

***Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*** by Jerry Bridges, NavPress: Colorado Springs, CO, 2007. (80 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

## **1. Life of a Saint**

The Greek word for saint is *hagios*, and it refers not to one's character but to a state of being. Its literal meaning is "one who is separated unto God." In this sense, every believer—even the most ordinary and the most immature—is a saint. The actual wording of Paul's address in 1 Corinthians is to "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1:2). Here again, we may be surprised with Paul's use of the word *sanctified*, a word we usually associate with holy living. But the words *sanctified* and *saint* both come from the same Greek word family. A saint is simply someone who is sanctified. Although it sounds awkward in English, we could literally rewrite Paul's words as "to those separated in Christ Jesus, called to be separated ones." [page 12]

## **2. A Life Transformed**

Every believer is a saint—a person separated from his old sinful way of life and set apart by God to increasingly glorify God as his life is transformed. [page 14]

## **3. Living a Life Set Apart**

The guerrilla warfare between the flesh and the Spirit described in Galatians 5:17 is fought daily in the heart of every Christian. That is why, for instance, Peter urges us to "to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11). So although 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Ezekiel 36:26 speak of a decisive change that always occurs in the heart of every new believer, the outworking of that change is not instantaneous and absolute. Instead it is progressive over time and never complete in this life. However, the awareness of this internal struggle with sin should never be used as an excuse for sinful behavior. Rather, we should always keep in mind that we are saints called to live a life that is set apart for God. [page 15]

## **4. Living Inconsistent with Our Calling**

When I was serving as an officer in the U.S. Navy some fifty years ago, there was an expression: "conduct unbecoming an officer."

Perhaps we might do well to adopt a similar expression for believers: "conduct unbecoming a saint." Such an expression would pull us up short, wouldn't it? When we gossip or become impatient or get angry, we could remind ourselves that our conduct is unbecoming a saint. We are, in principle, if not in degree, acting like the Corinthians. We are living inconsistently with our calling. [pages 15-16]

## **5. The Word "Sin" Has Disappeared**

In his 1973 book *Whatever Became of Sin?* Psychiatrist Karl Menninger wrote,

The very word, “sin,” which seems to have disappeared, was once a proud word. It was once a strong word, an ominous and serious word...But the word went away. It has almost disappeared—the word, along with the notion. Why? Doesn’t anyone sin anymore? Doesn’t anyone believe in sin?

To reinforce his observations, Dr. Menninger noted that in the presidential proclamation for the annual National Day of Prayer, the last time the word *sin* was mentioned was in President Eisenhower’s proclamation in 1953—and those words were borrowed from a call to national prayer by Abraham Lincoln in 1963! So, as Dr. Menninger observed, “as a nation, we officially ceased ‘sinning’ some twenty [now over fifty] years ago.”<sup>1</sup> [page 17]

<sup>1</sup>Karl Menninger, MD, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York, Hawthorne Books, 1973) 14-15.

## **6. Ignoring Our Own Sins**

It’s easy for us to condemn those obvious sins while virtually ignoring our own sins of gossip, pride, envy, bitterness, and lust, or even our lack of those gracious qualities that Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). [page 19]

## **7. Sin Is Serious in God’s Sight**

Sin is sin. Even those sins that I call “the acceptable sins of the saints”—those sins we tolerate in our lives—are serious in God’s eyes. Our religious pride, our critical attitudes, our unkind speech about others, our impatience and anger, even our anxiety (see Philippians 4:6); all of these are serious in the sight of God. [page 21]

## **8. Sin Is Vile, Ugly ...**

Ralph Venning, the author of *The Sinfulness of Sin*, uses especially colorful (in a negative sense) words to describe sin. Over the space of only a few pages, he says that sin is vile, ugly, odious, malignant, pestilent, pernicious, hideous, spiteful, poisonous, virulent, villainous, abominable, and deadly. [page 26]

## **9. We Rebel against God**

Primarily, the word *holy*, when used of God, speaks of His infinite, transcendent majesty. It speaks of His sovereign reign over all His creation. Therefore, when we sin, when we violate the law of God in anyway, be it ever so small in our eyes, we rebel against the sovereign authority and transcendent majesty of God. To put it bluntly, our sin is an assault on the majesty and sovereign rule of God. It is indeed cosmic treason. [page 27]

