

**Message no:** 2TS02  
**Series:** Two Important Temptation Scenes  
**Section:** Temptations of the Evil One  
**Sub-section:** Major Areas That Can Go Wrong (2)  
**Date preached:** 15 May 83  
**Date edited:** 1 Oct 01

## **FLESHLY APPETITES AND ASPIRATIONS**

Physical, bodily needs, appetites and urges  
Temptation through what we see  
Aspirations and attainments not intended by God  
Knowledge and wisdom contrary to what God intends

In this message, we shall be reflecting on how Satan tempted Eve, how she entertained the temptations, and how they led to her fall. This can help us understand the ways in which Satan seeks to tempt us and the areas we are vulnerable in. These areas still pose serious problems for us today and it is important that we learn how to overcome the temptations of the evil one.

### **Physical, Bodily needs, Appetites and Urges**

#### *Temptation of Eve*

##### **Genesis 3:6**

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

It is recorded that Eve saw that the tree was good for food and she took from its fruit and ate. She also gave it to her husband and he ate. Thus they fell in the area of partaking of food. In the first temptation faced by the Lord Jesus Christ, we see that it was also related to food. The Lord Jesus was hungry and the evil one tempted Him to turn the stones into bread.

The way Eve was tempted to partake of the fruit and how she fell is applicable to the whole area of physical and bodily needs and appetites, and the various urges that we have while living in this body. These areas are easily subject to temptations especially after the Fall.

We have seen in the previous message that God had given specific instructions not to partake of the fruit of this tree. Eve fell because she failed to bring her bodily appetites under subjection to the will of God.

#### *Disciplining Our Body and Bringing It Under Subjection*

It is important for us to learn from Eve's failure. There are consequences if we do not

discipline our body and bring it under subjection.

**1 Corinthians 9:27**

but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Paul mentions in verse 25 the importance of exercising self-control and in verse 27 he tells us of the need to bring our body under subjection: "I discipline my body and make it my slave." "Make it my slave" basically means that Paul is able to bring his body under subjection. He is master over his body rather than being enslaved to the impulses of his body.

We need to discipline the body and not just give in to every impulse of the body or to satisfy all bodily appetites and inclinations. We have many and varied physical urges and appetites, for example, hunger and thirst and the desire for rest and sleep. We should not just simply satisfy them. That is not the way to live our lives.

It is helpful to remember that temptations can come either in the form of improper or overindulgence of bodily appetites. In the case of Eve, it was improper indulgence because she partook of something clearly prohibited by God. In the area of bodily appetites, there are certain things that are clearly prohibited by the Lord, for example, the area of sexual lust and immoral conduct. Involvement in these areas would be improper indulgence.

However, the evil one can also tempt us in areas that involve satisfying of legitimate needs, for example, satisfying our hunger and thirst with food and drink. Failures in such context may involve how we go about it and when. The evil one can tempt us with overindulgence or to give no due regard for the needs of others or preoccupation with food such that it distracts us from concentrating on doing the will of God, for example, during times of prayer.

*The First Temptation of The Lord Jesus*

In the first temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see the evil one tempting Him in the area of satisfying a legitimate need. He was hungry and on the face of it, there seems nothing wrong for Him to satisfy His physical hunger.

Let us refer to Matthew 4:3, 4 and see what we can learn from the Lord Jesus Christ when He countered the attack from the evil one in this area.

**Matthew 4: 3, 4**

3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Let us examine why the Lord Jesus Christ answered the evil one the way He did in verse 4 when He was tempted to change the stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. It may not be immediately obvious. We may wonder why the Lord Jesus answered by quoting those words from the Old Testament.

The Lord Jesus did not counter the temptation by saying, "It is wrong to eat bread and we should not eat bread." This would be inaccurate as it is a legitimate thing to eat bread to satisfy one's hunger. Instead, the Lord Jesus said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" In one sentence, the Lord Jesus addresses the heart of the matter.

