

## Dealing with Temptation

This week we begin a new series entitled “Living in the World.” Leonard Ravenhill once said, “The most amazing thing God ever did was to take an unholy man in an unholy world, make him holy, and put him back in an unholy world and keep him holy in it.” That is exactly what has happened to all of us who follow Jesus—we have been made holy, and we are being kept holy in an unholy world.

One of the first things we face while living in this world is how to deal with temptation. We usually laugh about temptation, like Mae West: “I generally avoid temptation, unless I can’t resist it.” The Bible, however, presents temptation in a very different light: it is the most powerful tool of the one who hates us and desires to destroy us, Satan himself.

Temptation is simply an enticement to sin with a (false) promise for greater good. The one who foists these temptations upon us is both relentless and ruthless. We know from experience that falling into temptation has very destructive consequences. John Owen, in his book, *Of Temptation*, teaches that falling into temptation defiles our conscience, disquiets our peace, weakens our obedience, and clouds our vision of God.

In today’s text, Paul gives some amazingly helpful counsel on dealing with temptation. Paul is warning the Corinthians against the temptation of idolatry and then he says:

### I Corinthians 10:12-13

<sup>12</sup>Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall <sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

In his commentary on this text, Matthew Henry says that Paul gives us a word of caution and a word of comfort. Let us consider those two things:

#### 1. Don’t trust your unreliable self. (v.12)

**A. Some think they can stand, but Paul says this is an illusion.** All we need to do is consider Peter’s experience when he said to the Lord that although everyone else would leave, he never would, and then a few hours later he denied Jesus!

**B. Take heed.** Paul teaches us that rather than being presumptuous about our moral strength; we need to be very careful. We can do that by abiding by five principles:

**Know yourself.** If David had known himself better, he would not have gone to the top of his palace to look out over the women bathing, and he would have avoided some terrible consequences.

**Fill your heart with the love of God.** We do this through the Word and prayer. This was obviously what Joseph was doing when he fled from the temptation of Potiphar’s wife.

**Take measure.** Joseph did this by avoiding Potiphars wife and not listening to her.

**Keep good friends.** Peter discovered this when his friend and fellow apostle corrected him as shown in Galatians 2.

**Repair the breach. We can see that Paul says to the** Corinthians, “...flee from idolatry...” in verse 14. When we experience weakness, we should make the appropriate corrections in our lives.

#### 2. Do trust your reliable Savior. (v.13)

**A. God, in His faithfulness, limits our temptation.** Our temptations are not uncommon to other people, especially Christ, and, secondly, they are not beyond our ability to handle. It is wonderful to know that all of our temptations have been filtered by the Lord so that we will not be overwhelmed.

**B. God provides for His tempted children by always allowing a way of escape and by giving us strength for endurance.** It is good to know that we are never inevitably trapped by any sin or temptation, but that God will always provide for us. The way in which He especially provides for us is in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ, who Himself faced the evil one in the wilderness.

It was in that wilderness that Jesus accomplished what the Israelites failed to accomplish in their 40 years in the wilderness: He triumphed over the evil one so that now He can comfort us and strengthen us in our temptations (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15).

This is how God keeps us holy in an unholy world. Praise be to His name!

### Discussion Questions

- 1) Describe Satan's typical tactics in temptation.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) Review the practical points given on how we can deal with temptation.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) Why does Jesus' victory in the wilderness against the evil one secure our victory against him as well?

### Extra Reading

#### HELPFUL BOOKS

#### Overcoming Sin and Temptation

by John Owen

*A modern language translation of three classic short works by John Owen on fighting sin.*

## Dealing with Moral Failure

One of the most cherished, memorized, and quoted psalms in the Bible is the one King David wrote after the worst moral failure of his life. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband. The prophet Nathan had called him to account. David's response is recorded in Psalm 51. One of the most important components of our Christian lives is our willingness and ability to recover from our own moral failures. Let's take a close look at this psalm, to see what it is we must do when we fall into sin.

### 1. Ask God for help. (v.1, 2)

#### Psalm 51

*<sup>1</sup>Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup>Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!*

We can only be helped when we ask God for it. We can only fully confess when we know of His willingness to forgive. David immediately calls upon the unfailing love and compassion of God.

