

**Spring Gospel Meeting**  
**April 1-6, 2012**  
**Olsen Park church of Christ, Amarillo, Texas**  
**2012 Congregational Theme: "Setting Priorities"**



**Gospel Meeting Theme: "High Priority Items"**  
**Speaker: Tim Norman**

***Sermon Titles:***

**Sunday AM Class: Setting Priorities**  
**Sunday AM Sermon: Above All Put On Agape Love**  
**Sunday PM: Keeping Our Priorities Straight**  
**Monday PM: Be Angry, And Yet Do Not Sin**  
**Tuesday PM: Put Aside Slander & Gossip**  
**Wednesday PM: Distinguishing Righteous Concern From Sinful Worry**  
**Thursday PM: The Importance Of Being Content**  
**Friday PM: Reject Denominationalism**

## INTRODUCTION:

1. What are priorities? Our priorities are the things we regard as more important than other things. Synonyms include prime concerns, most important considerations, primary issues. For example, if we haven't eaten or slept in 24 hours, eating and sleeping will likely be priorities, prime concerns, most important considerations.
2. Setting things means putting things in specified places or positions. For example, if someone is setting the table, they are putting plates, silverware, glasses, and the like in specified places or positions on the table.
3. So, setting priorities means deciding what is most important to us.
4. In this morning's class, let's talk about setting priorities. In this morning's sermon, we'll talk more about our highest priority. In tonight's sermon, we'll talk about keeping our priorities straight. During the rest of the week, we'll be talking about some other high priority items. I hope you'll count yourself blessed for having heard all these lessons.

## DISCUSSION:

1. **We are all setting our own priorities.** We may not be aware of it, but we are doing it. Every moment of every day we are deciding what is, to us, the most important thing we can do with our time.
2. **Our actions reflect our priorities.** If something else were truly more important to us, we would have done it. Since we didn't do something else, what we did was actually our highest priority.
3. **While our priorities are what are most important to us, they aren't necessarily what are best for us.** Examples: sexual immorality, laziness, gluttony, etc.
4. **When our priorities and what is best for us differ, we need to change the former to reflect the latter.** In other words, we need to get our priorities straight!
5. **Who is to say what is best for us?** Proverbs 3:5-8.
6. **What should our highest priority be?** Matthew 6:33A; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Matthew 16:26.
7. **What is our highest priority?** Is it God or is it actually ...

- A. **Family?** Luke 14:20; Matthew 10:37.
- B. **Money?** Luke 18, 22-23.
- C. **Work?** Luke 14:16-19.
- D. **Pleasure?** 2 Timothy 3:1-2A, 4B-5.
- E. **The praise of men?** Matthew 23:5-7; John 12:42-43.
- F. **Control?**
- G. **Etc.**



8. **Are we deceived about our true priorities?** Matthew 7:21-23.

- A. **Deception is really a danger.** The greatest danger to the most important thing is often not something that's inherently wrong, but something that's only wrong because we put it ahead of God. As someone has put it, the greatest danger to the most important thing is the second or third most important thing. "Family-centered parents do not have the emotional freedom, the power, to raise their children with their ultimate welfare truly in mind. If they derive their own security from the family, their need to be popular with their children may override the importance of a long-term investment in the children's growth and development" (Covey).
- B. **Deception is really inexcusable.** Let's be honest. We do what we want to do. "If your job requires extra hours, remember Daniel. He had responsibility for the security of a third of the vast Medo-Persian Empire, yet he regularly prayed three times a day, and his God-ward actions were constant and predictable (Daniel 6:5, 10). We have time for what we are committed to" (Dale Smelser).
- C. **Deception is really harmful.** Sharp wrong turns away from God are obvious and we can quickly see how they get us off the path of blessing. However, small wrong turns away from God still take us away from God and over time they are just as much a curse. The problem with small wrong turns away from God is that they are easier for us to rationalize and we usually don't see the consequences of our mistakes until irreparable damage has been done. "People often find themselves achieving victories that are empty, successes that have come at the expense of things they suddenly realize were far more valuable to them. People from every walk of life – doctors, academicians, actors, politicians, business professionals, athletes, and plumbers – often struggle to achieve a higher income, more recognition or a certain degree of professional competence, only to find that their drive to achieve their goal blinded them to the things that really mattered most and now are gone" (Covey).

## APPLICATIONS:

1. **We need to appreciate that God insists upon being our highest priority.** Matthew 6:24. He expects us to be able to honestly say Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 10:31.
2. **We need to appreciate why God insists upon being our highest priority.** John 10:10B; Luke 18:28-30; 1 Timothy 4:8B-9. Sin is such a curse that hell is the destiny of those who choose its path. "It is impossible for us to break (disprove, tdn) the law. We can only break ourselves against the law" (Cecil B. deMille).
3. **Have we set God as the highest priority in our lives?** Haggai 1:2, 4-5; Revelation 3:15-16, 17-18, 19.

**INTRODUCTION:** "Where Were You (When The World Stopped Turning)"

"Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day · Out in the yard with your wife and children Working on some stage in LA · Did you stand there in shock at the site of That black smoke rising against that blue sky · Did you shout out in anger In fear for your neighbor Or did you just sit down and cry · Did you weep for the children Who lost their dear loved ones And pray for the ones who don't know · Did you rejoice for the people who walked from the rubble And sob for the ones left below · Did you burst out in pride For the red white and blue The heroes who died just doing what they do · Did you look up to heaven for some kind of answer And look at yourself to what really matters.

I'm just a singer of simple songs I'm not a real political man · I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell you The difference in Iraq and Iran · But I know Jesus and I talk to God And I remember this from when I was young · Faith hope and love are some good things He gave us And the greatest is love.

Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day · Teaching a class full of innocent children Driving down some cold interstate · Did you feel guilty cause you're a survivor In a crowded room did you feel alone · Did you call up your mother and tell her you love her Did you dust off that Bible at home · Did you open your eyes and hope it never happened Close your eyes and not go to sleep · Did you notice the sunset the first time in ages Speak with some stranger on the street · Did you lay down at night and think of tomorrow Go out and buy you a gun · Did you turn off that violent old movie you're watching And turn on "I Love Lucy" reruns · Did you go to a church and hold hands with some stranger Stand in line and give your own blood · Did you just stay home and cling tight to your family Thank God you had somebody to love.

I'm just a singer of simple songs I'm not a real political man · I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell you The difference in Iraq and Iran · But I know Jesus and I talk to God And I remember this from when I was young · Faith hope and love are some good things He gave us And the greatest is love ... The greatest is love ... The greatest is love ... Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day?"

Truly, the greatest is love. Mark 12:28-31; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13; Galatians 5:14; 22A; Colossians 3:14.

In the English language, we call many different things love – infatuation, family bonds, passion, affection. The Greeks had different words for all these things. The most elevated form of love, the kind of love mentioned in the passages we've just read, is what the Greeks called *agape*.

What is *agape* love? How many of us could immediately give an accurate and succinct definition? **Agape love always wants and does what's truly best for God and other people.**

In this morning's sermon let's do two things. First, let's seek to really understand this definition of *agape* love. Second, let's explore why of all the good things God gave us the greatest is *agape* love.

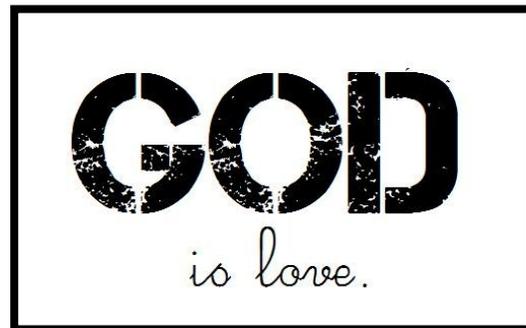
**DEFINITION: Agape love ...**

1. **Always.** *Agape* love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8. *Agape* love is unconditional. It's a given.
  - A. ***Agape* love is not about what people deserve or appreciate. It's about grace and what people need.** Luke 6:27-36; 2 Corinthians 12:15.
  - B. ***Agape* love is not about what it prefers to do. It's about what it needs to do.**

"A pioneer woman of long ago was a living example of a mother who loved her children with a sacrificial love, love for the child's sake.

The lady and her husband had settled on the prairie to rear their family and try to make a living. The Lord had so far blessed them with healthy children and they were anxiously awaiting the arrival of another little one. The day came that she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. A neighbor lady had come in a covered wagon to assist with the birth and help in any way she could. It was after everything was taken care of and lady was cleaning the child that she noticed something was wrong with her foot. One little foot was perfect, but the other was turned in a horizontal position.

Several days later the old country doctor was traveling through the area. He knew this woman was expecting a baby; so he made a special stop to see how she was getting along. When she showed him the baby's foot, he told her that if she didn't want the child to be a cripple, there was only one thing she could do. She must start giving therapy treatments immediately. These were the instructions of the doctor: 'Hold her in your lap and force her foot frontward one hundred times daily. Do this without fail.'



While the little bones were pliable, that mother sat down to carry out the doctor's instructions. At the first turn of the foot, the pain was so intense that the baby gave a piercing scream. Bravely, the mother turned the foot again and again and again, counting as she went. As the baby writhed in pain, tears poured down that mother's cheeks, blinding her vision, but she didn't give up. Day after day she administered this painful therapeutic treatment. Weeks and months passed by, and she could gradually see the little foot begin to straighten.

This mother's heart was gladdened and she received the rewards that accompany a sacrificial love when the day came that she looked out her window and saw her child running and playing in the sunshine as normally as the other children. Even though it had been heartbreaking for her to have to give the painful treatment, she accomplished that which was best for her little girl and her future life" (Gwendolyn M. Webb, Training Up A Child).

- C. "We must all be sure that those to whom we are committed in love know that there is no price tag, no admission price on our love. I have given you my love freely. It is my gift to you. There is no fine print in the contract, no hidden agenda. Love is the purest and simplest of gifts. Most people want to be very sure that their love is not taken for granted. Unconditional love says the very opposite: 'Take me, and take my love for granted.' In the words of the contemporary hymn: 'All I ask of you is forever to remember me as loving you'" (John Powell).

## 2. Wants and does.

- A. *Agape* love is the motivating force of a true Christian's life. 1 Corinthians 16:14; 13:3.
- B. To *agape* love, we can't simply *want* what's truly best for God and other people. We must also *do* what's truly best for God and other people. 1 John 3:17-18.

