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Society is captivated by the thrilling world of amusement, but the ride is always downhill, short-lived, and unfulfilling. New, changing, and cheaper forms of fun challenge traditional convictions and boundaries of the church. Financial prosperity, leisure time, and a very soft life combine to lure the Christian family into the world of amusement. What principles does a Christian family need in order to protect itself from these snares?

Be Sober The word amusement, when parsed (a – muse – ment), implies a state of not thinking. Its archaic usage referred to delusion or deception. Although profitable recreation can rest a tired mind, indulging in amusement may be an effort to escape from a troubled conscience. "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness" (Proverbs 14:13).

Music can sooth a mind troubled by sin. But like King Saul's amusement, sensual music is only a temporary lift to an "evil spirit" and simply postpones serious thinking. "They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job 21:12-14).

Worldly amusement can be a mind-altering stimulant much like addictive drugs. The rush of adrenaline that accompanies thrill is addictive. Motorcycles go faster and faster until a brush with death sobers the driver—or he loses his life. The greater the intoxication of thrill the greater the hangover of dissatisfaction and emptiness. We should avoid recreation that is primarily for thrill.

Our position against video games spares us many evils. Video games, which amuse by simulating the thrill of extreme danger, desensitize men to natural fear and encourage reckless actions. The bottom of the Roman amusement ride ended in the bloodthirsty slaughter of the Coliseums.

Be vigilant. When recreation is viewed as recess from discipline and a license for indulgence, it leads to sinful amusement. Worldly vacation centers often appeal to men's carnal natures and dispose them to moral looseness and sin. Willful exposure to such an atmosphere removes our defense against sin. Indecent dress, worldly music, and hilarity dull spiritual sensitivity. "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter" (James 5:5). Even educational theatres such as IMAX are primarily geared for amusement with

booming music and graphics and should be avoided. Sin is no longer exceedingly sinful if we immerse ourselves in crowds of sinners without a burden for their souls.

Be productive. Life is too short to waste in idle self-gratification. Electronic technology amuses idle minds. The world's video gaming, internet surfing, and social media not only entertain but also demoralize the mind. Their addictive intrigue devours hours of valuable time and sleep and leaves one with a guilty sense of wastefulness. The computer that is lauded as a timesaver can become a time waster. Whether it is a computer on the desk or a cell phone in the pocket, if it is a toy rather than a tool, it has become a master rather than a servant. Games that cannot be deleted must be avoided to maintain our convictions.

An urban lifestyle with few chores and work opportunities for growing children creates more pressure for amusement fillers. But amusement does not provide fulfillment, happiness, or true joy. Children should be blessed with lifestyle patterns that provide the fulfillment of usefulness and service. Fun is not the essence of life and does not satisfy. "Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity" (Ecclesiastes 11:10).

Be good stewards. Do not pay to play. Children should learn at a young age that riding the bucking sport cars at the grocery store is not permitted. The conscience is then educated to stay out of video arcades, avoid miniature golf courses, and pass by the Jet Ski rentals. Since fireworks are an extravagant waste of resources, we should not go out of our way to watch them.

Be mature. Children entertain themselves with toys and games in their childhood development, and we do well to set up the building blocks with them. But many never develop beyond this stage—the toys only get more elaborate and expensive. Fascination with radio-controlled planes, helicopters, and cars can stifle spiritual life. Electronic gadgetry of all kinds amuses but starves spiritual and vocational development. Lawn mowers make better mechanical training than go-carts.

What many consider real living by God's standard is really dying. "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Timothy 5:6). The hilarious, thrilling amusement ride eventually drifts to a stop at the bottom and leaves one empty and stranded. Serious Christians continue climbing the heights of glory in step with God.

—BAS



The Personification of God

"The Voice of the Lord God"

God created man in His own image so that He could enjoy fellowship with man. Sin in Eden broke this fellowship relationship. But God still longs to communicate with men. Men hear His voice in various ways.

God at times speaks from heaven. "Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire" (Deuteronomy 4:36). God reveals Himself as the Almighty One, who is worthy of all praise and honor. The Lord who made us has the right to direct our lives. "This is my beloved Son: hear him" (Mark 9:7). He knows every detail of our lives and knows what is best for us.

God speaks through nature. "There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:3). The many marvels of nature from the depths of the ocean to the height of the stars reveal an all-wise God who created all things. The mighty display of power in natural catastrophes causes many to fear and continually reminds all men to be ready to meet their Maker.

God spoke through the prophets. The voice of God calls man back to obedience to God's Law. "Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live" (Jeremiah 38:20). To hearken to God's voice is to receive life, but to refuse it is to place oneself outside of God's blessing. God's will revealed through the prophets made men accountable, but man's accountability is now even greater: "God, who ... spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

God speaks in a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12). Many do not hear this voice because earthly commotion crowds it out. We hear this voice when we pause to meditate on God and His Word and allow Him to speak through our conscience (Isaiah 30:21).

