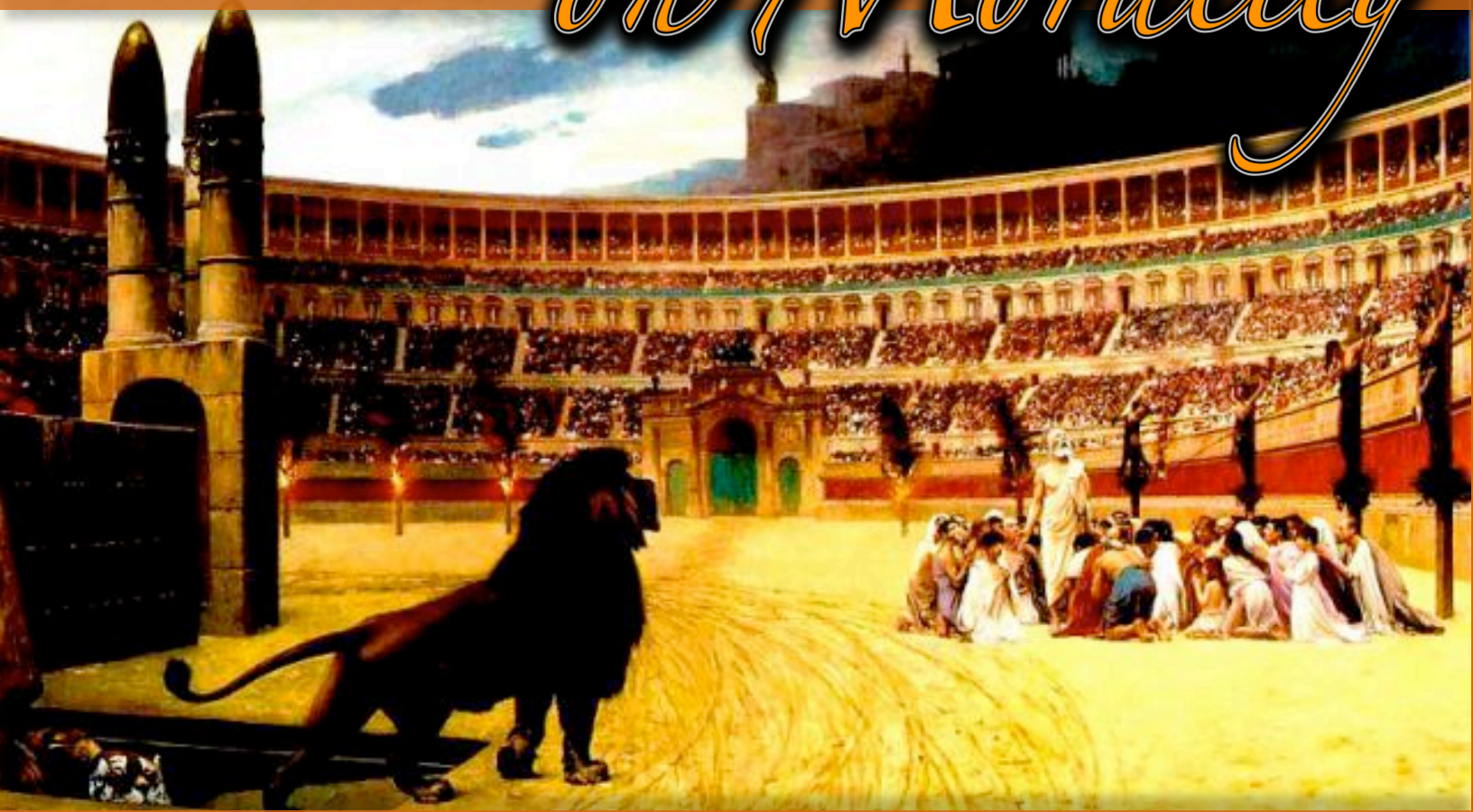


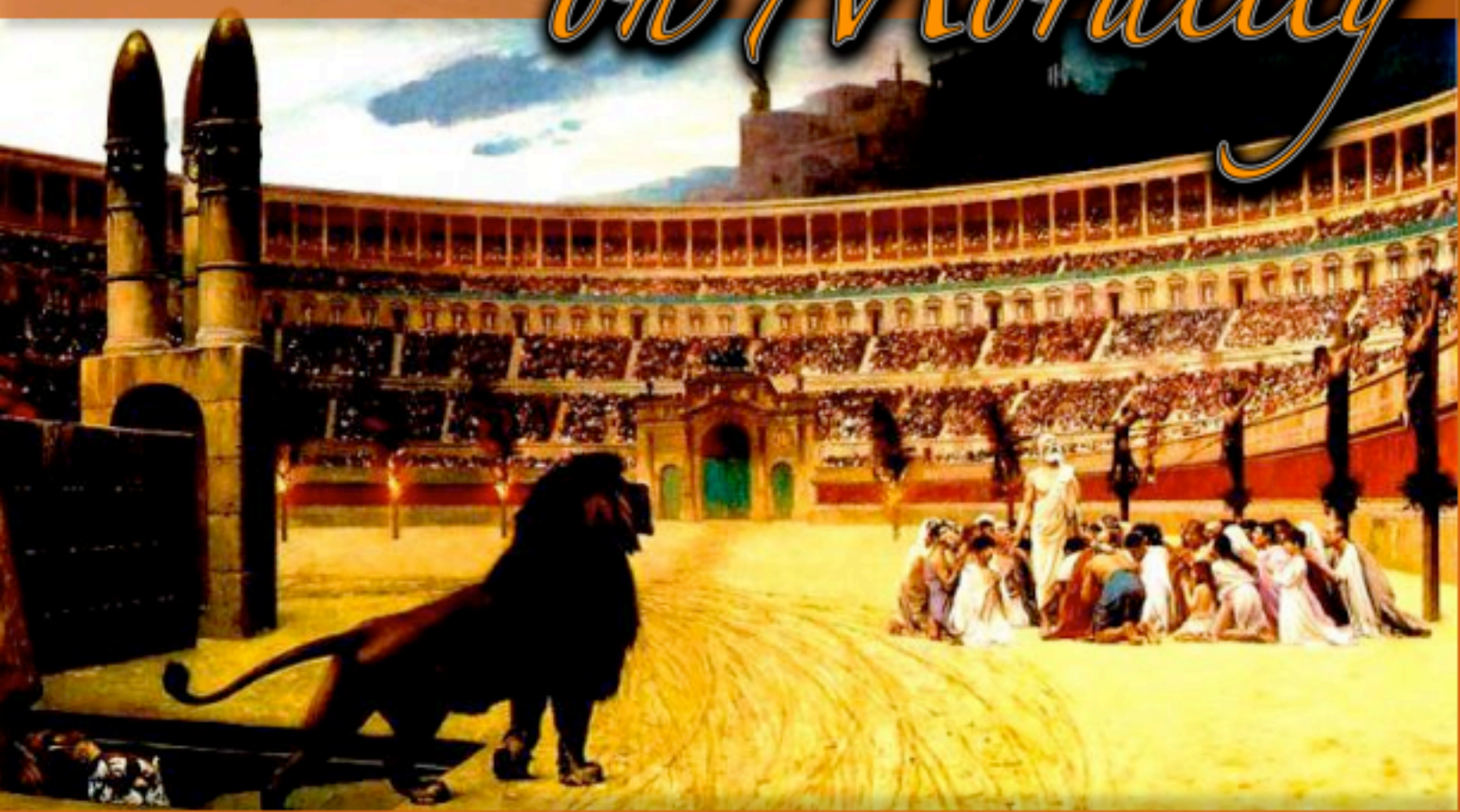
EARLY CHRISTIANS *on Morality*



A study of what the early Christians
just after the age of the New
Testament believed about morality

by: Chris Eppler

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FURTHER READING

Here are some books that you can either read freely online or purchase if you would like to do some further reading on what the early Christians thought and taught.

The “Ante-Nicene Fathers” can be freely downloaded from the following site:

<http://www.holybooks.com/ante-nicene-fathers-vol-i-ix/>

“Will The Real Heretics Please Stand Up” by David Bercot is excellent.

“Will The Theologians Please Sit Down” by David Bercot is a good followup to the heretic book.

“A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs” by David Bercot is also very valuable in finding a synopsis of what the early Christians thought about many subjects.

“We Don’t Speak Great Things – We Live Them” is a translation of writings of Justin Martyr and Mark Felix.

“Common Sense – A New Approach to Understanding Scripture” by David Bercot explains methods for interpreting scripture.

“The Kingdom That Turned The World Upside Down” by David Bercot speaks of the impact the church had on the world.

“Intimacy With God” by Clement of Alexandria is a great read explaining our relationship with the Lord.



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(NOTE)

This work has been made with the hope that together we can search the scripture and develop a greater understanding of it. Hopefully, it will make your study of this topic more edifying, more profitable, and more enjoyable. It is not intended to take the place of your responsibility to prepare for the studies. Please devote adequate time to the material before our study, so we can all be edified by one another (Hebrews 10:24–25).

All verse references are taken from the New American Standard Bible 1995 unless otherwise noted.

The footnotes that read “ANF” refer to the “Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325”. For example, ANF 5.277 would be understood as “Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 5 Page 277”. These books can be freely read and downloaded from the internet. One such place to find them is <http://www.holybooks.com/ante-nicene-fathers-vol-i-ix/>

This book was printed by the Mauriceville Church of Christ at a cost of \$1.50.



INTRODUCTION

IN PREPARATION

Read Acts 20:17-38.

Who brought trials upon Paul? What had he done with the elders regardless?

What did Paul declare to the elders while he was with them?

What had Paul worked hard to show them by ministering his own needs?

What would happen after Paul departed from them?

Who were the “early Christians”?

The early Christians or “church fathers” as they are often called were the saints immediately following the period recorded in our New Testament. We would note that though they are often called “fathers” this is not a title that they placed on themselves or would have accepted. These men were many times students of the apostles. They are often called “Ante-Nicene Fathers” as their time period is generally defined as late first century to the Nicene Council of 325 AD.

The writings we have of these men are extensive and this is just what survives. They had a deep respect for God’s word and quoted from it extensively. Very extensively. Nearly 50% of the New Testament could be recreated from their quotations alone. The English translation of their writings, entitled “Ante-Nicene Fathers”, encompasses over 10,000 pages of very small print.

These men dedicated their lives to the pursuit of the truth found in the word of God. They studied continuously and were often times known to be great teachers in the kingdom. These were men that were completely convinced of Jesus and His church and were willing to die (and often did) for the cause of Jesus Christ. They tended to meet the same fate as martyrs as did the apostles a generation before.

Why should we be concerned about their views?

Simply put, these men were students of the apostles, but were the first generation that lived after miraculous revelation. In other words, they are the first generation that was like us, seeking to apply God’s word without the benefit of the apostle’s supernatural guidance. If we take the time to consider



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how they went about living as Christians, being in the same boat as us, it can give us insight into how we should live and apply the word. This is not to say that they were always right in their application, indeed they were not, however, they did encounter the same struggles as us and recorded how they went about dealing with those struggles. The wise man seeks the council of an older person not because that person is perfect, but because they have already walked the road.