## 3. What's truly best.

- A. People may disagree about what's truly best but the popular idea that love is unconditional because it accepts or tolerates anything anybody does is patently absurd. *Agape* love is unconditional because it does what's truly best regardless of what people may do.
- B. Illustrations: a parent and a child who is about to put a key in an electric outlet; a friend & someone who is about to drive drunk.
- C. Who knows what's truly best? God! Isaiah 55:8-9. We must never presume to know better than God what's truly best.
- D. Since God knows and wants what's truly best, we *agape* love when we treat God and other people the way He commands. John 14:15; 1 John 5:2.

## 4. For God and other people. There is no "I" in *agape* love. *Agape* love does not seek its own. 1 Corinthians 13:5.

- A. *Agape* love is from God. 1 John 4:7A.
- B. What does God need from us? Absolutely nothing. Acts 17:24-25; Romans 11:35-36A. So why does God love us? He's seeking our good, not His own.
- C. Unlike God, we often seek our own in love.
- 1) Sometimes children tell parents how much they love them and the parents' reaction is, "All right, what do you want?" The parents desperately wish their children would say such things when they didn't want something, when they would just be doing it for the parents and not for themselves.
  - 2) Prior to marriage, many people act lovingly for self-seeking reasons— they want a spouse not that they might live for the spouse, but that a spouse might live for them. This is why many tokens of love – opening doors, sending flowers, dressing to please, and the like – often disappear once the honeymoon is over. It's thought that they have served their purpose. No, their purpose is service.
  - 3) Some parents live vicariously through their children. They convince themselves that their children's welfare is the only reason they push them so hard to succeed when it's really about the parents' selfish ambitions and not the best interests of their children.
- D. To adapt John F. Kennedy's famous phrase, people who *agape* love don't ask what's in people for them. Rather, they ask what's in them for people. "Whatever else can and should be said of love, it is quite evident that true love demands self-forgetfulness" (John Powell).
- E. Jesus clearly expressed the self-forgetful nature of *agape* love in John 15:13. Jesus clearly demonstrated the self-forgetful nature of *agape* love on Calvary. Matthew 26:39, 42, 44.
- F. Truly, "love is the doorway through which the human soul passes from selfishness to service" (Unknown).

## WHY IS THE GREATEST OF THESE AGAPE LOVE?

### 1. **Agape love is the essence of God and the Christian life.**

- A. 1 John 4:7-8. Consider the phrase, “God is love.” “God *is* love ... means more than God is loving; it means that love is of the essence of his being ... The statement ‘God loves’ ... might stand alongside other statements, such as ‘God creates,’ ‘God rules,’ ‘God judges’; that is to say, it means that love is one of His activities. But to say ‘God is love’ implies that all His activity is loving activity. If He creates, He creates in love; if He rules, He rules in love; if He judges, He judges in love. All that He does is the expression of His nature, which is—to love” (Morris).
- B. If I can’t say, “Tim Norman is love,” then Tim Norman is nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2.

### 2. **Agape love is the ultimate challenge God gives the Christian in life.**

- A. “If you don’t want to –  
break the fixation with self and give up your self-centeredness,  
learn how to care about and be sincerely dedicated to the satisfaction of another,  
become a sensitive listener, who hears what is said and some things that are not able to be said,  
postpone personal gratification to meet the needs of another,  
get in touch with your deepest feelings and most hidden thoughts,  
share your most vulnerable self as an act of love,  
get honest feedback from someone who really knows you through your own self-disclosure,  
give up you pan-scales and be prepared to give 100 percent,  
take on the added responsibilities for a ‘we,’  
work at the delicate art of dialogue and shared decision making,  
... if you don’t want to do these things, then obviously you don’t want to love” (John Powell).
- B. Rainer Maria Rilke, “For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks.”
- C. William Barclay, “Christian love is not something which simply happens; it is something which has to be sought, desired, pursued, something into which a man must pray and discipline himself. So far from being an automatic possession, it is the supreme achievement of life.”
- D. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, “The ultimate lesson all of us have to learn is unconditional love.”

### 3. **Agape love is the greatest gift we can give other people.**

- A. Washington Irving wrote the following about maternal love: “The love of a mother is never exhausted; it never changes; it never tires. A father may turn his back on his child; brothers and sisters may become inveterate enemies; husbands may desert their wives; wives their husbands. But a mother’s love endures through all: in good repute, in bad repute, in the face of the world’s condemnation, a mother still loves on, and still hopes that her child may turn from his evil ways, and repent. Still she remembers the infant smiles that once filled her bosom with rapture, the merry laugh, the joyful shot of childhood, the opening promise of his youth; and she can never be brought to think him unworthy.”
- B. What’s true of a mother’s love for her children is perfectly true of God’s love for His children. Isaiah 49:15.
- C. Every human being needs unconditional love.
- D. Those who deserve love the least are the ones who need it the most.
- E. I once watched a television show where a law enforcement officer said that she always tried to remind herself whenever she made arrests that she was arresting people who had mothers that loved them. Why did she do this? To remind herself that even criminals need love.
- F. Eleanor Roosevelt put it well when she said, “A mature person is one who has learned that there is both good and bad in all people and in all things, and who ... deals charitably with the circumstances of life, knowing that ... all of us need both love and charity.”
- G. Erich Fromm put it well in his book, The Art Of Loving. “Unconditional love corresponds to one of the deepest longings, not only of the child, but of every human being; on the other hand, to be loved because of one’s merit, because one deserves it, always leaves doubt; maybe I did not please the person whom I want to love me, maybe this, or that – there is always a fear that love could disappear. Furthermore, ‘deserved’ love easily leaves a bitter feeling that one is not loved for oneself, that one is loved only because one pleases, that one is, in the last analysis, not loved at all but used.”

### 4. **Agape love is the greatest gift we can give ourselves.**

- A. Matthew 16:24-25; Acts 20:35B. The Christian paradox is that the abundant life, the life of inexpressible joy and peace that surpasses all understanding, the life that Jesus came to earth to give us, is not found in its pursuit, but in forgetting about our own desires and losing ourselves in the service of God and other people.

- B. Why is this so? Michael Novak explains it well in the context of the unconditional love of family. “Being married and having children has impressed on my mind certain lessons, and most of what I am forced to learn about myself is not pleasant. The quantity of sheer impenetrable selfishness in the human breast (in *my* breast) is a never-failing source of wonderment. I do not want to be disturbed, challenged, troubled. Huge regions of myself belong only to me. Seeing myself through the unblinking eyes of an intelligent, honest spouse is humiliating. Trying to act fairly to children, each of whom is temperamentally different from myself and from each other, is baffling. My family bonds hold me back from many opportunities. And yet these bonds are, I know, my liberation. They force me to be a different sort of human being in a way I want and need.”
- C. The challenges of *agape* love make up the bridge to human maturity and ultimate human fulfillment. “Weathering the storms of the love process is the only way to find the rainbows of life. The comforts that one finds on the ‘less-traveled road’ of love are found nowhere else. Life has a much deeper meaning when I truly love another” (John Powell).
- D. “Giving the gift of myself in love leaves me with a deep and lasting satisfaction of having done something good with my life. I live with the sweet memory of having contributed a gift of love to the lives of others. Likewise I am left with a sense of having used well the gifts which God has invested in me. Love takes time, demands a history of giving and receiving, laughing and crying, living and dying. It never promises instant gratification, only ultimate fulfillment. Love means believing in someone, in something. It supposes a willingness to struggle, to work, to suffer, and to join in the rejoicing. I doubt that there has even been one recorded case of deep and lasting fulfillment reported by a person whose basic mind-set and only question was: What am I getting out of this?” (John Powell).
- E. “One of two brothers fighting in the same company in France, fell in battle. The one who escaped asked permission of his officer to go and bring his brother in. ‘He is probably dead,’ said the officer, ‘and there is no use in risking your life to bring in his body.’ But after further pleading the officer consented. Just as the soldier reached the lined with his brother on his shoulders, the wounded man died. ‘There, you see,’ replied the officer, ‘you have risked your life for nothing.’ ‘No,’ replied Tom, ‘I did what he expected of me and I have my reward. When I crept up to him, and took him in my arms, he said, “Tom, I knew you would come. I just felt sure you would come.”’”
- F. There are many unhappy people in the world. Most people who count themselves happy are only happy in the shallowest possible way. To whatever extent people are truly happy, it’s the result of *agape* love and since we can always love more, we can always be happier. Let’s do ourselves the greatest possible favor and give ourselves a gift of incalculable worth – a life of *agape* love, a life in which we are fully striving to always want and do what’s truly best for God and other people.

## CONCLUSION:

1 John 4:7-8

“It is of this John that the story is told that, in the evening of his long life, he would sit for hours with his younger disciples gathered at his feet. One day, as it is related in the well established tradition, one of his disciples complained: ‘John, you always talk about love, about God’s love for us and about our love for one another. Why don’t you tell us about something besides love?’ The disciple ... is said to have replied: ‘Because there is nothing else, just love ... love ... love.’ It is a long and hard road; it is an altar of sacrifice; it asks an enormous price in self-forgetfulness; it must seek nothing for itself. Love is the only way to our human destiny and to the feet of God, who is Love” (John Powell).

“On 9-11-01, hundreds of people who were not killed by the initial impact at the World Trade Center were trapped, but they still had access to cell phones. Others were passengers on what they knew to be a doomed flight over Pennsylvania. What was the message repeated again and again from those who were able to make connections with home? Was it directions about where to find wills or life insurance papers? Did they tell their husbands and wives what to do about selling the houses? No, those were the last things on their minds. Instead, they said again and again, ‘Honey, remember I love you,’ or ‘Please tell the kids over and over how much I love them.’ And if there was time, some said, ‘Please call Mom and tell her I love her.’ When one distills the essence of our existence, it has almost nothing to do with houses or bank accounts or business achievements. It is all about love” (Alan Loy McGinnis).

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. If we are setting our priorities consistent with what is truly important – God and *agape* love – then our highest priority is to keep it that way. As someone has put it, “The most important thing is to keep the most important thing the most important thing.”
2. Sadly, we often fail to do this. We start out, but don’t hold out. Revelation 2:4-5.
3. Why does this happen? Why, despite our best intentions, do our new life resolutions, like our new year’s resolutions, so often end up making little to no difference in our lives?
4. There are several possible explanations. Tonight let’s examine four key factors.