## **10. Our Sin Grieves Our Father**

In the context of exposing sin in our relationships with one another (see Ephesians 4:25-32), Paul says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (verse 30). When we think of our sin as rebellion against God’s sovereign authority and a despising of both His law and His person, we are viewing God in His rightful role as our ruler and judge. But when we see our sin as grieving the Holy Spirit—that is, as grieving God—we are viewing God as our redeemer and Father. Our sin grieves our heavenly Father. Whether we are unkind to someone else or unforgiving when someone is unkind to us, we grieve our Father’s heart. [page 28]

## **11. Sin Is Sinful, All Sinful**

I referred earlier to the Puritan Ralph Venning’s book *The Sinfulness of Sin*. The title sounds somewhat like a tautology, a needless repetition. But in his title, Venning was trying to make a point, and here is his point in his own words: “On the contrary, as God is holy, all holy, only holy, altogether holy, and always holy, so sin is sinful, all sinful, only sinful, altogether sinful, and always sinful.”<sup>1</sup> [page 29]

<sup>1</sup>Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin* (Edinburgh, Scotland, and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965, first published 1669), 31.

## **12. Great Sinner, Great Savior**

John Newton, who wrote the much-loved hymn, “Amazing Grace,” was earlier in his life a slave trader and even captain of a ship transporting captured Africans to America. For medical reasons, he left the seafaring life, became a customs officer, studied theology, and eventually became a minister. However, even as a minister, Newton never forgot the horrible nature of his sin as a slave trader. At the end of his life, Newton said to his friend, “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.”<sup>1</sup> [page 31]

<sup>1</sup>Brian H. Edwards, *Through Many Dangers: The Story of John Newton* (Welwyn, England: Eurobooks, 1980), 191.

## **13. Under the Control of the Holy Spirit**

At this point in our struggle, we are prone to think, *It’s fine to be told sin no longer has dominion over me, but what about my daily experience of the remaining presence and activity of sin? Does the gospel cleanse me from that? Can I hope to see progress in putting to death the subtle sins of my life?*

Paul’s answer to that pressing question is found in Galatians 5:16: “I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” To walk by the Spirit is to live

under the controlling influence of the Spirit and in dependence upon Him. Paul says that as we do this, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [page 41]

#### **14. The Holy Spirit Is Working in Us**

So in summary we see that the Holy spirit works in us to convict us and make us aware of our subtle sins. He then works in us to enable us to put to death those sins. Then He works in us in ways of which we are not conscious. And then He uses the circumstances of our lives to exercise us in the activity of dealing with our sins. [page 45]

#### **15. Facing Our Sins Is Humbling**

We have looked at the remedy for sin and the power of the Holy Spirit working in our favor. We've also seen that we must play an active role in dealing with sin. The apostle Paul wrote that we are to "put to death" the various expressions of sin in our lives (see Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5). This includes not only obvious sins we want to avoid but also the more subtle ones we tend to ignore. It's not enough to agree that we do tolerate at least some of them. Anyone except for the most self-righteous person will acknowledge that. "After all, no one is perfect," may be our attitude. But to honestly face those sins is another matter. For one thing, it is quite humbling. It also implies that we must do something about them. We can no longer continue to ignore them as we have in the past. [page 47]

#### **16. Our Sin Debt Has Been Cancelled**

We should always address our sin in the context of the gospel... Our tendency is that as soon as we begin to work on an area of sin in our lives, we forget the gospel. We forget that God has already forgiven us our sin because of the death of Christ. As Paul wrote in Colossians 2:13-14, "[God has] forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." [pages 47-48]

#### **17. Our Sins Are Forgiven Because of Christ's Death**

As we struggle to put to death our subtle sins, we must always keep in mind this twofold truth: Our sins are forgiven and we are accepted as righteous of God because of both the sinless life and sin-bearing death of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no greater motivation for dealing with sin in our lives than the realization of these two glorious truths of the gospel. [page 48]

#### **18. Depend on the Spirit and Work to Deal with Our Sins**

While depending on the Holy Spirit, we must at the same time recognize our responsibility to diligently pursue all practical steps for dealing with our sins. I know that keeping both these truths—equally in mind is difficult. Our tendency is to

emphasize one to the neglect of the other. Here the wisdom of some of the older writers will help us: “Work as if it depends on you, and yet trust as if you did not work at all.” [page 49]