What the Lord Jesus Christ is saying is that although eating bread is legitimate, food is not all there is to life. He goes further to emphasise that the main focus should be "on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." In other words, the main thing in life is obedience to what God has spoken and doing the will of God. This is far more important than satisfying even legitimate bodily needs.

If we consider the temptation of the Lord Jesus more carefully, especially in the light of His reply, we can see that it involves the when and how of satisfying legitimate needs. Although the temptation is also in the area of food, it is quite different from the scene in the Garden of Eden. In the Garden of Eden, partaking of the fruit was something clearly prohibited by God but here it is not so. Here, the Lord Jesus can legitimately satisfy His physical hunger. But the Lord Jesus shows us that the mere fact that He was hungry does not mean that He would go ahead to satisfy the hunger and to satisfy it in that particular way. The questions to consider are:

- Did God the Father want the Lord Jesus to satisfy His physical hunger at that point of time? If so, how should He satisfy it?
- Did God the Father want the Lord Jesus to command the stones to become bread? If the answer is yes, then the Lord Jesus would proceed to do so.

The evil one had said, "Command that these stones become bread." But the Lord Jesus refused to do so because to Him, satisfying His hunger is not the most important thing. What is most important is to live according to the will of God. The Lord Jesus wants to emphasise to us that we must concentrate on and live according to God's revelation and guidance.

We may have legitimate needs in our lives but it does not mean that we must satisfy them all the time, for example – our need to sleep, eat or rest. It is important to consider when to satisfy such needs and how to satisfy them. There may be situations in life in which God wants us to fulfil certain responsibilities and attend to urgent needs or to spend time in fasting and prayer. Though hungry, tired and taxed, it may not be time yet for us to eat, rest or sleep. In such situations, will we just say, "Oh, it is a legitimate need on my part. I am hungry therefore I shall just go ahead and eat" or "I need some rest therefore I shall just go ahead and sleep." During such

times, we need to exercise self-control to discipline our body and bring it under subjection and not just give in to our natural desires or inclinations.

If we do not discipline and bring our body under subjection, the evil one can bring all kinds of hindrances to distract us. Therefore, no matter how difficult or taxing the situation or how tired and hungry we are, obedience to God must come first. We must ask the Lord to strengthen and enable us to carry on when we know that this is what He wants us to do.

### *Watch and Pray*

There is a helpful exhortation for us from the Lord Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew 26:41. This verse is important in Christian living.

#### **Matthew 26:41**

"Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

It was a very important time for the Lord Jesus Christ. He was agonising in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in preparation for the Cross. He wanted the disciples to keep watch together with Him but they were not able to do so. He asked them, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?" (Matt. 26:40). It was important for them to keep watch but they were not able to and so the Lord Jesus told them, "Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Here the Lord Jesus impresses upon us that we are weak. We may have good desires and we may want to move in the right direction: "the spirit is willing", but we are weak and cannot overcome by ourselves: "the flesh is weak". So what is the answer? The Lord Jesus provides us the answer and that is: "Keep watching and praying."

There are two aspects to the meaning of the expression "keep watching and praying." One aspect is the need to be vigilant and not be careless. The other is the recognition of our frailties, and knowing that we are weak and cannot overcome on our own, we pray to the Lord constantly to strengthen, guide and enable us to overcome.

We need to be prayerful and vigilant at all times. During times of difficulties and strong spiritual opposition, we need to persevere and pray to the Lord to help us to overcome. When things appear to go well or the situation appears pleasant and easy, we may be rather vulnerable because we may become careless and thereby be ensnared by the evil one. In different situations, the dangers may be different. But whatever the situation, we need to remember that as fallen beings living in a fallen world, we are very vulnerable and even though we have come to know the Lord, we are still weak in ourselves. By ourselves, we will always fail. But we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. We can be strong – in the Lord.

