and implies reverence for the good as good, not merely as that to which honor and reputation are attached ... Thus *aidos* ... would always restrain a good man from an unworthy act ... In 1 Timothy 2:9, *aidos* refers to that ‘shamefastness’ or modesty that shrinks from exceeding the limits of womanly reserve, as well as from the dishonor that would justly attach to doing so” (Trench).
- E. A young woman once wore short shorts to an airport. She ran into a preacher she knew and was immediately ashamed of her clothing. If she had dressed with modesty or *aidos*, a scriptural sense of shame, she wouldn’t have bought the short shorts much less have worn them in public.
- F. Why is modesty, a scriptural sense of shame, key to adorning ourselves with proper clothing? Because pleasing God must be our highest priority if we’re going to overcome such powerful influences as the fashion industry, our peers, our own personal preferences, etc.
- G. Unfortunately, modesty doesn’t govern how most people dress. In the early seventies, faithful preachers taught long and hard against miniskirts with little apparent effect. Yet, what happened when Paris decided that miniskirts were out and long skirts were in? Overnight, many “Christians” started adorning themselves with proper clothing. Clearly, pleasing God wasn’t their primary concern.
- H. **What really governs the way we dress?**



2. **DISCREETNESS IS THE SECOND KEY TO DRESSING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS (1 TIMOTHY 2:9).**

- A. Dressing “discreetly” means being “careful, judicious, circumspect” in our choice of clothing.
- B. “Careful” means “done with or showing thought or attention.” “Judicious” means “having, showing, or done with good judgment or sense.” “Circumspect” means “to be watchful in all directions and with regard to all possible consequences.”
- C. The original Greek word is *sophrosune*. It means to dress with “good sense ... literally soundness of mind ... sanity” (Lenski). “Inherent in this ... word is the use of ‘good judgment’ in the matter of dress” (Fee).
- D. Why is discreetness, thought or attention, good judgment or sense, watchfulness in all directions, key to adorning ourselves with proper clothing? Because dressing for spiritual success requires us to THINK and THINK WELL.
- E. We can’t just “throw something on” and hope to dress properly.
 - 1) We must know what the Bible says about proper and improper clothing.
 - 2) We must wisely apply these principles.
 - 3) We can’t be naïve about the way our clothing, or lack thereof, affects other people.
 - 4) We must make sure our clothing will be modest in all situations.
 - 5) If we’re not sure something is proper, we must err on the side of caution.
 - 6) No matter how much we want to wear something, we can’t make excuses for improper clothing.

F. **Do we really think about what we wear?**

3. **PUTTING FAR MORE EMPHASIS ON INWARD THAN OUTWARD BEAUTY IS THE THIRD KEY TO DRESSING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS (1 TIMOTHY 2:9-10).**

- A. Our text, 1 Timothy 2:9-10, is a “not, but” passage similar to John 6:27, “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.” In this passage, Jesus isn’t forbidding us to work for food that feeds our bodies as required by 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Rather, Jesus is commanding us to work much harder for food that feeds our souls.
- B. Similarly, 1 Timothy 2:9-10 and 1 Peter 3:3-4 don’t forbid styling hair, wearing jewelry, or putting on expensive clothes. Rather, they teach us to put far more emphasis on good works than things like hair, jewelry, and apparel.
- C. God is not anti-fashion or anti-attractiveness. The excellent wife whose price was far above jewels wore clothing of fine linen and purple (Proverbs 31:10, 22). She rightly cared about her outward appearance, but she cared far more about her inward appearance (Proverbs 31:10-31).
- D. Why is putting far more emphasis on inward than outward beauty key to adorning ourselves with proper clothing? Because dressing for spiritual success requires more than modesty and discreetness. It also requires us to keep clothes, even modest and discreet clothes, in their proper place. If we focus on adorning our body to the neglect of more important matters, we are still far from properly dressed.
- E. **Are we really more concerned about the way we look inwardly or outwardly?**

BIBLE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING PROPER CLOTHING

1. **NAKEDNESS IS SHAMEFUL.**

- A. Before eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve “were both naked” and “not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). Afterwards, “they knew they were naked; and sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings” (Genesis 3:7).
- B. Jesus advised the Laodiceans to buy from Him “white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed” (Revelation 3:18).
- C. Spiritual nakedness, like literal nakedness, is shameful.

2. **GOD GAVE US ANIMALS AND PLANTS TO COVER OUR NAKEDNESS.** Hosea 2:9.

3. **NAKEDNESS IS INADEQUATE CLOTHING, NOT NECESSARILY NUDITY.**

- A. Why did Adam and Eve hide from the presence of the Lord? Even though they were wearing loincloths, they were still naked! Read Genesis 3:8-11.
- B. After meting out their punishment, “the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). To be modest, we must wear more than a loincloth. The garment God made “was a long covering from the shoulders to the knees. This was God’s definition of being clothed” (*Christian Chronicle*).

4. **OUR CLOTHING MUST BE PROPER IN ALL SITUATIONS.** “You shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it” (Exodus 20:26.) Our clothes should be modest when we bend over, sit down, cross our legs, lift our arms; when someone is standing over us, under us; etc.

5. **WE CAN BE COVERED BUT STILL SHAMEFULLY DRESSED.** The principle is found in Genesis 38:14-15. Its application means we must not wear clothing that’s transparent, too tight, etc.

6. **WHAT WE SEE TREMENDOUSLY AFFECTS US.**

- A. After David saw Bathsheba bathing, he committed adultery with her, got her pregnant, and had her husband murdered to cover his sin. 2 Samuel 11:2-5, 14-17.
- B. After Herod saw his stepdaughter dance, he promised her up to half his kingdom. She got the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Mark 6:21-28.

7. **IT’S SINFUL TO LOOK TO LUST.** Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). Jesus takes looking to create desires we can’t righteously fulfill very seriously. “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matthew 5:29).

8. **IT’S TEMPTING TO LOOK TO LUST.** God made women attractive to men and visa-versa. We can appreciate beauty without looking to lust, but it’s a challenge. We need Job’s determination. “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1).

9. **WE MUST NOT TEMPT PEOPLE TO LOOK TO LUST.** We must not dress provocatively, i.e. in a way that arouses inappropriate sexual desire or interest. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!” (Matt. 18:6-7).