## **19. Prayer Is a Useful Tool**

Prayers regarding our subtle sins should be of two types. First we pray over them in a planned, consistent manner, probably in our daily private time with God. Second, we should pray short, spontaneous prayers for the help of the Holy Spirit each time we encounter situations that might trigger one of our sins. [page 50]

## **20. Means to Deal with Sin**

[Dealing with sin:]

- Apply the gospel
- Depend on the Holy Spirit
- Recognize your responsibility
- Identify specific respectable sins
- Memorize and apply appropriate Scriptures
- Cultivate the practice of prayer
- Involve one or a few other believers with you. [page 51]

## **21. Ungodliness and Wickedness Are Different**

Contrary to what we normally think, ungodliness and wickedness are not the same. A person may be nice, respectable citizen and still be an ungodly person. The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:18, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.” Note that Paul distinguishes ungodliness from unrighteousness. Ungodliness describes an attitude toward God, while unrighteousness refers to sinful actions in thought, word, or deed. An atheist or avowed secularist is obviously an ungodly person, but so are a lot of morally decent people, even if they say they believe in God. [page 53]

## **22. Ungodliness--No Thought of God**

Ungodliness may be defined as living one’s everyday life with little or no thought of God, or of God’s will, or of God’s glory, or of one’s dependence on God. [page 54]

## **23. Lives Worthy of God**

Paul wrote to the Colossian believers.

We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a

manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (1:9-10)

Notice how God-centered that prayer is. Paul wanted his hearers to be full of the knowledge of God's will—that is, His moral will. He desired that they live lives worthy of God and fully pleasing to Him, and he prays to that end. That is God-centered praying. Paul wanted the Colossians to be godly people. [page 55]

## **24. Work Heartily for the Lord in Daily Lives**

[Paul's] admonition to “work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (verse 23) provides us a principle by which we are to seek to live godly lives in the context of our vocations or professions. Yet how many believers seek to live by this principle in their daily lives? Do we not rather approach our vocations much like our unbelieving and ungodly coworkers who work purely for themselves, their promotions, and their pay raises, with no thought of pleasing God? [page 56]

## **25. Ever-growing Relationship with God**

For the godly person, God is the center and focal point of his or her life. Every circumstance and every activity of life, whether in the temporal or spiritual realms, is viewed through the lens of this God-centeredness. However, such a God-centeredness can be developed only in the context of an ever-growing intimate relationship with God. No one can genuinely desire to please God or glorify Him apart from such a relationship. [page 58]

## **26. Ungodliness Is All-encompassing**

Because ungodliness is so all-encompassing, it will help to identify specific areas of life where you tend to live without regard to God. These might include your work, your hobbies, your playing or watching sports, and even your driving. Scripture texts that might be helpful to memorize, ponder, and pray over include 1 Timothy 4:7-8; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 1:9-10 and 3:23; as well as Psalm 42:1-2; 63:1; and 27:4.

Above all, pray that God will make you more conscious of the fact that you live every moment of every day under His all-seeing eye. While you may not be mindful of Him, He is certainly aware of you and sees every deed you do, hears every word you say, and knows every thought you think (see Psalm 139:1-4). Beyond that, He even searches out your motives. Let us then seek to be as mindful of Him as He is of us. [pages 60-61]

## **27. Christian Character Traits**

Some years ago, I surveyed the entire New Testament looking for instances where various Christian character traits were taught by precept or by example. I found twenty-seven. It may not surprise you that *love* was taught most often, some fifty times.

It may surprise you that *humility* was a close second with forty instances. But what really surprised me is that *trust in God* in all our circumstances was third, being taught thirteen or more times. [page 63]

## **28. Don't Be Anxious About Anything**

[In] Matthew 6:25-34, ... [Jesus] uses the word *anxious* six times. We are not to be anxious about what we are to eat, drink, or wear, or even about the unknown circumstances of tomorrow. Another expression Jesus uses regarding anxiety is “Fear not” or, as some translations render it, “Do not be afraid” (see, for example, Matthew 10:31; Luke 12:7). Paul picks up this admonition about anxiety with his words in Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything.” And Peter adds his exhortation, “[Cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). [page 64]

## **29. Anxiety**

Anxiety is a distrust of God. [page 64]

