

“Milk and Meat” – Answering Questions on Christianity
Life Bible-Presbyterian Church Adult Sunday School

DOCTRINE OF SALVATION – Part 7

Ref: *7 Toxic Ideas Polluting Your Mind*, Anthony Selvaggio.

If we would be sanctified and holy, we must be wary of worldly thoughts and ideas contrary to God. 1 John 2:15-16 reminds us “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

1. Ideas to Idolatry.

- a. Ideas are powerful. He was born on April 20, 1889 in what was then known as Austria-Hungary. As a young man, he fought in World War I and was decorated for his valour in service to his country. After the war, he entered politics and launched a failed coup against German leaders. For this he was imprisoned. After his release, he wrote a book “*Mein Kampf*”. That man was Adolf Hitler. His little book, and the dreadful ideas it contained, altered the course of the entire twentieth century and led to the death of millions. Bad ideas can lead to atrocities such as Nazism or ISIS terrorism.
- b. All evil ideas come from the father of lies – Satan. Satan is more crafty than others (Gen 3:1). We must not underestimate his ability to deceive us, even masquerading as angel of light (2 Cor 11:4). He’s got a foothold on the world; he is the ruler of the world (Eph 2:2). The world accepts Satan’s ideas as clever, modern and progressive.
- c. How do we counter Satan’s ideas?
 - i. Identify the enemy – Satan.
 - ii. Demolish the enemy – bring our every thought to obey Christ. 2 Cor 10:5 “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”
 - iii. Demolish strongholds of Satan by God’s Word. Eph 6:17 “wield the sword of the Spirit”. 2 Cor 10:4 “(For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)”

2. Technopoly – the iphone & ipad nation.

- a. Technopoly is the state of culture that considers technology as superior, and finds satisfaction in owning and using tech gadgets. Now we even have driverless “Google self-driving” car – which recently collided with a bus.
- b. Motivation: to be independent of God. When the men wanted to build the tower of Babel, (Gen 11:4) “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” Technology is God’s good gift to people. We can use technology to glorify God and serve God more effectively. But it can also be abused.
- c. Moderation. Prov 25:27 tells us that too much of a good thing is not good. A little bit of honey is healthy. But if you indulge in excessive honey, it becomes harmful. The same is true of technology. Technology is like honey. Honey tastes sweet and we want more and more of it. Technology allows us to be entertained all the time – music in our ears, watch videos and play games on smartphones, post photos & ideas on social media 24/7, shop online and pay using ewallet. These are not bad in itself (unless immoral), but exercise moderation.
- d. Disengagement. Technology can cause us to be immersed in our virtual world and isolated from the real world of people. In 2010, there was a couple in Korea let their baby die of starvation while they were obsessed with played an online video game to raise a virtual baby. Bizarre! But it’s true. Technology can dull our perception of reality, disengage us from our family and desensitize us to our sin. We see this disengagement in restaurants and at home dinner tables, where families gather, and everyone is glued to their ipad or phone, instead of talking, sharing, telling stories or enjoying each other’s company. We do not know how to converse any more. People become more socially awkward and reclusive. In Japan, the extreme social behavior called “Hikikomoro” is seen in reclusive adolescents or young men staying in their darkened room playing video games day and night, with no desire to go out

to work, meet friends or play sports. The virtual world becomes a more attractive replacement of the real world with its complex relationship problems and need for discipline and hard work.