### 2. Make a good confession. (v.3–6)

Notice here that David comes completely clean with his failure:

#### A. I did it. (v. 3)

*<sup>3</sup>For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*

#### B. I offended God. (v. 4)

*<sup>4</sup>Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.*

#### C. I'm like that. (v. 5)

*<sup>5</sup>Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

#### D. I've no excuses. (v. 6)

*<sup>6</sup>Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*

We can only be healed of what we fully, candidly confess.

### 3. Seek full restoration. (v.7–12)

#### A. Complete cleansing (v.7)

*<sup>7</sup>Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

#### B. Joy of forgiveness (v.8, 9)

*<sup>8</sup>Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. <sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.*

#### C. Spiritual renewal (v. 10)

*<sup>10</sup>Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

#### D. Intimacy with God (v. 11,12)

*<sup>11</sup>Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*

*<sup>12</sup>Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

God is gracious not only to remove our offense but to bring us joy in our recovery. Don't stop until you know the joy of restored intimacy with Him.

**4. Re-engage God's mission. (v. 13–10)****A. Witness with zeal. (v.13)**

*<sup>13</sup>Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.*

**B. Worship with brokenness. (v.14-17)**

*<sup>14</sup>Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. <sup>15</sup>O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. <sup>16</sup>For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. <sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

**C. Work with vision. (v.18,19)**

*<sup>18</sup>Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; <sup>19</sup>then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

Our moral failure may change our circumstances in some ways or alter the types of ministries we can perform, but we are always His grateful servants.

**Discussion Questions**

- 1) How do we sometimes make “partial confessions” or “qualified confessions?” What are the effects of these approaches?
  
- 2) Why is it important that we consistently experience full restoration from our moral failure? Why do we sometimes doubt that this is possible?
  
- 3) How is our witness, worship, and work diminished without a full recovery from moral failure?

**Digging Deeper**

Is there some sin or moral failure for which you have not fully confessed and made proper restitution? Draft a plan for how you can to that this week.

How are you not experiencing a fully recovery from sin? Take steps to discuss this with a pastor or mature Christian.

**Suggested reading:**

by Sinclair Ferguson

[The Doctrine of Repentance](#)

by Thomas Watson

## Managing Our Possessions

In our current series of lessons, we are studying how we can live effectively in a fallen world. There are many "dangers, toils, and snares" which would derail our walk with Jesus, and we need to be prepared to face each one of them successfully.

Today we look at the theme of money management. Money is obviously very powerful, both for good and ill. The apostle Paul said that the love of money is the root of all evil, and, at the same time, we know that money can accomplish great good. In our text this week Jesus tells a fascinating parable followed by some vital teachings on money management.

### Luke 16:1-15

<sup>1</sup>He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. <sup>2</sup>And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' <sup>3</sup>And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup>I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' <sup>5</sup>So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' <sup>6</sup>He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' <sup>7</sup>Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' <sup>8</sup>The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. <sup>9</sup>And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

<sup>10</sup>"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. <sup>11</sup>If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? <sup>12</sup>And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? <sup>13</sup>No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

<sup>14</sup>The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. <sup>15</sup>And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Jesus says three primary things in this text.

#### 1. Godly money management capitalizes on opportunities. (vs. 1-9)

Jesus teaches here that children of darkness are often more shrewd than the children of light in using earthly resources. The manager in his parable dishonestly cancels portions of the debt owed to his master. The dishonest manager is using worldly wealth to gain friends. Jesus teaches us that we should learn a lesson from this shrewd, dishonest manager: we too should learn to use our earthly resources to make friends in heaven. We do this, of course by serving the poor and evangelizing the lost.

#### 2. Godly money management prepares us for ownership. (vs. 10-12)

In these verses, Jesus teaches us that there is a real connection between our stewardship in this life and our ownership in the next life. Right now we do not own anything. We are only managers. But in the Great Day to come, we will own the universe along with Jesus Christ. Our faithfulness now is a requirement for our inheritance then. How do we manage faithfully?

John Wesley once said, "Make as much as you can; save as much as you can; give as much as you can." The real question is whether we are managing our resources according to our selfish agendas or according to the Kingdom agenda.

