

Proverbs

A Matter of Life and Death

Lesson #3 for January 17, 2015

Scriptures: Matthew 5:21-30; Proverbs 6:21,23-24,30-31; 7:2-3,26-27.

1. How many issues do we face each day which are a matter of life and death? What about driving on the freeway? Some of Satan's most successful temptations involve desires and appetites which God has given us and which are natural but which Satan has perverted.
2. Read Matthew 5:21-30. These words from Jesus are simply an in-depth expansion of Proverbs 6 and 7. The issue of how men and women should relate to each other is illustrated well by how Jesus related to people in His day. He was so gracious even to flagrant sinners. (See John 4:5-42; 8:1-11.) Jesus was breaking down barriers. And He felt comfortable talking to the woman at the well of Samaria. To understand how incredible this was in contrast to the thinking in His day, consider these words from Barclay's commentary.

But there was still another way in which Jesus was taking down the barriers. The Samaritan was a woman. The strict Rabbis forbade a Rabbi to greet a woman in public. A Rabbi might not even speak to his own wife or daughter or sister in public. There were even Pharisees who were called "the bruised and bleeding Pharisees" because they shut their eyes when they saw a woman on the street and so walked into walls and houses! For a Rabbi to be seen speaking to a woman in public was the end of his reputation—and yet Jesus spoke to this woman. Not only was she a woman; she was also a woman of notorious character. No decent man, let alone a Rabbi, would have been seen in her company, or even exchanging a word with her—and yet Jesus spoke to her.—Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1975). *The Gospel of John* (Vol. 1, p. 151). Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press.

3. What the Pharisees did in private was very different from how they wanted themselves to be seen in public. How did they trap the woman in John 8:1-11? What did Jesus write?
4. We all know and understand the fact that the law defines sin. (See Exodus 20:3-17 [the Ten Commandments]; 1 John 3:4; Romans 2:14; 7:7; **14:23**; James 4:17.) Proverbs and Jeremiah 31:31-34 suggest that just as God wrote His law on tables of stone, He wants to write His law on our hearts. What does it mean to write God's law on our hearts? Read *Christ's Object Lessons* 69.1; 97.3; and *Desire of Ages* 668.3. If we could reach these standards, wouldn't that represent having the law written on our hearts?
5. Read Proverbs 6:21 and 7:3 in one of the more traditional translations. Compare Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 17:14-20. How different would their story had been if the Israelites had followed that advice from Deuteronomy? Jews, Muslims, and Christians have taken this idea and worn symbols of their beliefs around their necks, around their arms, and even on their foreheads. Crucifixes, phylacteries, and prayer beads are not going to save anyone. These ideas were to be taken symbolically to mean that just as the neck and throat are the means by which we take in nourishment and air, the eyes and the ears should be guarded against taking wrong things into our brains.
6. It is very interesting to notice that at one point, a cross was a symbol of incredible shame—the result of being killed as a traitor to the Roman government. Today, it is recognized by Christians as a proud symbol of adherence to the principles of the gospel.
7. So, our challenge in this lesson is to find ways that we can write God's laws on our minds and hearts so as to avoid some of Satan's most pervasive temptations. Proverbs suggests that we can do that by keeping the law ever before us. It is like a light (Proverbs 6:23; Psalm 119:105) that is to guide us every day throughout our lives. There are some incredible examples in the

Bible of people who unswervingly obeyed God's directions for their lives despite imminent threats for doing so. Consider the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as recorded in Daniel 3 and Daniel's own experience in the den of lions as recorded in Daniel 6. Did Joseph have any idea what would happen to him when he rejected the advances of Potiphar's wife? (Genesis 39; *Patriarchs and Prophets* 218.1)

8. What is the "apple of the eye"? (Proverbs 7:2) Surely, we protect our eyes more carefully than any other part of our body because they are so delicate. We should be just as cautious in avoiding sin.
9. Many young people living in our day would consider the advice provided in Proverbs 6 and 7 as a way to kill a lot of fun in life. Why do so many people think that sinning is fun? (Hebrews 11:24-25) Notice this interesting paragraph from the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 25.

When a religious person is tempted, the greatest temptation is to find a religious reason to justify the iniquity. Using God to rationalize bad behavior is not only a terrible form of blasphemy—it's powerfully deceptive. After all, if someone thinks that "God is with me," then what can you say in reply? This can happen even in cases of adultery. "God has shown me that this [man or woman] is the one I should be with." If that's what they believe, who or what can trump what "God" has shown them? [Brackets and content in brackets above are in the original.]

10. No doubt, Satan will use every conceivable attraction that he can dream up to tempt us to sin. Could spiritual reasons ever be used to give us excuses for moral improprieties? Fortunately, God's law is not negotiable. It is simple, straightforward, and universally applicable.
11. Why do you think Proverbs 6:30-31, dealing with stealing, follows immediately after Proverbs 6:24-29, dealing with adultery? Is there a relationship between stealing and adultery? Is it more than just the fact that when we violate one of God's commandments and recognize that we are out of compliance, then it is easier to sin in another way?
12. Notice these incredible words from Ellen White.

The strongest bulwark of vice in our world is not the iniquitous life of the abandoned sinner or the degraded outcast; it is that life which otherwise appears virtuous, honorable, and noble, but in which one sin is fostered, one vice indulged. . . . He who, endowed with high conceptions of life and truth and honor, does yet willfully transgress one precept of God's holy law, has perverted his noble gifts into a lure to sin.—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 150.2; *MB* 94.2-95.1.

13. In light of Proverbs 6:30-31, is it justified for a person to steal if he is starving? Why do some translations approached this passage very differently? (Compare Exodus 22:1-4; Deuteronomy 15:7-8.) Of course, the Deuteronomy passage points out that we should help those who are in need.
14. And then the passage goes back to talking about adultery. (Proverbs 6:32-35) Is the most dangerous thing about adultery that if the husband finds out about it, he becomes angry? Is the most dangerous aspect of sin that if God finds out about it, He becomes angry?

"Thou shalt not commit adultery." This commandment forbids not only acts of impurity, but sensual thoughts and desires, or any practice that tends to excite them. Purity is demanded not only in the outward life but in the secret intents and emotions of the heart. Christ, who taught the far-reaching obligation of the law of God, declared the evil thought or look to be as truly sin as is the unlawful deed.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 308.6-7.

15. What is an "evil thought or look"? In our world of sensual advertisements, is it possible to avoid temptation? We live in a world steeped in and awash in sin. What does it take to convince us

that sin is deadly? Why is it attractive and pleasant? Has Satan hijacked good things designed by God to promote his agenda? Aren't men and women supposed to be attracted to each other? If not, would there be any marriages?

16. When you are tempted to sin, do you think about the fact that it might result in death? (Romans 6:23) If you could spend a full 24-hour period watching the most popular channels on television, you would probably see hundreds of examples of adultery and other related iniquities. There are very few products today that are not advertised using sex appeal.
17. But, Proverbs 7:6-23 tells us the true story. The adulterer is walking blindly into a trap, and he certainly is not thinking clearly at that moment.
18. We do not know when this passage in the book of Proverbs was actually written. Was it before Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines? Were those 1000 women in constant competition for his attention? Is that what led to his writing this passage in Scripture?
19. In a larger sense, surely this enticing woman represents temptation in all its forms. "The righteousness of Christ will not cover one cherished sin." (*Christ's Object Lessons* 316.2) "If one sin is cherished in the soul, or one wrong practice retained in the life, the whole being is contaminated. The man becomes an instrument of unrighteousness." (*Desire of Ages* 313.1)

Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel. The prevalence of a sinful desire shows the delusion of the soul. Every indulgence of that desire strengthens the soul's aversion to God. The pains of duty and the pleasures of sin are the cords with which Satan binds men in his snares. **Those who would rather die than perform a wrong act are the only ones who will be found faithful.** *5Testimonies* 53.2. See also *Steps to Christ* 34.1. [Bold type is added.]

20. The Bible illustrates the fact that some very important people have fallen to temptation. Some of the giants in the Bible have fallen hard for sin. Think of David and Solomon. And what about Saul who had been given a new heart by God? Our only safety is carefully following God's law.