In order to live a life that is effective and victorious in the Lord, we need to discipline the body, be master over it and bring it under subjection to fulfil the will of God. This is vital for an overcoming life and for our personal well-being. We need to nurture and strengthen our spirit so that we will be able to act according to what the Lord desires of us in any given situation. This would be living in line with the words of the Lord Jesus that "man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." The practical outworking of this involves exercising our spirit and our will to do what God desires rather than living according to the inclinations of our bodily appetites.

How do we work out our lives well in daily living? I would like to summarise and list out some important ingredients in Christian growth and effectiveness of service.

#### *Important Ingredients In Christian Growth and Effectiveness Of Service*

a) *Increasing knowledge and understanding; increasing spiritual insight and perception*

If we want to obey and honour the Lord and to bear fruit in every good work, knowledge and understanding are very important. If we do not know what God desires, how are we going to act?

Our total response to God and understanding what He desires involve not only the mind but also the spirit. Spiritual insight and perception are important and they are closely related to the renewed mind. The Lord can reveal things to us not just by helping us to understand with our mind but also through our spirit. Our spirit can at times perceive certain things that are not very clear to the mind. Recognising and understanding what God desires involve the renewed mind, spiritual insight and perception.

Paul's prayer for the Colossians recorded in Colossians 1:9-11 is very relevant to what we are considering. First of all, in verse 9, Paul prayed for the Colossian believers that they "may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding".

The knowledge here is not the kind of knowledge that the worldly wise talks about. It is the knowledge of the will of God in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. It is knowledge in relation to accurate understanding of ultimate reality. In the next verse, Paul shows us that this knowledge has relevance to an effective life of service and bearing fruit.

#### **Colossians 1:10**

so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

To “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” is to obey the Lord and fulfil His will. We need to continue to grow in the knowledge of God's will, in spiritual wisdom and understanding, in the renewal of the mind, and increasing spiritual insight and perception, so that we may continually please God in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work.

*b) Proper exercise of the spirit and will in dependence on God*

After we have understood and recognised what God desires, we need to exercise our spirit and our will to act on what we have come to recognise. The proper exercise of the spirit and will is in dependence upon God's power. There needs to be God's enabling. The next verse tells us how this takes place.

**Colossians 1: 11**

strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;

We need to continually exercise our spirit and will according to our understanding, knowledge and spiritual perception. As we exercise our spirit and our will in dependence upon God and according to His power, this would lead to increasing strength of the inner man and more and more we will be effective for God and will bear fruit in every good work with steadfastness and patience. Paul, recognising the importance of being strengthened with power through God's Spirit in the inner man, prayed in this direction for the Ephesian believers:

**Ephesians 3:16**

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;

Our inner man can only be strengthened through the Spirit of God. Where there is proper exercise of our spirit and our will, we will grow stronger in the inner man, in our spirit and will. All of us, in one way or another, are always exercising our will, but often in the wrong direction. When this takes place our inner man degenerates. What is needful is that we continually exercise our spirit and will properly, according to our spiritual perception, in line with our understanding and knowledge of God's purposes, according to the guidance and enabling of the Holy Spirit.

*c) Bringing our body and emotion under subjection*

Our body and emotion must be brought under subjection through the proper exercise of our spirit and will in accordance with God's will. We can glorify God in our body (1 Cor. 6:20). Emotion can be part of healthy Christian living in the wholesome experience of God and spiritual reality. However, emotion and bodily appetites must not be the basis of our lives and response to situations.

## **Temptation Through What We See**

### *Temptation of Eve*

#### **Genesis 3:6**

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, ...

Some key words in Genesis 3:6 reveal how the temptation came about, what took place and how Eve fell:

“the woman saw”

“it was a delight to the eyes ... desirable”

We can see here that it was a *temptation through what the eyes see*. Eve was tempted through what she saw: that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes and desirable to make one wise. Eve fell because she entertained the temptation in relation to something expressly prohibited by God. This area of temptation is a very major problem in Christian living and for all mankind.