**DISCUSSION:**

1. **We are unrealistic about the difficulty.** Mark 4:16-17.
  - A. How many of us want to lose weight? Why do we start out but don’t hold out? Because we are unrealistic about how hard it is to lose weight. When we realize how hard it is, we get discouraged and quit trying. As with weight, so it is with laying aside the sin which so easily entangles us. Hebrews 2:1.
  - B. “E. M. Gray ... spent his life searching for the one common denominator that all successful people share. He found it wasn’t hard work, good luck, or astute human relations, though those were all important ... ‘The successful person has the habit of doing the things failures don’t like to do,’ he observed. ‘They don’t like doing them either necessarily. But their disliking is subordinated to the strength of their purpose’ (E. M. Gray). Keeping our priorities straight “requires independent will, the power to do something when you don’t want to do it, to be a function of your values rather than a function of the impulse or desire of any given moment” (S. R. Covey).
  - C. Difficult, but doable! Philippians 4:13.
2. **We lose focus on what’s really important.** Hebrews 2:1. If we learned today that in exactly six months we were going to die, would that knowledge change the way we would otherwise live? Would it be a change for the better? Why? It would bring what’s truly important into focus. Why don’t we live that way anyway? We lose focus. Discuss how the chief enlisted officer of the U.S.S. Nimitz kept himself focused on what was really important to him.
3. **We don’t plan our priorities.**
  - A. How does putting God first in our lives specifically translate into the way we fulfill our various roles in life? Titus 3:14 (NKJV “to meet urgent needs”). For example, what are the vital long-term goals in my role as a child of God, a husband, a parent, a child, a friend, a worker, etc.? Here are some examples of goals for my role as a child of God: I want to get closer to God. I want to share God with other people. I want to rejoice in the Lord always.
  - B. If we fail to plan, we plan to fail. It’s one thing to say, “I’m going to lose weight.” It’s another thing entirely to figure out just exactly how we are going to go about doing it. The former is vital, but without the latter it’s impotent. As in weight loss, so in sin loss!
4. **We don’t manage our priorities.** Luke 9:23.
  - A. While some important things act on us, i.e. they demand our attention, most important things require us to act on them. In other words, we must be proactive about our priorities. We must not simply react to what happens in our environment. Rather, we must dictate the environment in which we will act. Luke 14:16-20, 21-24. Illustrate with reading our Bible and prayer as means to getting closer to God; to loving our wives as Christ loved the church. Weekly planning is preferable to daily planning.
  - B. We must learn to say no to unimportant things that urgently demand our attention. Mark 4:18-19; Luke 10:38-42. “Things are kind of tough right now, but once things slow down...” Things don’t slow down. “Temporary” pressures are sandwiched back to back with other “temporary” pressures and gradually develop into a long-term style of living. Brethren, we must not wait for things to slow down so we’ll have time to get our priorities straight. Rather, we must get our priorities straight and slow other things down so we can immediately start doing the things God really needs us to be doing. Christians “should constantly guard against the scourge of over commitment. Even worthwhile and enjoyable activities become damaging when they consume the last ounce of energy or the remaining free moments in the day ... *You* must resolve to slow your pace; you must learn to say ‘no’ gracefully; you must resist the temptation to chase after more pleasures, more hobbies, more social entanglements; you must ‘hold the line’ with the tenacity of a tackle for a professional football team, blocking out the intruders and defending the home team. In essence, three questions should be asked about every new activity which presents itself: Is it worthy of our time? What will be eliminated if it is added? What will be its impact on our family life? My suspicion is that most of the items in our busy day would score rather poorly on this three-item test” (J. R. Dobson). “Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of the things which matter least” (Goethe).

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. **What is anger?** Anger is a God given emotion.

2. **What are some characteristics of anger?**

- A. People use many different words to describe it.
- B. It is something everyone feels.
- C. It affects us physically.
- D. It varies in intensity.
- E. It varies in duration.
- F. It is aroused in various ways.
- G. It can be held inside or openly expressed.
- H. We can be angry and not even know it.
- I. We can express it in various ways.
- J. It can lead us to do various things.
- K. It can be misdirected.
- L. We can control it or let it control us.
- M. It can be constructive or destructive.
- N. It can be a greater blessing and/or curse for some people than for other people.



3. **Comprehensive definitions.**

A. "Anger is an emotional state, experienced by everyone, but impossible to define precisely. It occurs in varying degrees of intensity, from mild annoyance or aggravation to violent rage. It begins in infancy and continues to the later years. It may be hidden and held inside or expressed openly and freely. It can be of short duration, coming and going quickly, or it may persist for decades in the form of bitterness, resentment, or hatred. Anger may be destructive, especially when it persists in the form of aggression or revenge, but it can also be constructive if it motivates us to correct injustice or to think creatively. Anger is aroused when we feel threatened, demeaned, or blocked in our progress toward some desired goal. Usually we know when we are angry, and others know as well. Sometimes, however, anger is kept hidden behind a calm and smiling façade, or buried someplace in the recesses of our brains. It always involves a physiological arousal that the angry person may not recognize consciously" (Dr. Gary R. Collins, licensed psychologist with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Purdue University, Christian Counseling – A Comprehensive Guide).

B. "Anger is a normal emotion with a wide range of intensity, from mild irritation and frustration to rage. It is a reaction to a perceived threat to ourselves, our loved ones, our property, our self-image, or some part of our identity. Anger is a warning bell that tells us that something is wrong. Anger has three components:

Physical reactions, usually starting with a rush of adrenaline and responses such as an increased heart rate, blood pressure, and tightening muscles; often known as the 'fight or flight' response.

The cognitive experience of anger, or how we perceive and think about what is making us angry. For example, we might think something that happened to us is wrong, unfair, and undeserved.

Behavior, or the way we express our anger. There is a wide range of behavior that signals anger. We may look and sound angry, turn red, raise our voices, clam up, slam doors, storm away, or otherwise signal to others that we are angry. We may also state that we are angry and why, ask for a time-out, request an apology, or ask for something to change.

Everyone experiences anger, and it can be healthy. It can motivate us to stand up for ourselves and correct injustices. When we manage anger well, it prompts us to make positive changes in our lives and situations. Mismanaged anger, on the other hand, is counterproductive and can be unhealthy. When anger is too intense, out of control, misdirected, and overly aggressive, it can lead to poor decision making and problem solving, create problems with relationships and at work, and can even affect your health" (PBS.Org, Sources: Anger Research Consortium; American Psychological Association).

4. **Can anger be good?**

A. Mark 3:1-5; Psalm 119:53.

B. "*Thumos* is a word with an almost unlimited potentiality for good... It can describe a quality without which no good character can flourish" (Barclay). "In the LXX *thumos* can be used of men in a good sense ... There the word means righteous indignation in face of that which is wrong ... In secular Greek ... *Thumos* can be a noble word ... It is the capacity of the soul whereby men ... are righteously indignant at the sight of wrong ... No soul, writes Plato, can stand against wrong without noble passion (*thumos*) ... In the NT, especially in the Revelation, *thumos* is used of the wrath of God. Sinners will be compelled to drink the cup of the fury (*thumos*) of God's wrath (Rev. 19:15; 16:19; 15:1; 16:1)" (Barclay). "If we could get angry only at what Jesus got angry at, we would make a wonderful world" (Archibald Hart).

## 5. Can anger be evil?

- A. Galatians 5:19-21.
- B. "Anger has enormous costs. The impulse that felt so right at the moment, so justified, becomes in the quiet hours another source of guilt and regret. What seemed so worthy of blame passes. What remains are the scars, the hurt, the alienation. If you are often angry, every one of your relationships may be affected. Marriage can become a minefield. Distance grows. Walls thicken. Children may become hardened, resistant, while carrying deep feelings of worthlessness. Co-workers may withdraw or sabotage you, bosses become critical. A bitterness may grow with certain friends. And anger affects your health. A 25-year follow up study of law students who had taken a test measuring hostility revealed a startling fact. Twenty percent of those who had scored in the top quarter of the hostility scale had died, compared to a death rate of only five percent in students who had scored in the lowest quarter of the same test (New York Times, 1989). Frequent anger is damaging to your body and increases the death rate from nearly every cause" (When Anger Hurts – How To Change Painful Feelings Into Positive Action, McKay, Ph.D., Rogers, Ph.D., and McKay, R.N.).
6. **We must learn to be angry, and yet do not sin.** In this lesson, let's study what the Bible says about this God given emotion so it's the blessing God intends and not the curse it often ends up being. We will discuss three things. First, when is it wrong to be angry? Second, what must we do to keep ourselves from sinning in anger? Third, what can we do to help other people be angry, and yet not sin? I strongly suspect that almost everyone, if not everyone, will find this study to be an extremely practical use of our time.

## DISCUSSION:

### 1. WHEN ARE WE ANGRY, AND YET DO SIN?

- A. **When we are too easily angered.** We must be slow to anger. Psalm 86:15; Proverbs 14:29; 19:11.
- B. **When we are too quickly angered.** We must think before we become angry. Proverbs 12:16A; James 1:19-20. Example: 1 Samuel 17:17-19, 26, 28.
- C. **When we are too intensely angered.** Our anger must be proportionate to the offense. Psalm 78:38; Isaiah 64:9. Example: Esther 3:5-6.
- D. **When we are angry because of sinful attitudes.**
- 1) **Selfishness.** Luke 15:25-32.
  - 2) **Pride.** Isaiah 16:6.
    - a. Pride is often the root of anger with God. Isaiah 37:28-29.
    - b. Pride is often the root of anger with other people. 2 Kings 5:9-14 (see also 2 Chron. 26:16-21; Esther 3:5).
  - 3) **Low self-esteem.** I used to think that 1 Corinthians 13:4, "Love does not brag and is not arrogant" was somewhat redundant, simply effect and cause. But I've come to understand that some people brag, not because they think too highly of themselves, but because they think too little of themselves. What has this got to do with anger? Some people get angry because they think less highly of themselves than they ought. People with low self-esteem often see criticism, not as an attack on their behavior, but as an attack on their worth as a human being. In other words, they hear critics saying they are bad people instead of good people who've done something bad. They get angry at criticism because they see it as a threat to what little self-esteem they have, some amount of which they need to carry on from day to day.
  - 4) **Self-righteousness, i.e. looking at others without also looking at ourselves.** Isaiah 8:19-22. Examples: 2 Samuel 12:1-7A; 2 Chronicles 28:8-15.
  - 5) **Insecurity.**
  - 6) **Unfair and unrealistic expectations.** Psalm 78:38-39.
  - 7) **Hatred.** Jonah 3:10-4:4, 9-11.
  - 8) **Ingratitude.** Esther 5:9-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.
  - 9) **Evil jealousy or rivalry.** 1 Samuel 18:6-9.
  - 10) **Others?**
- E. **When we don't control our anger.**
- 1) Galatians 5:19-21. "Outbursts of anger" is *thumos*.
  - 2) "In Greek there are two words for anger. There is *thumos*, which was described as being like the flame which comes from dried straw. It is the anger which quickly blazes up and which just as quickly dies down. It is an anger which rises speedily and which just as speedily passes. There is *orge*, which was described as anger become inveterate ("a feeling ... long established and unlikely to change"). It is the long-lived anger; it is the anger of the man who nurses his wrath to keep it warm; it is the anger over which a person broods, and which he will not allow to die" (Barclay).
  - 3) **When we don't control our anger, we:**
    - a. **Yell.** Ephesians 4:31. Clamor is "a loud and confused noise, especially of vehement shouting ... a vehement protest or demand" (Oxford). "One of the greatest and most destructive myths about anger is the view that we need to get it out of our systems, let off steam, swear, holler, scream, pound a pillow, or find some other way to vent hostility in an effort to decrease feelings of anger. This idea is never suggested in

scripture and neither is it supported by psychological research. In contrast, there is evidence that ventilation, expressions of rage, tantrums, and continual talking about our anger all tend to *increase* anger instead of reducing it" (Collins).