## **30. Giving Way to Anxiety, Believe That God Does Not Care for Me**

Peter told us that the basis of our casting our anxieties on God is that He cares for us. So when I give way to anxiety, I am, in effect believing that God does not care for me and that He will not take care of me in the particular circumstance that triggers my anxiety of the moment. [page 64]

## **31. Not Accepting God's Providence**

Anxiety is a sin also because it is a lack of acceptance of God's providence in our lives. God's providence may be simply defined as God's orchestrating all circumstances and events in His universe for His glory and the good of His people. [page 64]

## **32. Not Submitting to God's Agenda for Me**

My anxiety is triggered not so much by a distrust in God as by an unwillingness to submit to and cheerfully accept His agenda for me. [page 65]

## **33. He Chooses Better for Us**

How happy are they who can resign all to Him, see His hand in every dispensation, and believe that He chooses better for them than they possibly could for themselves!<sup>1</sup> [page 66]

<sup>1</sup>John Newton, *Letters of John Newton* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 137.

### **34. Give Me a Heart Submissive to God's Will**

Ask God to give you faith to believe that His providential will for you in these circumstances comes to you from His infinite wisdom and goodness and is ultimately intended for your good. And then ask God to give you a heart that is submissive to His providential will when it is contrary to your own plans. [page 67]

### **35. God Does Not Forget His Children**

The Phillips Modern English rendering of 1 Peter 5:7 [is], "You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern." Though the Phillips version is usually regarded as a paraphrase, I believe its rendering of 1 Peter 5:7 accurately captures the meaning of the text. Jesus said that God does not forget a single sparrow (see Luke 12:6). How much more, then, is it true that you, His child, are indeed His personal concern? [page 68]

### **36. All Circumstances Are a Part of His Will**

The passage of Scripture that has greatly helped me deal with frustration in Psalm 139:16, which says, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (NIV). "Day ordained for me" refers not only to the length of my life but to all events and circumstances of each day of my life. This is a tremendously encouraging and comforting thought. So when something happens that tends to frustrate me, I actually quote Psalm 139:16 to myself and then say to God, "this circumstance is part of Your plan for my life today. Help me respond in faith and in a God honoring way to Your providential will. And then please give me wisdom to know how to address the situation that tends to cause the frustration. [page 69]

### **37. All Sin Serious to God**

Keep in mind that even through anxiety and frustration may not be as serious as adultery, they are still sins. And all sin is serious in the eyes of a Holy God. [page 70]

### **38. Glorify God in Difficult Circumstances**

Acceptance means that you accept your circumstances from God, trusting that He unerringly knows what is best for you and that in His love, He purposes only that which is best. Having then reached a state of acceptance, you can ask God to let you use your difficult circumstances to glorify Him. In this way you have moved from the attitude of a victim to an attitude of stewardship. You begin to ask, "God, how can I use my disability (or whatever the difficult circumstance may be) to serve You and glorify You?" [page 75]

### **39. God Gives and Takes Away**

Some years ago, I experienced a crushing and humiliating disappointment... Job 1:21 [reads], “[Job] said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.’” The morning after the event, I knelt before the Lord and said, “Lord, You gave and You have taken away; blessed be Your name.” Through that Scripture and that prayer, God enabled me to relinquish what He had taken. [page 76]

### **40. Downward Spiral of Sin**

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul gives a vivid description of the downward moral spiral of pagan humanity of that day, as God gave them up more and more to the wicked inclinations of their evil hearts. Near the beginning of that description, Paul writes, “Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God *or give thanks to him*, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” [page 82]

### **41. Giving Thanks to God**

We should seek to develop the habit of continually giving thanks to God. We should above all thank Him for our salvation and for the opportunities we have for spiritual growth and ministry. We should thank Him frequently for the abundance of material blessings He has provided. And then, when circumstances go awry and do not turn out the way we had hoped, we should, by faith, thank Him for what He is doing in circumstances to transform us more and more into the likeness of His Son. [page 86]

### **43. God Works with Us as a Father**

If by now you are already discouraged about your sins, remember the gospel. Though your obedience to God’s law is defiled and imperfect, Christ’s obedience is perfect and complete. And God has not only forgiven you your sins (both the subtle and the not-so-subtle) but has also credited to you that spotless obedience of Christ. God does want to work in you and with you to deal with your sins, but He does so as your Father, not your Judge. [page 87]

