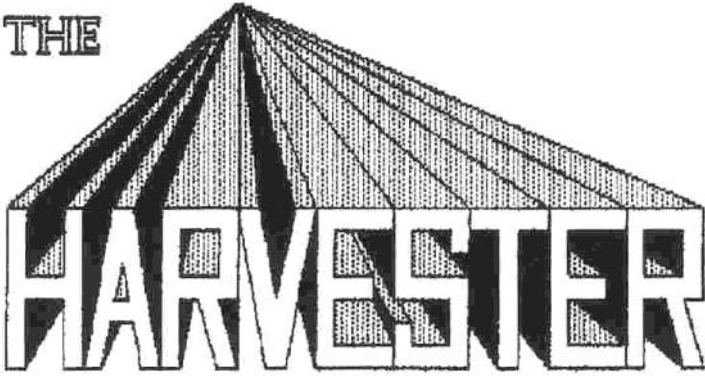


THE



"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2)

November 2023

No. 455

CONCUPISCENCE

What is concupiscence? Other than being a word we verbally stumble through when reading scripture aloud in a few select locations (3 times), "concupiscence" is not common to our modern day vernacular. Possibly the most cited scripture we come across this strange word is in Colossians 2 where Paul describes the aspects of the flesh-serving life we put behind us to seek living Christlike in the "new self:"

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: (6) For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the

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children of disobedience: (7) In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. (8) But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. (Col. 3:5-8)

The three times the word “concupiscence” appears are all in Paul’s writings. Now, concupiscence isn’t a Paul-only concept; Paul just has a particular take on a well-known concept due to his Gentile expertise. In short, concupiscence is a longing for what is forbidden.

For the Gentiles being exposed to the Word, the Christlike lifestyle was a drastic departure from how they were raised. Paul dedicates multiple efforts to talk of this in terms of putting off the “old self” or the “old man” for this reason. This is what Paul refers to in the passage above in verse 7 “...in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.” Paul is acknowledging that many had a sinful background. Notably, what is now recognized to the newly converted as “sin” was once “life;” it was widely accepted cultural norms, tolerated, or even promoted from their culture at-large down to their friends and neighbors. This is where this word “concupiscence” is so much more than “don’t sin;” it is “don’t miss the sin in which you once participated” and “don’t enjoy even the sins of others.” This is specified in one of two other times Paul mentions concupiscence:

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: (4) That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; (5) Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: (6) That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. (7) For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. (8) He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit. (1 The. 4:3-8)

Paul hones in on fornication particularly (v. 3), because it was one of the most tolerated of the Gentile cultures and potentially the most drastic change in the “old self” to the “new self.” Greco-Roman culture of Paul’s time not only tolerated but also often celebrated polygamy, homosexuality, and promiscuity. Before bringing up the word of interest, Paul says to have a holy appetite (v. 4), where the opposite of a holy appetite is concupiscence. This is where concupiscence can be viewed as a “quiet killer.” So many religious people of Paul’s time (e.g., Pharisees) and still to this day focus entirely on the action of sin and may forget that we are called to put away sin’s precursors: the desire to, appetite for, enjoyment of, and longing for it. That is, the goal in living after Christ isn’t simply to cease the act of sinning, it is to cease having the desire to sin. To be entirely focused on the action only risks putting us in a situation to desire to commit a sin where the only barriers keeping us from giving in are the means or opportunity; those come surprisingly easy.

In Paul’s time and in our current time sin is often celebrated, and increasingly so, it seems. Unfortunately, people find themselves extremely curious about things they’ve been told are forbidden. We’ve all likely seen a small child specifically instructed not to go into a room or space, not to go into a particular drawer, or not to go beyond some other barrier. Then, the child immediately begins pushing the boundaries. We can almost see their thoughts as they inch closer and closer to the prescribed limit. “Is this too close...is THIS too close...?” It’s unfortunate, but one of the best ways to get someone interested in a thing is to tell them it’s off limits. Paul’s plea is that we learn to lose this curiosity, even through secondhand experiences.

Paul delves into this concept elsewhere without strictly noting the word “concupiscence.” One particularly good study on the importance of needing to lose the desire for that which is forbidden, is through Romans. In Romans 1, Paul notes through a good portion of this chapter that when given free will, hu-

mans had (through their own foolishness) determined themselves to be wiser than God and subsequently given themselves into many sins. These people...