- b. **Mock.** Nehemiah 4:1.
- c. **Call people names.** 1 Samuel 20:30A.
- d. **Are physically violent.** Numbers 22:27; 1 Samuel 20:30A, 33A; Jeremiah 37:15.
- e. **Harm innocent bystanders.** "Transference." 2 Chronicles 16:10.

F. **When we don't let go of our anger.**

- 1) Psalm 103:9; 30:5; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Ephesians 4:26, 31. In the latter verses "angry" is from *orge* and "anger" is *orge*. See the last Barclay definition in DISCUSSION 1. E. 2) immediately above.
- 2) Example: Amos 1:11.
- 3) If we don't let go of our anger we can become hateful, bitter (Hosea 12:14), and/or resentful; we can bear grudges (Psalm 55:3B); take vengeance; etc.
- 4) Passive aggression. "Some people are pleasant and apparently cooperating in face-to-face situations, but they give vent to their anger in subtle ways ... Passive aggressive people may gossip and spread damaging stories, 'forget' to do what they promised, refuse to cooperate, make 'put down' or embarrassing comments when others can't respond, or leave another person's property where it 'just happens' to be damaged or stolen. Drinking, failing in school, or an extramarital affair are examples of subtle ways that people use to attack or get even with parents, a mate, or some other person who has made us angry. The passive-aggressive person seems to have an exquisite talent for doing what hurts the most, but often these actions can be excused, justified, or explained. This is an indirect form of aggression aimed at the source of one's anger" (Collins).
- 5) We can be angry, and not even be aware of it. This is called repression. I strongly suspect that many people are unaware of the fact that they do have anger issues.

G. **When our anger bears bad fruit.** Matthew 7:18.

- 1) **Further anger.** Proverbs 15:1; Ephesians 6:4.
- 2) **Strife.** Proverbs 15:18; 30:33; 1 Timothy 2:8.
- 3) **Misery.** Proverbs 21:19 (NKJV, "contentious and angry woman").
- 4) **Discouragement.** Isaiah 12:1; 57:16; Colossians 3:21.
- 5) **Injustice.** Isaiah 14:3-6.
- 6) **Disqualification for service.** Titus 1:7.
- 7) **Etc.**

2. **WHAT MUST WE DO TO BE ANGRY, AND YET NOT SIN?**

A. **We must understand anger.**

- 1) In general.
- 2) In ourselves.
- 3) In others.
- 4) In God.

B. **We must acknowledge our anger.** *What must we acknowledge about our anger?*

- 1) **The presence of sinful anger.** 2 Corinthians 13:5. We must confess our sins to repent of our sins. We must confess our sinful anger to ourselves, God, and other people.
- 2) **The futility of our sinful anger.** "Anger resides in the bosom of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:9B).
  - a. No matter what we may think, anger just isn't worth it. James 1:20.
  - b. It isn't our anger that commands respect. It's just that we've taught people they don't have to take us seriously until we are angry.
- 3) **The devastating consequences of sinful anger.** Proverbs 29:22B. To God, other people, and ourselves.
- 4) **The weakness of our sinful anger.** Proverbs 16:32.

C. **We must not make excuses for our sinful anger.**

- 1) **We can control our anger.** Genesis 4:3-7. God does not command the impossible.
- 2) **We control our anger when we think the price of not controlling our anger is too high.**
  - a. The Elihu illustration. Job 32:1-10.
  - b. The boss calls while the husband and wife are fighting illustration.
  - c. The forgiving the spouse but not another person illustration.
- 3) **Nature, nurture, and environment influence behavior, they don't dictate behavior.**
- 4) **We need to own our anger.** Instead of saying, "You make me so mad when you do that," we should say, "I get so mad when you do that." This is a subtle but significant difference. It accepts responsibility for our anger and is far less inflammatory.

- 5) **It just doesn't matter who sinned in anger first.** Proverbs 15:1.
- D. **We must repent of our sinful anger.**
- 1) "The first step in learning how to deal with your anger is wanting to change. Until a person really wants to do something about the problem, little will be accomplished" (LeHaye).
  - 2) Repent as early as possible. Life is too precious to waste being angry. Ecclesiastes 11:9-10.
  - 3) Truly repent. Proverbs 19:19.
  - 4) Continue to repent. Be patient. Don't give up. We must focus on progress we've made, not on how far we've yet to go.
- E. **We must avoid temptation whenever possible.**
- 1) **Whenever possible, we must anticipate and avoid tempting situations.** Refereeing basketball illustration; dwelling on negative things (Philippians 4:8-9).
  - 2) **We must pray.** Matthew 6:13.
  - 3) **We must grow spiritually.** Ecclesiastes 5:16-17. As we grow spiritually, fewer things we will upset us. "It has been said that we can no more insulate ourselves from irritating remarks, attitudes, and actions than we can hide from germs. We can, however, protect ourselves by maintaining the resistance that comes from healthy self-respect. Anger is less destructive and more easily controlled when a person is secure as an individual and not plagued by excessive feelings of inferiority and self-doubt ... When Christians have realistic pictures of themselves as persons of value, there is less need or inclination to get angry" (Collins).
  - 4) **We must take care of our bodies.** Eat properly, exercise, get plenty of rest, etc.
  - 5) **We must solve the problems that tempt us to sin in anger.** In the aftermath of sinful anger, don't stop at feeling better. Find the underlying cause and don't stop until the temptation is eliminated.
  - 6) **We must not needlessly associate with angry people.** Proverbs 22:24-25. Apply to mass media.
- F. **We must face temptation properly.**
- 1) **When we are tempted to sin in anger, before we do anything else, we must first:**
    - a. **Pray.**
    - b. **Calm down.** Genesis 27:41-45; Esther 2:1. It is very difficult to act justly when we are inflamed with anger. Deuteronomy 19:4-7.
    - c. **Think things through.**
      - i. Psalm 4:4; Nehemiah 5:6-7A NKJV, "And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers;" James 1:19-20.
      - ii. When we are tempted to sin in anger, there are several important questions we must ask and answer. Here are just a few examples: Why am I angry? Should I be angry? In other words, am I already sinning because I am angry? What should I do about the situation? Can I do it without sinning in anger? In other words, would I control my anger or would I let it control me? Should I still be angry? Etc.
    - d. **Go someplace else when possible to pray, calm down, and think things through.** Esther 7:7A.
      - i. Proximity often hinders praying, calming down, and thinking things through.
      - ii. We must take whatever time it takes.
      - iii. We must repeat as often as needed.
  - 2) **If a person's behavior is tempting us to sin in anger, we must forget or confront.** It is *either* Proverbs 19:11 *or* Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3-4.
  - 3) **If it's something beyond our control that's tempting us to sin in anger, we must give it to God and trust Him to take care of it.** Psalm 37:7-9.
  - 4) **Even if we resist the temptation to sin in anger, we must still quickly let our anger go.** Mark 11:25-26; Ephesians 4:26.
- G. **We must work very, very hard and without ceasing.**
- H. **We must get all the help we can possibly get.**
- 1) From God. Pray, study.
  - 2) From other people. James 5:16; etc.
3. **HOW CAN WE HELP OTHER PEOPLE BE ANGRY, AND YET NOT SIN?** Proverbs 29:8.
- A. **We must not needlessly provoke or irritate.** Psalm 106:29, 32; 1 Samuel 1:4-7; Ephesians 6:4.
  - B. **We must anticipate when we might provoke people to anger and before we do it ask them not to be angry.** Genesis 18:30, 32; 44:18.
  - C. **We must remain calm in the face of anger.** Proverbs 15:1.
  - D. **We must give people the time and space they need to calm down.** Genesis 27:44-45.
  - E. **We must reason with those who are reasonable.** Exodus 32:11-14; Psalm 106:23; Judges 8:1-3.
  - F. **We must not reason with fools.** Proverbs 29:9.
  - G. **We must pray for people who are angry.**

**INTRODUCTION:** James 3:6-10.

**DISCUSSION:**

1. **Slander is sinful.** Leviticus 19:16A (NKJV “talebearer”); Psalm 15:1-3 (NKJV “backbite”); Proverbs 10:18B; Matthew 15:19-20A; Colossians 3:8 (Greek, *blasphemia*; NKJV “blasphemy” – this type of blasphemy can be spoken against men as well as God – Romans 3:8); etc.
2. **Gossip is sinful.** Romans 1:28, 29-30, 32 (NKJV “whisperers, backbiters”).
3. **Slander and gossip are real problems for us.** Jeremiah 9:4; 2 Timothy 3:1-2, 3, 5 (NKJV “slanderers”).
4. **What is slander?** “Slander is the open, intentional sharing of damaging information” (C. Mayhall, *Words That Hurt Words That Heal*).