Satan offers to men the kingdoms of the world if they will yield to him the supremacy. Many do this and sacrifice heaven. It is better to die than to sin; better to want than to defraud; better to hunger than to lie. Let all who are tempted meet Satan with these words: "Blessed is everyone that feareth the Lord; that walketh in His ways. For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." Here is a condition and a promise which will be unmistakably realized. Happiness and prosperity will be the result of serving the Lord.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 495.1; CC 119.6; LDE 142.2.

Choose poverty, reproach, separation from friends, or any suffering rather than to defile the soul with sin. Death before dishonor or the transgression of God's law should be the motto of every Christian. As a people professing to be reformers, treasuring the most solemn, purifying truths of God's word, we must elevate the standard far higher than it is at the present time.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 147.1; CH 626.2; MYP 80.2.

21. Christians should all know that our continual focus of attention should be on Jesus Christ. Focusing on one's sins is a deadly trap because by beholding we become changed. (GC 555; 2 Corinthians 3:18) In whatever form it takes, sin must be avoided.
22. Do some of these quotations sound like fanaticism? If we believe God's Word and try to follow it precisely, are we falling into legalism?
23. Do we really believe that sinning leads to death? What is the relationship between God's

character of love and His law? If God is infinitely forgiving, do we really need to worry about obeying His law? Won't He always forgive our transgressions? In your daily Christian life, have you found that following God's directions leads to the most happiness? Are God's rules always for our best good? Proverbs 6 and 7 are explicit about the dangers of adultery.

24. Considering that the average American male aged 25-44 has had 6.1 sexual partners and the average American female of those ages has had 3.6, this is a serious issue. How many Americans would still be alive if we enforced the rules in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22? Do we really believe that God has our ultimate happiness in mind? Do we really believe that His ideas are what is best for us?
25. As parents, do we clearly live out God's principles before our children? Parents must live exemplary lives in order to be good examples to their children. "Do as I say and not as I do" does not work very well. People learn by repetition. "*Repetitio est mater studiorum.*" (A Latin proverb)
26. God's law is described as a lamp, a light, and a way of life. (Proverbs 4:23) How does God create a clean heart within us? (Psalm 51:10; Jeremiah 31:31-34)
27. The *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 38 says:

Putting a clean heart within us is a miracle of God's creative power (*Ps. 51:10*). To receive it, we must acknowledge our weakness and accept the forgiveness and moral cleansing that God offers through Jesus Christ (*Psalm 51, Jer. 31:34, 1 John 1:7-9*). God transforms us, making us new people through His Holy Spirit (*John 3:3-8, Titus 3:4-7*).
28. By beholding we become changed. (See #21 above.) If parents are sinning (and who does not), how are they to be good examples for their children? Would it be fair for our children to say to us, "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say"?
29. Consider the following words about how temptation works.

It can be desirable to the ears and mind (*Prov. 6:24, 7:21*), to the eyes (*6:25*), to one's appetite for food (*7:14, here sacrificial meat eaten at home by the offerer; compare Lev. 7:16*), to fulfill a desire for companionship (*Prov. 7:15*), to satisfy a yearning for touch (*vs. 16*), and can appeal to one's sense of smell (*vs. 17*) and sexual appetite (*vs. 18*). Of themselves, these are good desires that God has given. But temptations are effective, because they present attractive ways to fulfill them by violating the boundaries that God has established for our protection (*James 1:14, 15; compare Gen. 3:6; 1 John 2:16*). By appealing to several desires and offering assurance that there is no danger (*Prov. 7:19, 20; compare food and sex in Num. 25:1, 2; Rev. 2:14*), Proverbs 7 illustrates how strong temptations can be. (*Ibid. 39*)
30. What sins are attractive to each one of us? Why do they attract us? Why are they dangerous?
31. It does no good to claim, "The Devil made me do it!" Sin is a choice that we do not have to make. God will provide a way of escape. (1 Corinthians 10:13)
32. Do the standards suggested by this lesson seem impossibly high to you? Jesus certainly experienced more temptations than we will ever realize. That does not make it any easier. But, He has promised to help us. What can we learn from the wise counsel in this lesson to help us live better lives, closer to Jesus, and prepare ourselves for the coming kingdom?

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