***Reversionism  
  
Mixed Motives in the Lord's Service  
  
No. 3 - PH20-01  
  
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 1:15-18***

Please open your Bibles once more to Philippians 1:18. While the apostle Paul was sitting in his house prison in Rome, writing the letter to the Philippian church, the Christians in Rome were engaged in an extensive evangelistic witnessing campaign throughout the city. This effort was certainly in keeping with what we know the Word of God has set forth as the duty of Christians, which is to act as ambassadors of Jesus Christ. It was indeed in the plan of God that the people of Rome should have had the gospel explained to them.

However, this act of Christian service stemmed from two divergent motivations. There were two distinctively different groups witnessing in the city of Rome. One group was moved by God the Holy Spirit. They were acting under the filling of the Spirit. Consequently, Paul says, they served in goodwill, which means from a good mind. They were functioning from God's viewpoint. Their minds were operating on divine viewpoint in their service because they had been responsive to doctrinal truth instruction. The Lord approved of this group. He approved their service, and someday they will be rewarded in heaven for what they did.

However, another group was not moved by God the Holy Spirit but was moved by the old sin nature in their witnessing. They were acting, in short, under the influence of Satan. They were serving out of jealousy and out of discord toward Paul. They were functioning on human viewpoint. Their minds were in this condition because they were negative to doctrinal truth which had been brought to them. They were negative toward Paul, their teacher, and they were negative to his methods of grace. The Lord did not approve of the service of this group of Christians, nor would they receive rewards in heaven for their efforts. Their false motivation they would have profusely denied had you brought it up to them. This is because these reversionists were actually blind to their own spiritual condition which is generally true of people who are in a spiritual reverted condition.

So, here we have two groups of people very zealously witnessing and serving the Lord. Each of them is very convinced that they are functioning under a condition in which God is pleased with what they are doing. Yet, one of them has the mind of the Holy Spirit in their witnessing and in their service. The other is completely blinded to their state simply because they have moved down backwards toward the reversionist position.

This pattern is repeated many times over in churches today. You will have Christians who will depart from one church in rebellion against the teacher, the teaching, or the technique of that church. They will go to some other church where they become examples of zealous Christian service. These people, however, are usually in a condition of reversion which Galatians calls "falling from grace." His life, in other words, is off course from the grace which God has made possible as represented in the spiritual maturity structure in his soul. All the grace of God functioning and leading him is neutralized. The reversionist, consequently, is spiritually off course or insane, and he is drawn to false objects and to false decisions in his life.

Paul takes this situation facing him in Rome; he sees these two groups operating; he knows exactly what is taking place; and, now Paul declares his attitude. So, what? What's the consequence? What's the effect? I want to remind you that all that we are trying to explain to you on this point does not have as its purpose the idea that you should now look around and see how many Christians you can spot that this fits. We are trying to explain this to you for your own personal benefit and for your own personal orientation. Being your own priest requires that you do your own representation before God. Therefore, you have to be private. It has to be your doing, and therefore you have to pay attention to your own life, and you are not allowed to pay attention or to meddle with the lives of other people. Therefore, whether somebody else is a reversionist is beside the point. That is not your concern. What we are learning here is for our own direct application and use.

**Philippians 1:18**

Therefore, in Philippians 1:18, the apostle Paul gives us his conclusions concerning this situation that he has in Rome. He begins with the words, "What then?" In the Greek, it looks like this: "tigar." This is just an expression which we may translate idiomatically as, "Well, so what? What of it." It's an idiom. Paul says, "Okay, so that's how it is. So what? What shall we conclude? How shall we act? What then?" "Notwithstanding every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached, and in that I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." "Notwithstanding" is the little word "plen," and it means "however." Paul says, "What then? However." He's going to introduce the observations and conclusions that he wants to make concerning the effects of these two motivations. He singles out, in other words, what's important about all this after all is said and done. It is that Christians are working for the Lord, but they are doing it out of a competitive antagonistic spirit, and they are not doing it out of the sense of the Lord's glory. They are functioning on the old nature, but not functioning under the filling of the Spirit.