- A. **Damaging information.** Slander is destructive, it tears down, curses. Psalms 50:20.
  - B. **Damaging information, not just negative information.** The open, intentional sharing of negative information doesn't necessarily result in harm. Sometimes the open, intentional sharing of negative information is the most edifying thing we can possibly do. Matthew 18:15-17.
  - C. **Damaging information, but not necessarily false information.**
    - 1) Proverbs 20:19 (NKJV “talebearer ... one who flatters with his lips;” literally the latter is “one who opens his lips”). See also Proverbs 11:13.
    - 2) “Usually we think of slander as a false statement made about someone with malicious intent. The dictionary backs this up by defining slander as ‘the utterance in the presence of another person of a false statement or statements, damaging to a third person’s character or reputation: usually distinguished from *libel*, which is written.’ However, in the Bible, the definition of slander goes beyond making false statements ... Based on the Old and New Testaments, slander is the *open, intentional sharing of damaging information* and is characterized by bad reports that blemish or defame a person’s reputation *whether they are true or not!* (C. Mayhall).
    - 3) Just because something is true, doesn’t mean we can tell it. “Truth is not the only standard we need to consider. While truth is certainly one issue, so are confidentiality and potential harm. Scripture provides more complete standards for our speech. ‘Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another’ (Romans 14:19), and ‘Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it will give grace to those who hear’ (Ephesians 4:29)” (J. M. Stowell, *The Weight Of Your Words, Measuring The Impact Of What You Say*).
    - 4) Genesis 9:20-27; Proverbs 17:9.
  - D. **Open sharing, but not necessarily open sharing with everyone.** Psalms 101:5A.
5. **What is gossip?**
- A. In God’s word, there are two primary categories of damaging speech. “The first is *idle chatter demeaning another’s integrity and reputation* (1 Tim. 5:13; 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16). This category of verbal misuse is not always malicious in its intent, but it is always damaging. The concept is frequently translated in Scripture as *whisper* or *gossip* (Psalm 41:7; Proverbs 20:19). The second category includes the *intentional, malicious communication of bad reports*. This concept is normally translated *slander* (Psalm 31:13; Jeremiah 9:4; 2 Corinthians 2:20)” (J. M. Stowell).
  - B. Clearly, gossip and slander are very closely related. J. M. Stowell calls them “catastrophic cousins.” The difference, if any, is intent – in other words, *why* damaging information is being shared.
    - 1) Slander is born out of malice. In 1 Timothy 3:11; 2 Timothy 3:3; and Titus 2:3 the NASB has “malicious gossips” where the NKJV has “slanderers.”
    - 2) Gossip shares damaging information, not out of malice, but for other equally unacceptable reasons. J. M. Stowell suggests six possible motives for gossip:
      - a. **Curiosity.** “It’s not by accident that 1 Timothy 5:13 links busybodies (people whose curiosity has gone wild) with gossips (those who share what their unchecked curiosity has discovered) in the same negative context” (J. M. Stowell).

- b. **Idleness.** I Timothy 5:13-14.
  - c. **A desire to be the center of attention.**
  - d. **The opportunity to elevate ourselves over others.** “It is when we feel insecure and threatened that we are most likely to spread ugly gossip about others. By rubbing some of the glitter from someone else’s crown, we believe our own will shine more brightly. By cutting others down, we think we will feel taller” (L. Koopman, *Beauty Care For The Tongue*).
  - e. **Bitterness.** Ephesians 4:31. Greek, *blasphemia*; NKJV “evil speaking”). “In nine times out of ten, the slanderous tongue belongs to a disappointed person” (George Bancroft). “Malicious words are often spawned by *bitterness*. Selfishly withholding forgiveness opens the door to a vengeful spirit, and slander is a tool of revenge. The slander we pour out against those who have hurt us is the natural vent of our hostile spirit” (J. M. Stowell).
  - f. **A desire to sooth our own anxieties.** Misery loves company.
6. **Why are slander and gossip sinful?** Because they are so damaging!
- A. “The Jews of the intertestamental period called the source of slander ‘the third tongue’ because it is fatal to three sets of people: those who *speak* the slander, those who *listen* to it, and those *about* whom it is spoken” (J. M. Stowell).
  - B. **Slander and gossip kills:**
    - 1) **Souls.** 2 Corinthians 12:20 (NKJV “backbitings, whisperings”).
    - 2) **Reputations.** “To murder character is as truly a crime as to murder the body: the tongue of the slanderer is brother to the dagger of the assassin” (Tryon Edwards).
    - 3) **Relationships.** Proverbs 16:28 (NKJV “whisperer”). “Gossip separates the closest of friends ... When you hear gossip about a friend, it begins to drive a wedge between the two of you. It builds a barrier of suspicion and doubt. Conversely, if your friend gossips to you about someone else, you begin to doubt his or her loyalty. After all, if he gossips *to* you, maybe he will gossip *about* you” (J. M. Stowell). Proverbs 26:20 (NKJV “talebearer”). See also Proverbs 26:20; Ecclesiastes 10:20.
  - C. **The damage is often irreversible.**
    - 1) **To the speakers.** Proverbs 25:9-10.
    - 2) **To the listeners.** Slanderers share “bits of information that are difficult to ignore or forget (Proverbs 18:8; 26:22). The ‘juicy morsels’ stay with us, permanently staining our perceptions of and appreciation for those about whom we are hearing” (J. M. Stowell).
    - 3) **To those about whom it is spoken.** Deuteronomy 22:13-19. Joseph M. Stowell tells the story of a young man during the Middle Ages who confessed, “I’ve sinned by telling slanderous tales about someone. What should I do?” His confidant told him to go and put a feather on every doorstep in town. After doing so, he asked if there was anything else he should do. His confidant told him to go back and pick up all those feathers. The young man excitedly replied, “That’s impossible! By now the wind will have blown them all over town!” The confidant said, “So have your slanderous words become impossible to retrieve!” (J. M. Stowell).

## APPLICATIONS:

- 1. **We must understand slander and gossip.** Their sinfulness, prevalence, meaning, and damaging effects.
- 2. **We must have no fellowship with slander or gossip.** 1 Peter 2:1.
  - A. **We must not speak slander or gossip.** Ephesians 4:31 (Greek, *blasphemia*; NKJV “evil speaking”).
  - 2. **Before we say anything, we must go down the anti-slander/gossip checklist.** Is what I’m thinking about saying negative? Do I know it to be true (two or three witnesses)? Will it serve a constructive purpose? Am I saying it to the right person? Am I saying it in the right way?
    - 2) **We must be so busy doing right that we have as little time or inclination as possible to slander or gossip.** 1 Timothy 5:13-14; 1 Peter 2:1-3.
    - 3) **We must be very careful what we say about rulers.** Acts 23:1-5; Titus 3:1-2.
- B. **We must not listen to slander or gossip.** Proverbs 20:19.
  - 1) **It is just as sinful to listen to slander or gossip as it is to speak slander or gossip.** “There would not be so many open mouths if there were not so many open ears” (Joseph Hall). “Slander-mongers and those who listen to slander, if I had my way, would all be strung up, the talkers by the tongue, the listeners by the ears” (Titus Maccius Plautus). “Listen not to a tale-bearer or slanderer, for he tells thee nothing out of good-will; but as he discovereth of the secrets of others, so he will of thine in turn” (Socrates).

- 2) **Listening often leads to speaking.** “Hearing gossip adds unneeded information to our mental notebooks. These negative thoughts give Satan a foothold in our lives. Hearing often results in telling—for some people, ‘gossip in’ soon becomes ‘gossip out’” (J. M. Stowell).
  - 3) **We must lovingly oppose slander and gossip.** “What if you are caught in the middle of a group that is tearing someone down? Recently in a Bible study, one woman who works constantly with professional women said, ‘When I find myself in a group that is tearing someone to shreds, I smile sweetly and say, “You know, I’m getting very uncomfortable about this.”’ When asked what the response usually was to her statement, she said, ‘They change the subject’ ... Another suggestion was to respond softly, ‘That would really hurt her if she knew what we were saying’” (C. Mayhall). “When you defend those who are absent, you retain the trust of those present” (S. R. Covey, *Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People*). Confronting gossips “takes considerable courage, and many people would prefer to take the course of least resistance, belittling and criticizing, betraying confidences, or participating in gossip about others behind their backs. But in the long run, people will trust and respect you if you are honest and open and kind with them. You care enough to confront. And to be trusted, it is said, is greater than to be loved. In the long run, I am convinced, to be trusted will be also to be loved” (S. R. Covey).
  - 4) **If we hear damaging information we must not believe it unless we confirm it to be true.** 1 Corinthians 13:7; Matthew 18:15, 16.
3. **We must not justify slander or gossip.** “We all know we shouldn’t gossip. Yet our thirst for ‘news’ (both hearing and telling) at times seems insatiable. Consequently, we devise ways of sharing it that save our consciences. Will Rogers quipped, ‘The only time people dislike gossip is when you gossip about them’” (J. M. Stowell). “Bless his/her heart” does not sanctify slander or gossip!
  4. **We must respond as God commands if we think we are being victimized by slander or gossip.**
    - A. **Be humble.** Ecclesiastes 7:20-22.
    - B. **Take responsibility.** “Pay the stupid tax.”
    - C. **Confront or forget.** 1 Corinthians 4:13A (NKJV “being defamed, we entreat). *Conciliate*, “stop (someone) from being angry or discontented; placate; pacify ... reconcile; make compatible ... *Conciliate* implies the use of arbitration or compromise to settle a dispute or to win someone over” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*).
    - D. **Let our light shine/give no place to the devil.** 1 Peter 2:12 (NKJV “speak against”); 3:16 (NKJV “defame you as evildoers”).
    - E. **Take comfort.** Luke 6:26. “The slander of some people is as great a recommendation as the praise of others” (Henry Fielding).
    - F. **Repay good for evil.** Psalm 35:12-16.
    - G. **Accept that we might not be able to make it stop.** Psalm 35:15.
    - H. **Give the situation to God in prayer and trust Him to take care of the problem.** Psalm 35:17 ff; 140:11A, 12-13. “When we are victims of gossip, we need to realize that God knows, that He cares, and that He can deal with the situation. We can find peace only when we leave the situation to ‘Him who judges righteously’ (1 Peter 2:23)” (J. M. Stowell). “The surest method against scandal is to live it down by perseverance in well-doing, and by prayer to God that He would cure the distempered mind of those who traduce and injure us” (Herman Boerhaave).

**CONCLUSION:** Psalm 141:3.

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. Are you a worrywart? “Are you a mellow person who never seems to worry about things you cannot control? Or are you seen as a worrywart, always thinking about what might happen? How much distress does this create in your daily life? How much people worry and the problems it causes for people is on a continuum. Craske, Barlow and O’Leary recommend asking yourself the following questions to determine” how much worry is negatively impacting your life. “Do you worry about things that you recognize most people do not worry about (such as little things around your home)? Do you find it very difficult to stop worrying, and cannot relax as a result? Does your worry rarely result in your reaching a possible solution for a particular problem? Do you believe that if you do not worry a terrible event will actually happen? Do you worry about not being worried, or worry when everything is going well in your life?” (*University of Idaho Counseling and Testing Center*, adapted).