It is helpful to pay attention to two words: “delight” and “desirable”. They convey the sense of something attractive and appealing to us. Likewise, the term “temptation” also connotes something attractive and appealing to us, that draws us to move in a negative direction.

It is helpful to be clear on this point - things that are appealing and attractive do not necessarily mean that they are good for us. However, it also does not mean that things that are good for us must be very distasteful, unappealing and unattractive. There are many good things in life that are attractive and appealing in a healthy sense, especially if we learn to love what God loves and our lives are healthy.

We can be easily deceived and led astray when we live according to what we are inclined towards, what we see as appealing and attractive to us. We must be careful and vigilant in this respect. At the very heart of temptation, how the evil one destroys our lives is by offering things that are attractive to us and thus drawing us to his ways.

If we compare the third temptation faced by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 4, we see similar elements there.

### *The Third Temptation of the Lord Jesus*

#### **Matthew 4:8**

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;

The evil one did not merely say to the Lord Jesus, "I am going to give You this and that" in order to tempt Him. He instead deliberately brought the Lord Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Here, there was an additional pull in the temptation because the Lord Jesus could see the attractions. Satan was trying to tempt the Lord Jesus through what He could see.

Satan was also trying to appeal to the Lord Jesus Christ by offering something appealing and attractive - all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. The evil one often tempts us through the things in the world. The verse in 1 John 2:16 is very relevant for our present consideration.

**1 John 2:16**

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

Although the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life can be classified under the category of the lust of the flesh, the apostle John distinctly highlighted them. This is because these are important areas that we need to beware of - temptation through what we see - the lust of the eyes, and the area of pride. The latter will be considered in greater detail in subsequent messages: 2TS05, and 2TS06.

Realising how temptations can easily come to us through what we see, we need to be careful and not to linger on tempting scenes. That was the failure of Eve. She should have turned away from rather than focussed her eyes on that which she knew the Lord had specifically prohibited and thus entertained the temptation. She let it delight her eyes resulting in a desire for it and it culminated in sin.

In matters that we know are not good for us and which are a temptation to the eyes, we should not linger upon them. If we linger, the tendency is that they would cause us to falter and lead us in the direction of sin. We must take steps to avoid sights, places and things that would give rise to this problem of temptation in the area of sight. Should we stumble upon them, we should quickly turn away from them.

On the one hand, we should try to avoid and overcome this problem. On the other, we should take care not to do things that tempt others or cause them to falter through tempting sights. Otherwise, we would also be held accountable for contributing to their stumbling. Let me give an example.

*Area of Dressing*

As far as I am able to understand of the constitution of men and women, in the area of relationships with the opposite sex, men generally tend to be more easily affected by sight. As such, it would be helpful that sisters pay some attention to the area of dressing so that they do not become a source of unnecessary difficulties for the brothers.



Our approach should not simply be looking at ourselves in the mirror, looking at the way we dress and say, "To me it is all right. I won't be affected by someone else dressed like that." The issue here is that of taking some care in our dressing so that we do not stumble the opposite sex. Our approach should be one of consideration for others. This does not mean we must dress in the way that others expect of us or we must try to please others and dress exactly the way they want.

It does not mean that brothers need not exercise some care in this area of dressing. They should also pay some attention to how they dress in order not to cause unnecessary difficulties for the sisters or cause them to feel uncomfortable in this area.

#### *"I see - I want" Attitude*

When we see something attractive or beautiful, we tend to want to acquire and possess it. It may be in the area of gadgets and appliances, various kinds of material possessions, or objects of beauty, or just things that we see others possess. We need to pay some attention to this kind of "I see - I want" attitude. Some of us have more problem in this area. The thing itself may not be bad but we need to consider prayerfully whether it is a manifestation of the problem of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and if so, not to yield to it.

When we want to acquire something we see, we should ask ourselves, "Is this something that God wants me to have?" or is it something "I want to have" - because it is attractive and I am inclined towards having it?