10. WE CAN KNOW WHAT TO COVER, HOW TO AVOID DRESSING PROVOCATIVELY, ETC.

- A. **The Bible tells us.** Exodus 28:42 (“Linen breeches ... such ... as worn by the Egyptians generally, reaching from the waist to a little above the knee ... Unto the thighs — *i.e.*, to the bottom of the thighs where they adjoin on the knee” (*Pulpit Commentary*); Ezekiel 16:7-10; John 21:7 (literally, “for he was naked”); etc.
- B. **Human nature tells us.** The Cedar Creek Corrections Center in Littlerock, Washington understands provocative clothing. Their visitor guidelines (Rev. 1/09) teach us much IF we are willing to learn. “Appropriate, modest clothing should be worn by all visitors. Buttons or closures should be fastened to the degree necessary to maintain modesty. All clothing must be clean and in good repair; free of holes, rips, or tears. Undergarments must be worn, to include briefs and brassieres for females, and briefs, boxers, or long underwear for males. Examples of inappropriate clothing include:
 - 1) Clothing that might expose undergarments, cleavage, stomach/midriff, bare back when arms are raised, or bare chest
 - 2) Tight fitting clothing
 - 3) Low cut tops or bottoms
 - 4) Clothing that is sheer, see through, or mesh (other than hosiery)
 - 5) Fish net stockings
 - 6) Camisole type/halter or tank tops, even if worn under other clothing ...
 - 7) Clothing referring to obscenity ... or sex in any form
 - 8) Wraparound clothing with full length openings
 - 9) Shorts, including culottes and cutoffs

Dresses, skirts, and slits in clothing must not fall more than 3 inches above the knee.”

- 11. **ERR ON THE SIDE OF SAFETY.** Clothing is either clearly modest, clearly immodest, or somewhere in between. If a mountain road doesn't have a guardrail and it drops off 1,000 feet, sensible people drive as far from the edge as possible. Given the value of souls (Matthew 16:26), we must be even more conservative with our apparel. Sensible people wear clothes that are clearly modest. When in doubt, they don't (Romans 14:23).

12. MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS.

- A. These principles apply equally to men.
- B. People desperately need good examples—set one!
- C. Parents, instill these principles in your children at the earliest possible age.
- D. Children, trust and appreciate your parents.
- E. Girls, your dad understands boys better than you do.
- F. Fathers, be firm.
- G. Mothers, support your husband.
- H. Drink and you may undress (Genesis 9:20-21; 19:30-36; Lamentations 4:21B; Habakkuk 2:15).

THERE'S NO EXCUSE FOR IMMODEST CLOTHING. From the time of Adam and Eve, people have tried to excuse the inexcusable. This has certainly been true of immodest clothing. Here are some common rationalizations.

- 1. **SOME PEOPLE WILL LUST AFTER US NO MATTER WHAT WE WEAR.** True, but some people will lust after us only if we wear immodest clothing. If we needlessly tempt people to lust, we are just as guilty as people who lust (Matthew 18:6-7). People trying not to lust need all the help they can get. We are our brother's keeper.
- 2. **MODESTY IS DETERMINED BY CULTURAL STANDARDS.**
 - A. Without question, some things may be provocative in one culture but not in another culture. For example, once upon a time in America a woman's exposed ankles were provocative. Today, we don't give them a second thought.
 - B. However, given the way God has made men and women, it's also without question that some things are provocative in all cultures, regardless of time or place.
 - C. Whether modesty is dictated by human nature or culture, Christians must not dress provocatively. They must respect the boundaries of human nature and not push the boundaries of cultural acceptability.
- 3. **IT'S A MATTER OF JUDGMENT.** Given the word of God and human nature, it's not entirely a matter of judgment. However, when judgment is involved, we must still use good judgment. No, we don't have to answer to other people in matters of judgment, but we will have to answer to God.
- 4. **NO ONE WILL LUST AFTER ME.**
 - A. Don't be naïve. Let's take modern swimsuits for example. If we don't look twice at people at the pool or beach, that doesn't mean people don't look twice at us. Why is the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition so popular? Because people do look! And yes, even at us. All people are attractive to some people.

- B. Here's what's really happening. "The fact is that our generation has been so bombarded with sexual stimuli that we have about reached the condition described by Jeremiah ... we are not at all ashamed, neither can we blush (Jeremiah 6:15; 8:12). **It is not that we think nothing lustful; it is that we think nothing of the sinfulness of thinking lustfully**" (Sewell Hall).

5. I HAVE TO WEAR IT TO PARTICIPATE, EXCEL, ETC.

- A. Admittedly, some activities require immodest clothing. For example, if you want to be a Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader, you must dress provocatively. Does this mean Christians can be Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders? No, it means Christians can only participate in things that allow them to dress modestly.
- B. Yes, being a Christian means we can't do certain things. But, God promises us we'll do even better things (Mark 10:28-30). If we compromise, we lose far more than we can ever hope to gain (Matthew 16:26).
- C. Fortunately, some activities, if pushed, will accommodate modesty concerns. Modest uniforms may invite abuse (1 Peter 4:4), but they may also invite respect for the courage of our convictions and embolden less courageous people to stand with us for what's right.

6. I HAVE TO WEAR IT TO ATTRACT MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITE SEX.

- A. This is just not true. Modest apparel will attract people who are more interested in us as a person than a sex object, whose primary concern is pleasing God, etc.
- B. It's proper to say there are two different types of girls—the kind men want to date and the kind they want to marry. Both attract men's attention. A woman's clothing has much to do with the kind of attention she'll attract.

7. IT'S TOO HOT TO BE MODEST.

- A. God doesn't ask the impossible.
- B. "If the pioneer women of this country could wear long dresses, often with long sleeves, pantaloons, boots, and who knows what all else, what am I complaining about? They wore these things laundering and cooking over an open fire, working in the field, etc. I can certainly wear modest clothing when I have air conditioning, electric fans, stoves, and other such labor saving devices ... You can be sure, however, that if fashion designers tomorrow declared shorts, halters, cropped shirts, tube tops, etc. to be out of date and passé, such clothing would be abandoned in the blink of the eye, regardless of the weather" (Linda Cruz).
- C. If Saudi Arabian women can wear their outfits in the desert because they love Allah, then Christians who love God can dress modestly no matter how hot it may be.