Secondly, they are much closer to the apostles than we are. These men lived basically in the time and culture as did the apostles. We at this point are separated from the apostles by more than nineteen centuries whereas their separation was merely a generation. Many times the earlier writers like Polycarp can speak as a person who asked the apostle John a question. Justin Martyr can speak as a man who was taught by Polycarp who was taught by John. These men had insight into the lives and teachings of the apostles that we do not as they were around them and lived in the same culture as they did.

Thirdly, they were scholarly. They were not just unlearned men scratching down their thoughts on subjects. These men were learned, knowledgeable men. They systematically approach their subjects and carefully examine them in that way. Due to their systematic scholarly approach, we gain much insight from their writings and into those struggles with which the early church was coping. As we read through the writings of these men it becomes apparent that education and scholarship is not quite what it once was!

Lastly, we learn much about living in hope from these men. We look up and see dangerous times and events on the horizon and often wonder how we will get through it. When we consider these men it gives us great encouragement. We see men keep on writing who were witnessing persecutions and many times became the victims of it themselves. They bore up under the persecution and just kept on. They were not men with a supernatural connection to the Lord. They were just like us. They were men of faith who knew that carrying on the teachings of Christ and the mission of the church was of utmost importance, regardless of what Satan threw their way. They stood for the truth, not just some technical truth, but they stood for it morally in the midst of a very immoral world. A perverse generation as Jesus might have called it. Their views matter!



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What is a short list of some of these good men?

Ignatius of Antioch - Ignatius lived from approximately AD 35 - 107. He converted as a youth and became a shepherd at Antioch in Syria. He is believed to have been taught by the apostle John along with his friend Polycarp. It seems that he became a shepherd around the time Evodius died around 67 AD. Ignatius served in this capacity until 107 AD when he was martyred by wild beasts in the arena. We have seven confirmed epistles written by him. They were written to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans, and to Polycarp.

Polycarp - Polycarp lived from AD 69 - 155. Polycarp was a shepherd in Smyrna. Irenaus, who was a student of Polycarp, records that Polycarp said of himself that he was taught by the apostle John. The surviving work that we have of Polycarp is his letter to the Philippians. Polycarp was martyred in AD 155 by being burned at the stake and stabbed as recorded by the church in Smyrna.

Justin Martyr - Justin Martyr lived from approximately AD 100 - 165. He founded a school in Rome where he taught. Ultimately after having a dispute with Crescens, he was reported to the authorities along with a few others and beheaded. We have three main surviving works of Justin Martyr: the First Apology, the Second Apology, and the Dialogue with Trypho. Some of his other works exist only in fragments.

Irenaeus - Irenaeus lived from approximately AD 130 - AD 202. He was a student of Polycarp who was a student of the apostle John. Irenaeus was a shepherd in Lyons, France. Much of the writing of Irenaeus was to combat gnosticism with the most famous being *Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies). He is assumed to have died a martyr, but it is not known with any degree of certainty.

Clement of Alexandria - Clement lived from approximately AD 150 - 215. Clement was well educated in Greek philosophy and literature. There is some evidence that he may have been born in Athens. He was raised in a pagan household, but converted to Christianity later in life and then taught in the Catechetical School of Alexandria. We have three full surviving works of Clement: the *Protrepticus* (Exhortation), the *Paedagogus*



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(Tutor), and the *Stromata* (Miscellanies).

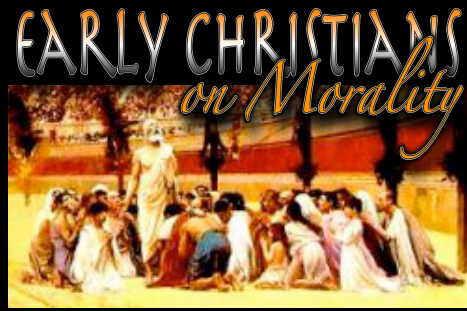
Tertullian - Tertullian lived from approximately AD 160 - 225. We have 31 complete works in existence today and fragments of others. He wrote against gnosticism extensively and also on many other topics, but later in life was caught up in the Montanist heresy. He is also the first known writer to use the word "Trinity". He was born and died in Carthage, Africa at an old age.

What are some considerations as we study their views on morality?

First and foremost we must remember that these men were not inspired. They cared deeply about Christ and His word and some were even had contact with the apostles, but their words are not inspiration. This is attested to by themselves. The early Christians believed that the period of inspiration ended with the death of the last apostle. Clement defines the end of inspiration with Nero's killing of Paul. (*Stromata* ANF 1.554) Thus he believed that inspiration ended in the first century and any later revelation was heresy. They did not consider their own writings inspired and neither should we.

Secondly, being that their words are uninspired we should expect some error. That error was minimal with the earlier writers and continually grew. There is much error in the teaching of Tertullian and especially Origen by the early third century. As one would expect, the primary problems were organizational teachings as Paul prophesied to the Ephesian elders at Acts 20. However, this is not to say that just because their thinking disagrees with mine that it is they that are wrong!

Thirdly, they were eastern people and as such think and write like eastern people. It is a problem when we approach our Bible like it is a western book. The same is true of these men's writings. They did not think and write like us. They reasoned differently. Not poorly, just differently. For instance, we tend to think very linearly about time, but eastern people did not. Archaeologists cannot even make a decent timeline of Egyptian Pharaohs because the Egyptians did not think linearly and as a result spoke of a person succeeding another when they were really co-regents. We must keep in mind that we are reading ancient texts by people that thought differently than we.



CHRISTIAN SPEECH

IN PREPARATION

Read James 3.

What can we conquer if we are able to conquer the tongue, subjecting it?

What are some things that the tongue is capable of doing?

What are some illustrations that James uses to describe the tongue?

What strange ability does the tongue have, defying nature?

The Christian's Tongue

James explains what a terrible danger the tongue is. It cannot be tamed. It always has the potential to cause harm. It can even do strange things like send forth blessing and cursing from that same hole. Indeed we must work hard to keep our tongues in check. It is not a new problem. It was a problem during Bible times and it was a problem for the early Christians. The early Christians were united in their stance that the tongue must be kept in check if we are to be pleasing to God.

Keeping The Tongue In Check Was A Given

In modern times we have written copious amounts with regard to careful use of the tongue. We warn against using language that is perceived as foul and admonish one another to be careful about our speech. However, as we read the writings of the early Christians, this was not something repeatedly talked about but was rather a given. Passages that speak against harming someone physically without cause, were seen as covering any verbal abuse. If the Lord forbids physical harm then it is a given that the tongue must be kept in check.

Jesus speaks of anger and the use of the tongue to hurt others in the sermon on the mount at Matthew 5:21-22. Answer the questions about this passage on the lines provided.

What is the source of murder according to this passage?

What penalties are prescribed in this passage?



CHRISTIAN SPEECH

Tertullian writes the following alluding to Matthew 5:22:

“...He has supervened, and has united the grace of faith with patience, now it is no longer lawful to assail even with word, nor to say “fool” even, without the “danger of the judgment.” Anger has been prohibited, our spirits retained, the petulance of the hand checked, the poison of the tongue extracted.”

(ANF 3.711)

Tertullian makes clear that if the saint is to be one with self-control and patience, then he must control the tongue as with any other action. We notice that there is a focus on the motivation of speech. It was not so much about a list of words that were not allowed to be spoken, but rather it was about the way a Christian should speak because they are a Christian.

Irenaeus writes the following about speech in “Against Heresies”:

“And therefore the Lord says, “As to every idle word that men have spoken, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment.”...and, “he that is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment.” All this is declared, that we may know that we shall give account to God not of deeds only, as slaves, but even of words and thoughts, as those who have truly received the power of liberty, in which condition a man is more severely tested, whether he will reverence, and fear, and love the Lord.”

(ANF 1.482)

Irenaeus makes the point that since we are free in Christ, our words and thoughts matter. The one who is a slave, his master only cares whether he is working or not. The one who is free, however, the Lord has concern with the words and thoughts. It is this liberty that tests us. Will we revere with our minds and fear with our tongues or will we go through the motions and let our tongues and minds do as they please? The Christian will give an account of action, word, and mind. As such we must live differently realizing the consequence and greater responsibility of the liberty that we enjoy in Christ.

Swearing

Jesus explains that the Christian is to be a trustworthy person. The word of a saint should



CHRISTIAN SPEECH

just be without need for some type of oath or swearing to back it up. Answer the following questions concerning Matthew 5:33-37 on the lines provided.

What were the ancients told?

What is the command of Jesus?

What limitation of man makes this necessary according to verse 36?

The early Christians took their role as Christians very seriously and spent a great deal of time trying to teach others the way. Justin Martyr wrote his first apology to Emperor Antoninus Pius. The word “apology” means “a speech in one’s own defense”. Essentially he is defending the practices of Christians to the emperor. As we are well aware, when Christians acting in name only do things that are counter to serving Christ, it makes it more difficult for the rest of us. This is certainly true of speech. In Justin Martyr’s first apology he explains to the emperor about Christians who are so in name only.

“And with regard to our not swearing at all, and always speaking the truth, He enjoined as follows: “Swear not at all; but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”...And as to those who are not living pursuant to these His teachings, and are Christians only in name, we demand that all such be punished by you.”

(ANF 1.168)

Justin Martyr tells the emperor that the saints demand that the emperor punish those that are not speaking as Christians though they claim the name. He speaks hyperbolically to drive home the point that the saints do not agree with the behavior of these posers and



CHRISTIAN SPEECH

hope that they get what they deserve and do not harm the name of Christ with the emperor and other rulers. As people who took wearing the name seriously, they had little patience or use for some that chose to flippantly wear the name of Christ and yet continue to live in sin by doing as the rest of the world or speaking as the rest of the world.

On Proper Use of the Tongue

Jesus commanded that the disciples “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” at Matthew 28:19. This command was taken very seriously by the New Testament Christians and it was taken seriously by the early Christians also. The fact that we have these extensive writings to pour through are a lasting testament to their desire to teach the word. The fact that Justin Martyr took the opportunity and chance to defend the faith to the emperor as Paul had done a century before is amazing.

Origen explains that it is imperative that a person be able to back up the things they teach from the word. They should be able to give a defense for their teachings.

“...nay, also of him who said, “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh of you a reason of the faith that is in you.” If he wishes to have it conceded, however, that it is not a fiction, let him show with what object this supernatural power made him, through some arrangement of the divinity, flee from the ark.”

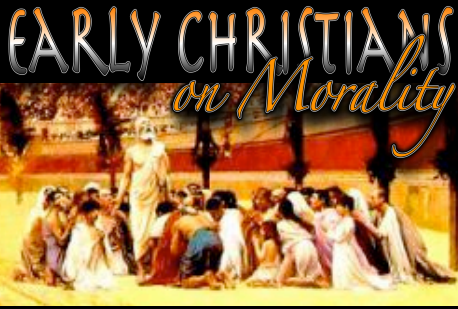
(ANF 4.477)

Origen writes this in response to a foolish argument made from Grecian myth by Celsus. Origen is wise in saying that he has offered proof of all that he says, but that Celsus was not able to give a defense of his position. We should always value the ability to defend.

Origen also explained to Celsus that the Christian should be able to use their tongue to teach at the level the person is ready to hear. They considered the hearers when teaching them and we would be wise to do the same.

“...we put the gospel before each one, as his character and disposition may fit him to receive it, inasmuch as we have learned to know “how we ought to answer every man.”

(ANF 4.577)



ENTERTAINMENT

IN PREPARATION

Read Deuteronomy 6.

What was the Jewish household to focus their children on as they were raised?