**3. Godly money management reveals Christ as master. (vs. 13-15)**

Jesus teaches us that we can have only one master. If we love the one, we will hate the other. The perfect illustration of this fact is seen in the reaction of the Pharisees in verse 14. They loved their money; therefore they ridiculed Jesus. When Jesus challenges our money management, we will do one of two things: we will either, like the rich young ruler, withdrawal from him, or, like Zacchaeus, we will “come down out of our trees” and worship and serve him with our money. Which are you?

**Discussion Questions**

- 1) What are some of the "shrewd" ways in which we can manage our money?
- 2) When we say we want to know God's will, what issues do we normally have in mind? What issue does God have in mind? (see verse 3)
- 3) In managing money as believers, why does it not make any difference how much money we have?
- 4) Why does making more money rarely make us any happier?
- 5) Why is our money management a test of our loyalty to God as our master?

**Related Reading:**

*The Treasure Principal*  
by Randy Alcorn

*Counterfeit Gods*  
by Joshua Harris

**Digging Deeper**

What changes do you need to make in your money management in order to be serving God alone with your finances?

## Sexual Ethics

The sexual life of believers has always made us distinctive from the world. In case we think that our sexualized culture makes it impractical to live out the Christian sexual ethic, we must remember that the Graeco-Roman world was at least as challenging as our own. For this reason, the Apostle Paul makes a strong plea with the Thessalonians to live out their sexual lives in a counter-cultural way.

### Read I Thessalonians 4:1–8

Let's make three primary observations in the text.

#### 1. If you believe in Christ, you must also walk with Him (vv. 1,2)

Notice that the Apostle says that "you received from us" how you ought to walk. We know that we "receive" the gospel ( cf. I Corinthians 15: 3), but he says here that our lifestyles are also received. That is, if we receive the sacred truths of the gospel, we must also receive a new way of living. If we depart from this way of living, we also depart from Christ!

#### 2. Your walk with Christ excludes sexual immorality (v. 3)

We walk with Christ for the purpose of conforming to His will. And what is His will for you? Paul says it is "your sanctification." This He wants from you more than anything else; and the first aspect of holiness Paul mentions is your sexual life: "that you abstain from sexual immorality."

The Bible's definition of "sexual immorality" is roughly this: any intimate sexual behavior outside of a biblically warranted marriage (one man and one woman in a faithful covenant union). Notice in Matthew 5: 27-32 that this moral purity extends even to our thoughts!

So whether we are single or married, male or female, young or old; whether we have homosexual tendencies or heterosexual tendencies, the calling is the same for all God's people, that we must refrain from all intimate sexual activity except that in a biblically warranted marriage.

#### 3. Sexual immorality is highly destructive (vv. 4-8)

Not only does God give us the command to abstain from sexual immorality, but, as usual, He also tells us why: it is highly destructive. In three ways:

##### 1) Sexual immorality destroys our gospel witness (vv. 4, 5)

Paul here draws a contrast between Christian behavior and that of the Gentiles: they have sex according to their glands, we according to God's will and character. The pagan gods were capricious and fickle; our God is holy, faithful and true to His one bride, the Church. We imitate Him. If we were to imitate the unbelievers' sex life, we would simply be demonstrating that we serve the same gods as they!

##### 2) Sexual immorality wrongs our brothers and sisters (v. 6a)

Contrary to the popular idea that sexual relations with a non-marriage partner can be a loving act, the Bible teaches that it is actually a hateful one. At the best it is indifferent. The best thing we can do for one another is to encourage each other to be more like Christ, but if we are having immoral sexual relations with someone, we are doing the exact opposite. Furthermore, we are actually stealing from them, for we are taking something from them that does not rightfully belong to us. Sexual immorality is intensely selfish.

##### 3) Sexual immorality provokes God (vv. 6b-8)

God takes great offense at our sexual immorality. Just take a look at I Corinthians 6: 9, 10 or Ephesians 5: 5 or Revelation 21: 8, and you can see that the Kingdom of God is shut to the sexually immoral. Why is this? Paul tells us: a) sexual immorality is a violation of our sacred calling to follow Jesus and b) it disregards God, treating Him as though He were a light weight

pagan god who has no eyes or ears and no power to react or, even worse, as though He didn't exist at all. And it treats Him as though He were not present, and yet He is the One Who, by His grace, has made our bodies temples of His Spirit!  
(cf. I Corinthians 3:16)

Well, what should we do, for we have all transgressed the sexual standards of the Bible and, on our own merits, would stand condemned and excluded from His favor?