2. According to *ehealthMD*, here are some “**Facts About Anxiety And Worry**. 1. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting over 19 million people. 2. People with an anxiety disorder are three-to-five times more likely to go to the doctor and six times more likely to be hospitalized for psychiatric disorders than non-sufferers. 3. Women are twice as likely as men to be afflicted with **generalized anxiety disorder** and **panic disorder**. 4. **Anxiety** is the most common symptom of patients seeing a psychiatrist or a psychologist” (updated September 2009).
3. “Worry is amazingly common. At least one in four of us—about 65 million Americans—will meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder at some point in our lifetime. Even those individuals whose lives are going well may worry excessively on occasion” (Edward M. Hallowell, *Psychology Today*).
4. “But, shouldn’t we worry about some things?” I put it this way. We should be righteously concerned about some things,
  - like God is (Exodus 3:16; 4:31; Job 7:17; Ezekiel 36:21),
  - like Paul was (2 Corinthians 11:28-29),
  - like Timothy was (Philippians 2:20),
  - like the Philippians were (Philippians 4:10), etc.

BUT, we shouldn’t sinfully worry about anything. Psalms 139:23-24; Matthew 6:25, “Do not be worried;” Matthew 6:31A, “Do not worry;” Matthew 6:34, “Do not worry;” Philippians 4:6, “Be anxious for nothing.”

5. “But, how do we distinguish between righteous concern and sinful worry?” That’s the point of this lesson and I hope when we are done we will all be able to make this vitally important distinction.

**DISCUSSION:** *Righteous concern and sinful worry both see the possibility of bad things happening. Both wonder, “What if ...”* However:

**1. Righteous concern keeps peace. In contrast, sinful worry destroys peace.**

- A. Righteous concern does not disturb peace. Psalms 94:19.
- B. The emotional effects of sinful worry include, among *many* other things, being bothered or troubled (Luke 10:38-42), fear (Isaiah 35:4A, “Say to those with anxious heart, ‘Take courage, fear not’”); discouragement, helplessness, panic, distress, pain (Jeremiah 49:23-24), and depression (Proverbs 12:25A, “Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down”).
- C. “Worry is insidious, invisible, a relentless scavenger, roaming the corners of your mind, feeding on anything it finds. It sets upon you unwanted and unbidden, feasting on the infinite array of negative possibilities in life, diminishing your enjoyment of friends, family, achievements, and physical being—all because you live in fear of what might go wrong. People who worry ... suffer. For all their hard work, for all their humor and willingness to laugh at themselves, for all their self-awareness, worriers just cannot achieve peace of mind” (Edward M. Hallowell, *Psychology Today*).

**2. Righteous concern only focuses on today’s troubles. In contrast, sinful worry also focuses on tomorrow’s troubles.**

- A. Matthew 6:34.
- B. “It is not the cares of today, but the cares of tomorrow, that weigh a man down” (George MacDonald).
- C. “Worry doesn’t help tomorrow’s troubles, but it does ruin today’s happiness” (Anonymous).
- D. Don’t borrow trouble! “Worry is the interest paid on trouble before it falls due” (W. R. Inge).

3. **Righteous concern focuses on the most realistic possibilities. In contrast, sinful worry focuses on the most unrealistic possibilities.**
  - A. "The great majority of the things we now make ourselves panicked about are self-created 'dangers' that exist almost entirely in our own imaginations" (Albert Ellis & Robert A. Harper).
  - B. The news editor of *Psychology Today* well illustrated this aspect of sinful worry, "My sister ... was coming for dinner, and she was late. Never mind that there is no recorded instance of her being on time for anything: worry ... easily leaps the bounds of what's reasonable and rational ... worry [is, *tdn*] 'a disease of the imagination,' and tonight my imagination was flush with fever, envisioning all the misfortunes that might have befallen Sally between her door and mine. [I was] feeling the acid seep of a 'toxic worry' ... just then Sally strolled through the door. 'Hi,' she said, as unconcerned as ever. 'What's for dinner?'" (*Psychology Today*).
  - C. "My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened" (Michel de Montaigne).
  - D. "How much pain they have cost us, the evils which have never happened" (Thomas Jefferson).
  - E. "When I look back on all these worries I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened" (Winston Churchill)."
4. **Righteous concern focuses on the good that would come from the bad. In contrast, sinful worry focuses on the bad that could come from the bad.** Proverbs 12:25.
5. **Righteous concern trusts God. In contrast, sinful worry doubts God.**
  - A. Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Psalm 138:7-8.
  - B. Isaiah 57:11A ("Of whom were you worried and fearful when you ... did not remember Me nor give Me a thought?"); Matthew 6:25-26, 28-33.
6. **Righteous concern does what it can do to prevent bad things from happening or to minimize their impact if bad things do happen. In contrast, sinful worry does nothing but worry.**
  - A. Exodus 3:16-17; Joshua 22:24A ("We have done this out of concern").
  - B. "When we are worrying, we are thinking about something over and over again but do not resolve the situation or arrive at a solution to the problem. When we continually think about the exam that will be given next week and imagine many distressing outcomes yet do not study or do something to release the tension, we are worrying" (*University of Idaho Counseling and Testing Center*).
  - C. What can we do?
    - 1) **Pray.** 1 Peter 5:7. "Every evening I turn my worries over to God. He's going to be up all night anyway" (Mary C. Crowley).
    - 2) **Count our blessings.**
      - a. Philippians 4:6-7.
      - b. "In my forties, I have been working on letting go of my compulsive worrying, and I have been amazed at how swiftly a sense of gratefulness banishes the worry warts. And I've tried many other things—asking myself what is the worst thing that could happen and imagining going through that to a new place; noticing without judgment my worry; indulging it; pushing it away. None of these has been as effective as tapping into a sense of appreciation *in this moment* for what I do have. Worried about money? I focus on the fact that so far, I have always had what I needed and right now, I have enough. Worried about health? I focus on the amount of good health I'm thankful to be experiencing right now. Worried about—my favorite—a loved one being taken suddenly in an accident? I focus on how grateful I am that they are in my life right now. I think tapping into the wellspring of gratitude works for two reasons. First, worry is always about the future, if only the next hour or minute, whereas gratitude is in the here and now. Cast over your list of worries. Aren't they always about what might or might not happen? You are worried about the reaction of your boss tomorrow to your presentation. You're worried about how you are going to afford to send your son to college. You're worried about the test results. In every case, you project yourself into the future and imagine something bad happening. As Andre Dubus points out, 'It is not hard to live through a day if you can live through a moment. What creates despair is the imagination, which pretends there is a future and insists on predicting millions of moments, thousands of days, and so drains you that you cannot live the moment at hand.' Gratitude brings you back to the present moment, to all that is working perfectly right now. Tomorrow may bring difficulties, but for right now, things are pretty good. Gratefulness also eliminates worry because it reminds us of the abundance of" the providence of God. 'Yes, something bad might happen, but given all that you have received so far ... you will continue to be supported on through life, even in ways you would never have guessed or chosen for yourself'" (M. J. Ryan, *Attitudes Of Gratitude*, adapted).
      - c. "Only man clogs his happiness with care, destroying what is with thoughts of what may be" (John Dryden).
  - 3) **Do whatever else might help the matter of concern and help us not worry.** Philippians 4:8-9.
  - 4) **Practice.**
    - a. Sinful worry is a choice we can learn to make less and less frequently.

- b. This is not a lesson about all the things we can do to learn to worry less, but there are many things we can and must do.
- c. Further, we must not get discouraged in doing them. At first, our efforts may bear little or no fruit. But, if we'll keep on practicing, we will make progress. Galatians 6:7-9.
- d. "Most of the worriers I treat need to retrain their minds and learn new mental skills. It's like training your muscles to learn the pattern of a golf or tennis swing, so that the correct swing becomes automatic. You can train your brain to learn effective ways of dealing with situations that arise again and again, such as financial worries or fears of failure" (Edward M. Hallowell, *Psychology Today*).

**5) Exercise our body as well as our mind.**

- a. "Bodily exercise profits a little" (Philippians 4:8 NKJV).
- b. "Working Out Worry. As simple as it sounds, exercise is the best natural anti-anxiety agent we have. Exercise reduces tension, drains off excess aggression and frustration, enhances well-being, improves sleep, curbs the tendency to overeat, aids in concentration, and reduces distractibility. It is healing to the body, and therefore to the mind. Getting exercise at least every other day should be part of your plan to reduce anxiety and control worry. But you can also exercise on the spot to reduce acute worry. If you are having a bad day at the office, try walking up and down a flight of stairs five times. Your mind will be less troubled when you come back to your desk. The change in physiology induced by exercise calms the mind" (Edward M. Hallowell, *Psychology Today*).

**7. Righteous concern moves on to other things when it's done all it can do. In contrast, sinful worry just keeps on worrying.** The girls driving through the night illustration.

**8. Righteous concern is attractive. In contrast, sinful worry is repulsive.**

- A. Exodus 4:31.
- B. Sinful worry is not only unproductive – "Worrying is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere" (Glenn) – and distracting – "A day of worry is more exhausting than a day of work" (John Lubbock), it's *counterproductive*.
- C. Apply to unfaithful children. Psalm 127:1-2. Sinful worry is just as much a spiritual problem for us as our children's unfaithfulness is a problem for them. The best sermon is one where the speaker not only talks the talk, but also walks the walk.

**9. Righteous concern is rooted in truth. In contrast, sinful worry is rooted in lies.**

**A. Sinful worry tries to convince us that it is productive, that it prevents or minimizes disasters.**

- 1) It's not. It doesn't. Matthew 6:27; 13:22 ("The worry of the world ... choke(s) the word, and it becomes unfruitful).
- 2) "If worrying were a paying job, I would be a rich woman. Somehow during my childhood, I got the idea that worrying could actually stave off future disasters, and as I entered adulthood, I became convinced that if I were to stop worrying, took my eye off the ball, as it were, that something dreadful would happen. If I worried enough about being poor, I wouldn't be. If I worried enough about my partner's safety, nothing would happen to him. If I worried enough about my stepson's health, he wouldn't get sick. There was no room in my heart for happiness because worry took up all the space. (Indeed I was convinced that if I were too happy, it would somehow hex the situation. If I got too happy about love, for example, I wouldn't worry sufficiently and therefore it would be taken from me)" (M. J. Ryan, *Attitudes Of Gratitude*).
- 3) Righteous concern is an alarm that warns us to do other things to head off or minimize a potential problem. Sinful worry tries to convince us that the only thing we have to do to head off or minimize a potential problem is to just keep on listening to the alarm. Sinful worry doesn't solve problems any more than alarms put out fires. "Anxiety is only the problem when it's the solution" (Kevin Everett FitzMaurice).