What blessing would they receive if they were trained this way?

What do you think is the focus of most households if judged by time spent?

Where do you think the focus is in your household?

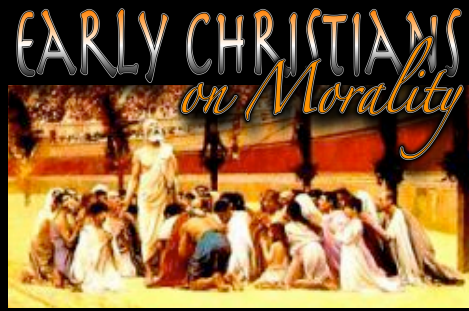
Job's Eyes

Job was assailed by his friends rather than comforted by them. Job could not think of anything that he had done that would cause the Lord to bring upon him all the suffering that he was undergoing. His friends, however, had a different opinion. They were sure that this had all happened to Job because of some sin in his life. Over and over the friends speak against Job and refuse to accept that he had done nothing to cause this. As Job enumerates the way that he has worked to see to it that he had not sinned, he makes the statement we find in Job 31:1.

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?"

Before Job was tempted, he made an agreement within himself that he was going to protect what his eyes viewed. He is essentially telling his friends that he had even put protections in place to keep from falling victim to sin. He would not even look upon it. While we may think of Job's time as an innocent time when there was nothing to look at, he makes it clear that this was not the case. There were things that were there to tempt him to do wrong just as is the case today.

We live in a time when there are numerous things upon which we can lay our eyes that will lead us into sin. It is probably easier today than it has ever been with the advent of television, print, and internet. Wickedness can be pumped right into our homes to gaze upon if we so desire. Many times people excuse this by saying that it does not matter what we look at. God is concerned with action and words, etc. However, this is not how Job felt. He made a covenant with his eyes that he would not gaze lustfully at things of this world. Neither did the early Christians feel that what we look at does not matter.



ENTERTAINMENT

Nothing New Under The Sun

“That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.”

Ecclesiastes 1:9

As we navigate the technological world in which we live, it is easy to feel like all this stuff around us is new. While it is true that the delivery method may change and new ways be invented, the reality of what the preacher records is valid. There is nothing new. The same wickedness that is available today for us to view was available and prevalent during the times of the early Christians. The early Christians recognized that the gladiatorial games and the theater were corrupting influences that the Christian needed to avoid. Consider the words of Lactantius with regard to theater:

“...I am inclined to think that the corrupting influence of the stage is still more contaminating. For the subject of comedies are the dishonouring of virgins, or the loves of harlots....In like manner, the stories of the tragedicians place before the eyes the parricides and incests of wicked kings, and represent tragic crimes...Why should I speak of the actors of mimes, who hold forth instruction in corrupting influences, who teach adulteries while they feign them, and by pretended actions train to those which are true? What can young men or virgins do, when they see that these things are practised without shame, and willingly beheld by all? They are plainly admonished of what they can do, and are inflamed with lust...”

(ANF 7.187)

We find similar writings in a number of the early Christians. They had a real problem with going to the theater or the arena and watching what is wicked to do. As the previous quote ends, the children that are taken to such things will likely try to mimic them. The Lord makes clear at Deuteronomy 6 that children must be trained otherwise. Answer the following questions from Deuteronomy 6:1-8 on the lines provided.

How should I teach my children according to vs 7? _____

How focused on the word should my house be? _____



ENTERTAINMENT

Garbage In, Garbage Out

Unfortunately we live in a time when many Christians are convinced that there is a disconnect between what goes into their minds and thus comes out of their hearts. Our Bible makes clear that if we put garbage into our eyes and ears, then that is exactly what is going to come out of the heart of the person. Answer the following questions from Matthew 15:17-20 on the lines provided.

What happens to the food going into the mouth? _____

What is it that defiles a man? _____

What evil can come from the heart?

The Jews had a misunderstanding according to verse 20. They thought that a person was defiled by whether their hands were clean or not, but they were completely disinterested with the heart. Jesus is trying to get them to understand that if they continue to allow their heart to spew evil thoughts, murders, adulteries and so forth, then they are truly defiled. The early Christians agreed and pinpointed focusing on wicked things as the reason the heart gets corrupted. Consider the words of Tertullian.

“...the father who carefully protects and guards his virgin daughter’s ears from every polluting word, takes her to the theater himself, exposing her to all its vile words and attitudes; he, again, who in the streets.”

(ANF 3.88)

Tertullian comments on the foolishness of the aforementioned contradictory behavior in this manner.

“Why, in the same way, is it right to look on what it is disgraceful to do? How is it that the things which defile a man in going out of the mouth, are not regarded as doing so when they go in at his eyes and ears?”

(ANF 3.86)



ENTERTAINMENT

They abhorred what took place at the theater and arena. They realized that there is no disconnect between the heart and the eyes and ears, rather there is a direct conduit between the two! This would seemingly be in agreement with the admonition of Paul.

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”

(Philippians 4:8)

The Violent and Immoral Cities

We tend to make a separation between viewing shows that are sexually immoral and shows that glorify violence. However, the early Christians did not do it. Just like they believed that viewing things that were sexually immoral would lead to sexual immorality so did they believe that viewing violence would lead to violence. They saw it happen before their eyes as people cried out mercilessly for the gladiator to “finish” the fallen. They preached abstinence from all these forms of “entertainment”. Actually, Cyprian was saddened by what he saw taking place in the cities of the people.

“And now, if you turn your eyes and your regards to the cities themselves, you will behold a concourse more fraught with sadness than any solitude. The gladiatorial games are prepared, that blood may gladden the lust of cruel eyes.”

(ANF 5.277)

Jesus felt the same way when he looked upon Jerusalem. According to Luke 13:34 he was saddened over the fact that they continued in their wicked path and would not come to Jesus for safety and redemption. Luke writes of Jesus “When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it” at Luke 19:41. It is a sad thing to look at such a large grouping of people and see wickedness predominate. The early Christians were likewise saddened by what they saw in the cities.

The early Christians were no doubt looked upon strangely for abstaining from the theater and the arena. It was not what people of that day did. In like manner we may be looked upon as strange as we abstain from the public spectacles of our day that corrupt in the same manner. Yet the saint must remember that if we are to be successful, we must make a covenant with our eyes and ears to protect our heart.



MODESTY

IN PREPARATION

Read 1 Timothy 2.

What does Paul want the women to do according to verse 9 of our text?

How is a woman to adorn herself as a Christian? (vs 10)

What does Paul urge all the men to do in verse 8 and what does this mean?

According to verse 4, why should the saints be modest?

Our Goal

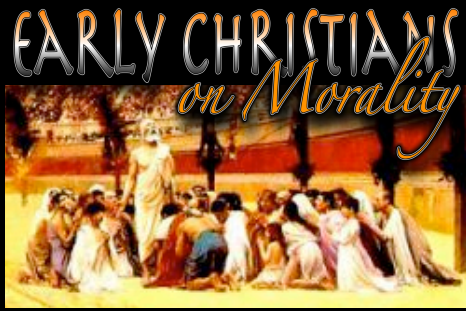
1 Timothy 2 is often used to demonstrate the need to dress modestly and with good reason as Paul indeed addresses this subject in the chapter. However, it is apparent that many times we miss the point to the chapter and see it as sections that are unrelated. Paul ties the whole chapter up with the bow of our goal as Christians, winning others.

Paul begins the chapter by admonishing the saints to offer prayers on behalf of the rulers so that the saints may lead a quiet and tranquil life. This is not just so saints can have it easy, but so that they can most easily teach others the gospel according to verse 4. Notice then the “therefore” at verse 8. The reason why men need to have holy hands and women need to dress modestly is so that they can take advantage of the peace and tranquility as they win souls to Christ! We learn from this chapter that modest dress can affect our ability to teach others. If we dress as the world we will have a hard time convincing the world to live differently. Thus modesty can be the difference between a soul won and a soul lost!

Just as our New Testament writers took the issue seriously, so did the early Christians.

The Purpose of Clothing

In one simple word, covering. God intended for mankind to be covered after the fall in the garden. Genesis 3 records this for us. Adam and Eve were originally naked and were not ashamed. The serpent deceived Eve who in turn gave to her husband to eat of the tree also. Upon doing so their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked and ashamed of it. Answer the following questions from Genesis 3 on the lines provided.



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What did Adam and Eve do to remedy their initial shame?

Did God find this to be a permanent solution? What did He do before expelling them?

The early Christians believed very literally that clothing was solely for covering. Protection from the elements. Consider the words of Clement of Alexandria.

“I say, then, that man requires clothes for nothing else than the covering of the body, for defence against excess of cold and intensity of heat, lest the inclemency of the air injure us. And if this is the object of clothing, see that one kind be not assigned to men and another to women. For it is common to both to be covered, as it is to eat and drink. The necessity, then, being common, we judge that the provision ought to be similar.”

(ANF 2.264)

Thus Clement demonstrated his belief that clothing was not for the purpose of drawing attention. It was to cover and protect the body. He believed this to the extent that he saw no purpose in there being a real difference between the clothing of man and woman. In a world of tunics, Clement is saying that clothing should be basic, light colored, and for covering the male and female form.

Thus we learn that the Lord considers some clothing to be a covering and other clothing to not be. The early Christians recognized this distinction. Consider the words of Clement of Alexandria with regard to silken, tight-clinging clothing.

“For luxurious clothing, falling close to the body, takes its form more easily, and adhering as it were to the flesh, receives its shape, and marks out the woman’s figure, so that the whole make of the body is visible to spectators, though not seeing the body itself.”

(ANF 2.265)

He comments further about extravagant clothing also. We tend to just talk about revealing



MODESTY

clothing, but it is important to note that in the context of 1 Timothy 2 Paul is dealing primarily with dressing for show and being overly concerned with the exterior to the neglect of the interior.

“Such clothing is for looking at, not for covering. ...Accordingly, deriding those who are clothed in luxurious garments, He says in the Gospel: “Lo, they who live in gorgeous apparel and luxury are in earthly palaces.” He says in perishable palaces, where are love of display, love of popularity, and flattery and deceit. But those that wait at the court of heaven around the King of all, are sanctified in the immortal vesture of the Spirit, that is, the flesh, and so put on incorruptibility.”

(ANF 2.265)

The early Christians avoided clothing that did not cover the body and that drew attention to the body. While Clement goes beyond the Lord’s application of His words, His point is well taken. Why should the saints of his day dress like the Gentiles who were all about flattery and materialism? We would do well to adopt a similar attitude.

“If they stumble, that is their problem!”

It is common for people to object to restraint in clothing with the statement, “If they stumble, then that is their problem, not mine!” However, this is definitely not what God’s word teaches. Jesus makes clear at Matthew 18:5-6 that it is indeed possible to be the cause of another person’s stumbling and that it will bring judgment upon the offending party.

What does Jesus say is a lesser punishment for the offender at Matthew 18:6?

If we go on to 1 Corinthians 8, we can read further about Paul’s admonition to protect others from stumbling.

What does Paul say at verse 13 that he would give up for his brother? _____



MODESTY

Why? Was there anything wrong with partaking of it?

We realize then that the Christian should be very concerned about their influence over others and about enticing others to sin. We would not try to prod someone to pick up a gun and murder someone. We would not try to prod someone into stealing from someone. Yet we often have no problem prodding someone into lust, adultery, fornication, etc. through our dress! Why is this any different? It is not and the early Christians realized this. Consider once more the word of Clement of Alexandria.