Today God speaks to us through the living Word. It contains a record of God's voice in the past and through the Spirit speaks to our hearts' needs. Do we personally know the voice of God in our own experience?

God's voice entreats. "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? ... And he said, Go, and tell" (Isaiah 6:8, 9). God's voice calls man to do His will. At times we need to lay aside

our preferences or our work to do His bidding. Many godly people have suffered and even given their lives to follow the requirements of God. Some still are suffering.

God's voice comforts. "For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17). Jesus received the Father's approval, and we also can by living holy, obedient lives. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16). God's comforting voice speaks peace to our conscience.

God's voice condemns. "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). Their hearts were condemned because they had disobeyed God's law. Adam and Eve's efforts to clothe themselves did not diminish the guilt. They needed to accept God's provision by faith to remove the condemnation of sin. Through atonement we can again welcome God's voice rather than fearing His presence.

God's voice warns. "And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (Joel 2:11). God's voice calls men to make their calling and election sure while there is opportunity. It causes the unprepared to fear but fills His saints with reverential awe knowing that they can be under God's blessing.

God's voice will bring judgment. "And there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done" (Revelation 16:17). When God's voice sounds in final judgment, man will not be able to change his life. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Revelation 22:11).

God has faithfully revealed His will down through time. As we hear His voice today, may we respond in a way that honors Him and that the Lord can use to speak to others.

Brother Laverne

Did ever people hear the voice of God
Speaking out of the midst of the
fire, as thou halt heard, and five?"
Deuteronomy 4:33

Satan's Tactics in Destroying Brotherhood Unity

God established the foundation for unity in human relationships. Adam and Eve enjoyed a perfect relationship with God and with each other in the Garden of Eden. But at the moment they yielded to Satan's suggestion to partake of the forbidden fruit, they found themselves fighting fear, envy, mistrust, irritation, criticism, and disappointment. Their perfect relationship was destroyed, never to be totally regained in this life.

Out of His love and mercy for mankind, God has made a way possible for human relationships to be harmonious. Through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, man can again experience a redeemed relationship with God and with each other. Therefore, the new birth is an imperative for the brotherhood to be peaceable.

Genuine love and submission to God will express itself in renewed relationships with one another. Therefore, true brotherhood possesses a love and respect for others which affects one's attitudes and actions. It consists of those who pray for, care about, share with, and receive from each other so that each member of the body of Christ reaches his fullest potential. For such a relationship of brotherhood unity to exist, an oneness in Christ must prevail.

"Be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:2, 3). Whenever a sincere effort is put forth to live out these principles in everyday life, Satan will seek to destroy it. What are some of the tactics he uses?

Sowing discord threatens brotherhood unity when members stir contention and strife by failing to harmonize. A congregation is made up of individuals with varying backgrounds, levels of maturity, convictions, and personalities, creating a fertile seedbed for disunity to surface. When one fails to blend with a Scriptural group voice and aggressively promotes another viewpoint at the expense of the feelings and opinions of others, Satan has won.

To overcome this tactic, one needs to maintain a love for each individual and acknowledge that he needs the brotherhood more than the brotherhood needs him. Everyone must be flexible enough to lay down his own preferences to allow the voice of Scriptural brotherhood to prevail.

Materialism gives Satan an advantage in our time of affluence. A materialistic "Christian" discovers that too often he is too busy to help with outreach work, to involve himself with a work project, or to freely give in a monetary way to meet the needs of the brotherhood.

Materialists become independent. They fail to sense the need of seeking advice before investing or borrowing and give little thought to how a purchase may be viewed through the eyes of another brother. From a financial perspective, they feel rather self-secure and their sense of need for the brotherhood is lost. For the brotherhood to endure materialism must be overcome and our love for God and His church must have first place in our lives.

Interpersonal relationship struggles can destroy peace. Brotherhood requires harmony among people, so interpersonal relationships are very integral to brotherhood. Satan attempts to cause relationships to deteriorate. Misunderstandings, unkind or thoughtless remarks, broken confidences, or harsh criticism all contribute to broken relationships.

Brotherhood unity is fragile and must be handled with care. Even the strongest brother or sister can be hurt by careless words and actions. "Let love be without dissimulation [hypocrisy]. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Romans 12:9-10).

Apostasy is an ever-present threat to brotherhood unity. It is often the result of little reserve for change. Change is not always wrong, but when traditional practices are laid aside for the sake of change, a direction of travel is set in motion which tends to bring worldly influences into church life. Such a situation produces tension in the brotherhood between the careless and the more careful. To overcome this tactic, members need to respect traditional practices and appreciate those with a more conservative mindset. The more progressive need this restraint to help them stay on course.