Paul says, "In every way." This means by means of either motivation which was involved in his witnessing. That's what he means by "either way." However, he says, "Every way (either way, with good motivation or bad motivation), this we must observe, whether in pretense or in truth." The "whether or" is again a comparison. He's making a contrast. It's the Greek word "eite," and this is a signal word that he's going to contrast. What he is contrasting here (of every way) is whether these who are motivated properly in their service or these who are not motivated properly in their service. Let's match them both up. One of them, he says, is operating in pretense which is the Greek word "prophasis." "Prophasis" means simply a pretext. These are serving under a pretext with a false front motivation, or in truth ("alethia") which means "genuine motivation" from positive response to the Lord. One either side, one thing has come through all of this. One thing is happening in the city of Rome after all is said and done, and that is the gospel is being preached.

"Christ is preached." The sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world is being preached, and the idea is proclaimed ("gataggello"). This means proclaiming a message in the form of a herald. All over the city of Rome, Paul says, the fact of eternal life; the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and, the grace way of life that has now been made possible for all of us is being declared and proclaimed all over this city. Some people are doing it in a way that they're going to be rewarded for. Some people are doing it in a way that they're not going to get a peanut's worth of reward for their effort. However, either way, people are getting the information.

Therefore, you may see somebody that you may suspect is being under a rebellious reversionistic condition who's hustling around serving the Lord. That person is in a bad situation (as we shall see in a little bit), and he is headed in a very dangerous direction. Nevertheless, it is true that the truth of God is the truth of God. When it is proclaimed, people who receive it and people who respond to it are going to be blessed--immaterial of the communicator. That's why who tells you the information is not important. He is not the celebrity. He is not the star. The Lord Jesus Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit--there is the celebrity. They are the stars. They are the people who are important. What the Holy Spirit tells you, that's what's important. How he tells it to you is completely unimportant.

Therefore, Paul comes to this conclusion. At the end of verse 18 he says, "And in that," meaning that the gospel is being preached, "I do rejoice." The word "rejoice" is "chairo". It is present which means that every time he hears about what these people are doing, he is constantly glad about this. It is active, and that means that this is his personal joy. It's indicative. It's a state of condition that he is glad to declare. Listeners only hear the gospel. They don't see the bad motivation of the person who is giving them the gospel. Doctrine counts--not the communicator.

So, Paul says, "I rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice," and he puts it again in the future. We have the future passive indicative the second time. The first time it is present active indicative. He says, "Right now I'm just as happy as I can be over it." Then he says again, "I will rejoice;" that is, in the future. Every time this thing comes up I'm going to be glad the gospel goes out, and I'm not going to have to try to be happy (passive). I will automatically rejoice. I am going to be happy about this. "And I will rejoice." All the efforts to put the squeeze on him by the sweet Christians are not going to make him unhappy. A super grace Christian can be happy as long as the Lord is glorified.

**False Motivation**

Therefore, here is the summary of a few points on this:

1. **Paul does not condone false doctrine or false motivation in Christian service**. This is not a justification for teaching what is false. Nor is it a justification to excuse false motivation because you have a great deal at stake, and you lose a great deal as a believer if your motivation is false.
2. **Secondly, Paul does not concern himself with the false motivation of other Christians**. He leaves that with the Lord. He concerns himself only with the fact that the work is being done. Where do you think we would go in the local church if, as a pastor and the administrator of this organization and this local body, I had to concern myself with the motivations of all the people who serve on so many fronts in this local assembly? I would be hard-pressed if I had to be chasing around and be preoccupied with that. Sometimes I see things that do not reflect good motivation, but I can only limit myself to what the person is willing to do within the context of the ministry; within the service that we are performing; and, with what the Lord has called this particular church to do at this particular point in time.

Once in a while, people come in and they get pushy; they get to be strong-armed; and, they start elbowing us around because they come with the wisdom of the ages upon them, and they think they have an image of a pattern of how it should be done. Consequently, they move right in to explain to you how God wants you to be doing it here at Berean church. Seminary students, particularly in their first year, are particularly prone to do this. They are the ones who will come in and explain so many things to me on how it would be well done, most of which they've learned back home, and maybe it was well done in their church back home.