### **44. Attitude of Humility**

How, then can we guard against the sin of self-righteousness? First, by seeking an attitude of humility based on the truth that “there but for the grace of God go I.” [page 91]

### **45. Doctrinal Pride**

If your Calvinism or Arminianism or dispensationalism, or your view concerning the end times, or your disdain for all doctrinal beliefs causes you to feel doctrinally

superior to those who hold other views, then you are probably guilty of the sin of doctrinal pride. [page 92]

#### **46. Character Flaws**

Recently I learned, to my dismay, that one of my theological heroes from a bygone era had “feet of clay”—that is, some notable character flaws. One of his friends and admirers once wrote of him, “With all his glaring faults he was the greatest man I have known.” What were those glaring faults? Elsewhere, this same friend described him as heartless, selfish, and domineering. [page 101]

#### **47. Self-control**

The Scriptures, both in Proverbs and the letters of the New Testament, have a lot to say about self-control. Paul lists it as one expression of the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23), and he includes a lack of self-control in the list of vices characteristic of the last days (see 2 Timothy 3:3). His instructions to Titus regarding his ministry in Crete included several exhortations to teach self-control (see Titus 2:2,5,6), and a reminder that the same grace that brings salvation also trains us to live self-controlled lives (see Titus 2:11-12). Then Peter urges us to be sober-minded, or self-controlled, several times in his two letters (see 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8; 2 Peter 1:5). [page 110]

#### **48. Control of Oneself Through the Holy Spirit**

Biblical self-control, however, covers every area of life and requires an unceasing conflict with the passions of the flesh that wage war against our souls (see 1 Peter 2:11). This self-control is dependent on the influence and enablement of the Holy Spirit. It requires continual exposure of our mind to the words of God and continual prayer for the Holy Spirit to give us both the desire and power to exercise self-control. We might say that self-control is not control *by* oneself through one’s own willpower but rather control *of* oneself through the power of the Holy Spirit. [page 111]

#### **49. God Is Sovereign in Every Situation**

If the person is in denial about his or her impatience and becomes defensive or hostile when you point it out, then you should revert to the first option to follow the example of Jesus. To do this, however, requires a firm belief in the sovereignty of God in every situation of your life. God is likely using this person’s sinful actions to help you grow in the biblical virtues of patience and meekness (see the example of Moses in Numbers 12:1-3). [page 119]

## **50. No One Causes Us to Be Angry**

In facing up to our anger, we need to realize that no one else *causes* us to be angry. Someone else's words or actions may become the occasion of our anger, but the cause lies deep within us—usually our pride, or selfishness, or desire to control. I agreed to do something for a friend, and then I forgot. When my failure came to light, he became quite angry with me. Why did he become so visibly upset? It was because my failure had made him look bad in front of some of his friends. This is not to excuse my forgetfulness and the real fact that I had put him in an awkward situation. But the cause of his anger was not my failure but his pride.

We may become angry because someone has mistreated us in some way. A person gossips about us, and when we hear about it, we get angry. Why? It's likely because our reputation or our character has been questioned. Again the cause is our pride. [page 122-123]

## **51. Being Mindful of God**

Peter's instructions to slaves (1 Peter 2:18-20) are a specific application of a broader scriptural principle: We are to respond to any unjust treatment as "mindful of God." To be mindful of God means to think of God's will and God's glory. How would God have me respond in this situation? How can I best glorify God by my response? Do I believe that this difficult situation or this unjust treatment is under the sovereign control of God and that in His infinite wisdom and goodness He is using these difficult circumstances to conform me more to the likeness of Christ? (see Romans 8:28; Hebrews 12:4-11).[page 124]

## **52. Not Okay to Be Angry with God**

What are we to say to people who are desperately hurting and feel that God has let them down or is even against them? Is it okay to be angry toward God? Most pop psychology would answer yes. "Just vent your feelings toward God." I've even read the statement, "It's okay to be angry at God. He's a big boy. He can handle it." In my judgement, that is sheer blasphemy.

Let me make a statement loud and clear. It is *never* okay to be angry at God. Anger is a moral judgment, and in the case of God, it accuses Him of wrongdoing. It accuses God of sinning against us by neglecting us or in some way treating us unfairly. It also is often a response to our thinking that God owes us a better deal in life than we are getting. As a result, we put God in the dock of our own courtroom. I think of a man who, as his mother was dying of cancer, said, "After all she's done for God; this is the thanks she gets." Never mind Jesus suffered untold agony to pay for her sins so she would not spend eternity in hell, this man thought that God also owed her a better life on this earth. [pages 126-127].