“But by no manner of means are women to be allowed to uncover and exhibit any part of their person, lest both fall, – the men by being excited to look, they by drawing on themselves the eyes of the men.”

(ANF 2.246)

Clement recognized wisely that immodest dress is the cause of lust. He speaks here of women, but deals with the dress of men extensively also. It is clear that they realized the danger of not being covered. It is a matter of life or death, of losing one’s soul! Clement even mentions at ANF 2.266 that *“neither is it seemly for the clothes to be above the knee.”* While we recognize that this is not a scriptural prohibition, it is interesting that they understood some of the same conventions as do we about appropriate length and such.

Protecting Our Young

It is increasingly common for young folks to dress in ways that are plainly inappropriate and it be accepted by society. We must always remember that society does not want for our children what we do. Society wants to consume them in the worldliness and wickedness in which they are caught. May we keep in mind that some clothing is just inappropriate for a Christian or any respectable person for that matter. Some clothing is plainly the mark of the wicked, not the saint. Consider in closing these words of Terullian.

“First, then, blessed sisters, take heed that you admit not to your use meretricious and prostitutionary garbs and garments...”

(ANF 4.22)



MARRIAGE

IN PREPARATION

Read Ephesians 5.

How do you think verse 15 applies to the marriage discussion beginning at verse 22?

What are the roles of husband and wife as Paul describes?

How is the husband to treat his wife? What example does he have of this?

What is the mystery that Paul is revealing to the Ephesians?

An Ancient Institution

Marriage was created by God in the beginning. Genesis records that He made Adam and then decided that it was not good for him to be alone so he made a companion, Eve, for him. The Bible demonstrates that this beautiful institution is the most ancient and is designed and regulated by God. The original words of God on the matter are as follows:

“The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

(Genesis 2:23-24)

Eve was special for Adam. The Lord brought all the animals before Adam to be named, but also to demonstrate to him that there was no helper suitable for him among them. God was going to make someone just for Adam. It is in this beautiful context that the basic unit for humanity was born, the family.

A Government Institution?

When we think of marriage today, we largely think of it as something that is originally designed by God, but maintained today by the government. People of the world have gone so far today to think that they can redefine what marriage is and is not. This is not the Bible idea, nor is it the way the early Christians saw it.

The early Christians saw marriage as something that was special in the eyes of God and was often the difference between an individual going to Heaven or Hell. A bad marriage could destroy a good person. As such, early Christians sought



MARRIAGE

the approval and advice of the shepherds. Consider the words of Ignatius.

“Speak to my sisters, that they love the Lord and be satisfied with their husbands, both in the flesh and in the spirit. In like manner also, exhort my brothers, in the name of Jesus Christ, that they love their wives, even as the Lord loves the church... It becomes both men and women who marry to form their union with the approval of the bishop, that their marriage may be according to God, and not after their own lust.”

(ANF 1.100)

Can you imagine? Ignatius advises that the church should be consulted about who to marry! He does not give this as law, but explains that it is becoming of the unwed who wish to marry to speak with the shepherds about their intentions. Thus the church and spirituality were to be of prime concern rather than the lust of the flesh. This truly makes perfect sense. Paul commands Timothy and Titus to appoint men as shepherds who are good husbands that only have eyes for their wife and have raised children who are faithful. The shepherd is to be a man who is accomplished in the raising and leading of a family. Why then would one not go to these men seeking counsel about who to marry? If it indeed is God’s institution and not man’s institution in our eyes, we should value the men that God has given us through His word to lead us. It would seem that if more young people would seek this counsel and then take it when it is given there would likely be less divorce and crumbling households in the Lord’s church.

What does Peter say the role of a shepherd is at I Peter 5:2?

What does Peter say the young men were to do at vs. 5? Can this be applied to women?

Marriage To Unbelievers

In modern times we have largely taken a stance of “it is none of the church’s business” when it comes to who a person marries. Thus when a young person decides to marry an



MARRIAGE

unbeliever it is seen as meddling for the shepherds or any of the saints to advise against doing so. However, this was not the case in the days of the New Testament. This was an issue that saints were concerned about. Answer the following questions from I Corinthians 7 on the lines provided.

What does Paul say with regard to someone who is converted, but their husband remains an unbeliever at verses 12-15?

What should a Christian remember according to verse 16?

What command is given to the widow at verse 39?

It is apparent that the early church was having to deal with this issue extensively. Many were being converted from the Gentile world, but their spouse may not come along with them. While many times in the book of Acts the whole family was converted, that did not happen all or even much of the time. The early Christians had serious problems with someone who willingly chose to enter into such a relationship. Tertullian did not see I Corinthians 7 as an okay to marry unbelievers, but rather how to deal with it if only one spouse is converted.

“It may be that, by interpreting this admonition regarding married believers too broadly, they think that permission is thereby granted to marry even unbelievers. God forbid! ... Rather, it is clear that this Scripture points to those believers who may have been found by the grace of God already in a Gentile marriage.”

(ANF 4.44-45)

Tertullian recognized that this marriage of a Christian to an unbeliever was the source of



MARRIAGE

great problems.

“Each and every believing woman must of necessity obey God. How can she serve two lords – the Lord, and her husband (a Gentile, to boot)? For in obeying a Gentile, she will carry out Gentile practices: personal attractiveness, dressing of the head, worldly elegancies, more sordid brandishments, and the very secrets of matrimony tainted.”

(ANF 4.46)

Most stopped short of calling it sin, but all seemed to recognize that it was dangerous and unwise. May we place the importance on God’s word, the church, and the advice of the shepherds as did these brethren. Marriage is a life-altering institution. May we wisely make it an alteration for the better!

Divorce

God’s original intent was for man and woman to come together and be that way for life. It did not take long for man to start tainting that ideal. By the time of Moses the people were so hard-hearted that God allowed them to divorce for a time though that was not his intention for the union. (Matthew 19)

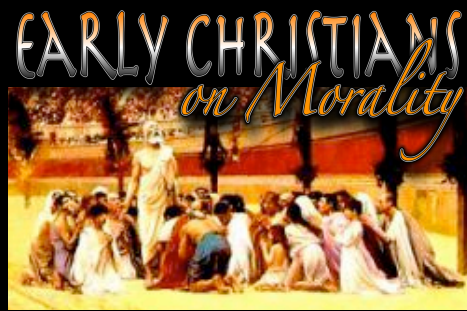
What is God’s marriage law according to Matthew 19:9? Matthew 5:32?

The early Christians agreed. Marriage was to be one man, one woman, for life. The only lawful cause for divorce was in the case of adultery. Consider the following quote from Justin Martyr’s first apology.

“Concerning chastity, He uttered such sentiments as these: “Whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart before God.” ... And, “Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced from another husband, committeth adultery.” ... So that all who, by human law, are twice married, are in the eye of our Master sinners, and those who look upon a woman to lust after her. For not only he who in act commits adultery is rejected by Him, but also he who desires to commit adultery...”

(ANF 1.167)

This position was held by the church steadfastly for centuries and is Biblical.



SEXUAL PERVERSION

IN PREPARATION

Read I Corinthians 6.

What kind of people had some or most of the Corinthians been prior to conversion?

What changed these people into a different kind of person?

What does Paul say happens when we join ourselves wickedly to another?

Who does the immoral man sin against?

Undefined

“Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

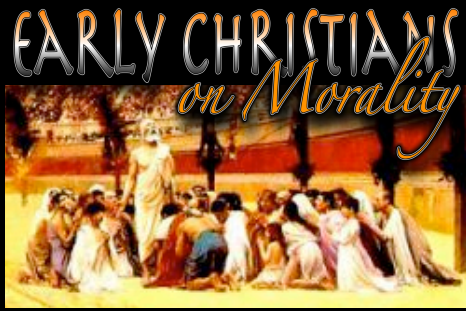
(Hebrews 13:4)

The Hebrew writer explains that marriage is an honorable institution. The Lord established it in the beginning as the way a family is begun and the only place where sex may take place. Thus we have the warning. It is marriage between a man and woman as defined in Genesis 1-2 and Matthew 19 that is honorable. All else is not honorable and a perversion of what the Lord intended and allows. The message is clear, judgment will take place upon those that pervert God’s law with regard to relationships and sex.

What exactly is the Lord forbidding in this passage? We begin with the word “adultery”. This word simply refers to someone that breaks the vow of marriage through sex with someone other than their spouse. As Jesus explains at Matthew 19, God intended for man and woman to come together and not be separated, They are committed for the remainder of their lives. Adultery is when this commitment is violated by one or both of the parties. Answer the following questions on the line provided.

What rule does Jesus make for remarriage at Matthew 19:9?

What is the apostle’s reaction to this rule?



SEXUAL PERVERSION

The second word we consider in the passage in Hebrews is translated “fornicators”. This comes from the Greek word “ *pornos*” which is defined as an “immoral person”. It comes from another Greek word “*pernemi*” which means “to sell”. The idea being that the immoral one is akin to the prostitutes of the day that had given themselves over to illicit sexual sins. It is actually related to the word “*piprasko*” which refers to trafficking or selling one into slavery. Indeed the analogy is good as the fornicator has indeed sold themselves over into the slavery of Satan. When fornication is used in conjunction with adultery as in this passage it represents the idea of sexual sin outside of marriage. That is, adultery is when a marriage is violated and fornication is when sexual sin occurs that is not in violation of a marriage.

The Bible is clear that marriage between a man and woman is the only place that sex may occur. Anything beyond this is perversion of the Lord’s command with regard to sex. The early Christians lived in a time, as do we, that is full of the perversion of God’s command on the subject of sex and marriage. Being a part of such a world, the early Christians wrote a great deal about the sins that they were facing in which the Romans indulged.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality is a sexual perversion that has been in existence since close to the beginning of humanity. We first read about this problem first in conjunction with Lot at Sodom. Lot was the nephew of Abraham. He had decided to set up his family near Sodom after he and Abraham realized that the shared land could not sustain their vast herds. This was a huge mistake in the life of Lot.

What does God say about the men of Sodom at Genesis 13:13?

What does Genesis 19:5 say of these wicked men at Sodom?



SEXUAL PERVERSION

What did God do to Sodom in Genesis 19? _____

One thing is clear, God did not approve of the activities of these wicked men! The Bible takes this same stance throughout, even into the New Testament.

What does Paul say about homosexuals at I Corinthians 6:9? _____

What does Paul say about homosexuals at I Timothy 1:10? _____

While some today may try to teach that scripture somehow condones this behavior, it absolutely does not! The early Christians understood this and stood against it. Standing against this behavior was difficult to do in a society that so openly advocated it. Aristides explains his view of homosexuality in the following quote.

“Some polluted themselves by lying with males.”

(ANF 9.269)

It was seen in the same way as in our Bible. It is a pollution of the individual. A sin against one's own self. Notice how Athenagoras felt about homosexuality.

“They do not abstain even from males, males with males committing shocking abominations, outraging all the noblest and comeliest bodies in all sorts of ways.”

(ANF 2.143)

Clement of Alexandria was outraged by what he witnessed.

“Men play the part of women, and women that of men, contrary to nature. Women are at once both wives and husbands...O miserable spectacle! Horrible conduct!”