Therefore, Paul can't preoccupy himself with, "Why are you doing this?" That is your business, and the Lord will deal with you. He preoccupies himself with the fact that we've got to get the gospel out with the phase of ministry that they're engaged in.

1. **Service from false motivation is destructive to the Christian who is guilty of it**. You will lose for false motivations.
2. **Paul's happiness does not lie in acceptance by his opponents**. He doesn't have to be liked by the Christians. This is an occupational hazard in the ministry. It is unbelievable, but there are some people who don't even like me. I simply accept that--that there are some people that are dumb enough and stupid enough to be like that. There is nothing I can do about it. I simply say, "Well Lord, help straighten them out." If Paul would have been preoccupied with all these people who are out there to crush him and to do him in, he wouldn't be able to do anything. He had enough troubles operating under the restrictions of that imprisonment, let alone to be concerned that all the people really liked him.

One of the things that is objectionable in Christian education is the Madison Avenue public relations quality of dealing with people that ministers are taught. They are taught to function under what's going to make people happy and how you are going to draw things out. What these are are human viewpoint devices on appealing to the old sin nature. As a matter of fact, when I was in seminary, I had to read a book by a fellow named Dale Carnegie on How to Win Friends and Influence People. As you read through the book, there was one thing that evolved very clearly in that class instruction. That was that the old sin nature is here to stay. That's another title for the book: How to Win Friends and Influence People, or The Old Sin Nature is here to Stay. This book is filled with ways that you can kind of sidle up to a person and start functioning with a person. It's like a board member I used to have around here. He would tell me, "John, get next to Mr. So-and-so and butter him up." The idea was Madison Avenue public relations. You be a promoter. That's the image of the ministry that is often conveyed to men who are going into the ministry. This is false.

The apostle Paul was not concerned whether people liked him or not. He was very much concerned whether they love Jesus Christ, and he was fantastically concerned that people understood the truth. He was going to do everything in his power to explain God's viewpoint of doctrine to them. He was extremely preoccupied and concerned that Christians understand that to go negative toward this brought long-range disaster into their lives now as well as for eternity. So, the apostle Paul was interested in the things that are important to the believer--not the things that would advance him professionally.

You are often taught in seminary today how to do the things that will advance you professionally, and how to advance your church as an image within the community so that you will be a successful organization: constantly increasing the number of chairs in the place; constantly building a bigger room; and, constantly expanding the numerical size, and this is called "growing." This is what preachers say, "Is your church growing?" Most preachers can say, "Yes, I'm getting more spiritual idiots every day, and they're getting dumber all the time." However, somebody is there, and that's what counts: fill the seats. Paul says, "No, he's not unhappy because of their attitudes toward him.

1. **Paul's eyes are on the Lord so his happiness will continue** as God continues to spread Bible doctrine.
2. **Paul's ministry will continue in spite of pressures and attacks from Christians who are under emotional domination in their own souls**. Paul's ministry will go on no matter what the reversionistic Christians are going to do. What these reversionistic Christians don't understand is that they are like a sailor who's trying to land a ship on a beach that's filled with underwater rocks. This is what Jude gives as the picture of apostates. Consequently, they're being shattered in their lives on the apostates because they think they are homing in on the destiny that God has for them, and instead they're going to be shipwrecked on the underwater reefs that are hidden there because of their negative attitude.