- 8. EVERYONE DRESSES THIS WAY.** Not people who want to go to heaven. "You shall not follow the masses in doing evil" (Exodus 23:2).

- 9. STORES DON'T SELL ANY OTHER KIND OF CLOTHES.** Clearly, modesty is not the fashion industry's highest priority, but if we look hard enough we can find decent apparel. If not, people who want to please God learn to sew or find a seamstress so they will have modest clothing.

10. I ONLY DRESS THIS WAY AROUND CLOSE FRIENDS.

- A. Take modern swimsuits again.
- B. "Some justify the wearing of such if only done among the selected few and where there is a close tie of friendship ... A woman who feels that her husband's best friends surely will not lust after her while they are swimming or water skiing is rather naïve about the make-up of men. Normal men are just not made that way" (Robert Taylor).
- C. "The fact that close friends go swimming together is no insurance against lustful looking and against consequences even more serious. If anything, such practices are more dangerous among ... friends than among strangers. More than one wrecked marriage has been traceable to laxness of dress and excessive intimacy between couples" (Sewell Hall).

- 11. I ONLY DRESS THIS WAY WHEN I'M AROUND PEOPLE I DON'T KNOW.** The mere fact that we're among strangers doesn't mean we can tempt them to lust. Christians have only one dress code.

INTRODUCTION:

1. Are you a worrywart? “Are you a mellow person who never seems to worry about things you cannot control? Or are you seen as a worrywart, always thinking about what might happen? How much distress does this create in your daily life? How much people worry and the problems it causes for people is on a continuum. Craske, Barlow and O’Leary recommend asking yourself the following questions to determine” how much worry is negatively impacting your life. “Do you worry about things that you recognize most people do not worry about (such as little things around your home)? Do you find it very difficult to stop worrying, and cannot relax as a result? Does your worry rarely result in your reaching a possible solution for a particular problem? Do you believe that if you do not worry a terrible event will actually happen? Do you worry about not being worried, or worry when everything is going well in your life?” (*University of Idaho Counseling and Testing Center*, adapted).
2. According to *ehealthMD*, here are some “**Facts About Anxiety And Worry**. 1. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting over 19 million people. 2. People with an anxiety disorder are three-to-five times more likely to go to the doctor and six times more likely to be hospitalized for psychiatric disorders than non-sufferers. 3. Women are twice as likely as men to be afflicted with **generalized anxiety disorder** and **panic disorder**. 4. **Anxiety** is the most common symptom of patients seeing a psychiatrist or a psychologist” (updated September 2009).
3. “Worry is amazingly common. At least one in four of us—about 65 million Americans—will meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder at some point in our lifetime. Even those individuals whose lives are going well may worry excessively on occasion” (Edward M. Hallowell, *Psychology Today*).
4. “But, shouldn’t we worry about some things?” I put it this way. We should be righteously concerned about some things,
 - like God is (Exodus 3:16; 4:31; Ezekiel 36:21),
 - like Paul was (2 Corinthians 11:28-29),
 - like Timothy was (Philippians 2:20),
 - like the Philippians were (Philippians 4:10), etc.BUT, we shouldn’t sinfully worry about anything. Matthew 6:25-34 – Matthew 6:25, “Do not be worried;” Matthew 6:31A, “Do not worry;” Matthew 6:34, “Do not worry” – Philippians 4:6-7, “Be anxious for nothing.”
5. “**But**, how do we distinguish between righteous concern and sinful worry?” That’s the point of this lesson and I hope when we are done we will all be able to make this vitally important distinction.



DISCUSSION: *Righteous concern and sinful worry both see the possibility of bad things happening. Both wonder, “What if ...”* However:

1. **Righteous concern keeps peace, sinful worry destroys peace.**
 - A. Righteous concern does not disturb peace. Psalms 94:19.
 - B. The emotional effects of sinful worry include, among *many* other things, being bothered or troubled (Luke 10:38-42), fear (Isaiah 35:4A, “Say to those with anxious heart, ‘Take courage, fear not’”); discouragement, helplessness, panic, distress, pain (Jeremiah 49:23-24), and depression (Proverbs 12:25A, “Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down”).
 - C. “Worry is insidious, invisible, a relentless scavenger, roaming the corners of your mind, feeding on anything it finds. It sets upon you unwanted and unbidden, feasting on the infinite array of negative possibilities in life, diminishing your enjoyment of friends, family, achievements, and physical being—all because you live in fear of what might go wrong. People who worry ... suffer. For all their hard work, for all their humor and willingness to laugh at themselves, for all their self-awareness, worriers just cannot achieve peace of mind” (Edward M. Hallowell, *Psychology Today*).
2. **Righteous concern only focuses on today’s troubles, sinful worry also focuses on tomorrow’s troubles.**
 - A. Matthew 6:34.
 - B. “It is not the cares of today, but the cares of tomorrow, that weigh a man down” (George MacDonald).
 - C. “Worry doesn’t help tomorrow’s troubles, but it does ruin today’s happiness” (Anonymous).
 - D. Don’t borrow trouble! “Worry is the interest paid on trouble before it falls due” (W. R. Inge).