Praise God for the Good News! Because of what Jesus has done for us on Calvary's Cross, the powers of death and hell are forever destroyed. Because of His great work for us, we are completely innocent—no matter how wicked we have been. Because of His substitutionary atonement, even our future sexual sins are entirely forgiven already! What a gospel! What a God! What can I do to demonstrate my gratitude to Him?

Live a holy life. Abstain from sexual immorality. Amen.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) Why can we not separate Christian doctrine from Christian lifestyle? Why would we even try? (see verses 1, 2)
  
- 2) When we say we want to know God's will, what issues do we normally have in mind? What issue does God have in mind? (see verse 3)
  
- 3) Review the implications of sexual impurity. (V. 4-8)
  
- 4) Think about the power of the Gospel/the atonement over sexual sin.

### Suggested reading:

[Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God](#)

by C. J. Mahaney

[Sex Is Not the Problem \(Lust Is\)](#)

by Joshua Harris

### Digging Deeper

What concrete steps do you need to take to insure that you are walking with Jesus and avoiding sexual immorality?



## Speak The Truth

In a recently published book entitled, "Tangled Web: How False Statements are Undermining America," James B. Stewart shows how the rising flood of lies in our nation is unravelling society itself. He cites Martha Stewart and "Scooter" Libby and Barry Bonds and Bernie Madoff as classic examples of this tragic phenomenon, and he suggests that we can not survive as a nation in this ethical environment.

More tragic are the studies by George Barna which clearly demonstrate that the professing Church is ethically no different from the unbelievably world. We lie at the same rate, we cheat at the same rate, etc. Barna says that the only significant statistical variation between the average unbeliever and the average professing Christian is where they are sitting at 11:00 on Sunday mornings!

The Apostle Paul has something to say about this. He shows in our text today that we must be people of the truth because 1) we have been radically transformed, 2) we have been clearly commanded, and 3) we have been compellingly motivated.

### Read Ephesians 4:25

#### 1. We have been radically transformed (v.25a)

Paul speaks of a life-changing experience we have undergone: "having put away falsehood..." or, literally, "having put away the lie..." What is this lie we have put off when we came to Christ? The lie that says that we are at the center of the universe and that our goal in life is to grab for all the worldly pleasures we can enjoy.

What is the truth that has displaced that lie? The truth that Jesus Christ is at the center of the universe and that my highest priority in life is to find my joy by bringing Him pleasure. Satan himself is the father of lies who seeks to destroy us; Jesus came speaking the truth and has defeated the evil one and set us free from his tyranny; therefore, we are committed to the truth with all our hearts.

#### 2. We have been clearly commanded (v. 25b)

Now that we live in the truth, we must speak it. Let's consider four ways in which we must speak the truth:

1. *With a new world-view.* We now see things differently. We used to respond in fear and in pride. That is why we lied. We now fear God alone and we make Christ our only boast. We now believe that God is our Creator and Sustainer and Judge; therefore we choose not to dishonor or to provoke Him, but rather to please Him.
2. *With a new integrity.* We now tell the truth even if it hurts (cf. Ps. 15). We consider it vital that others be able to trust our word, because we are the people of God.
3. *With a new candor.* We now refuse to hide behind self-justifying, self-defensive words, which not only are untrue but also betray a lack of trust in the Lord as our Advocate and Defender. In his book, "The Human Element," Will Schutz describes the rigidities and defensive behaviors that occur in so many organizations because, down deep, we don't want other people to know things about us that cause us to despise ourselves. Brothers and sisters, we have been delivered from this garbage and have been commanded to act like it!
4. *With a new ministry.* Now that are liberated from the lie, we cease from flattering others (saying positive things about them that are untrue and only intended to ingratiate ourselves to them). We now have the truth, which gives us the power to encourage them (saying positive things about them that are true and which are intended to build them up in Christ).

#### 3. We have been compellingly motivated (v.25c)

Paul explains why our truth-speaking is so important: “for we are members one of another.” John McKay, twentieth century missionary and later president of Princeton Seminary, once said, “A lie is a stab into the very vitals of the Body of Christ.”