(ANF 2.276)

“The whole earth has now become full of fornication and wickedness. I admire the ancient legislators of the Romans. These men detested effeminacy of conduct. The giving of the body to feminine purposes, contrary to the law of nature, they judged worthy of the most extreme penalty.”

(ANF 2.277)



SEXUAL PERVERSION

Incest

The Lord carefully defined incestuous relationships at Leviticus 18. This is an abomination in his sight as is evident by the effort in defining and condemning it.

The apostle Paul dealt with a situation of this at I Corinthians 5. There was a man there that was being tolerated by the church that had his father's wife. Whether this woman was his mother or not is somewhat up for debate. However, it would seem that she was his mother as Paul is shocked by the wickedness, saying that it is a sin not named even among the Gentiles. It was certainly something that occurred amongst the Gentiles, but was not something that was acceptable. Aristides mentions this sin. Notice how he lumps it in with homosexuality.

“The Greeks, O King, follow debased practices in intercourse with males, or with mothers, sisters, and daughters. Yet, they, in turn, impute their monstrous impurity to the Christians.”

(ANF 9.279)

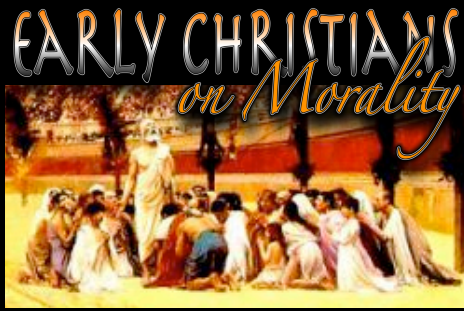
Paederasty

The Greeks had an intricate system of men violating boys. It was something that was common. The man would take the boy under his wing as far as training and helping him get established in society through the man's connections. As such, this abomination was viewed as normal, even desirable in many circles. This system carried on into Roman culture and became quite a problem that the early Christians had to deal with. It is eerie to read the quotations and see how the early Christians saw it as an outcropping of homosexuality. While many today condemn those that warn that acceptance of homosexuality will lead to abominations such as paederasty, the early Christians saw the two for what they were, related.

“Paederasty is condemned by the barbarians. However, by the Romans it is honored with certain privileges. In fact, they try to collect herds of boys like grazing horses.”

(Tatian, ANF 2.77)

Clement of Alexandria says of it that *“they burned with insane love for boys.”* (ANF 2.282) It is important that we note something that the early saints were very clear about. Acceptance of sexual perversion leads to current abominations later be accepted as fine.



CHASTITY

IN PREPARATION

Read I Corinthians 7.

What does Paul say one of the main purposes of marriage is in verses 1-9?

What does Paul say his wish is? What does this mean?

Why does Paul say at verses 25-26 that it is better for a virgin to remain as she is?

What does he go on to say is a great advantage of being unmarried?

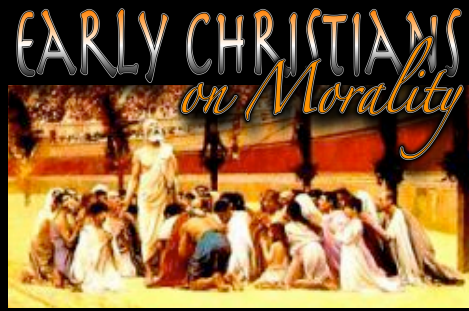
Sexual Perversion Continued

There is one area of perversion that we have yet to speak about. Premarital sex. We live in a time where the culture around no longer speaks about it like it is a big deal. According to a recent CDC report, nearly 75% of women age 30 and under report having lived with a man outside of marriage. Not only is it not a big deal, it is commonly being seen as the wise thing to do. Trying marriage out before jumping into it may seem like the wise thing to do to many, but it is contrary to not only God's word, but thousands of years of conventional wisdom! One would have to wonder why in light of the constantly increasing percentage of people that try living with someone before marriage that the divorce rate continues to increase also. If bad marriages are being avoided by living together, it would certainly seem that the divorce rate should be going the other direction!

While we may be dismayed at what we see happening to the concept of chastity, it is important that we realize that this is not a new problem. It was dealt with in Bible times and certainly by the early Christians also. The early Christians dealt extensively with abstinence outside of marriage and saw it as a greatly honorable thing.

A Modesty Issue

In the time that we live there is the foolish idea that the clothing and entertainment choices of young men and women has nothing to do with sexual activity. It is repeatedly denied by many in the world, however the scripture is clear that there is dress that is becoming of the saint and dress that is immodest and should be avoided by the saint as it presents an image of worldliness and worldly activities.



CHASTITY

Answer the following questions from I Peter 3:1-6.

What kind of behavior of the wife will be likely to win her husband without a word?

What adornment should this woman focus upon? What does this mean?

It would seem clear that the chaste woman is careful with how she adorns herself. It is not about trying to dress up the external. The woman of God focuses on the internal and dresses herself with a gentle and quiet spirit. Paul tells Timothy at I Timothy 2:9 that he wants women “to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly...”. It is evident that the New Testament writers understood that outward apparel can cause spiritual problems. The early Christians noted this also. They went as far as to say that women who were immodest had already surrendered their virginity! Consider the words of Cyprian.

“The Scriptures also warn us that the women who are accustomed to make an excuse for their dress by reference to their husbands should be restrained and limited by religious observance to the church’s discipline. Accordingly, how much more is it right that the virgin should keep that observance. For she has no excuse for adorning herself...Your shameful dress and immodest adornment accuse you. Nor can you be counted now among Christ’s maidens and virgins, since you live in such a manner as to make yourselves objects of desire.”

(ANF 5.432)

Of course, Cyprian goes too far in speaking of these women as less than virgins, but he does make a good point about modest dress. Why would a young man or woman who professes godliness want to dress and act like those of the world that do not profess godliness. It hurts the cause and inevitably leads to carrying out the actions of this world. We should wake up and realize that unchastity is as much related to immodest dress and entertainment as adultery is to lust or murder is to anger. (Matthew 5)



CHASTITY

Sowing Wild Oats?

Chastity is often something that is only thought of with relation to women. It is basically absurd in the minds of many to think about men being chaste. However, the early Christians knew of many chaste men, men who had decided to not marry as Paul speaks of in I Corinthians 7. These men were accomplishing their goal just fine. Consider Tertullian's words.

“So many male virgins—so many voluntary eunuchs—carry their glory in secret, carrying no token to make them, too, illustrious.”

(ANF 4.33)

“Some women (even though they are not barren) abstain from sexual relations. Some of these women have remained virgins from the beginning. Others have become celibate later in life. We also see men who remain as virgins.”

(Justin Martyr, ANF 1.295)

We certainly want to make very clear that the issue of chastity is one that applies to male and female. We are all called as saints to shun fornication and refrain from sinning against ourselves and our God! The early Christians did not relegate this to the realm of womanhood. All were expected to live up to this standard.

Inevitable?

Many today have the idea that “kids will be kids”. Being a kid means experimenting with sex and there is really nothing that can be done about it. This is just absolutely not the case. The scripture makes very clear that God expects us to keep the marriage bed undefiled, avoiding fornication. (Hebrews 13:4) The early Christians expected people to refrain and knew of many instances where that was the case even late into life. Consider the following words from Justin Martyr.

“Many who have been Christ's disciples from childhood—both men and women—remain pure at the age of sixty or seventy years.”

(ANF 1.167)

Fornication was not seen as an inevitability. It was something that could be avoided with a



CHASTITY

little self-control. Unchastity was not tolerated and should not be today either. Older women who were widowed and did not want to remarry would often do as Paul had mentioned and devote themselves to Christ. (1 Timothy 5:12)

The Virgin Order

We have a much more moderate view of being devoted to virginity today than there was in the early Christians. Paul spoke his words moderately in 1 Corinthians 7. While some were wanting to forbid the virgin to marry, Paul makes clear that it is something that the virgin has to decide. During that time of persecution it would be easier to be unentangled, however the best thing was to avoid burning. Therefore, he advised that remaining a virgin was best, but not to lose your soul over a failed attempt. In other words, go ahead and marry. Thus we see from Paul that being single is perfectly acceptable and even preferable in certain situations, but not mandatory.

The early Christians actually had an order of individuals, primarily women, that had devoted themselves to perpetual virginity. Tertullian says it was based on the Revelation picturing virgins with Jesus. (ANF 3.563, Revelation 14:4) As a result, some would decide at baptism that they would be of this virgin order. *Apostolic Confessions* says that it was not a requirement, but rather a choice.

“A virgin is not ordained, for we have no such commandment from the Lord. Rather, virginity is a state of voluntary discipline—not for the reproach of marriage, but to have more time for godly service.”

(ANF 7.493)

Of course, there was danger in this. Paul warned of men who would forbid marriage at 1 Timothy 4:3 and this is exactly what this type of attitude grew into. It went from simply being a choice that an individual could make to being a requirement for preachers and an office for men and women in the church. Paul’s words were simply that those that pledged themselves to virginity should be busy being servants of the church since their attention was not divided. It was never meant to be held in higher regard than marriage or to be some special church office. However, it is worth noting that the church, though sometimes misguided, did have a genuine regard for the virgin, as it should!



MARTYRDOM

IN PREPARATION

Read Acts 7.

What kind of man does chapter six describe Stephen as being?

After reading chapter seven, how would you describe his knowledge?

What did Stephen see when he gazed up and what do you think this meant?

What was Stephen's attitude toward his murderers?

Avoiding Pain

Much of our existence today centers around avoiding pain at most any cost. We have many technological advances that keep us from having to endure most anything. We do not have to walk anywhere any longer due to the many modes of transportation at our disposal. We have all types of appliances that greatly lessen the work that we would have had to do a couple generations before. All of this is not necessarily a bad thing, but these advances have detached us from the pain of life in Bible times.

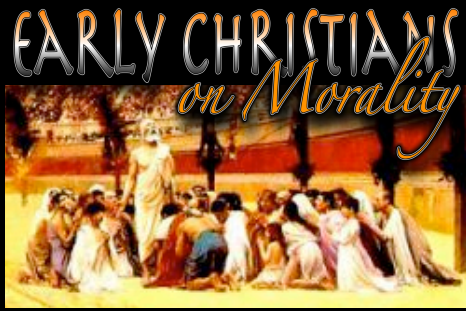
The Christians in our Bibles were going to have to undergo torture and persecution. The Lord nor his apostles ever promised that they would be exempt from these trials. Rather the Lord and the New Testament writers just focused on helping the saints get some perspective and endure what was inevitably going to come upon them.

How did Paul feel about persecution at II Corinthians 12:10?

How did Paul feel about the Thessalonians? Why? (II Thess 1:4)

What will happen to all the godly? (II Timothy 3:12)

How does Peter say saints should react to trials? (I Peter 4:12ff)



MARTYRDOM

No guarantee by itself.

One thing to note as we examine some quotations by these writers is that they often viewed the martyr as one who was guaranteed heaven. Consider this quote from “*Martyrdom of Polycarp*”.

“All the martyrdoms were blessed and noble, and they took place according to the will of God...The martyrs despised all the torments of this world, redeeming themselves from eternal punishment by [the suffering of] a single hour.”

(ANF 1.39)

They were very protective of the memory of their martyrs and with good reason. These men and women by and large were exceedingly dedicated to the Lord and motivated by love for Him. However, it is an overstatement made by these writers to the effect that being a martyr automatically saved the person. Paul explains at I Corinthians 13:3 that “if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.” He is clear that it is certainly possible to waste oneself in martyrdom if it is not motivated by love. Clement of Alexandria understood this.

