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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.

Worship 10:00 a.m.

(every other week)

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

Our Part is to Try and Trust

By Gary Henry

“In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

One of life’s great discouragements is the thought that it “won’t do any good” to do what we are thinking of doing. In some situations, we can’t decide which of two actions would be the most effective. At other times, it looks as if nothing we might try to do would make any difference. So we do nothing.

But too often, our decision process is the reverse of what it should be. Rather than deciding up front what is right to do, based on timeless principles, we try to predict the result of an action, and then define what is “right: in terms of what we think will “work” the best. More often than we’d care to admit, we adopt the philosophy of “utilitarianism,” the idea that the value of an action is determined by its utility or usefulness. If it looks like it “won’t do any good” then we think nothing more needs to be said.

But in fact, there is a good deal more that needs to be said. What is right is right, whether we think it’s “useful” or not. And not only that, it is often honorable to begin a work even when no hope has been vouchsafed to us that we will be able to finish it.

The “crystal ball” is a notoriously unreliable device, and none of us has one that works very well. As creatures unable to see more than a few hours ahead, we are poor prognosticators. Even our best and most carefully considered predictions often turn out to be wrong. To be more specific, things that were right to do often turn out to do more good than we could have ever anticipated.

So we should just put away our forecasts and predictions and go ahead and do whatever is the best thing we're capable of doing at any moment. We must be guided by conscience and the knowledge that it always "does good to do good" whether we can see how it's going to happen or not. The advice of Ecclesiastes 11:1 is mighty good counsel: "*Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.*" If we will keep busy doing the best we know to do, we need not doubt that good will come of it.

"It is for us to make the effort. The result is always in God's hands." (Mahatma Gandhi).

Possess Your Vessel

By Mike Thomas

The Thessalonians were surrounded by immorality and ungodly influences, but those who became Christians "*turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God*"

(I Thessalonians 1:9). In encouraging them to fulfill this commitment, Paul reminded them of the need to avoid the sexual immorality that was very common in their former ideology. He wrote: "*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God*" (I Thessalonians 4:3-5).

It is evident that we are inundated with the same wave of licentious influences that ancient idolaters faced. We may not have heathen temples inviting passersby to participate in the "worship" of fertility deities by laying with temple prostitutes, but we have the same type of influences beckoning us each day to be immoral. With electronic devices that can produce any image we want and literature that corrupts the judgment of unsuspecting readers, we are just as exposed to heathenism as were the Thessalonians, if not more so. Satan is working aggressively to warp the views of sexuality in children, disrupt the unity of the home by corrupting marriages, and plaguing individuals with luring images. Our only hope of remaining free from these influences is to trust in God's word (and mercy) to overcome this onslaught of lust. The things Paul said to the Thessalonians about possessing our "*vessel in sanctification and honor*" can be most helpful.

For one thing, this instruction implies it is possible for us to control our sexual desires and physical body. Joseph is a classic example of this possibility. A young man at the peak of his sexual desires was able to resist the continual seduction of a woman who pleaded with him "day by day" to be with her (Genesis 39:7-10). He had to choose between integrity and godliness or passion and lust, yet fortunately, he chose to possess

his vessel. This is exactly what happens to us every day on our devices and influences. Potiphar's wife is pleading with us to yield to forbidden pleasure and flirts with us to compromise our integrity and moral purity. Truthfully, it is the devil who issues these influences. He exposes our children to perverted images in storybooks, cartoons, and video games. He sees to it that our phones and computer monitors have enticing images pop up when we least expect it. He convinces people to walk around in skimpy, seductive attire. Satan is the reason young people are pressured to sacrifice their virginity and is the cause of married people compromising their wedding vows. It is in moments like these that we need the wisdom and character of Joseph to guard against Potiphar's wife. Peter said it this way, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"* (I Peter 5:8). The moment we dismiss this warning or believe we are immune to this threat is the moment we set ourselves up for failure. Paul referenced the Israelites who had twenty-three thousand die in one day for yielding to sexual temptations. He then said: *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"* (I Corinthians 10:11-12).

The comforting thought in all of this is God is willing to help us if that is our sincere desire. He assures us that the devil will flee from us when we are serious about resisting him (James 4:7), so that should give us hope. Our Creator also assures us that His eyes *"are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry"* (Psalms 34:15; I Peter 3:12). One of the best ways He helps us is by giving us the strength and wisdom to remain content with our spouse. *"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'"* (Hebrews 13:5). Ironically, He makes this promise after emphasizing the sanctity of marriage and the judgment against infidelity. *"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge"* (Hebrews 13:4). Contentment is key for married people. We are to save our sexual desires for our spouse and not share them with anyone else. It is the affection "due" them, so we must not selfishly use them in other ways.

"Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (I Corinthians 7:2-3).

When we violate this commitment and selfishly look for other ways to fulfill our desires, we expose ourselves to a world of devastation and hurt. No moment of pleasure is worth the loss of honor, integrity, family, and the beautiful companionship of marriage. Yet no sin is as deceitful and powerful, yet crippling and devastating to families, churches, and society, as that of infidelity and sexual impurity. It brings severely painful consequences to its participants. Instead, God wants us to ask for help in remaining

faithful and pure. He will not leave us nor forsake us as we seek to possess our vessel in sanctification and honor. Plus, the threat of eternal punishment should motivate us to look past the lure of sexual temptation and make better choices. Paul warned, "*For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God*" (Ephesians 5:5). Frankly, no sin is worth the flames of hell and eternal separation from God, let alone the highly deceitful lure of sexual persuasion. But that is not always easy to see when Potiphar's wife is coming after us day after day.

One of my motivations in writing this article is the recent confession of a fellow Christian who lost his family because he yielded to sexual immorality. His days are filled with darkness and tears because the pleasure that looked so promising was nothing but a facade and hoax. Wisdom is crying aloud with examples like these. The threat is real, dear friends, and the price is steep when it comes to sexual impurity. Yet, if like this fellow Christian, we yield to foolishness, let us turn to God for mercy and be fully convinced of His love and willingness to save us. "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart; these, O God, You will not despise*" (Psalms 51:17). The person who wrote that psalm was recovering from his own fall to sexual temptation, so this is not a sin God has not seen before and one He has not forgiven. He knows who wants to do right and be set free from wickedness. Let us remember that when we stumble into any sin, including this one. God is able to save us to the uttermost because of the blood of Christ and His tremendous love for us. But the best scenario is to avoid failure altogether by praying for wisdom, strength, self-control, and contentment. We will never regret possessing our vessel.

By What Authority are You Doing These Things?

By Heath Rogers

"Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?'" (Matthew 21:23).

A study of authority in religious matters is very important. It lies at the center of everything we believe, teach, and practice as individual Christians and collectively as a local church. Every religious question is fundamentally a question of authority. However, there are many religious-minded people who never stop to consider the question of authority and its application to their beliefs and practices.

Authority is "the power or right to give commands, enforce obedience, take action, or make final decisions" [Webster's New World Dictionary, page 94]. Authority has to do with jurisdiction. It is the right to tell others what to do, expect them to do it, and punish them if they don't.

The chief priests and elders who confronted Jesus were asking a legitimate ques-

tion. Jesus had caused a great disturbance in the temple. He had overturned tables where men were conducting business and drove people out of the temple (Matthew 21:12). These things were being done with the approval of the Jewish leaders. What right did Jesus have to disrupt these practices and remove them from the temple?

Although some may not like the idea of one having power over them, we realize there is a need for authority in different areas of our lives. We need legitimate standards of authority in society. Someone must set forth laws of conduct, and someone must enforce these laws. Otherwise, we would struggle to exist in a "law of the jungle" environment where the strongest impose their will by force. We need standards of authority in schools. Otherwise, no education can take place. We need standards of authority in the workplace and the home. Without recognition and respect for authority, we have chaos.

This need for authority must be applied to religious matters as well. *"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor"* (Psalms 8:3-5). As a man contemplates the creation around him, he realizes there is a Creator more powerful than himself. The authority of this Creator is implied in the opening verse of the Bible. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). All authority belongs to God by right of creation. We must recognize and respect this authority. *"But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ~Why have you made me like this?' Does not the potter have power over the clay?"* (Romans 9:20-21).

The question asked of Jesus by the chief priests and elders could be asked of us regarding our practices as well. By what authority are we doing the things we are doing, and who gave us the right to do these things?

Worship

By Justin Odom

The following quote came from a man that left "traditional" church because he didn't feel connected. He started worshipping on a farm with four other people.

"So I said to myself, maybe we need to begin to do church differently. But what does that look like? And I didn't know until I got to the garden."

Notice the use of "I" and "myself" and "we." In John 4 Jesus told us the place doesn't matter as much as the attitude. If you don't feel connected to where you worship, why not try worshipping as Christ said, in spirit and in truth (attitude and commands)

Come worship with the Lord's family at the Church of Christ. (Slightly adapted)