**B. Sinful worry tries to convince us that we can't live without it.**

**C. Sinful worry tries to convince us that we'll quit worrying just as soon as the pending disaster is averted.**

## INTRODUCTION:

I have recently been studying Colossians. Not too long ago, a passage jumped out of the page at me and ever since I have been so excited about sharing what I've learned.

Let's start with a question. If people commit fornication, where do they first go wrong?

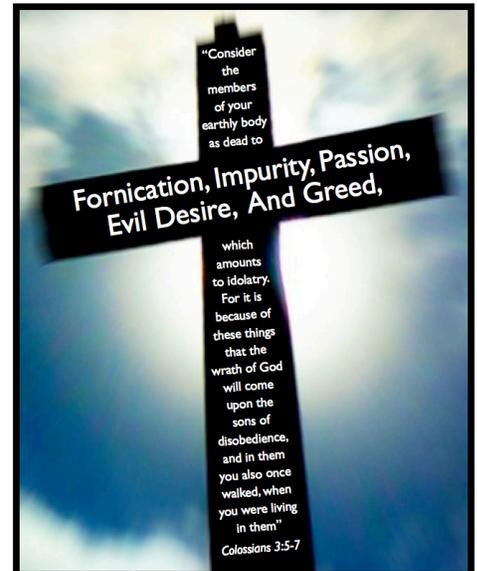
The Holy Spirit gives us the answer in Colossians 3:5 and the answer may surprise you. It certainly did me.

## DISCUSSION:

- In Colossians 3:5 the Holy Spirit commands us to consider the members of our earthly body as dead to five things.
  - Immorality or fornication.** "Fornication" is a better translation than "immorality." The latter is too broad in meaning. *Porneia* only refers to immoral sexual intercourse. However, it does refer to all types of immoral sexual intercourse: premarital, extramarital (adultery), homosexuality, lesbianism, incest, bestiality, etc.
  - Impurity or uncleanness.** *Akatharsia* is broader than *porneia*. When linked with fornication, I believe *akatharsia* refers to any conduct that is sexually impure. *Akatharsia* includes fornication, but it also includes all forms of sexual impurity that lead up to but stop short of fornication.
  - Passion.** We commit *pathos* when we allow immoral sexual passions to dictate our behavior. Romans 1:26-27; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5.
  - Evil desire.** We commit the sin of evil desire when we choose to desire sexual impurity. Why do we commit passion, uncleanness, or fornication? Because we want to! We desire to do evil.
    - Is it wrong for single people to desire marriage so they can fulfill their sexual desires in a moral manner? No. 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9.
    - Is it wrong for anyone to desire to fulfill his or her sexual desires in immoral ways? Absolutely. Matthew 5:27-28.
  - Greed or covetousness.** *Pleonexia* is literally the "desire to have more" (Vine). It means greed, avarice, covetousness, or insatiableness. It is not wrong to want more good things, but it is wrong to be discontent until we get them. *Pleonexia* is the quality of a person who no matter how much good he has, it is not enough. It is discontentment with goodness.
- These five things are to be a part of our past. If they are a part of our present they doom our future if we don't repent. Colossians 3:5-7.
- So, let's answer our initial question.
  - If people commit fornication, is that the first thing they do wrong? No, before fornication is uncleanness.
  - Is uncleanness then the first thing they do wrong? No, before uncleanness is passion.
  - Is passion then the first thing they do wrong? No, before passion is evil desire.
  - Is evil desire then the first thing they do wrong? No, and here is the surprising part – before evil desire is covetousness, i.e. discontentment with the way God allows them to fulfill their sexual desires. That's where fornicators first go wrong!
- Colossians 3:5 is a regression analysis of sin and it teaches us that the first step off the strait and narrow way is not desiring evil, but being discontented with good. This makes perfect sense. If we are perfectly satisfied with good we don't desire evil. If we aren't satisfied with good, it is then and only then that evil desire has the ability to sweep in and fill the void.

## APPLICATIONS:

- General applications.** There are three things we all need to do regarding contentment.
  - We must figure where we are in life and what good things we can and ought to be doing.** Ecclesiastes 3:1.
  - We must repent of greed and resolve to be content therein.** 1 Corinthians 7:17.



- C. **We must learn how to be content.** Philippians 4:11. We could devote an entire lesson to learning how to be content. Here is just one of many important things we must do. We must not do things that tempt us to be discontent. For example, we must not look at provocative things or read provocative literature.

## 2. Specific applications.

### A. Fornication.

- 1) **Single people.** The 95/5 5/95 rule.
- 2) **Married people.** When we hear that some married person we respect has committed fornication we are shocked. How could they do such a thing? *The very same way we could do such a thing!* People don't become fornicators overnight. Fornication is just the last of several sinful steps. It is quite possible that there are people here tonight that are on the road to fornication – and may not even realize it!

### B. Debt.

### C. Children.

### D. Middle age.

### E. Old age.

### F. The specific applications are endless!

## 3. Other important applications.

### A. Every step is wrong!

- 1) "I may have done sexually impure things, but I didn't fornicate!" You still did wrong!
- 2) "I may have let my passions get the best of me, but I didn't do anything!" You still did wrong!
- 3) "I may have wanted to be sexual impure, but I didn't act on the desire!" You still did wrong!
- 4) "I may not be content with my sexual relationship with my spouse, but I have no desire for sexual satisfaction outside my marriage!" You still did wrong! Again, it isn't wrong to desire good, but it is wrong to be discontented until we get it!

- B. **Besides fornication, what is sexually impure conduct?** Sexually impure conduct is any conduct that arouses sexual passions we can't morally satisfy with the person who arouses them. Kissing, for example, can quickly pass from something that is holy to something that is unholy. Outside marriage a kiss should reveal our heart, not our hormones.

### C. Don't needlessly tempt people to be discontent. We are our brother's keeper!

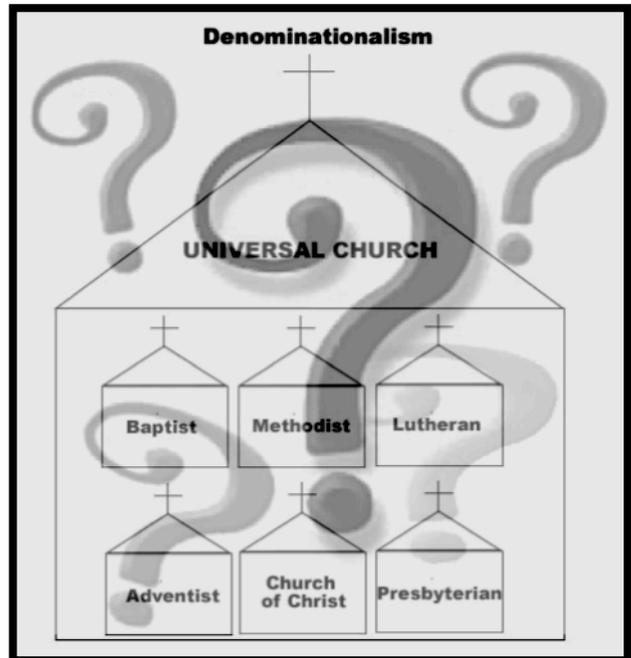
- D. **Discontentment is a liar.** Discontentment tells us if \_\_\_\_\_ then we will be satisfied. The truth is if we aren't satisfied without \_\_\_\_\_, we won't be satisfied with \_\_\_\_\_. Ecclesiastes 5:10.

- E. **Discontentment is idolatry.** Colossians 3:5. With greed, we are not content with what God allows. No, our discontent proves we'd prefer to set aside His constraints and make our own rules, i.e. be our own gods.

- F. **Godliness with contentment is great gain.** 1 Timothy 6:6.

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. What is a denomination? According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, a denomination is “a large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.”
2. Many people use a far broader definition of the term. To them, any large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name is a denomination even though they aren't organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy. For example, many people call the churches of Christ a denomination.
3. This broader definition of “denomination” is rooted, not in the historical meaning of the term, but in the widely held belief that the one body or church of Christ is made up of different denominations.
4. As \$1, \$2, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100 bills are different denominations, but all U.S. currency; so some think Methodists, Baptists, churches of Christ, non-denominational churches, etc. are all different denominations, but all part of the one body or church of Christ.
5. “Denominationalism is the division of one religion into separate groups, sects, schools of thought or denominations. Denominationalism as an ideology ... views some or all Christian groups as being, in some sense, versions of the same thing regardless of their distinguishing labels ... Theological denominationalism ultimately denies reality to any apparent doctrinal differences among the ‘denominations’, reducing all differences to mere matters *de nomina* (“of names”). A denomination in this sense is created when part of a church no longer feel they can accept the leadership of that church as a spiritual leadership due to a different view of doctrine or what they see as immoral behavior, but the schism does not in any way reflect either group leaving the Church as a theoretical whole” (Wikipedia).
6. In this evening’s lesson, I want to discuss why rejecting denominationalism is definitely a high priority item.



**FACTS:**

1. **There is one body or church of Christ.** Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4-6.
2. **Doctrine matters.** Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John 9.
3. **The one body or church of Christ is not doctrinally divided.** 1 Corinthians 4:17.
4. **Division is not inevitable.** Ephesians 4:11-16; 5:17.
5. **Jesus condemns division in the strongest possible terms.**
  - A. 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.
  - B. “Even though denominations within Protestantism have come to be the largest expression of organized Christianity beyond the level of the congregation, there has never been much theological reflection on denominationalism. A look at theology textbooks or church creeds confirms this. Probably the simplest explanation for this omission is that the Bible in no way envisages the organization of the church into denominations. It instead assumes the opposite, that all Christians, except those being disciplined, will be in full fellowship with all others. Any tendencies to the contrary were roundly denounced (1 Cor. 1:10 - 13). Paul could write a letter to the Christians meeting in various places in Rome or Galatia with every assurance that all would receive its message. Today, for any city or country, he would have to place the letter as an advertisement in the secular media and hope” (D. G. Tinder, *Elwell Evangelical Dictionary*).
  - C. Denominationalism is to doctrinal division what bloodletting was to physical disease. It doesn't cure the problem. It just compounds one problem that needs to be solved with another problem that needs to be solved. It just makes matters worse. The cure for doctrinal division is to scripturally resolve our differences, not to act like they really don't matter. They definitely do matter to God and they had better matter to us.