### **53. Deal with Anger Swiftly**

We have an idiomatic expression, “Nip it in the bud.” That’s what Paul is telling us to do. Deal with your anger swiftly, but above all, don’t go to bed with it still in your heart. At best, anger is sin (with the rare exception of true righteous anger), and at worst, it leads to even greater sins. [page 130]

### **54. God Uses Bad Circumstances for Our Good**

I have found that a firm belief in the sovereignty of God is my first defense against a temptation to allow anger to linger in my mind and emotions. If I want to deal with the temptation decisively, I actively call to my mind that the actions of another person (or persons) that triggered my initial response are under the sovereign control of God. Though the actions may be sinful in themselves, God intends them for my good. As Joseph said to his brothers, “as for you, you meant evil against me, but god meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). [page 134]

### **55. Growing in Love**

We should pray that God will enable us to grow in love. In 1 Peter, which is a letter urging its readers to pursue holiness, even in the face of tough times, Peter keeps emphasizing the importance of brotherly love—that is love toward fellow believers. For example, he writes, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). [page 134]

### **56. Christ Showed Humility**

When the strong-willed husband comes home and finds the house in a mess and dinner not prepared, he can allow love to cover the situation. In fact, if he follows the path of love, he will not only overlook that which tempts him to anger, he will roll up his sleeves and pitch in to help. He will follow the example of the Lord Jesus, who in full awareness of His deity performed the most menial task of washing the disciples’ feet (see John 13:2-15). [page 135]

### **57. We Personally Have Done Damage to God’s Glory**

The moral debt of wrongdoing, of sinful words and acts against us, is virtually nothing compared to our debt to God. I’m not minimizing the seriousness of hurts or damages you may have experienced. In the parable, ten to fifteen thousand dollars was a lot more than coffee-break money at work. It was a third of a year’s wages. And the wrongs you have suffered may be much more than an occasional snub or word of gossip about you. They may have been quite damaging to you in some way. But compared to the damage each of us has done to God’s glory, it’s a small amount. [page 138]

## **58. Others' Sin Does Not Make Our Anger Right**

My goal... is to help us face the fact that much, if not most, of our anger is sinful, even though it may arise from the sinful actions of others. In emphasizing our sin of anger, I do not mean to minimize the sin of those other people. But there is an old saying, "Two wrongs never make a right." The other person's sin does not make our sin of anger "right" or justifiable. Or as James wrote, "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires" (1:20). [page 139]

## **59. God's Sovereignty, Brotherly Love, Great Debtor to God**

So again, I commend to you the three principles or practices that I find so helpful: a firm belief in the sovereignty of God; a diligent pursuit of brotherly love that covers a multitude of sins and does not keep a record of wrongs; and a humble realization that, in comparison to my brother's sin against me, I am the ten-thousand-talent debtor to God. [page 139]

## **60. Judgmentalism**

Of course, judgmentalism is not limited to conservative evangelicals. It permeates our society and occurs on either side of the cultural divide. The animal rights activists who burn medical research clinics and the extreme environmentalists who vandalize ski slopes are acting out their judgmentalism. The person who says, "Jesus wouldn't drive an SUV" is judgmental, not because Jesus *would* drive an SUV (that's not the point) but because the person has made a dogmatic and judgmental statement based purely on personal opinion. [page 141]

## **61. Dress and Reverence to God, Not Connected**

Reverence for God, I finally concluded, is not a matter of dress; it's a matter of the heart. Jesus said that true worshippers are those who worship the Father in spirit and truth (see John 4:23). Now, it's true that casual dress may reflect a casual attitude toward God, but I cannot discern that. Therefore, I should avoid ascribing an attitude of irreverence based purely on a person's dress. [page 142]

## **62. Music Is a Preference**

I also grew up in the era of the grand old hymns sung to the accompaniment of piano and organ. It was majestic. To me, it was reverent worship of God. Today, in many churches, the grand old hymns have been replaced by contemporary music, and the piano and organ with guitars and drums. Again, I was judgmental. *How could people worship God with those instruments?* But the New Testament churches had neither pianos nor organs, yet they managed to worship God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (see Colossians 3:16). I still have a preference for church music sung as we did when I was younger, but it's just that—a preference—not a Bible-based conviction. It's

true that a lot of contemporary music is shallow and human-centered. But there is much that is as God-honoring and worshipful as our traditional hymns. So let's avoid being judgmental. [page 142]