3. **Righteous concern focuses on the most realistic possibilities, sinful worry on the most unrealistic possibilities.**
 - A. "The great majority of the things we now make ourselves panicked about are self-created 'dangers' that exist almost entirely in our own imaginations" (Albert Ellis & Robert A. Harper).
 - B. The news editor of *Psychology Today* well illustrated this aspect of sinful worry, "My sister ... was coming for dinner, and she was late. Never mind that there is no recorded instance of her being on time for anything: worry ... easily leaps the bounds of what's reasonable and rational ... worry [is, *tdn*] 'a disease of the imagination,' and tonight my imagination was flush with fever, envisioning all the misfortunes that might have befallen Sally between her door and mine. [I was] feeling the acid seep of a 'toxic worry' ... just then Sally strolled through the door. 'Hi,' she said, as unconcerned as ever. 'What's for dinner?'" (*Psychology Today*).
 - C. "My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened" (Michel de Montaigne).
 - D. "How much pain they have cost us, the evils which have never happened" (Thomas Jefferson).
 - E. "When I look back on all these worries I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened" (Winston Churchill)."
4. **Righteous concern focuses on the good that would come from the bad, sinful worry on the bad that could come from the bad.** Proverbs 12:25; Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:6A, 8.
5. **Righteous concern trusts God, sinful worry doubts God.**
 - A. Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Psalm 138:7-8.
 - B. Isaiah 57:11A ("Of whom were you worried and fearful when you ... did not remember Me nor give Me a thought?"); Matthew 6:28-30.
6. **Righteous concern does what it can do to prevent bad things from happening or to minimize their impact if bad things do happen. In contrast, sinful worry does nothing but worry.**
 - A. Exodus 3:16-17; Joshua 22:24A ("We have done this out of concern").
 - B. "When we are worrying, we are thinking about something over and over again but do not resolve the situation or arrive at a solution to the problem. When we continually think about the exam that will be given next week and imagine many distressing outcomes yet do not study or do something to release the tension, we are worrying" (*University of Idaho Counseling and Testing Center*).
 - C. What can we do?
 - 1) **Pray.** 1 Peter 5:7. "Every evening I turn my worries over to God. He's going to be up all night anyway" (Mary C. Crowley).
 - 2) **Count our blessings.**
 - a. Philippians 4:6-7.
 - b. "In my forties, I have been working on letting go of my compulsive worrying, and I have been amazed at how swiftly a sense of gratefulness banishes the worry warts. And I've tried many other things—asking myself what is the worst thing that could happen and imagining going through that to a new place; noticing without judgment my worry; indulging it; pushing it away. None of these has been as effective as tapping into a sense of appreciation *in this moment* for what I do have. Worried about money? I focus on the fact that so far, I have always had what I needed and right now, I have enough. Worried about health? I focus on the amount of good health I'm thankful to be experiencing right now. Worried about—my favorite—a loved one being taken suddenly in an accident? I focus on how grateful I am that they are in my life right now. I think tapping into the wellspring of gratitude works for two reasons. **First**, worry is always about the future, if only the next hour or minute, whereas gratitude is in the here and now. Cast over your list of worries. Aren't they always about what might or might not happen? You are worried about the reaction of your boss tomorrow to your presentation. You're worried about how you are going to afford to send your son to college. You're worried about the test results. In every case, you project yourself into the future and imagine something bad happening. As Andre Dubus points out, 'It is not hard to live through a day if you can live through a moment. What creates despair is the imagination, which pretends there is a future and insists on predicting millions of moments, thousands of days, and so drains you that you cannot live the moment at hand.' Gratitude brings you back to the present moment, to all that is working perfectly right now. Tomorrow may bring difficulties, but for right now, things are pretty good. Gratefulness **also** eliminates worry because it reminds us of the abundance of" the providence of God. 'Yes, something bad might happen, but given all that you have received so far ... you will continue to be supported on through life, even in ways you would never have guessed or chosen for yourself'" (M. J. Ryan, *Attitudes Of Gratitude*, adapted).
 - c. "Only man clogs his happiness with care, destroying what is with thoughts of what may be" (John Dryden).
 - 3) **Do whatever else might help the matter of concern and help us not worry.** Philippians 4:8-9. Worrying about ... Money? Spend less, save more. Health? Eat better, exercise more. Grades? Study. Don't minimize the importance of doing such things! They make a big difference several ways.

4) Practice.

- a. Sinful worry is a choice we can learn to make less and less frequently.
- b. This is not a lesson about all the things we can do to learn to worry less, but there are many things we can and must do.
- c. Further, we must not get discouraged in doing them. At first, our efforts may bear little or no fruit. But, if we'll keep on practicing, we will make progress. Galatians 6:9B.
- d. "Most of the worriers I treat need to retrain their minds and learn new mental skills. It's like training your muscles to learn the pattern of a golf or tennis swing, so that the correct swing becomes automatic. You can train your brain to learn effective ways of dealing with situations that arise again and again, such as financial worries or fears of failure" (Edward M. Hallowell, *Psychology Today*).

5) Exercise our body as well as our mind.

- a. "Bodily exercise profits a little" (Philippians 4:8 NKJV).
- b. "Working Out Worry. As simple as it sounds, exercise is the best natural anti-anxiety agent we have. Exercise reduces tension, drains off excess aggression and frustration, enhances well-being, improves sleep, curbs the tendency to overeat, aids in concentration, and reduces distractibility. It is healing to the body, and therefore to the mind. Getting exercise at least every other day should be part of your plan to reduce anxiety and control worry. But you can also exercise on the spot to reduce acute worry. If you are having a bad day at the office, try walking up and down a flight of stairs five times. Your mind will be less troubled when you come back to your desk. The change in physiology induced by exercise calms the mind" (Edward M. Hallowell, *Psychology Today*).

7. **Righteous concern moves on to other things when it's done all it can do. In contrast, sinful worry just keeps on worrying.** The girls driving through the night illustration.

8. **Righteous concern is attractive, sinful worry is repulsive.**

- A. Exodus 4:31.
- B. Sinful worry is not only unproductive – "Worrying is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere" (Glenn) – and distracting – "A day of worry is more exhausting than a day of work" (John Lubbock), it's *counterproductive*.
- C. Apply to unfaithful children. Psalm 127:1-2. Sinful worry is just as much a spiritual problem for us as our children's unfaithfulness is a spiritual problem for them. The best sermon is one where the speaker not only talks the talk, but also walks the walk.

9. **Righteous concern is rooted in truth, sinful worry in lies.**

A. **Sinful worry tries to convince us that it is productive, that it prevents or minimizes disasters.**

- 1) It's not. It doesn't. Matthew 6:27; 13:22 ("The worry of the world ... choke(s) the word, and it becomes unfruitful).
- 2) "If worrying were a paying job, I would be a rich woman. Somehow during my childhood, I got the idea that worrying could actually stave off future disasters, and as I entered adulthood, I became convinced that if I were to stop worrying, took my eye off the ball, as it were, that something dreadful would happen. If I worried enough about being poor, I wouldn't be. If I worried enough about my partner's safety, nothing would happen to him. If I worried enough about my stepson's health, he wouldn't get sick. There was no room in my heart for happiness because worry took up all the space. (Indeed I was convinced that if I were too happy, it would somehow hex the situation. If I got too happy about love, for example, I wouldn't worry sufficiently and therefore it would be taken from me)" (M. J. Ryan, *Attitudes Of Gratitude*).
- 3) Righteous concern is an alarm that warns us to do other things to head off or minimize a potential problem. Sinful worry tries to convince us that the only thing we have to do to head off or minimize a potential problem is to just keep on listening to the alarm. Sinful worry doesn't solve problems any more than alarms put out fires. "Anxiety is only the problem when it's the solution" (Kevin Everett FitzMaurice).