- e. Distraction. In Ray Bradbury's 1953 dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451*, he depicts a world where people are obsessed with watching wall-sized television screens. This obsession is encouraged by the government as a means to distract people from the harsh reality of living under a tyrant. The presence of fast cars, loud music, and advertisements creates a lifestyle with too much stimulation in which no one has the time to concentrate. Also, the huge mass of published material is too overwhelming to think about, leading to a society that reads condensed books (which were very popular at the time Bradbury was writing) rather than the real thing. *Pokemon Go* – the latest craze, coming soon to Singapore, is another meaningless faddish game that gets people to chase imaginary creatures. These entertainment and games are like drugs that enslave the hearts and minds of people to distract them from the truth and what is important in life. While entertainment is not inherently evil, when it dominates our lives, it creates what French sociologist, Jacques Ellul, calls "empty time". This causes people to "lose their sense of reality and to abandon their search for truth." French theologian Blaise Pascal "All the major forms of diversion are dangerous to the Christian life." Satan wants you to love the things on earth, to be distracted by meaningless things, and not love the things of heaven. (Col 3:2 "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."). Is technology distracting you from the most important things in life?
- f. Disembodiment. Technology allows us to hide behind pseudonyms and assume a destructive sinful behavior online. Consider the rampant immodesty displayed on the Internet. The Internet has brought emotional and physical exhibitionism to an entirely new level. It's not just the publicity-seeking movie stars who are baring their most intimate details but teenage boys and girls are "sexting," exposing their bodies and intimate habits online for the entire world to see. They share with millions of strangers, many of whom are sexual predators, things you will never share in a face-to face conversation with another human being. Cyber-bullying becomes more prevalent. Internet trolls destroy the reputation of others by posting slanders and inflammatory messages with deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or to trade insults, often for their own amusement.
- g. How can we resist Technopoly?
 - i. *Engage the real world*. We must regularly turn off our virtual world and tune in to our real world. We must put limits on our use of technology, turn off our TV, iphones, ipads and intentionally engage other human beings in meaningful face-to-face conversations. Instead of sending an email or text message to our colleague two doors away, why not walk down the corridor to his office and talk to your colleague.
 - ii. *Make time to be singularly focused on God's unfailing love* (Ps 48:9 We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.), His mighty deeds (Ps 77:12 I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.), and His awesome Word (Ps 119:97 O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.).
 - iii. *Remain embodied and modest online*. Make it a rule to never put intimate details about your life, or the lives of others, on the Internet. When you are online, always remain civil. Establish rules to govern your words. Do not engage in cybergossip, cyberbullying, and webtribution. Apply the golden rule in Mt 7:12 "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

3. Individualism.

- a. Our individualistic self-absorbed life conflicts with a God-centered biblical worldview. A culture of narcissism leads to the collapse of community. The post-war generation promotes a self-absorbed self-indulgent individualism and a reduced commitment to marriage.
- b. Undermine church authority. Individual church members see themselves as the final authority on biblical interpretation and discipline, thus undermining the authority of the church. The spirit of individualism most often manifests itself when a church member maintains an interpretation of Scripture that is contrary to the Westminster Confession of

Faith. In the process of church discipline, individuals who are corrected simply leave and go to another church rather than submit to the correction of the elders. Individualistic members believe the church exists to meet their individual needs and desires. This results in consumerism and contemporary worship music that sings more about man than about God. Many sermons are filled with subjective points meant to demonstrate personal relevance to the listener rather than objective truths about God. Individualism is also resulting in less volunteerism. Churches are adding all types of services to attract and keep their members. The Bible calls us to make God and His mighty deeds the focus of His church. D. A. Carson describes how this individualistic generation views the church: “The new generation does not readily think in terms of service to the church or to God, but in terms of what it can get out of it; they shop around for churches until they find a product they like.” The focus is now no longer on God and the body of Christ, but on serving the self.

- c. The irony of individualism is that it leads to destruction of the self. Jesus says, in losing or denying self, we find life eternal and abundant in Christ (Mt 10:39). Hence Satan wants us to be selfish and self-centered. As we live for self, we find only dissatisfaction, discontentment and disagreements. It is when we die to self that we can truly live for Christ.