### **63. Differing Opinions**

My point here is that it doesn't matter which side of an issue we are on. It is easy to become judgmental toward anyone whose opinions are different from ours. And then we hide our judgmentalism under the cloak of Christian convictions. [page 144]

### **64. The Bible Is the Judge**

What I've written to this point does not mean that we should never pass judgment on the practices and beliefs of others. When someone's lifestyle or conduct is clearly out of line with the Scriptures, then we are right to say that person is sinning. There are practices that are clearly condemned in Scripture. See, for example, the description of the moral slide into utter depravity that Paul describes in Romans 1:24-32. Or look at his description of the "works of the flesh" (see Galatians 5:19-21), or the characteristics of "the last days" (see 2 Timothy 3:1-5). These practices are clearly sinful. And when we judge them as such, we are simply agreeing with the Word of God. It is the Bible that is judging, not ourselves. [pages 144-145]

### **65. Are We Critical?**

It is often said that it takes seven compliments to undo the effects of one criticism. So let's examine ourselves, or better yet, let's subject ourselves to the examination of others. Do we have a critical spirit? Do we continually find fault with others, especially members of our own family or members of our own church? [page 147]

### **66. Differing Opinions and Accepted by God**

I'd like to be like Paul, who took a similar position regarding the divisive issues in Rome. He did not try to change anyone's convictions regarding what they ate or the special days they observed. Instead, he said, "Each should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). Such a statement makes many of us uncomfortable. We don't like ambiguity in issues of Christian practice. It's difficult for us to accept that one person's opinion can be different from ours and both of us be accepted by God. But that is what Paul says in Romans 14. And if we will take Paul seriously and hold our convictions with humility, it will help us avoid the sin of judgmentalism. [pages 147-148]

### **67. God's Blessings Are Diverse**

Not only are there differing talents and gifts but also there is a widespread diversity in God's blessing on those gifts. All this is from God, who makes poor and makes rich,

who brings low and exalts (see 1 Samuel 2:7). It is God who puts down one and exalts another (see Psalm 75:7). We must recognize that to be envious or jealous of someone is either eliminating God from the picture or else accusing Him of being unfair. [page 152-153]

## **68. God Has a Place for Us**

God has a place and an assignment for each of us that He wants us to fill. Admittedly, some assignments garner more human recognition than others, but all are important in the plan of God. [page 153]

## **69. Refusing to Face Sin**

I once confronted a controller-type person in our ministry about this tendency in his life (actually, I think I was the third person to do so). Instead of hearing me, he got visibly upset and severed our relationship. He carefully avoided me from that time onward. I have not seen him in some years. But the last I heard of him, he still had the problem. He refused to face his sin.

Don't be like that. Don't go through life harboring envy or jealousy or always having to win or get your way. Remember, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). Don't place yourself in the position of being opposed by God. [page 157]

## **70. Worldliness**

Based on Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 7:31, I define worldliness as *being attached to engrossed in, or preoccupied with the things of this temporal life*. The things of this temporal life may or may not be sinful in themselves. What makes our attitude toward things that are not sinful worldliness is the high value we put upon them. Paul tells us in Colossians 3:2, "Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." The things we value most should be "things that are above"—that is, spiritual things such as the Bible, prayer, the gospel, obedience to God, the fulfillment of the Great Commission, and most of all, God Himself. These are the areas where our values should be focused, not on even the legitimate things of this life. [page 166]

## **71. How Much to Give?**

So how much should we be giving? I believe a minimum benchmark in 10 percent—or, to use a biblical expression, a tithe. I know there is some disagreement as to whether or not tithing is a biblical standard in our New Testament era since it is not mentioned specifically in any New Testament letters. But there is the concept of proportionate giving—that is, according as God has prospered us (see 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:12). A tithe is a specific application of proportionate giving. Under it, the person who makes \$10,000 gives \$1,000. The person who makes \$100,000 gives

\$10,000. Both people have given proportionally as God has prospered them. (There is the added thought that perhaps the person making \$100,000 can afford to give more than 10 percent. That's why I regard the tithe as a minimum benchmark.) [page 168]