“We call martyrdom perfection, not because the man comes to the end of his life as others, but because he has exhibited the perfect work of love.”

(ANF 2.411)

Proud to Serve Christ

The martyrs were held in high honor as being proof that the saints were serious. They could not be intimidated by the world in which they lived and it certainly was an intimidating place. It is not that dying for the name of Christ is out of the realm of possibility for us today, but it is very unlikely. That was not so for these men and women. They could be called to give their blood for Jesus at any time! Justin Martyr boldly proclaimed “*Though threatened with death, we do not deny His name.*” (ANF 1.209)

Going back to I Peter 4 we see this clearly. At verse 13 he explains that the saints should just keep on rejoicing in the face of the fiery ordeal. This is similar to James’ statement to consider it joy when we encounter various trials. The Bible and the early writers understood that suffering for the name of Jesus was indeed something to be proud of.



MARTYRDOM

Looking Forward to Death

The apostle Paul understood that death meant being with Jesus. He says at Philippians 1:23-24 that “I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.” Paul longed to leave this life and be with the Lord even though he knew good and well that his departure was not going to be a pleasant one!

The early Christians maintained this thinking and tradition. They not only were willing to suffer and die, they longed for it. Consider the following quotes.

“In love to the Lord, the spiritual man will most gladly depart from this life—perhaps giving thanks both to him who afforded the cause of his departure from here, and to him who laid the plot against him...With good courage, then, he goes to the Lord, his friend, for whom he voluntarily gave his body.”

(Clement of Alexandria, ANF 2.411)

“The church is full of those persons—chaste women as well as men—who all their life have contemplated the death that rouses up to Christ.”

(Clement of Alexandria, ANF 2.419)

This is an amazing thing to consider! They actually looked forward to being released from this life in the noble manner of martyrdom. Ignatius is recorded as pleading with his loved ones to not interfere with his death for Christ. Thus they were able to serve Christ not only in life, but in their death. It is hard to imagine thinking the same way today. However, these men and women showed their great devotion to the Lord and His word by being willing to sacrifice themselves on His behalf.

Blaming God?

One would have to imagine that these deaths would play out differently in the modern news. The story would be full of the interviewer and those related to the martyr asking “Why would a just, loving God allow this?” Bad things happening to good people is used as a reason today to not serve God and as a “proof” that there is no God. However, this is not how the early Christians reacted. The martyrs were actually used as proof that God does care for his people. Consider these words of Clement of Alexandria.



MARTYRDOM

“They say, “If God cares for you, why are you persecuted and put to death? Has He abandoned you to this? No, we do not suppose that the Lord wishes us to be involved in calamities...So that it was not that He wished us to be persecuted, but He indicated beforehand what we will suffer by His prediction of what would take place, training us to endurance.”

(ANF 2.423)

Thus Clement makes the case that the martyrs proved that Christ was exactly who He said He was. Firstly, these men and women believed enough in Jesus that they were willing to die for Him. Secondly, He prophesied that this is what would happen to His followers and it happened just as He said. Thirdly, these trials were how they gained approval in that time and thus the persecutions were actually a blessing lending to perfection.

Missing the Point

Sadly, as time progressed these martyrs began to be worshipped. Their remains were treated as holy relics and essentially worshipped. The church at Smyrna recognized the danger of worshipping martyrs as recorded in the “*Martyrdom of Polycarp*”.

With regard to retrieving Polycarp’s remains, “However, [Satan] is ignorant that it is neither possible for us ever to forsake Christ...nor to worship any other. For we worship Him indeed, as being the Son of God. However, as for the martyrs, as disciples and followers of the Lord, we worthily love them on account of their extraordinary affections towards their own King.”

(ANF 1.42-43)

Yet, in this same writing we find the good initial intentions that would lead to sin.

“Accordingly, we afterwards took up Polycarp’s bones, as being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold. We deposited them in a fitting place, where, being gathered together, as opportunity is allowed us, with joy and rejoicing, the Lord will permit us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom.”

(ANF 1.43)

These people who laid down their lives for Christ are to be honored. Yet, we worship God.



ABORTION

IN PREPARATION

Read Jeremiah 1.

What was the purpose the Lord had for the prophet Jeremiah according to verse 5?

How did Jeremiah react to this calling from the Lord?

What was the main objection that Jeremiah had to the Lord's will?

When did God consecrate Jeremiah and know him?

Legalized Murder

55,000,000. That is million! This is the approximate number of babies murdered through the process of abortion in the U.S. since 1973. It is a terrifying, disgusting thing to consider the legalized murder of so many innocents. Little babies that are helpless and know nothing being destroyed due to the selfishness of their fellow man.

The Lord tells us that we are supposed to help the helpless. At James 1:27 the writer says that pure and undefiled religion is to help widows and orphans in their time of need. Passage after passage tells us that we are to protect the innocent, rather than make an industry of destroying them. God has called for the protection of the child in the womb from Old Testament times. Answer the following questions from Exodus 21:22-25.

What was the penalty if no harm was done to the infant?

What was the penalty if there was harm done to the infant?

How would you describe the actions of these men that struck the woman? Accidental. Negligent. Malicious.

How then do you think the Lord would feel about this being done Maliciously?



ABORTION

Worshipping the Creature...

At Romans 1:25 Paul explains that the Gentiles had taken to worshipping the creature rather than the creator. They foolishly were worshipping things that were lower than them rather than worshipping the Almighty. It is not uncommon today to see people suffer huge penalties for harming an animal that is protected. For instance, a person can be fined up to \$500,000 and spend two years in jail for harming a bald eagle. However, the life of a human can be discarded at will. One does not even have to pay for it as tax payers are forced to pay for it through support of organizations that provide abortions. It is interesting to note that this quip was made by early Christians also. Consider Clement of Alexandria's words.

“Although keeping parrots and curlews, the [pagans] do not adopt the orphan child. Rather, they expose children who are born at home. Yet, they take up the young of birds. So they prefer irrational creatures to rational ones!”

(ANF 2.279)

Nothing New Under The Sun

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes recorded these words at Ecclesiastes 1:9. “That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.” We may have a tendency to think that the writers of our Bible and the early Christians were just quaint people that did not have to deal with the sophisticated problems that we deal with. This is just absolutely false. Abortion was around in exactly the same ways that it is today. Consider these quotes.

Early Christians on The Morning After Pill

“We say that those women who use drugs to bring on abortion commit murder. And we also say they will have to give an account to God for the abortion. So on what basis could we commit murder? For it does not belong to the same person to regard the very fetus in the womb as a created being (and therefore an object to God's care)—yet, when he has passed into life, to kill him.”

(Athenagoras, ANF 2.147)

“Are you to dissolve the conception by aid of drugs? I believe it is no more lawful to hurt a child in process of birth, than to hurt one who is already born.”

(Tertullian, ANF 4.57)



ABORTION

“There are some women who, by drinking medical preparations, extinguish the source of the future man in their very bowels. So they commit murder before they bring forth. And these things assuredly come down from the teachings of your gods.”

(Mark Minucius Felix, ANF 4.192)

Early Christians on Late Term Abortion

“You shall not kill the child by obtaining an abortion. Nor, again, shall you destroy him after he is born.”

(Barnabas, ANF 1.148)

“You shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill one who has been born.”

(Didache, ANF 1.377)

Sometimes people of this day would kill the child as soon as the child was born. Others who felt wrong about this would expose the child. This is just leaving the baby outside to be carried off by animals, die due to the elements, or sometimes to be carried away by wicked men and sold to be slaves or prostitutes. Lactantius speaks of this.

“Let no one imagine that to strangle newborn children is allowable. For this is the greatest impiety! God breathes into their souls for life, not for death. Men...deprive souls that are still innocent and simple, of the light that they themselves have not given....Or can those persons be considered innocent who expose their own offspring as prey for dogs? As far as their participation is concerned, they have killed them in a more cruel manner than if they had strangled them!...Therefore, if anyone is unable to bring up children because of poverty, it is better to abstain from marriage than to mar the work of God with wicked hands.”

(ANF 7.187)

Early Christians on Surgical Abortion

“Among surgeons’ tools there is a certain instrument that is formed with a nicely adjusted flexible frame for first of all opening the uterus and then keeping it open. It also has a circular blade, by means of which the limbs within the womb are dissected with careful, but unflinching care. Its last appendage is a blunted or covered hook, by which the entire fetus is extracted by a violent delivery. There is also a copper needle or spike, by which the actual death is brought



ABORTION

about in this treacherous robbery of life. From its infanticide function, they give it the name, “killer of the infant”—which infant, of course, had once been alive.”

(Tertullian, ANF 3.206)

Selfishness

Murder is a result of anger and selfishness. James identifies this at James 5.

What does James say is their problem in the first 5 verses?

As a result of this attitude, what had they done according to verse 6?

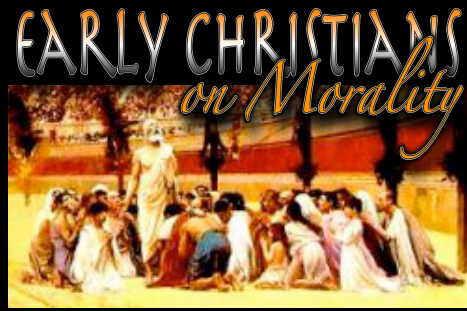
What was the cause of murdering at James 4:2?

Selfishness drives murder. Abortion is no different. It is a million selfish reasons that a person concocts to justify murder in their minds. The early Christians identified this as the source of it also. Consider these words of Hippolytus.

“Women who were reputed believers began to resort to drugs for producing sterility. They also girded themselves around, so as to expel what was being conceived. For they did not wish to have a child by either a slave or by any common fellow—out of concern for their family and their excessive wealth. See what a great impiety the lawless one has advanced! He teaches adultery and murder at the same time!”

(ANF 5.131)

May we always recognize the value of life. God commands it and demonstrates His value for mankind and the innocent. If we are to be His children and be godly, then we must have this same outlook on all life.



JUST WAR

IN PREPARATION

Read Isaiah 2.

Where does Isaiah say that the word would go forth from in the last days?

What do you think this passage is prophesying?

What will happen according to verse 4 with the nations at this point?

What do you think this references?

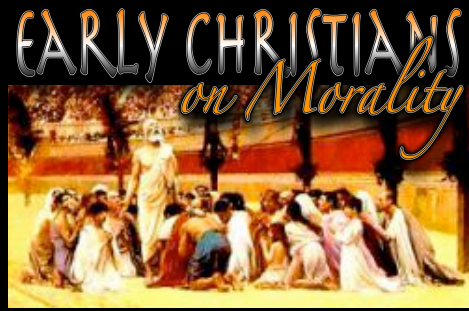
Warring Nations

The Revolutionary War. Franco-American War. First Barbary War. Tecumseh's War. War of 1812. Second Barbary War. First Seminole War. Black Hawk War. Second Seminole War. Mexican-American War. Third Seminole War. Navajo Wars. Paiute War. Civil War. Colorado War. Spanish-American War. Philippine-American War. Boxer Rebellion. Mexican Revolution. World War I. World War II. Cold War. Korean War. Vietnam War. Persian Gulf War. Somali War. Bosnian War. Afghanistan War. Iraqi War.