It is interesting to observe that Paul is quoting here almost verbatim from Zechariah 8:16, where the children of Israel are being told that one day they will return in safety to the city of Jerusalem, the “City of Truth” (KJV), where they will “Speak the truth to one another” and all the nations will envy them. O, for that day!

How about your life? Are you telling the truth even when it hurts? Is there someone you need to apologize to for having misled them? Do you have defensive patterns of communication which you need to renounce and change? Are you using the truth to encourage and edifying others? Let us each one “speak the truth with his neighbor.”

### Discussion Questions

- 1) In what ways have we been radically transformed? ( cf. Ephesians 4:17-24) Why does this transformation preclude lying?
  
- 2) What are some of the ways in which we are to be truth tellers?
  
- 3) Why, typically, do we tell lies in the first place?

### Suggested reading:

[Deception: Letting Go of Lying](#)

by Lou Priolo

## Making Peace

Peacemaking is a theme most often stressed by the mainline Protestant churches and often ignored by the Evangelical churches, but we discover in the Scriptures that it is an essential of our Christian experience; in fact, it is found right here in the Beatitudes at the opening of the Sermon on the Mount:

### Matthew 5:9

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

His basic teaching is obvious: peacemakers will be blessed by God. It behooves us, therefore, to ask ourselves “what is a peacemaker?” And “what is the nature of this blessing?”

#### What is a peacemaker?

1. One who embraces God's grand vision of peace.

The word “peace” in the Bible is an extremely important one. The Hebrew word “shalom” is mentioned over 250 times in the Old Testament; and the Greek word “Eirene,” is mentioned 92 times in the New Testament. We could describe shalom briefly by calling it “holistic well-being founded upon reconciled relationships.”

In Isaiah 9:6, 7 and 11:6 – 9, we are shown the vision of the messiah's shalom: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb... The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra... The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” This is the vision we must embrace. Furthermore, Jeremiah 29:7 teaches us that we must seek to realize that vision, no matter where we are in the world. The reason we often do not embrace the grand vision is because it is painful for us to look at our broken world by comparison. For example, we now have 28 major wars going on around the world, with many other minor ones, and thousands of lives are being lost. The American government spends \$1.2 trillion on our military program, while it would take only \$65 billion ( 5% of our military expenditures) to feed, clothe, and educate the children of the world.

Meanwhile, in Memphis, Tennessee, about one third of our families with children below the age of five live below the poverty line. Recently 25 to 30 of our local churches spent several years together studying our city to discover what would make for shalom in Memphis. They agreed that for Memphis to have shalom all of our neighborhoods would need to have effective law enforcement, available housing for families and singles, job opportunities, solid education, opportunities in the fine arts, and, most of all, vibrant churches in every neighborhood. Here is what that study group discovered (among other things): we have 127 neighborhoods in Memphis, 27 of which are experiencing shalom in every sector of life. (that's where most of us live). Out of the 100 neighborhoods which are in some deficit, 56 of those neighborhoods are in severe deficit, meaning that every sector of shalom is in arrears.

It is painful to embrace God's grand vision for shalom, because we hurt for our neighbor and are compelled to help.

2. One who understands the root of the problem

While we applaud the mainline church for reminding us of our role as peacemakers, we must say that we often find the liberal protestant church misdiagnosing the root problem. Jesus teaches us that the reason we have arguments, strivings, wars, and arguments is because of our jealousy and selfish ambition, our lusts that are unbridled by the Spirit of God (cf. James 4:1,2); that is, if we want to have peace with our environment, with our neighbors around the world, our church, and our families, we must receive the peace of God. The peace of God begins with peace with God. (Romans 5:1) This is the peculiar perspective of the follower of Christ. Jesus said, “peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I get to you.” (John 14:27)

3. One who dies to himself

We die to ourselves into ways: a) negatively, we cease from provocations; and b) we actively mediate and pursue peace. On the one hand, we must cease and desist from provoking arguments and from rumor mongering that only divides people; and, on the other hand, we must

not merely be appeasers. Appeasement, or simply not causing problems, is not the full role of a peacemaker. Many times peacemakers must engage in conflict in order to promote the general welfare of society. The most important way in which we confront our neighbor is with the gospel of peace itself, calling upon all humanity to repent and believe the gospel in order to have peace with God and with one another.