## **72. Our Lord's Infinite Generosity**

Everything we have and the ability to earn more comes from God (I suggest you go back and reread Deuteronomy 8:17-18). Giving back to God at least 10 percent of what He has given us is a tangible expression of our recognition of that and our thanksgiving to Him for it. Finally, we need to remember the infinite generosity of our Lord in giving Himself for our salvation. When Paul wanted to encourage generosity among the Corinthians, he wrote, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our giving should reflect the value we place on His gift to us. [pages 169-170]

## **73. Worldliness in Dress**

According to 1 Timothy 2:9, Christian women are to dress in respectful apparel with modesty and self-control. And so I say to the female readers of this book, if you simply go along with the immodest fashions of the day, you are worldly in this area of your life. And it's sad to say that this form of worldliness seems to be growing, especially among younger women. [page 171]

## **74. Helping Others**

I think of an automobile salesman I met some years ago. He said to me, "After I became a Christian, I stopped trying to *sell* cars and started helping people *buy* cars." [page 172]

## **75. Idols of Political and Cultural Issues**

A ... possible area of idolatry is political and cultural issues. I combine these two because, in so many instances today, cultural issues have become political issues. While I believe it is important for Christians to be knowledgeable and, to some extent, involved in these issues, we have to be careful that we don't make idols of our political parties or our cultural concerns.

There is no question that there are cultural issues, such as abortion and homosexuality, that are clearly antithetical to God's moral standards. And I support those leaders and organizations that have committed themselves to stand against them. But we need to remember that the first priority of the church as a whole is the proclamation of the gospel. Unborn babies do need to be protected, and the biblical standard of marriage does need to be preserved. But above all, people need to be rescued from the power of Satan and brought into the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. If we lose sight of the

church's primary calling, then we are in danger of making an idol of our cultural and political initiatives. [page 173]

## **76. Preoccupation with Temporal Things & Acceptance of Society's Standards**

Now let me review my twofold definition of worldliness. First of all, it's a preoccupation with the things of this temporal life. Second, it's accepting and going along with the values and practices of society around us without discerning if they are biblical. I believe the key to our tendencies toward worldliness lies primarily in the two words *going along*. We simply go along with and accept the values and practices of society around us without thought as to whether those values and practices are biblical. That's why Christian young women will wear immodest dress. They simply go along with the styles others are wearing without stopping to think whether or not those styles are pleasing to God. And there is nothing overtly sinful in sports themselves. But if we simply go along with others around us, we can end up making an idol of our favorite team. [page 174-175]

## **77. Increasing Our Affection toward God**

How, then, can we deal with our tendencies toward worldliness? It is not by determining that we will not be worldly but by committing ourselves to becoming more godly. We need to grow in our relationship with Him and begin to view all aspects of life through the lens of His glory. In the nineteenth century, a Scottish minister, Thomas Chalmers, preached sermon called "The Expulsion Power of a New Affection." That's what we need to combat our worldliness. We need an increased affection for God that will expel from our hearts our affections for the things of this world. [page 175]

## **78. Christ Died for Us**

I ...[gave] a reference to Thomas Chalmers' sermon "The Expulsion Power of a New Affection." The question naturally arises, "How can we grow in this new affection?" The answer is that it comes from an increasing awareness of our still-remaining sinfulness and of Christ's love for us in dying for that sin. [page 178]

## **79. Christ's Righteous and the Holy Spirit**

Remember that our progressive sanctification—that is, our putting off sin and putting on Christlikeness—rests on two foundation stones: the righteousness of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Always look to Christ and His perfect righteousness for your standing and acceptableness to God. Remember, if you are united to Christ, God sees you clothed in his perfect righteousness. And always look to the Holy Spirit to enable you to deal with sin in your life and to produce in you the fruit of the Spirit. [page 181]

## **80. The Root of Bitterness**

<sup>1</sup>Some readers may wonder why I do not refer to the phrase “root of bitterness” in Hebrews 12:15 as a warning against the sin of bitterness. The expression is an allusion to Deuteronomy 29:18 and the phrase “poisonous and bitter fruit,” which in that passage speaks of inward, heart rebellion against god. In Hebrews 12:15, the writer is using that expression from Deuteronomy to warn again apostasy, not bitterness of ongoing resentment. [page 185]