Self-centered persons violate Scriptural directives. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:4). To be self-centered reveals pride and destroys the brotherly spirit which is essential for the brotherhood to thrive. Conversations tend to be one-sided, visiting in each other's homes declines, the support given to those walking through difficult times is weak, and one's fellowship circle tends to be rather small. The many rich blessings which true brotherhood offers are not realized by everyone. Therefore it is imperative that self does not have preeminence.

True brotherhood is priceless. Therefore, Satan will constantly endeavor to destroy it. May we ever be on guard and employ God's grace to overcome Satan's tactics.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

Brother Wilmer



Church Committee Report

Paraguay Mission

"Brother John, I am calling on behalf of the Paraguay Mission Committee. We are asking you to consider serving in Paraguay for three months while Brother Amos's are on furlough." So begins another contact in an effort to keep the work staffed. One of the primary responsibilities of the Paraguay Mission Committee is to supply the needed personnel. A family is needed to serve occasionally for a two-year term. More often, the request may be to cover a furlough. Usually numerous contacts need to be made in order to find the family that is able and willing to go.

While the work of finding personnel is likely the largest part of the Committee's responsibility, we are responsible for other needs as well. The Committee makes arrangements for travel for personnel. This includes arrangements for those going to live in Paraguay and for the bishops' regular travel to the field for council and Communion. Furthermore, when families go to live long-term in Paraguay, a significant amount of paperwork is done before they go so that they are able to apply for residency status.

The Committee considers requests from the field involving major expenditures such as vehicle purchases, land purchases, or building projects. While the MMM Board makes final disposition of requests, the Committee makes the initial recommendations to the Board.

The Committee also gives general oversight to the Paraguay Development Fund. This fund was established to assist Paraguayan brethren by loaning funds for their business projects with a goal to help them better provide for their families. This fund does not utilize MMM funds, but is rather supplied by private monies donated by interested individuals. Presently, the PDF is helping various brethren become involved in commercial milk production. About two years ago the opportunity of commercial milk production opened up in the area of our churches. This appears to be a good financial opportunity. One does not need to make a large investment in cows

and equipment. Some are participating with only a single cow milked by hand.

Over the course of thirty-two years, the mission in Paraguay has grown under the blessing of God. Today sixteen missionary families serve among the four congregations. We pray that the churches in Paraguay would continue to grow, not only in numbers but also in strength and stability.

Brother Nathan For the Paraguay Mission Committee



"Glorify God in Your Body" (Part 1) Pure Morals

Dear Christian, who owns your body? "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Your body belongs to God. This series of articles focuses on the question, "How can this body, created and redeemed by God, glorify Him?"

Many today live by the concept "If it feels good, do it." Is this a morally sound concept? No! But what are pure morals? Pure means "unmixed, free from contamination, or having no faults." Morals are rules or habits of conduct. Pure morals, therefore, are codes of conduct that are rooted in the absolutes of God's Word.

"For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). Pure conduct begins with pure thought life. Do your thoughts fit through the sieve of Philippians 4:8? Are they true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report? "Think on these things."

What do you do with impure thoughts that Satan injects into your mind? Not every thought that enters is worthy to stay. "[Bring] into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Fill your mind with good. Sing a song such as "Jesus, Lover of My Soul." Repeat a Bible passage like Psalm 90 from memory.

What is your reading diet? Reading diet reveals and forms character. If a book or magazine is interesting, does that mean it is worthwhile? Pure books build pure character. The pure Word of Life cleanses our minds. "Every word of God is pure" (Proverbs 30:5).

Do the books you read inspire you to be more selfless and devoted to Christ? When have you last read from Martyrs Mirror? Read and be inspired by those whose pure morals lifted them to spiritual victory in out-

wardly depressing circumstances. Good storybooks also encourage faithfulness. Can you identify with Tip Lewis's victory in the story *Tip Lewis and His Lamp*? So "give attendance to [worthwhile] reading."

"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). Satan uses fleshly desires to tempt you to fall. But victory is possible! How? By diligent Bible study, fervent prayer, and the fear of the Lord.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Pure actions are essential for pure hearts. Exercise proper reserve with others at all times. Will you look twice at that corrupting billboard? "Let thine eyes look right on" when the magazine rack is full of filth. Do all your thoughts and actions glorify your Creator and Savior?

Brother Andrew

O Holy Spirit, keep us pure,
Grant us Thy strength when sins allure;
Our bodies are Thy temple, Lord;
Be Thou in thought and act adored.
—Adelaide M. Plumtre