6. **All doctrine matters.**

- A. Denominationalists believe that Jesus accepts some doctrinal division because they think Jesus only requires unity in matters of true doctrinal importance.
- B. Some denominational theologians point “to a constellation of core beliefs that can be used to reveal the invisible church. One such attempt to codify this group of doctrines is Jack Cottrell’s very brief book ‘Faith’s Fundamentals, Seven Essentials of Christian Belief.’ In this book Dr. Cottrell attempts to delineate seven doctrines that are essential to ones own salvation, doctrines essential to recognizing other Christians and doctrines that permit a Christian to fulfill the Great Commission. The general idea is to draw a line between those doctrines that go to the heart of Christian belief, without the entanglements of distinctions illuminated by many Christian creeds which are otherwise in conflict. This allows unity of the essential faith, even if there is diversity of any number of details upon which the Christian faith does not turn” (Wikipedia).
- C. Here’s the \$64,000 question. How do we decide what doctrinal matters are really important? Where does Jesus teach us how to make this distinction? **We can’t do the former because He hasn’t done the latter! All doctrine is important!** Matthew 4:4; 5:17-19; 23:23; 28:18-20; Luke 1:5-6; 17:10; Acts 13:22; 20:26-27; 2 Corinthians 2:9; Galatians 3:10; Ephesians 5:8-9; Colossians 1:9-10; 4:12; James 2:10.

7. **Some implications of denominationalism. *Denominationalism says ...***

- A. **Jesus asked too much.** John 17:20-23.
- B. **People can believe whatever they want about God.**
  - 1) To denominationalists, sincerity is, in large measure, the only essential doctrine.
  - 2) A blogger named Albone once wrote, “Not only do I look forward to the day when there’s no more discussion about instruments or no instruments, church of Christ vs. disciples of Christ, but rather I look forward to the day when all of God’s people simply see each other as God’s people, regardless of what traditions they prefer or what denomination with which they associate. One God made this whole universe to worship him. Worship him in whatever manner you please.”
  - 3) “Remarked the Presbyterian pastor who wants to teach his members about Presbyterian theology: ‘It’s not to say that because I am Presbyterian that I don’t listen to other things, or don’t think that there’s value in all this other stuff. I have a really good friend who is Methodist, and he and I are just always amazed at how similar we are. But we’re also different. That’s good, for God’s sake. Good’” (Nancy T. Ammerman, *The Christian Century*, 03-15-00).
  - 4) Why does he think that’s good? Unless I’m mistaken, it’s because he thinks its good for people to be able to choose what doctrines they want to believe. God, however, makes it very clear that it isn’t good, that it’s best for people to believe what He wants them to believe regardless of what they may want to believe. 2 Timothy 4:1-5.
  - 5) Yes, there is a place for differences in matters of judgment, but not in matters of doctrine. We must learn how to distinguish one from the other.
- C. **God ineptly communicated His will.** 1 Corinthians 14:33.
- D. **Non-Christians shouldn’t believe Jesus is the Son of God.** John 17:20-23.

**APPLICATIONS:**

- 1. **Is the church of Christ a denomination?** I really don’t mean to be difficult, but the answer depends on what you mean by “the church of Christ.” We might as easily ask, “Is the church of God a denomination?” Again, it would depend on what you mean by “the church of God.”
  - A. If by the church of Christ you mean the one body of Christ mentioned in Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4, then the answer is no. The church of Christ is not a denomination. The body of Christ is not divided.
  - B. If by the church of Christ you mean churches that meet in buildings that have signs that read, “The ... church of Christ meets here,” then the answer depends on what the people who meet in the building believe and practice.
    - 1) If their faith and practice is in keeping with the one faith of the one body of Christ mentioned in Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4, then the answer is no. Such churches of Christ are not a denomination. They are not doctrinally divided from any church Jesus recognizes as belonging to Him.
    - 2) And no, you don’t have to have “church of Christ” on your sign to be recognized by Jesus as belonging to Him. “Church of Christ” is just one of several scriptural ways to describe a church that belongs to Jesus.

- C. If a church calling itself a “church of Christ” believes and practices denominationalism, which many increasingly do, then it is a denomination. I’m not being mean or ugly. I’m just recognizing the reality that many churches of Christ no longer view their place in the one body of Christ any differently than they do the place of Methodist or Baptist churches. They have a denominational view of the church.

**2. Are all religious groups that claim but don’t actually follow Christ denominational?**

- A. No. A few groups that claim but don’t actually follow Christ reject the denominational view of the church.
- B. But what about “non-denominational” churches? “Non-denominational” churches have proliferated in recent years. For the most part, they are non-denominational because they aren’t united with other churches under a single administrative and legal hierarchy, not because they think there is anything wrong with denominationalism. In fact, most non-denominational churches have a very denominational view of the church.
- C. Some churches of Christ use non-denominational to describe themselves. Given the great difference between what they mean by the phrase and how many other people understand the phrase, un-denominational or anti-denominational might be more descriptive terms.

**3. Should we call religious groups that claim but don’t actually follow Christ denominations?**

- A. Let’s face it. When we say a group is a “denomination” we don’t mean what denominationalists mean when they say a group is a “denomination.”
- B. What do we mean? Unless we are focusing on their denominational view of the church, we mean that they are a religious group that claims but doesn’t actually follow Christ. We mean that we don’t think they are in Christ. 2 Peter 2:1-2. If we are going to speak where the Bible speaks, call Bible things by Bible names, we mean that they are heretics.
- C. While not politically correct, if we think churches are wrong, we need to quit beating around the bush and say so. I’m afraid we use “denomination” as a euphemism for what we really mean and for what we really ought to be saying. A “euphemism” is “a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing” ([New Oxford American Dictionary](#)). Yes, we need to be tactful, but not at the expense of making it perfectly clear that doctrine really does matter.
- D. It greatly disturbs some people that people like me think they are lost. I don’t have a problem with people thinking I’m not in Christ if they don’t think I’m abiding in the doctrine of Christ. Frankly, I vastly prefer that to the denominational view that doctrinal differences don’t matter as long as we’re sincere. Admittedly, sincerity is important, but it’s not the only important thing.
- E. “But,” someone might ask, “aren’t you being arrogant.” No, definitely not. Shouldn’t we think we are right? Otherwise, shouldn’t we immediately change what we believe and/or practice to what we think is right? It’s not arrogant to think we are right. It’s only arrogant to think we can’t be wrong.
- F. “But,” another might ask, “what if you are wrong?” Some say that the possibility of being wrong precludes us from taking a stand for what we believe to be right. In other words, since we could be wrong, we can’t say anyone else is wrong.
- 1) First, this would invalidate the word of God or render it of no effect. If this were true, no one could obey passages like Titus 3:9-11; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; etc.
  - 2) Second, standing for what we believe to be right is the best way to learn if we are wrong. We should approach people we think are doctrinally wrong in hopes of three possible outcomes.
    - a. First, if we are right, we’ll move them to think like God and us.
    - b. Second, if they are right, they’ll move us to think like God and them.
    - c. Or third, if we are both wrong, we’ll help each other think more like Jesus.
    - d. Frankly, where’s the downside? Shouldn’t everyone who claims to follow Christ be doing all they can to realize the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-23 and isn’t this the way to do it?
- G. Brethren, don’t get discouraged if people think you are narrow-minded. Rather, get excited about opening their minds and possibly your own to the what the word of God actually says. Don’t underestimate the power of God’s word. It’s often turned the world upside down. It can to the same thing in our generation if we’ll just get excited about sharing it with other people.

**CONCLUSION:**

1. In conclusion, I’d first like to speak to people who sometimes ridicule members of the church of Christ for believing they are the only ones going to heaven, for believing that you must be a member of the church of Christ to be saved, etc.

- A. Please don't misrepresent our beliefs. Please make sure you understand what we mean when we say such things. Frankly, if you did, you would probably agree with us.
  - B. When we say only members of the church of Christ are going to heaven, we mean that only people who are a part of the one body of Christ mentioned in Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4 are going to heaven, that only people who are a part of the church that Jesus promised to build in Matthew 16:18 are going to heaven. In such passages, the church or body of Christ is simply all people everywhere who are in Christ. Must we be in Christ to be saved? John 14:6. Yes, and therefore we must be members of the body or church of Christ to be saved.
  - C. We aren't saying you have to be a member of the church of Christ denomination to go to heaven. Frankly, we don't believe the one body of Christ is doctrinally divided. The members of this congregation and my local congregation are simply striving to be a part of that one un-denominated body or church of Christ and we believe you should be striving to do the exact same thing.
  - D. Here is another way to understand where we are coming from. We are just trying to be what Paul was – a Christian – no more, no less. Was Paul a member of a denomination? Of course not, and we don't have to be a member of a denomination either.
  - E. Please understand that this is what we mean when we say such things and that this is why we say such things.
  - F. But, we don't just want you to understand our un-denomination view of the body of Christ. No, we want you to join us in rejecting denominationalism and in our efforts to eliminate the divisions that would have never occurred if men had done what Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23.
2. Second, I'd like to speak to members of the church who are increasingly saying things like, "I'm church of Christ," "He's a church of Christ preacher," "The church of Christ teaches," or "What do we teach about."
- A. Such language often betrays a denominational and false view of the church.
  - B. Members of the true body of Christ are Christians, not "Church of Christ" or "Church of Christers." "Church of Christ" is not the name of the Lord's church. It is a description of the Lord's church and it isn't the only scriptural description. It's literally church of Christ, not Church of Christ.
  - C. It doesn't matter what the church of Christ teaches, i.e. what the people of Christ teach. The only thing that matters is what Jesus teaches and whether or not we are preaching and practicing the same.
  - D. We bypass an excellent opportunity to introduce people to un-denominational or anti-denominational Christianity when we fail to tell them we are just Christians, simply members of the Lord's church. Some bypass this opportunity out of ignorance, others out of convenience. I hope this lesson helps us understand that the true church of Christ is not a denomination and motivates us to seize every available opportunity to teach people that they, like us, should reject denominationalism.
3. Third, I'd like to briefly comment about churches of Christ who have changed their "name" on their signs.
- A. It is happening.
  - B. The key issue is not whether they have changed, but *why* they have changed.
  - C. If they have changed as a way of further embracing denominationalism, then their motive is wrong and they are rightly condemned.
  - D. If they have changed as a way of further denouncing denominationalism, then they are exercising lawful judgment. Brethren, if we say "church of Christ" is the only scriptural way of describing a local body of Christ, then we are binding what God has not bound. Yes, we can lovingly share our opinions regarding the expediency of such changes, but we cannot condemn them for making such changes.
  - E. And finally, how do we know their motive? By getting the facts, not by making assumptions!