4. **Consumerism.** *“Shop till you drop.”*

- a. A new church flyer offered “free coffee”, “free rockin’ music”, “free fun for kids” and “cool church done differently.” It described its worship as “casual, modern, biblical, friendly, and meaningful.” The pictures featured young, attractive people smiling from ear to ear. It reveals the extent to which consumerism has infiltrated the mindset of the church - the church exists to serve and provide fun and meet the needs of Christians.
- b. The core ideology of consumerism is that personal happiness is increased with the acquisition, consumption, and enjoyment of material possessions. In America, consumer spending makes up 70% of its economy. But instead of bringing happiness, it brings emptiness. Consumerism subtly beckons us to engage in the idolatry of consumption.
- c. Satan wants us to find meaning and satisfaction in the material stuff that we can buy and own: designer clothes, watches, big houses, buffets, smartphones and big cars. Gene Veith notes, “The Middle Ages had its cathedrals; the modern age had its factories; the postmodern age has its shopping malls.” The big shopping malls are temples to consumerism, and all its values of comfort, affluence, convenience and fashion.
- d. Our culture is filling us with emptiness. St Augustine said God made us with a God-shaped void that He alone can fill. Material things are false gods claiming to satisfy our inner longings. While consumerism satisfies us temporarily, it ultimately leaves us feeling empty.
- e. Consumerism distracts us with its constant lifestyle improvement. Pursuing material possessions and wealth is for many people their entire life’s work. They work long hours, neglecting their faith and health, so as to buy more stuff, and spend time buying more. “No civilization in history has offered more gifts than and therefore has amplified the temptation of living “by bread alone” with such power and variety and to such effect. In today’s convenient, climate-controlled revolutions, nothing is easier than living apart from God.” – Anthony Selvaggio. We have so many things to occupy our time, we stop thinking about the great issues of life. Consumerism leaves us spiritually empty and mentally distracted.
- f. The church suffers from the “Haggai problem.” Haggai attributes Israel’s half-hearted efforts to rebuild the temple to their misplaced priorities - they live in luxurious houses, while God’s temple fell into disrepair. In many countries, the church members furnish their beautiful homes while church buildings fall apart due to declining offerings.
- g. D A Carson says the danger of the consumer mentality is that people tend to judge all matters religious and theological by the criterion of whether they have been helped. We end up with a religion and preaching that is oriented more to self-help than to salvation.
- h. Living the Good Life. A Christian can live the life that is good by embracing the biblical worldview of wealth. Remember the things that we have will pass away. God has given us these things, not to enslave us, but as resources for us to enjoy and serve Him. We can serve

God by giving our resources to reach out to those who are lost, point them to the Saviour and the enduring riches found only in Christ, an unfading inheritance (1 Pet 1:4).

- i. What is the biblical view: Christ is our Inheritance. The 8th Commandment - you shall not steal – means you should have your own property, and be content with it. It's not okay to worship things. Retail therapy / shopping therapy – looking to fill an empty soul with things, impulse buys, only to feel empty thereafter. We can possess and enjoy things with thankful hearts to God, and not fall into idolatry. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Mt 6:21). In other words, what do you prize most of all in life? Is it Christ? Or your dreams of having more possessions (5 Cs). *“When I have 5Cs, and happily married to the man/woman of my dreams, and have smart godly children, then I'll be happy.”* We cannot bring our money with us when we die: “For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.” (Ps 49:16-17). Therefore, do not store up treasures on earth, but store up treasures in heaven (Mt 6:19-20). The real treasure of life is wisdom (Prov 16:16). “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.” (Prov 4:7). True wisdom is knowing God and Christ as our Saviour & Lord, and learning to obey His word (Prov 1:7). All of proverbs teach us to live a wise life, to reflect the image of a Holy God (Prov 9:10).

5. Covetousness or Contentment

- a. Godliness with contentment. As you consider a career or develop your career, you will feel great temptations toward greed. God reminds us in 1 Timothy 6:6 that godliness with contentment is great gain. Let us be content with our food and clothing.
- b. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Prov 30:8 “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:” Money is a good servant but a poor master. The love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Therefore, avoid extravagant spending. Set aside a sum to give to the Lord's work. If money is most important to you, money will become a pitfall to you in times of great temptation.

6. Falling or Fleeing.

- a. Lust is a great temptation. The temptation to be immoral or to think immorally is very strong today. The media constantly bombards the mind with sexual temptation. The Christian still has a fallen nature; he has not been delivered from the presence of sin and his flesh. He must continually flee from temptation (1 Cor 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.).
- b. Desire for sexual fulfillment is not sinful in marriage. God has placed legitimate sexual desires within the hearts of a husband and wife to be enjoyed within the bonds of marriage (Heb 13:4). God knows that a sexual relationship will be honourable and permanently satisfying (and without guilt) if it is enjoyed within the lifelong commitment of a loving marriage. Moral looseness before or during marriage causes bitterness, regret and sorrow.
- c. How can we maintain our purity? “Flee youthful lusts” (2 Tim 2:22), but follow after righteousness, faith, charity (love), peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”. To avoid moral failure, you must pursue a godly life with godly friends. Put on the whole armour of God. Eph 6:10-18.
- d. Jealously guard your thought life (Phil 4:8), test our Internet usage against Phil 4:8 – is it true, honest, just, pure, lovely, excellent, honourable (any virtue), praiseworthy? Avoid contaminating influences in music, videos and movies. Avoid verbally or pictorially suggestive commercials, websites and literature, places where immodesty is flaunted, and discussions about suggestive topics. God is serious about your purity of life. If you are careless with this grave danger, you will suffer great loss. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (Gal 6:7).