(32) Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

It is an alarming warning that not only is the action of ourselves sinning an affront worthy of death, but enjoying others' commitment is similarly sinful. Concupiscence thus essentially includes what amounts to "secondhand sin," where the punishment is the same as if we were the primary offending party; it's just as wrong, and it's just as evil.

In chapter 7 of Romans, Paul hones his focus into the key component of what differentiates "concupiscence" from "just" sin: the longing, the desire. Paul notes that laws by existing point out what crimes are (here, sin; v. 7). Once you realize what sin is now, committing sin now becomes noticeable (v. 8). For the Gentiles, it means coming to the realization that things they may have been doing all their life would be sinful. Without something telling you what sin was, you would not be astutely aware you were breaking it. Before this awareness of what is sinful, everything thus seemed open, free, or "fair game" (v. 9). That is, you're not restricted by considering there is a right and a wrong. After this awareness that you have been violating it, now you realize not everything is "fair game." For a Gentile, this law, particularly the perfect law of liberty that is good, just, and holy, designed to point you towards what you should be doing (what is right), can more acutely highlight how sinful you may really be (v. 10

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-11). This law doesn't render you hopeless by any means, just more aware (v. 12-13). Ultimately, we find ourselves with two "laws" combating: The flesh's and God's (v. 21-23). So, we're clearly aware that what we want to do may not be what God would have us do. The challenge is to make those align.

We should recognize this without calling it "concupiscence." This is the very concept Jesus relays during the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus clarifies that the true intent of the statutes contained in the Old Law were not a series of actions where adherence to their strict literal interpretation reflected how close one could draw to God - the fallacy of the Pharisee approach where it wasn't wrong unless the physical violation was committed. Rather, how close one drew to God (or, how Christlike one could live) was reflected before any physical violation of a law took place. One was far from God if there was a desire for the sin (a longing for the forbidden).

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: (28) But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. (29) And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. (Mat. 5:27-29)

The objective of this writing is not simply to define this often hard-to-pronounce word, "concupiscence." Rather, it is to examine and ask ourselves if we discover ourselves missing old sinful activities or delighting in the sins of others - secondhand sin, if you will. Sometimes we tell stories of the mistakes of old, from our "glory days," or filed under when we "sowed our wild oats," and we may find ourselves grinning. Sins of the past are not worthy of glad reminiscing or anything of which to be proud; this is what Paul warns against with his references to concupiscence. The wages of sin are death (Rom. 6:23), whether the sin is old, under ignorance of youth or before being added to God's Church, or recent and done by

somebody else while we watch and delight in their folly. The Gentiles, or oft-referred to as heathen, committed many of the sins Paul noted through Romans 1 knowing that they were not virtuous (even though it wasn't considered "sin" in their culture and lifestyle before coming to Christ and the knowledge of what was sinful). The Gentiles did these sins anyway and/or celebrated and accepted those who did. We still see this today. Even those who would count themselves amongst the non-religious or outright atheistic note there are "vices." There are actions they would still hide or keep quiet, because they knew there was something not worth publicizing within these actions. In striving to be Christlike, we must change our mindset to lose the desire for sin. By its nature sin is pleasurable, but only to the flesh. As Christ did, we must rise above the fleshly desires and align our desires with God's. God is looking for not only a people who avoids sin (and repents when failing to do so), but also one that has no longing for sin, finds no entertainment in it, nor has fond recollections of past ones.

BEN

THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

(Genesis 3)

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the

eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

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. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the moth-

GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
October 20 - 22	Liberty Liberty, KY	J. D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
November 10 - 12	Mount Carmel Road Gay, GA	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)

er of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What was the name of Isaac's wife?
2. For how long did David reign?
3. What "doeth good like a medicine"?
4. What did the prophet Micah say about Jesus' birth?
5. What was Peter's mother-in-law sick with?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

And remember last month's questions?

1. What did God breathe into Adam's nostrils? THE BREATH OF LIFE (Gen. 2:7)
2. Who was Bathsheba's first husband? URIAH (2 Sam. 11:3)
3. Who told Joseph that Jesus would save his people from their sins? THE ANGEL OF THE LORD (Mat. 1:20-21)
4. What did John the Baptist say when he saw Jesus? "BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!" (John 1:29)
5. What was the name of James' and John's father? ZEBEDEE (Mark 10:35)