We have in the Bible a very clear cut picture of what happens in a local church when a group of Christians gradually becomes reversionistic. For Christians in a church to become that backslidden and that spiritually deteriorated on a wide scale requires a pastor-teacher who simply is not doing his job. A pastor-teacher should be attempting by preparation to be able to explain what the Word of God has to teach so that people can grasp it and can thereby understand the one interpretation, and then proceed to make the applications under the guidance of the Spirit of God. If he is not doing that, then he is inviting spiritual reversion within this congregation, and he will have it.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote a little book called True Evangelism. In this book, Dr. Chafer makes the comment that revival in a church is abnormal. When one of the fundamentalists by the name of John R. Rice got hold of that book, he hit the ceiling with a fury over this book. This was because in this book on true evangelism, Dr. Shafer explains how people are won to the Lord not by the cleverness and the devices of the evangelistic campaign, but as the result of the appeals of God the Holy Spirit upon the mentality of someone to whom the gospel has been explained. Chafer knew what he was talking about because he was an evangelist for 14 years. He was an associate of the big boys. He was the associate of some of the biggest named people in evangelism, particularly with Billy Sunday. Therefore, he knew the operation of mass evangelism inside and out by experience and by association.

He saw what was taking place, and that's why he wrote this book to try to explain to ministers and to believers how God proceeds in evangelism. It is not the evangelism by entertainment; the evangelism by friendship; the evangelism by works of mercy; and all the other things that come up as a way that God is going to approach a soul who is lost. Chafer had the right idea. The result was an observation of the professional revivalists who go around from church to church and hold so-called "revivals." Their "revivals" begins like this. (I'll have to explain this to you because those of you who've been here all your life, particularly young people who've grown up here, have never had a visiting speaker evangelist in here. Consequently, you've never had "a revival," and here's how it goes.)

The first thing that happens is the first two, three, or four nights (depending on how bad the church is), the revivalist gets up and he hacks away about sin and about getting Christians to get back to the Lord. That's the first thing he does. He tries to revive the deadwood believers. That's what Dr. Chafer meant. He said, "That is wrong. If the Word of God has been properly taught by the pastor-teacher, you're not going to have a condition where people are so backslidden that you need to bring a specialist in to try to get them spiritually jacked up again." Well, John R. Rice and his evangelist friends just foamed at the mouth in fury when they read this book. John R. Rice went to Moody press (the publisher), and he said, "I'd like to buy the plates of the book that you're publishing by Dr. Chafer on True Evangelism. I'm going to destroy them. This book is the greatest blow against evangelism that has ever been written."

When he was doing some special lectures at Bob Jones University, John R. Rice stood up before the student body, and he carried on with considerable zeal on how Dr. Chafer said, "Revival in a church is abnormal." John R. Rice would say, "Now I ask you believers. Is God against revival?" He just really warmed the cockles of the hearts of that student body by raging against what Dr. Chafer said. Well, he was misrepresenting, and I'm sure he must have known better because you can go back and get the book and you can read the very phrase. I went back and checked it, and Dr. Chafer makes it very clear that what he is talking about is if a church is in a reversionistic state, the pastor is to blame.

**Revelation 3**

Let's look at just that kind of a church. Revelation 3 tells us of a gruesome horrible example of a church that's in that specific condition. This is the portion of the book of the Revelation which gives a series of letters to seven churches in the ancient world. Each of them represented a particular spiritual status. This is the last one. The message to the church at Laodicea is generally viewed as a message to a church of unbelievers. I want to clarify it right now that the church at Laodicea is not a National Council of Churches or a World Council of Churches church. It's not that kind of a church. It is a church of believers. It is written to a group of born again Christians. Everything you read from verse 14 through the rest of the chapter applies to Christians. So, let's get that straight. This is talking about believers. Look what he says:

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans. The word angel is the Greek word "aggelos," and "aggelos" is sometimes transliterated; that is, it just takes the English letter for the Greek letter as you can see here, and we get "angel" which refers to spirit beings that God has created, some of whom have obeyed God, and some of whom have disobeyed Him and are now Satan's demons. Sometimes the word "aggelos" is translated, at which time it means "messenger" or "communicator." If you translate on the word "aggelos", you translate it as messenger or communicator. This letter is being sent by the Lord Jesus Christ through the apostle John, who is receiving this vision in Revelation. It is being sent by John, who is writing it, to the pastor-teacher of the church of the Laodiceans, a pastor who obviously has not been doing his job very well, as we shall see by the condition of this flock.