The real issue is: do we live according to what we want or according to what God desires of us and for us? The heart of our approach to life ought to be: we only want what God wants for us and not what we want for ourselves. This is the meaning of commitment and submission to the perfect will of God in contrast to living as we please.

We have to prayerfully look to the Lord to evaluate whether it is something the Lord desires us to have. We need to be vigilant because there are many, many things in life we see which tend to arouse within us the desire to possess them. We must not just yield to such impulses or desires but must check ourselves. Does the Lord want me to possess it? It does not mean that a Christian cannot possess anything. There are things that are helpful to possess but it must be in line with what God desires for us.

Some of us have problems in this area when we go shopping. We see things in the shop and we want to buy them. If we know that we tend to have this kind of problem, then my suggestion is to reduce the shopping trips and reduce the length of time we spend in the shops. Consider beforehand what you need and then go to a suitable shop and buy it and go home - without looking around too much at other

things. In this way we can reduce opportunities for the evil one to tempt us and also save time. It may seem a comparatively minor problem but we should try to resolve it. It can grow when we feed it and it can become a serious problem of indulgence in the desires of the flesh.

### **Fleshly Aspirations For Attainments Not Intended By God**

#### *Temptation of Eve*

In Genesis 3:5, 6, we also see the evil one tempting Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit so that she could become like God, knowing good and evil.

#### **Genesis 3:5, 6**

5 "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

I would like to draw your attention to the following key phrases:

"You will be *like God*"

"*knowing* good and evil."

"*desirable to make one wise*"

The evil one tempted Eve with the idea that if she were to partake of the fruit, she would be like God, knowing good and evil and become wise. Taking of the fruit was clearly prohibited by God but Eve was tempted in that direction. She yielded because she wanted to be like God; she wished to attain a position that God did not desire of her. She wanted to know things that God did not desire her to know, deceived into thinking it would make her wise. The problem here can be summarised as *fleshly aspiration or longing for attainments or positions not intended by God* for us.

When we compare the third temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see how Satan tempted Him in the same way when he offered the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world.

#### *The Third Temptation of the Lord Jesus*

#### **Matthew 4:8, 9**

8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;

9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

"All the kingdoms of the world and their glory" have the implication of power and authority. But such power and authority from the evil one are outside of what God desires for the Lord Jesus or for us. Not intended by God - that is the crux of the temptation.

We need to beware of the evil one offering us power and authority. This is a very dangerous area. If we falter in this area, the adverse consequences can be very serious. This can take place in different forms. There are people who indulge in the worship of demons and occult activities because they want such power and authority. It can also come about through deception.

If we have an unhealthy desire for spiritual authority and power, we can easily fall prey to the evil one especially through deception. It is important for us to take care because once we yield, it will lead to a relationship with the evil one and bondage to him.

In subsequent messages (2TS09 to 11) we will be considering in greater detail, the attacks of the evil one through deception, factors which contribute to its taking place and safeguards against this area of attack. The subject of attacks of the evil one and how to overcome them is also covered in some detail in the messages AR202-217.

The evil one can work in many subtle ways. He can offer us power and authority not only in the spiritual realm but also in the affairs of this life. We must be vigilant to ensure we do not fall in this area because of personal ambitions, whether it be spiritual ambition or worldly ambition.

The evil one can tempt us with worldly position, achievements, status, fame and power that are outside of God's will. The aim of the evil one is to cause us to become entangled in them and become distracted from the mission that we have. We become submerged in all these things such that our focus on God is gone and wrong attitudes creep into our hearts.

Remember the area of problem we are considering is fleshly aspiration for attainments not intended by God for us. It does not mean that having a position or status in this world or career advancement is necessarily bad. It does not mean that a Christian should not pay any attention to his career or give it some thought. The issue is whether we have personal desires and ambitions in these areas so that we are more vulnerable to the temptations of the evil one to seek for attainments not intended by God for us.