### What is the nature of our blessing?

Ultimately, our blessing consists of the very precious name by which he calls us: "sons of God." One day he will renew the entire heavens and the earth, and we will be the crown of his new creation. Just as Jesus Christ came as Prince of Peace, we, too, will be princes and princesses on the earth. As David said in Psalm eight, we will be "crowned...with glory and honor," with "dominion over the works of (His) hands," with "all things under (our) feet."

### Discussion Questions

- 1) Why is it essential that we embrace the grand vision for biblical shalom?
- 2) Explain why peace in the world requires peace with God. How has this peace with God been accomplished?
- 3) What are the negative and positive aspects of peacemaking? How did Jesus perform both of these?
- 4) What are the privileges promised to biblical peacemakers? What does it mean for us to bear His name?

### Suggested resources:

[The Peacemaker](#)

by Ken Sande

Peacemaker Resources  
Website

<http://www.hispeace.org>

## Go Easy on the Trees

As evangelicals we often ignore the topic of the environment because 1) we think of eternal life as more important than temporal life, 2) we think of spiritual things as more important than material things, and 3) we fail to see the connection between creation and redemption.

### Deuteronomy 20:19–20

*<sup>19</sup> When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you? <sup>20</sup> Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it falls.*

This week's text is very interesting because Moses tells the children of Israel, before they go into the holy land, that their warfare is to be constrained in a particular way: when they besiege an enemy's city, they are not to destroy the fruit trees in order to build siege works. All of the surrounding nations typically destroy the fruit trees as part of the act of war; but Israel was to be different. Why? Because of what God had taught them about creation and their relationship to it. These things are the rich theological background behind His commandments to them and to us.

### What are the central truths about creation that we must know and embrace?

1. God is at the center of creation.  
We are neither Cosmo centric nor anthropocentric, but rather theocentric. We do not worship the world nor do we believe the world is here primarily for our exploitation. We believe the creation's primary purpose is to display the glory of God. cf. Genesis 1:1 and Psalm 24:1.
2. God is personally related to His creation.  
We are neither deistic nor pantheistic, but rather theistic. Genesis 3:8 teaches us that God Himself dwells here among us.
3. We are God's image-bearers who are called to rule by serving the creation and preserving it. Cf. Genesis 2:15.
4. Our natural tendency is to despoil and destroy God's creation. We, therefore need the directions God gives us, as in Dt. 20:19,20.
5. God will redeem and renew not only our bodies at the resurrection, but also the entire heaven and earth. We, therefore, are a people who labor with a sure and certain hope.

### How are we doing as stewards of the earth? Let's look at this under five categories:

1. Land  
The number of arable acres per person in the world is now decreasing significantly. We are also losing gradually our topsoil. The amount of area becoming deserts each year is 23,000 square miles. That is the size of West Virginia!
2. Water  
Both the quantity and the quality of our water supply is diminishing. This is true both internationally and nationally.
3. Air  
Our air contains 30% more carbon dioxide today than 250 years ago. At the same time, acid rain is destroying many of the fish in our fresh water lakes and ponds.
4. Plants  
Presently in the world we destroy 25,000,000 acres of forests per year. That is equal to the size of the state of Indiana. In America alone we bulldoze 400,000 acres of land per year
5. Animals  
From the animal kingdom we lose three species every day. Two thirds of our bird species are in decline. One third of our fish species are in danger. 11% of our mammals are in danger. This is what some call a biological holocaust.

God will redeem and renew not only our bodies at the resurrection, but also the entire heaven and earth. We, therefore, are a people who labor with a sure and certain hope.

### Where do we go from here?

1. Develop deep Biblical convictions.
2. Pray
3. Personally practice creation care
4. Engage issues and efforts in your community
5. Influence public policy

Remember that above all other things in His creation, God cherishes you the most. He will one day receive you happily into the new heavens and new earth that He is preparing for you.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) As a result of reading and studying this text, how has your view of creation and our role in it changed?
- 2) Of the current trends regarding the environment, which of them concerns you the most? Why?
- 3) What are some of the practical things we can do to help serve and preserve our environment?
- 4) What public policies most need to be changed in our country?

### Suggested resources:

*For the Beauty of the Earth*  
by Steven Bouma-Prediger

*Pollution and the Death of Man*

By Francis Schaeffer

[Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation](#)

(PDF)