Those are just the highlights. There were a number of intermittent smaller wars against native Americans or brief occupations of small nations like Haiti. Out of the 237 years this country has been in existence, there has been war in 216 of those years. That means only 21 years had no war! Being that we are a part of a nation that tends to be at war, the question of how war impacts Christians and how we are to view it is an important topic. The time period of our New Testament and of the early Christians was filled with war also as Rome was continually expanding and gaining new territory. Thus the early Christians talked much about war and aggression in general. While we may not agree with everything they say, it is certainly profitable to consider how they looked at war and aggression.

Pacifists

By and large the early Christians were advocates of pacifism. That is, they did not believe in retaliation of any kind. Much of this thinking was based on Jesus' words in the sermon on the mount of Matthew 5:38-41. Answer the following questions about that text on the lines provided on the next page.



JUST WAR

What does Jesus say was said in old times?

How does Jesus say we should treat aggressors today?

How does Paul say we should regard vengeance at Romans 12:19-21?

What did Jesus tell Peter to do and why at Matthew 26:51-54?

Why did Peter have a sword to begin with? Reference?

The view of the early Christians by and large was that Jesus meant that we do not have a right to self-defense when He said we are to turn the other cheek. Rather than viewing it as a figurative lesson that is teaching us to do good to our enemies, it was seen as a literal statement requiring us to forfeit our lives to wicked men. Notice the words of Clement of Alexandria.

“Christians are not allowed to use violence to correct the delinquencies of sins.”

(ANF 2.581)

While it would not seem that the New Testament teaches pacifism, it is admirable to note how seriously the saints took the command not to seek their own vengeance. They valued life and the influence they had in the Kingdom above all else. We would do well to adopt a similar attitude in protecting our influence.



JUST WAR

Growing up to be president?

The early Christians abstained from politics completely. Paul told the Philippians that “our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”. These saints took their citizenship in Heaven very seriously. So much so that they rejected the notion of even participating in the politics of this life. Notice these words of Tertullian around 197 AD.

“In us, all ardor in the pursuit of glory and honor is dead. So we have no pressing inducements to take part in your public meetings. Nor is there anything more entirely foreign to us than affairs of state.”

(ANF 3.45)

These saints just had no use for the workings of the government. This was not their home and thus was not their concern. They left the people of this world to get together and decide in the meetings what would be done. Their involvement was limited to prayer.

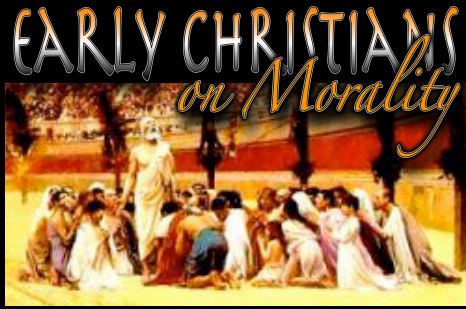
“We offer prayer for the safety of our rulers to the eternal, true and living God...We offer prayer without ceasing for all of our emperors. We pray for their prolonged lives and for security to the empire. We pray for protection of the imperial house, for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, and a world at peace.”

(Tertullian, ANF 3.42)

These prayers come from Paul’s commands to Timothy at I Timothy 2:2. Timothy is here commanded to pray for a quiet a tranquil life that will allow for effectively preaching the gospel to the lost. This was seen as the best involvement that the Christian could have, to pray for those in power to stay out of the way so the gospel could be easily shared. Our temptation today is to pray for our country and such because we want a quiet life just to have a quiet life. Paul’s words to Timothy were for the purpose of sharing the gospel. The early Christians wanted quiet and tranquility for this reason also. We must understand this and pray in similar fashion. The world is changed through teaching the gospel, not politics.

War, What is it good for?

The early Christians stood in opposition to war. It is important to note what kind of war they were generally talking about. It was not a war of defense to protect one’s homeland,



JUST WAR

rather it was the war of the Romans that were going throughout the earth building an ever-larger empire. This is not to say that they would have approved of a war of self-defense, but just that the war they dealt with was primarily empire-building war. Justin Martyr spoke strongly against such wars.

“We who formerly murdered one another now refrain from making war even upon our enemies.”

(ANF 1.176)

“We used to be filled with war, mutual slaughter, and every kind of wickedness. However, now all of us have, throughout the whole earth, changed our warlike weapons. We have changed swords into plowshares, and our spears into farming implements.”

(ANF 1.254)

Tertullian identifies well the problem with empire-building wars.

“Is the military laurel of triumph made of leaves, or of corpses? Is it adorned with ribbons, or with tombs? Is it wet with ointments, or with the tears of wives and mothers? It may be made of some dead Christians too. For Christ is also believed among the barbarians.”

(ANF 3.105)

Tertullian rightly asks how a Christian could take part in such wars. Wars where mothers lose children. Wars where inevitably some Christians even are killed. Wars were not seen as glorious events in the eyes of the Christians. They were hated and preached against.

Christian Soldiers?

We often wonder today whether it is right for Christians to be in the military. There are many aspects to this question, but is interesting to note that the early Christians did not believe it was right. They would allow a soldier to remain a soldier as long as he did not take oaths and did not harm anyone. These conditions made it hard to remain military.

“A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men and to refuse to do so if commanded, and to refuse to take an oath. If he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected for baptism. A military commander or civic magistrate who wears the purple must resign or be rejected. If an applicant or believer seeks to become a soldier, he must be rejected, for he has despised God.”

(Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition 16)



THE OCCULT

IN PREPARATION

Read Deuteronomy 18.

How did God feel about the things that were in the promised land? (vs 9)

What does God forbid the Israelites to do in verses 10-11?

How did God say He felt about one of the Israelites who got involved in such?

Why did God have the natives driven out of the land?

Popular Once More

There is certainly an ebb and flow to the occult. At some times in our history it has been very prevalent while at other times it has been rather hidden. During the dark ages the occult was rampant. It was actually rampant in the apostate church during this period of time. The time of the early Christians was filled with the occult and it seems to be ever increasing in popularity during our time.

Much of the spike in the occult can be attributed to media and the commercialization of the occult. Many movies and books are related to the occult. Hasbro even makes the Ouija board that has become connected with the occult as time has passed by. The increase also can be attributed to the modern pick your own religion movement. People today feel that they can just take parts of whatever spiritual things they want and conglomerate them into a personalized religion. This is often accomplished by grafting in some of the occult.

The people of the New Testament and the early Christians lived in a time of great pagan influence. The era of the Greeks had come to a close and the Romans had picked up where they left off. Even to the point of adopting and essentially renaming many of the Greek gods. Thus occultism and spiritism was something that the early Christians had to constantly face.

What were the Gentiles commanded to do at Acts 21:25?

What command does Paul give with regard to meat at I Corinthians 8?



THE OCCULT

What does Paul say on the subject at I Corinthians 10?

As is evident, the Corinthians were having quite a struggle with how to balance the pagan culture in which they lived with the fact that they had been washed and were no more like their people. It can certainly be a difficult prospect navigating the waters in this life as we strive to be in the world but not of the world. The early Christians took a hard stance against the spiritism that they encountered in their time.

The Stars

One type of occultism that was forbidden and mocked by the Lord is astrology. The idea that one can look at the stars and divine the future. Answer the following questions on the lines provided.

What is God saying of astrologers at Isaiah 47:13? Is He encouraging using them?

What does God identify as being a way of the Gentiles at Jeremiah 10:2?

Tatian said bluntly *“I am not willing to worship wandering stars!”* (ANF 2.68) Clement of Alexandria identifies the source of Astrology. *“The Egyptians were the first to introduce astrology among men. Similarly, the Chaldeans practiced it.”* (ANF 2.317) The belief in astrology was tied in with the belief of “fate”. Fate was the idea that external sources such as the stars determined what a person does and would happen to them. Origen denounces it.

“We are not forced by any necessity to act either rightly or wrongly—which those persons think is the case who say that the courses and movements of the stars are the cause of human actions.”

(ANF 4.240)



THE OCCULT

Fate

We use the word quite differently today. Fate to us just means that it seems sometimes that a person was unavoidably headed in a certain direction. However, to the ancients, it was something entirely different. It was a force. Basically a god that determined all a person does. It is really rather eery at how similar it is to the false teaching of predestination in Calvin's system. Methodius says the following:

"If fate causes men to injure one another and to be injured by one another, what need is there for laws?...To do good or evil is in our own power, and it is not decided by the stars."

(ANF 6.343)

"If God harmoniously orders the whole circular motion of the stars,...and if the stars produce the qualities of virtue and vice in human life,...then God is the cause and giver of evils. However, God is the cause of injury to no one. Therefore, fate is not the cause of all things."

(ANF 6.342)

Spiritism

The Bible speaks extensively about the dangers of sorcery, witchcraft, and spiritism. It was an abomination in Egypt. It was an abomination in the promised land. Sadly, it was not driven out of the land and people fell victim to it from time to time. Probably most famously was King Saul. In an effort to get Samuel to talk to him he spoke with the witch of Endor. Interestingly enough, being a fraud she was as surprised to see Samuel as Saul was! (I Samuel 28)

Answer the following questions on the lines provided.

What was Simon's profession in Acts 8? What had he been doing to the people?

Where will people such as Simon end up according to Revelation 21?



THE OCCULT

The early Christians dealt with people like Simon from time to time and spent a good deal of time warning Christians to stay away from such things. Some things were very serious and had to stop. Others were seen as smaller things that led to worse things and need to be stopped in infancy. Didache records warnings against omens and astrology.

“My child, do not be an observer of omens, for it leads the way to idolatry. Likewise, do not be an enchanter nor an astrologer.”

(ANF 7.378)

“Neither will I be silent respecting that piece of knavery of these sorcerers, which consists in divination by means of a cauldron.”

(Hippolytus, ANF 5.38)

Spiritism in the Church

It is interesting to note that while the early Christians stood against spiritism and the occult it slowly crept into the church itself. The mysticism of the pagans became a part of the apostate church, especially by the fourth century. This was likely due in large part to all the pagan people coming into the church but not being truly converted. They were lured in by the parties that the church was throwing and their bellies rather than their hearts were converted. (Bercot) As this grew and grew, so did the mysticism. We can actually identify some of the start of this in some of the early Christian quotes with regard to demons. They thought that men like Simon really had some power lent him by demons. The scripture however is clear that Simon realized that he did not have the real deal!

*“Sometimes the demons animate the fibers of the entrails, control the flights of birds, direct the lots, and are the cause of *oracles involved in many falsehoods.”*

(Mark Minucius Felix, ANF 4.190)

“As we have already suggested, there is hardly a human being who is unattended by a demon.”

(Tertullian, ANF 3.233)

With all the influence of the occult, it is easy to be carried away by it. The apostate church certainly was for a time. It began small and grew through time. May we avoid the occult!

*note: “oracles” were usually women in temples who were high on fumes from the earth that told the future



BENEVOLENCE

IN PREPARATION

Read Acts 4:36-5:11.

Who are we introduced to at the end of chapter four and why?

Where did he get his nickname and why do you think that is?

Who are we introduced to at the beginning of chapter five and why?

What happened to them and why did it happen?

The Money Box

Since the beginning of the church as the Lord was walking about with the money in the hands of Judas there has been issues surrounding the treasury of the church. Issues with how it is being collected. Issues with how it is being kept. Issues with how it is being spent. One thing, however, is certain, the Lord cares about how we give and how it is collected and how it is used.