Spiritual ambition includes positions and roles in the Lord's work which we may aspire to or which the evil one may tempt us to attain in order to gain the recognition of men. We may also enjoy the sense of power and having authority over others.

*Principle: Reject whatever is not of God and "worship God and serve Him only"*

As these areas of temptation can become rather problematic, I will share briefly what should be our approach. The way to counter temptations and attacks in these areas is to continually affirm and take the position of *rejecting whatever is not of God and whatever is outside of His will for us*. This includes the question of timing because sometimes it may be the Lord's will for us at a later date but not at that point in time.

We can learn from the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord willing, in future messages I will be considering in detail how the Lord Jesus countered the various temptations and the lessons we can learn. Along the way, I will point out aspects that are relevant and helpful without going into detail.

In the third temptation, the evil one offered the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. But the Lord Jesus replied: "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (Matt. 4:10)

Here it is more than rejection of whatever is not from or of the Lord; it is rejection of the evil one and what he has to offer.

Apart from dealing with the negative, it is important that we concentrate on the positive, and that is to "worship the Lord your God and serve Him only". We reject whatever the evil one has to offer and commit ourselves to worship God and serve Him only.

"To worship God and serve Him only" is an attitude of heart. This means a humble submission to God. We will submit to whatever He desires of our lives, wherever He leads and whatever role He may desire for us. Our sole desire is just to worship and serve God. We count it a real joy and privilege just to be able to walk with Him and to serve this perfect God who loves us and who knows and desires what is best for our lives. This attitude of heart is very important.

If we want to overcome this area of attack and be able to counter it effectively, we must not have personal ambitions independent of God or outside of God's will for us. This applies to worldly ambitions as well as spiritual ambitions. It includes even ambition for things that appear good like the personal desire to accomplish big things for God. The moment we allow ourselves to harbour personal ambitions it is wrong and we place ourselves in serious danger.

It does not mean we cannot have any ambition at all. The Bible does talk about ambition. Generally the word "ambition" has a worldly connotation. In 2 Corinthians 5 however, Paul tells us that there is a very good ambition which should be the sole ambition of every Christian.

**2 Corinthians 5:9**

Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

The phrase "at home or absent" in verse 9 refers to whether we are "at home in the body" - on this earth or "absent from the body" - with the Lord in heaven (vs. 6 and 8). Whether we are on this earth or at home with the Lord in heaven, our sole ambition is to be pleasing to Him. This should be the goal and what occupies our hearts and our whole direction in life. There must not be personal ambitions independent and outside of God's will. If we humbly submit to God and seek to please and honor Him, the Lord will lead and guide us to whatever is suitable and good for us and whatever will fit into the outworking of His purposes.

**Knowledge And Wisdom Contrary To What God Intends or Has Revealed***Temptation of Eve*

In the area of knowledge, we need to recognise that there are areas the Lord does not want us to pursue or to know. They may be areas that are harmful to us or areas that we are not ready for at our stage of development. We should not try to seek for such knowledge.

In Genesis 3:5, 6, Eve was tempted with the knowledge of "knowing good and evil". This is an area of knowledge that God did not want Adam and Eve to have (at least at that point in time), but Eve thought that such knowledge was "desirable to make one wise". Eve was tempted into thinking, "If I know, I will be wise". Here, *the temptation is with regard to knowledge and wisdom contrary to what God intends or what He has revealed.*

There is worldly wisdom as distinguished from spiritual wisdom. The apostle James explains the difference in James 3:13 and 15. He tells us that real wisdom and understanding is manifested by good behaviour in the gentleness of wisdom.

It is not true wisdom if there is bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. Such wisdom is earthly, natural and demonic and does not come from above. This means that it does not come from God; it is worldly and under the influence of the powers of darkness.

*Liberal theology*

In this area of temptation with regard to knowledge and wisdom that is contrary to what God has revealed, I have in the previous message mentioned liberal theology and its adverse effects on God's work. There are many writers of Christian literature who have been influenced by liberal theology and if we are not careful in our reading of such books, we can be influenced too. The problem with liberal theologians is that instead of submitting themselves to divine revelation in the Scriptures, they use their

human reasoning and wisdom to judge and criticise God's revelation in the Scriptures. They decide for themselves what is acceptable and what is not. Their so called "scientific" or "modern" approach led to the rejection of many fundamental and crucial aspects of the Christian faith including the virgin birth. They reject the plain meaning of the biblical account of many of the supernatural and miraculous occurrences, which include various manifestations of God's power, the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples, and the activities of the powers of darkness.

### *Worldly Wisdom*

The Scriptures tells us that the world through its wisdom cannot know God. This is because knowledge of God comes only through divine revelation.

#### **1 Corinthians 1:21**

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

Recently, I watched some documentary programmes on television featuring some of the leading philosophers of today (bear in mind this message was preached in 1983). These philosophers are recognised in the world as at the very top in their fields. They have very good minds and are able to discuss with clarity and in great depth all kinds of abstract ideas. However, the conclusions they arrived at and the remarks made were based on human wisdom and the wisdom of this world. As they talked, it became clear to me that, generally, they proceeded on the assumption or presupposition that God does not exist.

To illustrate what is worldly wisdom, I would like to share with you some of the strange conclusions that they arrived at. In one programme, a philosopher, introduced as someone well recognised in the field of philosophy, was asked about reality and how he looked at life. He shared that he regarded total reality as consisting of matter. Matter means physical or material things. While there are those who struggle to understand how the mind works, to him that was not an issue because to him there is no independent reality of such things as the mind or spirit because these are abstract and not matter. Well, you may say, "How can he say such a thing? We know each one of us has a mind." But to him there is no independent reality of the mind – you may appear to be using your mind to think but to him, our emotions and thoughts are just a matter of particles of molecules knocking against one another and producing sensations of thoughts and emotions!

Even the average man in the street, including the simple and uneducated, recognises the reality of the mind and that total reality does not consist of matter alone. But this "learned" and highly regarded philosopher, with all his training, mental capability and worldly wisdom, failed to recognise these fundamental realities.

In another programme, a philosopher, well recognised in the field of study known as philosophy of language and even more so as an outstanding linguist, discussed the area of the learning of languages.

Apparently, people used to regard learning of languages as something that a person picks up and learns from what he is exposed to in his environment. Having made extensive studies, he was able to show that the learning of a language is actually a very, very complex thing and it is not feasible for children to pick up and learn to communicate in a language so quickly simply by learning from his environment. He concluded that this is feasible only because mankind has a built-in language capability. We come into this world with this "programmed" ability, which enables us to be able to learn to speak and communicate in languages so quickly and efficiently.

As I watched the programme, I thought that this language capability is such a meaningful demonstration of God's creation of man and should help him to recognise or at least hold out the possibility that we have it because we have been created in this way by God. Unfortunately, after marvelling at this wonderful and very complex built-in capability for language learning that exists in man, he went on to attribute its existence in man to millions of years of evolution. It is sad that he should conclude that something so intricate and complex as our language learning capability is the result of evolution.

Those who adopt this approach to life think they are adopting the scientific approach. In reality it is the wisdom of the world.

The issue of man's ability to choose is another area that has stumped philosophers. People generally agree that man is capable of making choices, that he can choose from several alternatives and can actually choose other than what he has chosen. However, if we approach from the angle of reasoning that there must be factors that "cause" a person to make that particular choice, it is difficult to understand how the person could have chosen otherwise.

By human reasoning, philosophers are unable to find any satisfactory theory that could explain the reality that human beings are able to choose and thus they conclude that it is a great mystery which they cannot understand. There are those who conclude that our sense of the ability to make choices is an illusion. We will choose what we will choose.

But we know that the explanation as revealed by God is so simple - that God has created us in His image with the ability to choose. The ability to make choices is at the heart of what it means to be a moral being. Specific choices we make are not "caused" or determined by various factors. Various factors may affect and influence us but we have been created with the ability to choose and we will be held accountable for the moral choices we make because we can actually choose other than what we have chosen. If this were not so, man's response or actions cannot be properly described as blameworthy or praiseworthy and commendable.

However, although the people of the world may have human wisdom to quite a high degree, without divine revelation, they are at a loss and cannot comprehend such a fundamental truth. The Lord willing, I will be considering more fully the issue of freedom of choice in the next message.

On the one hand, the Scriptures tells us that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God" (1 Cor. 3:19). On the other, the Scriptures also indicates to us that even the most precious truths can appear foolish to the human mind:

**1 Corinthians 1:23**

but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,

We know that the truth of "Christ crucified" is a very central and precious truth but "to Gentiles" or non-believers, or to the human mind apart from divine revelation, it can appear foolish.

*The Place of the Human Mind in the Outworking of Our Faith*

We may ask this question: "Is there no place for the human mind in the outworking of our faith?" To me, the answer is clearly, "Yes, the human mind has a very important part in the outworking of the faith". The Lord Jesus tells us we must love the Lord our God with all our mind (Matt. 22:37). The renewal of our mind is an important aspect of our transformation so that we will not be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2). But it is important to be humble and our human mind must be open and subject to divine revelation. Real wisdom is wisdom from above and not human wisdom independent of God. By human wisdom and reasoning, we can easily go off at a tangent and arrive at all kinds of wrong conclusions. The Scriptures does mention that man can have true wisdom:

**1 Corinthians 2:6, 7**

6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;

7 but we speak God's wisdom ...

There are two key elements to take note of if we want to have true knowledge: be earnest in our pursuit of and be subject to divine revelation, especially God's revelation in the Scriptures. This will enable us to grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding and in the renewal of our mind.

We recognise God as the One who is infinitely wise and so we submit to His divine wisdom and seek to "live on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God". Whatever may be the issues and problems of life, it is important that we do not act or decide according to our own wisdom, but seek divine wisdom and subject ourselves to the principles revealed in the Scriptures which is inspired by God. This



must be the abiding way of approach in our lives if we want to live effective, overcoming lives.

### *Pursue Knowledge Within the Limits of What God Wants Us to Know*

Knowledge is useful and important in living, including Christian living. However, in the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden, knowledge posed a problem. I would like to make a few brief comments on the area of the pursuit of knowledge.

We must pursue knowledge only within the limits of what God *wants us to know* and what He wants us to know *at that point in time*. Some things may be proper for a Christian to know but such knowledge may not be suitable for him at his current stage of development. There are also areas of knowledge that the Lord does not want us to pursue, for example, knowledge that promotes sinful thoughts, which arouse fleshly desires or encourages wrongful conduct harmful to our being. We must be careful not to seek for knowledge that is not intended by God for us.

We must also beware of the pursuit of knowledge merely out of curiosity. The desire to satisfy the "I am curious and want to know" urge is a dangerous thing and can lead us to harmful consequences not only for ourselves but also for others. If we do not resolve this area of weakness, the evil one will feed this desire and the weakness will develop as we yield to the temptations to seek to know various things that are not helpful for us to know. Whatever God does not desire us to know, whether it be spiritual matters or not, we must not be curious and try to seek to know.

### **Concluding Remarks**

We must concentrate on and pursue what God intends for our lives and seek only for what He desires for us. The perfect God who loves us knows what is best for us. The Scripture declares: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32), that is, all things that are truly good for us. We must not yield to temptations that come from the evil one, reaching out, seeking and trying to grab the things that God does not intend to give to us. They may appear attractive and desirable, but they will be detrimental to our lives. We must continually affirm our unchanging posture of submission to God and resisting the evil one and all that comes from him.

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