**Laodicea**

Laodicea as a city is of considerable importance to us in this case. Some of the isagogical background will give us some understanding of the particular things that are said in this letter. Laodicea was a very beautiful city. It was situated in a valley in what is today Western Turkey. It was founded by Antiochus II in the middle of the third century before Christ, and he named it after his wife Laodice. It was a major city in the Roman Empire, and it had grown very very wealthy from the production of wool cloth, a glistening black beautiful wool cloth which was sent all over the Roman Empire. It was a source of great wealth to the city of Laodicea.

As a matter, Laodicea experienced an earthquake in 60 A.D. Homes, temples, and everything was shattered. When the emperor offered to give them financial aid to rebuild the city, they told the emperor that they did not want his help because they had need of nothing. They could rebuild the city themselves, and they did. That's how rich they were. It was the center of banking. It was a center of sports; of arts; and, of drama, and it was a very cultured, sophisticated, refined city. It was also the headquarters of the tax department for that part of the empire. It was a commercial center. It was no mean city.

Therefore, I don't want you to think that you're dealing with some little stumblebum one-horse town here when you're talking about Laodicea. It was famous for a medical school which it had in a temple. It had a pharmacy and a medical school here at the temple. This pharmacy was known worldwide because it produced a certain tablet which was used for medication for the eyes. It was found to be very beneficial.

It was also noted for the fact that it had hot springs which were very therapeutic when you bathed in them. However, if you happened to take a good gulp of it, it caused you to regurgitate, which is a fancy word for vomiting. It would really make you sick if you drank the waters which were very helpful for bathing as far as the hot springs effect went. Well today, the city is in ruins. However, when Revelation was written and this letter was addressed to it, it was a city which was very much alive.

Therefore, the apostle John here is told to write. The word "write" is "grapho." It is in the aorist tense which means at the point when he sits down now to do this job. It is active. He does it. It's imperative. It's a command that he write this revelation, and he himself records it. "These things" refer now to the things that follow in verses 14-22. The letter is coming from someone whom he calls "the amen." The Greek word is "hoamen." This is, of course, from the Hebrew. We find it in Revelation 1:18. We find it in Isaiah 65:16, and it simply means "to believe." It is often translated as "verily." "Verily, verily, I say unto you." "Amen, Amen, I say unto you." This refers to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the absolute standard of truth and is the object of our faith and salvation because He is the truth (2 Corinthians 1:20). People are saved by believing this gospel, by trusting in the one who is the truth, Jesus Christ. "I am the way the truth and the life," He says. He is called the faithful and the true witness.

"'Unto the messenger, the pastor-teacher communicator, of the church of the Laodiceans, I order you to write these things which now follow,' says Jesus Christ, the faithful and true witness." He is reliable and genuine, which is something in a church which is filled with reversionist people. Here is someone who is faithful and genuine which they are not. Here is a faithful and genuine witness. This is a legal term used in the Roman courts. Under the justice of the Roman courts, it was necessary to have witnesses before a person could be accused and convicted of a crime. Jesus Christ is the witness for the Godhead. He is the only revealed member of the Godhead. He is the one that we see, and we see Him as the one who witnesses to what God is like, and to what God thinks. We have this in John 1:18, John 6:46, 1 Timothy 6:16, and 1 John 4:12).

He is also called the beginning ("arche"), and that means that He is the source of the universe. This same word is in John 1:1. The Lord of the church is the creator of the things that we're going to see that the Laodiceans esteemed more than they do the person of Christ. Colossians 1:15-18 declare to us that He is the creator all. It declares, in effect, his deity. He is not created. He is not a created being. Certain heresies declare from this verse that this meant that Christ had been a created creature. However, He is said to be the source of all creation. Therefore, he could not have created Himself. "Creation" is "ktisis." That's a word that means "created things"--the creation of God.

Verse 15 says, "I know your works, that you are neither hot nor cold. I would that you were cold or hot." This Savior; the second member of the trinity; and, this person who reveals what God thinks is now going to make an estimate and an evaluation concerning the condition of the Christians in the church at Laodicea. Here's His evaluation. He says, "I know." This is the Greek word "oida." This is inherent knowledge. It's not something that comes from experience, but it's something that God in His omniscience knows of their condition. Here he sees Christians who are so backslidden that they are completely blind to their spiritual condition. These people are believers and apparently had, at one time, been in a much better spiritual condition. He refers to their works here which is their production, and it is human good production.

"I know your works, that" introduces a cause. It's the little Greek word "hoti." He introduces the reason for this judgment against them. This is the reason that He's going to expose to them as being reversionism. "You are." This is the Greek word "eimi" which indicates their condition. "Neither nor"--"you are neither hot nor cold." Here again you have one of those comparisons. Here it is "oute," one matched against another. This is a strong word. It is saying, "You are not on the one hand hot, and you are not on the other hand cold. He could have used another word which would have been a little softer. It would have been like, "You don't seem to be hot on one hand, and you don't seem to be cold on the other hand." However, when you use "oute," to set one against another, he is saying, "When you're hot, you're hot, and when you're not, you're not." That's the way in the Greek that he gets that idea across. There is no question about what the Lord sees in these people.

So what does He see? Extremes of spiritual condition. One, He says, "You're not cold." This is the Greek word "psuchros." In the context of this letter, we are dealing with Christians--not with unbelievers. Therefore, he is speaking of people here in every state in reference to Christ. They are either cold toward Christ, or they are hot toward Christ. That's the object of this comparison. If they're cold toward Christ, that refers to unbelievers. "They are not unbelievers," is what he is saying. However, on the other hand, they are not hot. This is the word "zestos," and that means "boiling." They are not hot.

What is a hot Christian? Well it's the opposite end of the scale. It's from being an unbeliever on one side to being a mature Christian with an erected spiritual maturity structure in the soul, and the cup of God flowing over in the super grace life. That's what God calls being hot, and this they were not. The Laodiceans were saved, but they were carnal. So he uses the word here, "I would." This is a kind of interjection here. It's, "Oh, that I would." It's a word which is used to express a fruitless wish. "I would that you were one or the other." If they were cold, then it would be easy to deal with them. What do they need? The gospel. If they were hot, it would also be easy to deal with them because then they could correct the problems in their lives. However, these people are in such a decrepit spiritual condition now that they are just incapable of correction. They are really in a bad state.

Verse 16 says, "So then, because you are lukewarm," and here it is. "So then" indicates that here comes the conclusion. "Lukewarm is "chliaros." "Chliaros" means "nauseating." It means unpleasant to the taste. It describes a saved person whose spiritual maturity has deteriorated, and he is moving toward a condition of reversionism (complete collapse), or he has already arrived there. Whatever they were in the past, they are now in a backslidden condition, and the implication is that they're cooling off. They're cooling off from a hot state in the spiritual maturity structure. That retrogression never goes back to cold. You never go back to where you are unsaved again. However, you come to a point where you are nauseous to God, and eventually to people. The worst people in the world, in other words, are reversionistic Christians. Their thinking is distorted. Their feelings are distorted. They think they're operating on God's viewpoint, but they're not. They're just remembering enough truth that they can fake it.

So he says, "I will" and this is "mello." This is a word which means to do something. This is God's divine reaction. "I will" means "I am about to do." "Mello" means "I am about to do something." What is God about to do with these Christians? He said, "I'm about to spew you out of my mouth." This is the word for "vomit." "I'm about to regurgitate you out of my mouth." It is a strong word. It is a word to describe something that we understand on a human level, to try to describe the feelings of God and the reactions of God in a way that we can grasp. Because they have been lukewarm, God has become nauseated. It doesn't mean that they're going to lose their salvation, but He means that He is going to reject them in discipline. The discipline will go unto the end of the complete rejection, if necessary, of the sin unto death. Remember that the sin unto death is only imposed upon reversionistic Christians. You do not have your life taken until you have come to the complete collapsed condition that starts with gradually coming back down the trail that you once went up. It is an aorist here. It's the point of no return when God finally acts. It is active. God executes extreme discipline. It is infinitive. It shows that this is God's purpose. "I will regurgitate you out of my mouth."

God doesn't need any help in doing this to Christians. Again I warn you to avoid trying to straighten out reversionistic Christians on your own, and for you to move in and start hacking away at them in some way that you are going to bring correction. These Christians make God sick. However, while they make God sick, they love one another. They are attracted to each other, and thus they reinforce one another in their reversionistic condition. That's why they flock together. That's why they want your approval. That's why they seek your contact when they have departed from a basis of truth. They want your contact because they seek the encouragement and the reassurance of the move that they have made.

Look at these people. Verse 17 tells us what they think of themselves: "But you say, 'I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.' You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." "You say" is the Greek word "lego." It's present active indicative. They're always saying this. This is their viewpoint about themselves. They keep insisting that they're fine Christians whom God is blessing. They possess a high estimate of themselves because they have no divine frame of reference any longer in their minds. Therefore, here he is going to trace their downward path.

Notice something here. This I think is really significant. Because you are always saying, "Why is God going to vomit you out of His mouth? Why is he going to put you under discipline? Why maybe will He even take your life in that discipline?" Because you are always saying (number one), "I am rich." This is "plousios." The first step down is prosperity. The first step down from God is because you've got it made with a little money, and you are not able to control the mastery of the details of life. You used to go around singing, "If I were a rich man." You used to dream and dream, and suddenly, you wake up and now the words have changed: "Now I am a rich man, and I'm living like I never lived before." Now things are really going, and you think things are getting really hot. However, you're getting cold. What's the first step? You have built yourself up with doctrine. You developed a spiritual maturity structure. And one of the things that God does in the super grace life is to give you material sufficiency and usually prosperity in excess with it. To some people, He gives very much excess.

So, what do you do? Now that you have such prosperity, you can really go out there where the big time is. Therefore, you squeeze out the things of the Lord, both in service and in doctrine. I could give you some fascinating case histories of people that I have known who, in modest circumstances, loved the Lord; learned His word; went on with Him; and, could not do enough for Him. Then when God prospered their status, they used it to squeeze Him out of their lives. Anytime somebody comes along to me and says, "Hot dog, boy, I really had a deal. Just this weekend alone, I have made $50,000." While that person is very excited over that, that gives me cause for concern, because I know that's $50,000 which will enable him to start slipping right down the trail to reversionism. Unless his soul is prospered; the things of God are sufficient; and, he's right back there taking in the Word so that God can keep right on prospering him and so that he can have some spiritual divine orientation as to what to do with that prosperity, he won't have the capacity to enjoy his money.

These poor pathetic people here started off describing themselves, "We are rich." That didn't mean just money. It meant that they had a status where they had the details of life. They had the food; they had the clothing; they had the entertainment; they had the culture; they had the social life; and, they had everything they could ask for. God had blessed, but they came to the point where they could not handle it.

The Bible often warns us about the corroding effects of prosperity without doctrine. Notice what I said. I didn't say that the Bible often warns against the corroding effects of being rich. Being rich does not corrode you, but being rich without a continued high level of intake of doctrine--that will corrode you. It will destroy you. There is no way that you avoid that (James 4:13-14. James 5:1-6, 1 Timothy 6:3-11, Matthew 6:25-34). What social events; what entertainment; or, what good friend was so much fun for you to run off to the lake or to go off someplace instead of being in Bible class when the time rolled around? Which of that has ever stood you in good stead when the time of crisis; the time of pressure; or, the time of decision making came in your life when you had to have some straight thinking?

Perhaps, some of you are staying home from church so that you can watch your favorite television programs. How many of those have carried you through? Some of you are getting disoriented, and you think there's something in life that you need, like maybe money; a few more friends; a husband; or, a wife. So you're chasing around looking for it. While you're chasing around looking for that, you're starving your soul from the intake of doctrine because you're not there where it's being dished out. You're never going to find what you're looking for. You will lose what you have.

The picture becomes much more grim, and we will take it up next time. However, I want you to remember that the first step toward a church that God says, "You people want to make me throw up," was that they were so prosperous; they thought they had everything they needed in life; and, they thought they had it made. Money without doctrine is a self-destructive possession.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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