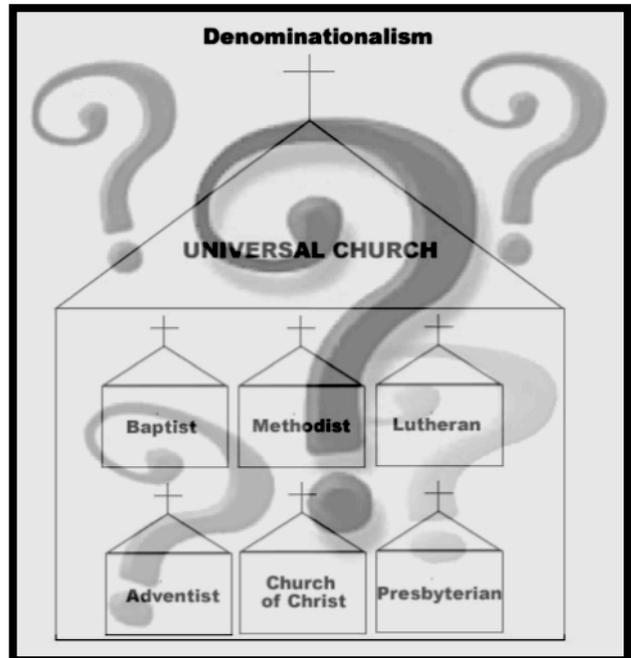
B. **Sinful worry tries to convince us that we can't live without it.** We can!

C. **Sinful worry tries to convince us that we'll quit worrying just as soon as the pending disaster is averted.** We won't!

CONCLUSION: Worrying makes life miserable and it's a misery we bring on ourselves. For God's sake, others' sake, and our own sake, let's own our worry and increasingly put it behind us. With God, we can do just that!

INTRODUCTION:

1. What is a denomination? According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, a denomination is “a large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.”
2. Many people use a far broader definition of the term. To them, any large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name is a denomination even though they aren't organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy. For example, many people call the churches of Christ a denomination.
3. This broader definition of “denomination” is rooted, not in the historical meaning of the term, but in the widely held belief that the one body or church of Christ is made up of different denominations.
4. As \$1, \$2, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100 bills are different denominations, but all U.S. currency; so some think Methodists, Baptists, churches of Christ, non-denominational churches, etc. are all different denominations, but all part of the one body or church of Christ.
5. “Denominationalism is the division of one religion into separate groups, sects, schools of thought or denominations. Denominationalism as an ideology ... views some or all Christian groups as being, in some sense, versions of the same thing regardless of their distinguishing labels ... Theological denominationalism ultimately denies reality to any apparent doctrinal differences among the ‘denominations’, reducing all differences to mere matters *de nomina* (“of names”). A denomination in this sense is created when part of a church no longer feel they can accept the leadership of that church as a spiritual leadership due to a different view of doctrine or what they see as immoral behavior, but the schism does not in any way reflect either group leaving the Church as a theoretical whole” (Wikipedia).
6. In this lesson, I want to discuss why we must reject denominationalism and encourage other people to do the same.



BIBLE FACTS:

1. **There is one body or church of Christ.** Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4-6. Please remember these passages. They are very important. We will reference them later in the sermon.
2. **Doctrine matters.** Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John 9.
3. **The one body or church of Christ is not doctrinally divided.** 1 Corinthians 4:17.
4. **Division is not inevitable.** Ephesians 4:11-16; 5:17.
5. **Jesus condemns division in the strongest possible terms.**
 - A. 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.
 - B. “Even though denominations within Protestantism have come to be the largest expression of organized Christianity beyond the level of the congregation, there has never been much theological reflection on denominationalism. A look at theology textbooks or church creeds confirms this. Probably the simplest explanation for this omission is that the Bible in no way envisages the organization of the church into denominations. It instead assumes the opposite, that all Christians, except those being disciplined, will be in full fellowship with all others. Any tendencies to the contrary were roundly denounced (1 Cor. 1:10 - 13). Paul could write a letter to the Christians meeting in various places in Rome or Galatia with every assurance that all would receive its message. Today, for any city or country, he would have to place the letter as an advertisement in the secular media and hope” (D. G. Tinder, *Elwell Evangelical Dictionary*).
 - C. Why has denominationalism become so popular? It is far easier to accept than resolve our doctrinal differences.
 - D. Denominationalism is to doctrinal division what bloodletting was to physical disease. It doesn't cure the problem. It just compounds one problem that needs to be solved with another problem that needs to be solved. It just makes matters worse. The cure for doctrinal division is to scripturally resolve our differences, not to act like they really don't matter. They definitely do matter to God and they had better matter to us.

6. **All doctrine matters.**

- A. Denominationalists believe that Jesus accepts some doctrinal division because they think Jesus only requires unity in matters of true doctrinal importance.
- B. Some denominational theologians point “to a constellation of core beliefs that can be used to reveal the invisible church. One such attempt to codify this group of doctrines is Jack Cottrell’s very brief book ‘Faith’s Fundamentals, Seven Essentials of Christian Belief.’ In this book Dr. Cottrell attempts to delineate seven doctrines that are essential to ones own salvation, doctrines essential to recognizing other Christians and doctrines that permit a Christian to fulfill the Great Commission. The general idea is to draw a line between those doctrines that go to the heart of Christian belief, without the entanglements of distinctions illuminated by many Christian creeds which are otherwise in conflict. This allows unity of the essential faith, even if there is diversity of any number of details upon which the Christian faith does not turn” (Wikipedia).
- C. Here’s the \$64,000 question. How do we decide what doctrinal matters are really important? Where does Jesus teach us how to make this distinction? **We can’t do the former because He hasn’t done the latter! All doctrine is important!** Matthew 4:4; 5:17-19; 23:23; 28:18-20; Luke 1:5-6; 17:10; Acts 13:22; 20:26-27; 2 Corinthians 2:9; Galatians 3:10; Ephesians 5:8-9; Colossians 1:9-10; 4:12; James 2:10.

7. **Some implications of denominationalism. Denominationalism says ...**

- A. **Jesus asked too much.** John 17:20-21A, 22-23A.
- B. **People can believe whatever they want about God.**
 - 1) To denominationalists, sincerity is, in large measure, the only essential doctrine.
 - 2) A blogger named Albone once wrote, “Not only do I look forward to the day when there’s no more discussion about instruments or no instruments, church of Christ vs. disciples of Christ, but rather I look forward to the day when all of God’s people simply see each other as God’s people, regardless of what traditions they prefer or what denomination with which they associate. One God made this whole universe to worship him. Worship him in whatever manner you please.”
 - 3) “Remarked the Presbyterian pastor who wants to teach his members about Presbyterian theology: ‘It’s not to say that because I am Presbyterian that I don’t listen to other things, or don’t think that there’s value in all this other stuff. I have a really good friend who is Methodist, and he and I are just always amazed at how similar we are. But we’re also different. That’s good, for God’s sake. Good’” (Nancy T. Ammerman, *The Christian Century*, 03-15-00).
 - 4) Why does he think that’s good? Unless I’m mistaken, it’s because he thinks its good for people to be able to choose what doctrines they want to believe. God, however, makes it very clear that it isn’t good, that it’s best for people to believe what He wants them to believe regardless of what they may want to believe. 2 Timothy 4:1-5.
 - 5) Yes, there is a place for differences in matters of judgment, but not in matters of doctrine. We must learn how to distinguish one from the other.
- C. **God ineptly communicated His will.** 1 Corinthians 14:33.
- D. **Non-Christians shouldn’t believe Jesus is the Son of God.** John 17:20-23.

APPLICATIONS:

- 1. **Is the church of Christ a denomination?** I really don’t mean to be difficult, but the answer depends on what you mean by “the church of Christ.” We might as easily ask, “Is the church of God a denomination?” Again, it would depend on what you mean by “the church of God.”
 - A. If by the church of Christ you mean the one body of Christ mentioned in Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4, then the answer is no. The church of Christ is not a denomination. The body of Christ is not divided.
 - B. If by the church of Christ you mean churches that meet in buildings that have signs that read, “The ... church of Christ meets here,” then the answer depends on what the people who meet in the building believe and practice.
 - 1) If their faith and practice is in keeping with the one faith of the one body of Christ mentioned in Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4, then the answer is no. Such churches of Christ are not a denomination. They are not doctrinally divided from any church Jesus recognizes as belonging to Him.
 - 2) And no, you don’t have to have “church of Christ” on your sign to be recognized by Jesus as belonging to Him. “Church of Christ” is just one of several scriptural ways to describe a church that belongs to Jesus.

- C. If a church calling itself a “church of Christ” believes and practices denominationalism, which many increasingly do, then it is a denomination. I’m not being mean or ugly. I’m just recognizing the reality that many churches of Christ no longer view their place in the one body of Christ any differently than they do the place of Methodist or Baptist churches. They have a denominational view of the church.

2. Are all religious groups that claim but don’t actually follow Christ denominational?

- A. No. A few groups that claim but don’t actually follow Christ reject the denominational view of the church.
- B. But what about “non-denominational” churches? “Non-denominational” churches have proliferated in recent years. For the most part, they are non-denominational because they aren’t united with other churches under a single administrative and legal hierarchy, not because they think there is anything wrong with denominationalism. In fact, most non-denominational churches have a very denominational view of the church.
- C. Some churches of Christ use non-denominational to describe themselves. Given the great difference between what they mean by the phrase and how many other people understand the phrase, un-denominational or anti-denominational might be more descriptive terms.

3. Should we call religious groups that claim but don’t actually follow Christ denominations?

- A. Let’s face it. When we say a group is a “denomination” we don’t mean what denominationalists mean when they say a group is a “denomination.”
- B. What do we mean? Unless we are focusing on their denominational view of the church, we mean that they are a religious group that claims but doesn’t actually follow Christ. We mean that we don’t think they are in Christ. 2 Peter 2:1-2. If we are going to speak where the Bible speaks, call Bible things by Bible names, we mean that they are heretics.
- C. While not politically correct, if we think churches are wrong, we need to quit beating around the bush and say so. I’m afraid we use “denomination” as a euphemism for what we really mean and for what we really ought to be saying. A “euphemism” is “a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing” ([New Oxford American Dictionary](#)). Yes, we need to be tactful, but not at the expense of making it perfectly clear that doctrine really does matter.
- D. It greatly disturbs some people that people like me think they are lost. I don’t have a problem with people thinking I’m not in Christ if they don’t think I’m abiding in the doctrine of Christ. Frankly, I vastly prefer that to the denominational view that doctrinal differences don’t matter as long as we’re sincere. Admittedly, sincerity is important, but it’s not the only important thing.
- E. “But,” someone might ask, “aren’t you being arrogant.” No, definitely not. Shouldn’t we think we are right? Otherwise, shouldn’t we immediately change what we believe and/or practice to what we think is right? It’s not arrogant to think we are right. It’s only arrogant to think we can’t be wrong.
- F. “But,” another might ask, “what if you are wrong?” Some say that the possibility of being wrong precludes us from taking a stand for what we believe to be right. In other words, since we could be wrong, we can’t say anyone else is wrong.
 - 1) First, this would invalidate the word of God or render it of no effect. If this were true, no one could obey passages like Titus 3:10-11; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; etc.
 - 2) Second, standing for what we believe to be right is the best way to learn if we are wrong. We should approach people we think are doctrinally wrong in hopes of three possible outcomes.
 - a. First, if we are right, we’ll move them to think like God and us.
 - b. Second, if they are right, they’ll move us to think like God and them.
 - c. Or third, if we are both wrong, we’ll help each other think more like Jesus.
 - d. Frankly, where’s the downside? Shouldn’t everyone who claims to follow Christ be doing all they can to realize the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-23 and isn’t this the way to do it?
- G. Brethren, don’t get discouraged if people think you are narrow-minded. Rather, get excited about opening their minds and possibly your own to the what the word of God actually says. Don’t underestimate the power of God’s word. It’s often turned the world upside down. It can to the same thing in our generation if we’ll just get excited about sharing it with other people.