Much of the problems in churches and the reasons for division and denominations comes down to how the money in the treasury is collected and used. God gives a plan for how money is to be collected and used by the church and the early Christians adhered to the plan. They were very careful with what they did with the funds that had been collected.

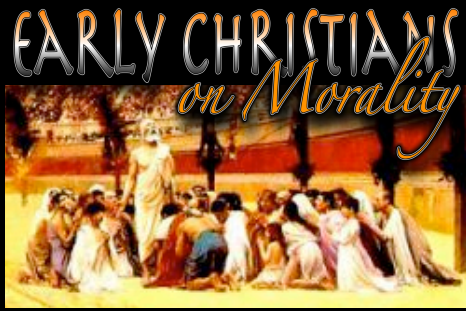
The Collection

It is common today for people to think that there was no weekly collection of the saints. However, our Bible and the writings of the early Christians tells a different story. Answer the following questions from I Corinthians 16.

When was the collection to be done? _____

Why was the collection to be done in this fashion?

What is to guide what a person gives according to verse 2?



BENEVOLENCE

While many think that this just means that each person collected money, it is evident that Paul was talking about putting the funds in the treasury. There was a purpose for this collection. It was to help the needy saints in Jerusalem. The early Christians certainly understood it as an ongoing collection. Justin Martyr records what they did.

“And on the day called Sunday...they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit.”
(ANF 1.186)

Thus the early Christians gave every first day of the week as they were able and willing. They understood I Corinthians 16 to refer to an ongoing collection. The collection was to fulfill the needs of the church and a church has ongoing needs to keep functioning. The early Christians saw giving as a very important thing. If one was unwilling to give, then he should not receive should the tables turn.

“Do not be ready to stretch forth your hands to receive, while you draw them back when it comes to giving...You shall not hesitate to give, nor murmur when you give. “Give to everyone who asks you.””

(Barnabas, ANF 1.148)

The Attitude

The scripture commands us to have a certain attitude when we are giving to someone in need or when we are giving money into the collection. Read I Corinthians 16:1-2 and then II Corinthians 9:7 and identify on the provided lines what that attitude and method is.

The early Christians made clear that the giving of alms was very important and it was important that it be done in a proper manner. Origen explains the problem of poor attitude.

“If we give alms to men with the thought of appearing charitable before men, and if we desire to be honored because of our generosity, we receive only the reward from men. In fact, universally, everything that is done by someone who is conscious that he will be glorified by men has no reward from Him who beholds in secret. For He renders the reward in secret to those who are pure.”

(ANF 9.444)



BENEVOLENCE

Distribution

It was also very important that the funds be distributed properly. It could not just be given to anyone that asked. There were rules by which the church abided in the distribution of these funds. Consider the following passages and answer the questions.

Acts 2 records that much money was laid at the apostles feet, but Peter told the lame man in Acts 3 that he had no money with which to help him. Why not?

The widow indeed of I Timothy 5 must meet certain criteria. What is that criteria? What would happen if she did not meet that criteria?

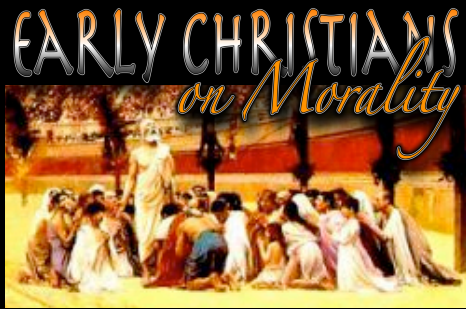
Just as we can see from our New Testament that there were rules placed on the distribution of funds, we see that this was the case in the days of the early Christians also. Let's look at some varied readings and identify the rules by which the early Christians distributed funds.

It was for needy saints, widows and orphans. Justin Martyr makes clear that they distributed the funds to the ones of their number who needed help.

“And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.”

(ANF I.186)

It was on an as-needed basis. Many today favor distributing funds by equal amounts to all. This was not the case in the early church. These brethren considered the needs of the individual and gave to them accordingly. They also made it clear that if the person was not truly in need and took funds anyway, that they would be held accountable for this. The



BENEVOLENCE

early Christians also refused to help people that were in a bad financial condition because they mismanaged what they received. In other words, giving money to needy saints and saints taking money was viewed as very serious business. Consider the following quotes.

“It is right to supply need, but it is not well to support laziness.”

(Clement of Alexandria, ANF 2.301)

“If anyone is in need because of gluttony, drunkenness, or idleness, he does not deserve any assistance.”

(Apostolic Constitutions, ANF 7.397)

“He that...receives in hypocrisy or through idleness—instead of working and assisting others—shall be deserving of punishment before God. For he has snatched away the morsel of the needy.”

(Apostolic Constitutions, ANF 7.433)

Clement of Alexandria makes clear that the churches considered it important that they be careful in distributing funds. They were not just to be given to anyone without concern for need. Consider this quote:

“Alms are to be given, but to the deserving, using judgment. That way, we may obtain a reward from the Most High. But woe to those who have enough, but who receive alms under false pretenses. Woe to those who are able to help themselves, yet want to take from others. For he who takes...out of laziness shall be condemned.”

(ANF 2.578)

The Didache offers the following advice:

“Let your alms sweat in your hands, until you know to whom you should give them.”

(ANF 7.377)

Money was something that could be hard to come by. The brethren had great desire to help those in need and fund the work of the evangelists, but they did not want that desire to overshadow prudence. They were careful with the funds that could be so scarce. Certainly the New Testament agrees and we should do likewise.



AVARICE

IN PREPARATION

Read Acts 5.

What do you think was the motivation for Ananias and Sapphira to act as they did?

What happened to this couple due to their actions?

What do you think this illustrates about God's feelings toward greed?

What reaction did this bring out in the church?

What is avarice?

The modern word that we would normally use would be greed. Really the idea of avarice is that of extreme greed by definition. However, when we are guilty of greed, any greed, it is extreme for we are worshipping something other than the Creator. Paul explains about greed or covetousness at Colossians 3:5.

“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”

Thus we quickly realize our problem today. We live in such a wealthy country. Even our poor would by and large be considered wealthy by most in other poorer parts of the world. Our definition of need is far broader than it has ever been. We need food. We need clothing. We need a phone. We need electricity. We need running water. We need transportation. On and on it goes. As time passes even our government now has defined things like internet and health insurance as basic human rights. As needs. It is safe to assume that the men and women of Bible times and the early Christians would think we are mad. They were having to trust in God from day to day that there would be food on their tables, but we in most circumstances do not even know what it is to be truly hungry.

What does Paul say we should do at Colossians 3:5?

What tends to be the motivation of false teachers according to II Peter 2:3 and what will happen to them?



AVARICE

Who did Jesus encounter at Matthew 19:16-22? _____

What was his initial inquiry? _____

What did Jesus tell him to do? _____

What was the outcome? _____

Our New Testament makes clear that avarice is something for which we will be condemned. Jesus taught against it as did the apostles. The generosity that came from people learning the truth of the gospel certainly lent itself to those that would come due to avarice and try to take of the brethren's generosity. The early Christians recognized this and taught against it.

Pierced With Many Grievs

Paul told Timothy at 1 Timothy 6:10 that "the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." The command to be free from the love of money is a sound command. Paul explains that the main one we hurt when we are given over to avarice is ourselves. We pierce ourselves! The early Christians concurred. Consider the following quotes.

"Foremost of all evil desires is the desire after another's wife or husband. There is also the desire after extravagance, many useless dainties and drink, and many other foolish luxuries. For all luxury is foolish and empty to the servants of God. These, then, are the evil desires that slay the servants of God."

(Hermas, ANF 2.28)

"Wealth, when not properly governed, is a stronghold of evil. Many, because of casting their eyes on it, will never reach the kingdom of heaven. For they are sick for the things of the world, and are living proudly through luxury...Love of money is found to be the stronghold of evil, which the apostle says "is the root of all evils."...But the best riches is poverty of desires. And the true magnanimity is not to be proud of wealth, but to despise it."

(Clement of Alexandria, ANF 2.248)



AVARICE

Liberation

The early Christians acknowledged that people become slaves to avarice. Slaves to wealth. We can certainly see that in our culture today. People that must have all their heart's desires right now. They then are in debt up to their ears and as such have become slaves.

“The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender’s slave.”

(Proverbs 22:7)

The early Christians explained this as being poor. They did not see lack of earthly wealth as being poor. Rather they saw people that lived for the things of this world as being the ones that are poor. It is reminiscent of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3. They were saying “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” but in reality they did not even know that they were “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” This then is the deceit of avarice. We are slaves of it without even realizing that is the case. Consider these quotes from the early Christians.

“It is not scanty means that ever constitute poverty, but greed. The good man, being free from this, will also be rich.”

(Clement of Alexandria, ANF 2.352)

“It becomes us not to lay down our souls for money, but money for our souls—whether spontaneously in giving, or patiently in losing.”

(Tertullian, ANF 3.712)

Cyprian probably says it best.

“Those whom you consider rich add forests to forests. They exclude the poor from their neighborhoods and stretch out their fields far and wide into space without any limits. They possess immense heaps of silver and gold, as well as mighty sums of money...Such a person enjoys no security either in his food or in his sleep. In the middle of the banquet he sighs, He does not realize, poor wretch, that these things are merely gilded torments. He is held in bondage by his gold. He is the slave, not the master, of his luxury and wealth....From him, there is no liberality to dependents, no giving to the poor....His possession amounts to this only: that he can keep others from possessing it.”

(ANF 5.279)



AVARICE

Stewards

We often speak today of being stewards of what God has entrusted us. The idea being that what we have is not ours, but is from God. It is certainly a sound Biblical teaching. Peter tells us at 1 Peter 4:10 that “as each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Thus as saints we are to recognize that what we have at our disposal is from God and should be used in His service. The early Christians believed the same. Consider these words of Tertullian.

“Let us not interpret “covetousness” as consisting merely in the lust of what is another’s. For nothing is ours, since all things are God’s, to whom we ourselves belong.”

(ANF 3.711)

She’s after his money!

The early Christians recognized that some marriages occur because of one or the other trying to obtain wealth. They looked at this as a disgusting thing. Paul told the Ephesians at chapter 5 that a marriage is to be based on love and respect. A beautiful thing that is akin to Christ’s relationship with the church. When someone cheapened it in a pursuit of wealth, they saints were indignant.

“The more wealthy a woman is—inflated with the name of “matron”—the more spacious of a house she requires for her burdens. It is as if it were a field where ambition may run its course. To such a person, the churches look paltry. A rich husband is a difficult thing to find in the house of God...To such a Christian woman, it is irksome to marry a believer inferior to herself in estate...However, she will be dowered with an ampler dowry from the goods of him who is rich in God.”

(Tertullian, ANF 3.48)

The Untouchables

The early Christians made the connection between wealth and suffering. They would encounter severe persecutions. They were safest if they had nothing to lose!

“Whom He has made rich, none will make poor. For in fact, there can be no poverty to him whose breast has once been supplied with heavenly food. Ceilings enriched with gold, and houses adorned with mosaics of costly marble, will seem crude to you now that you know that it is you yourself who are to be perfected, instead. Let us embellish this “house” with the colors of innocence; let us enlighten it with the light of justice.”

(Cyprian, ANF 5.280)

This book belongs to:
