

The Brown Street Beacon

"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,

holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)



Volume 2

June 29, 2014

Number. 21

Appearances of Evil or Evil Suspicions

Sometimes well-meaning Christians justify something that is unfavorable to God by misapplying scripture. There is often no sinister motive in the heart of the guilty party, but it can lead to sinful attitudes and actions nevertheless. Such often happens with the careless “throwing around” of the scriptural reference to the appearance of evil. In 1 Thessalonians 5:22, Paul wrote, *“Abstain from every appearance of evil.”* Because of the brevity of this verse, and because Paul doesn’t give any explanation of what was really on his mind when he wrote it, it is ready-made for misapplication. The only hint of what Paul had on his mind when he set forth this exhortation, is the immediate context. In the previous verses, Paul wrote, *“Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good”* (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). Contextually, Paul is dealing with God’s Word. One quenches the Spirit by not accepting the teachings of the Spirit. One despises prophecies by not believing or living by the prophecies under consideration. The reference to testing everything is similar to the exhortation of John when he told us to test the spirits to see whether or not they are of God (1 John 4:1). So, the evil that Paul is referring to in verse 22, at least contextually, would appear to be false doctrine as opposed to truth that is revealed by the Spirit. We should abstain from every form of false doctrine, and abide instead in the teachings of the Spirit.

Now, most of the time when we view this passage, we make a moral application of it. That is fine because it is perfectly legitimate to take a principle from a passage and make application of it. Paul used the Old Testament in such a way all the time. However, in doing so we have to be careful that we do not carelessly make too broad of an application of it. There are those who would conclude that everything they disagree with or don’t like is a form or appearance of evil, and then they apply their judgment to others. This unwittingly leads one to another sin, that is, developing evil suspicions toward brethren. Evil suspicions occur when we fail to love our brethren enough to give them the benefit of the doubt when we are thinking something negative about them. Remember, Paul said that love thinks no evil and believes all things and hopes all things (1 Corinthians 13:5, 7). Let me give you an example.

Let’s say you see a brother or sister walking out of a grocery store with a bottle in a paper bag. Would you assume that there is a bottle of whiskey in that bag? I would hope not. If you did, that would be an evil suspicion. “Well, what if that brother had been ticketed for driving drunk some time in the past?” you might ask. So what. If he repented of his sin, God has forgiven him and you should leave that where God does, in the past. Your job is to give him the benefit of the doubt be-

cause that is just the way love acts. Now, what if you saw that same brother walking out of a LIQUOR store with that same bag? Now that would be an appearance of evil since the beverages that are sold in liquor stores are almost exclusively alcoholic. That brother should not put himself in that situation where it looks like he is purchasing alcohol. If someone saw him walking out of a store that primarily sales liquor with a bottle in a bag, it would be reasonable to conclude that he has purchased liquor. These two scenarios are clearly different, and therefore should be approached differently. And in the end, in both cases, if you have questions, you should go directly to the person and talk to him, especially before you go and tell others what you think you saw.

You might say, well I think a person should never put a bottle of anything in a paper bag because it is an appearance of evil. First, that is just your opinion and you must be careful about pressing your opinion on others. Second, you would be wrong about that first example being an appearance of evil. Just because it is something that I, personally, would not do does not make it as appearance of evil. I am not the standard. The only thing it is, in reality, is the appearance that a man bought something in a store that is contained in a bottle. If you jump to a conclusion that it is something sinful, it is only because you don't think too highly of that person in the first place, and the real question is why?

Appearance of evil or evil suspicion? There is a difference between the two. Appearances of evil are brought on when a person is not careful enough in his or her conduct, perhaps due to a lax attitude towards that which is wrong in the eyes of God. Evil suspicion is brought on by a lack of love for a brother or sister in Christ, demonstrated by not giving them the benefit of the doubt, and then the suspicion is often bolstered by a tendency to be a busybody. Let's make sure that we avoid both of these things.

Don

Controlling Our Temper

Unknown Author

Brother John Clark once related a story about a woman who told a preacher she had a bad temper, but that it was over in a minute. "So is a shotgun blast, but it blows everything to pieces," was the preacher's reply. And far too many of us who are Christians are triggered by the least little incident, frequently losing our temper. When we lose our temper, we usually do and say things in anger which we later regret. "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly" (Proverbs 14:17).

It has been said that "anger is like rain, which breaks itself upon that whereon it falls." For example, anger usually culminates in bitter words, insults, the revealing of secrets or in the breaking off of relations between two parties. Of the aforementioned, insults are probably the most frequent cause of anger. Most of us had rather be injured physically than insulted. There is something about an insult that makes us want to repay with a worse insult. How many of us possess the magnanimous spirit of Abraham Lincoln when he was insulted? It is reported that when he was told that one of his cabinet members, Edwin Stanton, called him a fool, he replied, "If Stanton says I am a fool, I had better look into the matter, for he is a wise man." No doubt that worked much better than if he would have retaliated by losing his temper, setting off a chain reaction with much more bitterness and resentment to follow. Incidentally, after Lincoln was killed, it was Stanton who remarked in subdued tones of respect, "There lies the greatest leader this country has ever known."

The Bible teaches us the importance of practicing self-control. It is listed as the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23, and among what we sometimes refer to as the "seven Christian graces" in II Peter 1:6. Self-control is one of the Christian's weapons against the world. And practicing self-control involves controlling our temper. We must follow after Christ's example - "Who, did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Peter 2:22-23). The person who continually loses his temper is like an undefended city or one in ruins. The wise man Solomon said, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). What a sign of weakness when we constantly lose our temper! And it is certainly a poor reflection of Christ in our lives when we "fly off the handle."

Christians must learn to be calm and serious. James said, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). This brings to mind the motto: "Think twice before you speak. Losing your temper, blurting out angry words, and speaking your mind excites strife. "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

Angry words! O let them never
From the tongue unbridled slip;
May the heart's best impulse ever
Check them ere they soil the lip.