CONCLUSION:

- 1. In conclusion, I’d first like to speak to people who sometimes ridicule members of the church of Christ for believing they are the only ones going to heaven, for believing that you must be a member of the church of Christ to be saved, etc.

- A. Please don't misrepresent our beliefs. Please make sure you understand what we mean when we say such things. Frankly, if you did, you would probably agree with us.
 - B. When we say only members of the church of Christ are going to heaven, we mean that only people who are a part of the one body of Christ mentioned in Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4 are going to heaven, that only people who are a part of the church that Jesus promised to build in Matthew 16:18 are going to heaven. In such passages, the church or body of Christ is simply all people everywhere who are in Christ. Must we be in Christ to be saved? John 14:6. Yes, and therefore we must be members of the body or church of Christ to be saved.
 - C. We aren't saying you have to be a member of the church of Christ denomination to go to heaven. Frankly, we don't believe the one body of Christ is doctrinally divided. The members of this congregation and my local congregation are simply striving to be a part of that one un-denominated body or church of Christ and we believe you should be striving to do the exact same thing.
 - D. Here is another way to understand where we are coming from. We are just trying to be what Paul was – a Christian – no more, no less. Was Paul a member of a denomination? Of course not, and we don't have to be a member of a denomination either.
 - E. Please understand that this is what we mean when we say such things and that this is why we say such things.
 - F. But, we don't just want you to understand our un-denomination view of the body of Christ. No, we want you to join us in rejecting denominationalism and in our efforts to eliminate the divisions that would have never occurred if men had done what Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23.
 - G. Friends, we can disagree about baptism and instrumental music but agree on the need to reject denominationalism! Let's quit acting like our doctrinal differences don't matter. Let's agree that they do matter and then move on to trying to resolve our doctrinal differences on baptism and instrumental music and quit sweeping them under the rug!
2. Second, I'd like to speak to members of the church who are increasingly saying things like, "I'm church of Christ," "He's a church of Christ preacher," "The church of Christ teaches," or "What do we teach about."
 - A. Such language often betrays a denominational and false view of the church.
 - B. Members of the true body of Christ are Christians, not "Church of Christ" or "Church of Christers." "Church of Christ" is not the name of the Lord's church. It is a description of the Lord's church and it isn't the only scriptural description.
 - C. It doesn't matter what the church of Christ teaches, i.e. what the people of Christ teach. The only thing that matters is what Jesus teaches and whether or not we are preaching and practicing the same.
 - D. We bypass an excellent opportunity to introduce people to un-denominational or anti-denominational Christianity when we fail to tell them we are just Christians, simply members of the Lord's church. Some bypass this opportunity out of ignorance, others out of convenience. I hope this lesson helps us understand that the true church of Christ is not a denomination and motivates us to seize every available opportunity to teach people that they, like us, should reject denominationalism.
 3. Third, I'd like to briefly comment about churches of Christ who have changed their "name" on their signs.
 - A. It is happening.
 - B. The key issue is not whether they have changed, but *why* they have changed.
 - C. If they have changed as a way of further embracing denominationalism, then their motive is wrong and they are rightly condemned.
 - D. If they have changed as a way of further denouncing denominationalism, then they are exercising lawful judgment. Brethren, if we say "church of Christ" is the only scriptural way of describing a local body of Christ, then we are binding what God has not bound. Yes, we can lovingly share our opinions regarding the expediency of such changes, but we cannot condemn them for making such changes.
 - E. And finally, how do we know their motive? By getting the facts, not by making assumptions!

INTRODUCTION

1. Let's admit it. We tend to avoid Revelation. We shouldn't do this. Revelation is certainly not the place a new convert should start his or her studies. I also understand that Revelation may not be as rich doctrinally as some other books. But by avoiding Revelation we are denying ourselves a rich source of comfort and/or warning.
2. We are also inadvertently contributing to the popularity of premillennialism. Many people, even some members of the church, accept premillennialism as true simply because they have never been taught the truth regarding the book of Revelation.
3. Tonight's lesson is an overview an overview of the book of Revelation.
4. Before we begin, let me say from the very start that while understandable, Revelation is admittedly a difficult book. There is certainly room for reasonable disagreement. The following represents my best understanding of the book at this time. If you feel I am wrong in anything I say, I welcome your constructive criticism.
5. I also understand that in one lesson I won't answer every question you may have about the book of Revelation. That, however, is not the purpose of this sermon. My intention is simply to make Revelation less intimidating in hopes of encouraging you to study the book more for yourself. If you do so diligently and wisely, I am confident you will find the answers you seek and the lessons God wants you to learn.
6. We will discuss the book under four headings. First, approaches to the book. Second, keys to understanding the book. Third, an overview of the book. And fourth and finally, some practical applications of the book.



APPROACHES TO THE BOOK

1. **Preterist.** The events in the book are now all in the past. Foy E. Wallace (destruction of Jerusalem).
2. **Historical background.** Most of the events in the book are now in the past. Homer Hailey (Roman persecution).
3. **Continuous historical.** The events in the book describe the history of mankind from the first century to the end of time. B. W. Johnson (People's NT), John T. Hinds (Gospel Advocate commentary).
4. **Philosophy of history.** The events in the book describe in principle the nature of the ongoing conflict between good and evil. I believe Hendriksen adopts this view (More Than Conquerors).
5. **Futurist.** Except for the first three chapters, none of the events in the book have been fulfilled. The "Left Behind" authors, LeHaye & Jenkins. This is the premillennial approach to Revelation.

Comments. The first three approaches, especially the first two, have merit. The last has none. I favor the fourth. I think it captures the intent of the book. Nothing in it has to be interpreted literally, and even if there are direct historical references, whenever we apply the book today, we end up adopting the philosophy of history approach. It seems to me, therefore, that we might as well start there and not spend a great deal of time arguing about whether Revelation specifically applies to Jerusalem or Rome. Regardless of whether it specifically applies to either, the issue for us today is, "What does this book mean to me?" I believe the philosophy of history approach well captures the meaning of Revelation for Christians regardless of the specific time in which they live.

KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK

1. **Revelation is a book of visions, images, pictures, or signs which symbolically or figuratively convey underlying literal truths. The visions are not meant to be taken literally. The underlying truths are to be taken literally.** Revelation 1:1-2. "Signified it" (NKJV).
 - A. This style of literature is called apocalyptic literature. The Jews were very familiar and comfortable with this style of writing. It is found elsewhere in both the Old and New Testaments.
 - B. We have trouble with apocalyptic literature because we simply don't communicate this way. When we read a passage like Isaiah 34:3B-4A we think literally. "*The mountains shall be melted with their blood. All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; all their host shall fall down*" (NKJV). However, when the Jews read Isaiah 34:3B-4A they thought figuratively. They did not take the image literally.

Rather, they understood that God was using the image to figuratively convey an underlying literal truth. Namely, that when God judged the nations, it was going to be a very bad day for the nations. Isaiah 34:1-3A.

- C. A helpful parallel. Artists often paint pictures to express an underlying message. The picture is not the message. Rather, the picture is the means of communicating the underlying message. I think this is a good way of viewing Revelation. The book contains a series of vivid pictures painted by God to express underlying truths. The pictures themselves are not the truths. Rather, they are the means of communicating these truths.

2. Find the OT parallel.

- A. Almost every vision or image in Revelation has an Old Testament counterpart. If we will find and study its counterpart in the Old Testament, the meaning of a vision or image in Revelation becomes very clear.
- B. Revelation is difficult because it gives us a vision or image without an interpretation of its literal meaning. This, however, is not the case with its Old Testament counterpart. The Old Testament usually gives us both the vision and its interpretation. I have found that whatever the comparable vision meant in the Old Testament, that is basically the meaning of the vision in the book of Revelation.
- C. The Old Testament is like a guidebook that you buy at an art museum so you can learn what the artist was trying to communicate in his painting.

3. Revelation must be interpreted in a way that would have had meaning for its original recipients. Revelation was written during a time of persecution for two types of Christians. The faithful and the backsliding. Revelation 2:9-10. Revelation 2:4-5, 14-16; 3:15-16, 19. Therefore, we must reject any interpretation of Revelation that would have been meaningless to its original recipients.

4. The events of Revelation were going to shortly take place. Revelation 1:1-3; 22:7, 10, 12, 20.

5. There is more than one kind of judgment.

- A. Without question, there is only one final spiritual judgment. However, God has and I believe continues to come in temporal judgment against nations and individuals before the one final spiritual judgment.
- B. This is clear from a study of the Old Testament where God came in judgment against Israel, Judah, Assyria, Babylon, Edom, etc. and from a study of the New Testament where God promised to come in judgment against Jerusalem, something He did exactly as He said He would do.
- C. Therefore, the judgment of Revelation, save perhaps for the one described in chapters 20-22, is one that happened in the first century or shortly thereafter and one that happens any time Satan and his allies presume to fight against the Lord of Lords and His saints.

6. The message of Revelation is, "Glorious Victory In Christ, Horrible And Utter Defeat In Satan."

7. Numbers have symbolic value.

- A. Seven stands for perfection. Therefore, six, falling short of 7, stands for imperfection. Thus, as holy, holy, holy (777) is an apt description of the Lord God Almighty, so 666 (Revelation 13:18) is an apt description of Satan.
- B. Ten stands for fullness. Revelation 2:10; 6:9-11. Thus, 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-2), i.e. 10 X 10 X 10, is not a literal period of time, but an apt way of describing Satan's defeat in any conflict he has with God. However, just because Satan has been fully defeated in a particular battle, doesn't mean that He has given up fighting the war. Revelation 20:2-3; Luke 4:13.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1.	The glory of Christ.
Chapters 2-3.	The state of the church.
Chapter 4.	The glory of the Father.
Chapter 5.	The worthiness of Christ.
Chapters 6-7.	An overview of the conflict between good and evil from an earthly perspective.
Chapters 8-11.	The same conflict viewed with particular emphasis on God's warnings of judgment to come.
Chapters 12-14.	An overview of the same conflict from a heavenly perspective.
Chapters 15-16.	The same conflict viewed with particular emphasis on God's wrath in judgment.
Chapters 17-19.	The same conflict viewed with particular emphasis on Satan's allies in the conflict.
Chapters 20-22.	The final conflict between good and evil.

Comments. I have watched countless hours of films on World War 2. Although they are all about the same conflict, they hold my interest because they view it from different perspectives, i.e. from the view of the enlisted men, the officers, our enemies, the ground, the air, the sea, etc. It is my opinion that this is what we have in the book of Revelation. Five visions of the same conflict between good and evil viewed from several different points of view.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE BOOK

1. **In every generation, there is a fierce battle going on between good and evil.** Revelation 12:17; 1 Peter 5:8.
2. **Satan is a formidable foe.** We can defeat Satan, but we must not underestimate our enemy.
 - A. He is highly motivated. Revelation 12:12B.
 - B. He has strong allies in government (sea beast Revelation 13:1-8) and religion (land beast Revelation 13:11-17).
 - C. He will cause the righteous to suffer. Revelation 2:10; 3:10. The latter is either a promise of deliverance from the hour of trial, or it is a promise of deliverance in the hour of trial (1 Corinthians 10:13). The latter is more likely. Jesus keeps us *if* we keep His commands. Divine protection and human exertion go hand in hand.
 - D. Deceit is his strongest weapon. Therefore, we must love truth above all else. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.
3. **God is going to win the battle and the war.** Jesus is worthy. He can win. Revelation 5:1-10. He will win. Jesus will bless the faithful and punish the unfaithful. Revelation 7:13-17; 14:9-11. This should comfort us if we are giving our best to God and suffering for it. He knows us and will take care of us. However, this should scare us if we are giving anything less than our best to the Master.
4. **God warns before He punishes.** Revelation 14:6-7. We are without excuse.
5. **Man is incredibly stubborn.** Revelation 9:20-21; 16:8-11.
6. **A great way to study the book of Revelation.** Find time when you have a couple of hours and sit down and read Revelation all the way through without stopping. When you are finished, you won't have understood everything you've read, but you will come away with the clear message of the book. Namely, if you are on God's side, you are going to win big. If you are on Satan's side, you are going to lose big. **THE QUESTION FOR US ALL, THEREFORE, IS SIMPLE. WHOSE SIDE ARE WE ON?**