

Profanity (Part One)

Living Apart From God

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We are going to start in James chapter 3, which is called the 'Untamable Tongue' chapter, where he goes through and talks about how the tongue has never been tamed. We all seem to run at the mouth and get ourselves in trouble. James writes:

James 3:6-10 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell [showing the source of all this bad language]. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

As we go through the last days in this world, we are witnessing how much the tongue is a world of iniquity and how much of an unruly evil it really is, as the apostle James so picturesquely puts it.

You can hardly watch a movie or turn on the television without your ears being scorched by the foul language spewing out of the actors' mouths.

The Internet teems with profanity. People feel free to use language like that because they can, in some sense, be anonymous and it does not ever seem to come back on them. But it does.

Social networks, especially, seem to draw out a great deal of profanity. One study found that over 47 percent of Facebook pages or Facebook walls are covered in profanity, and 56 percent of the comments with profanity in them were written by 'friends' of the same people. So you can tell that they all felt very comfortable typing or writing in this crude way with each other.

Here is something that will blow you away: Another study of recorded conversations reported that the average person in the English-speaking world (I believe this study was done of Americans, Canadians, and Britons) speaks roughly 80 to 90 swear words each

day, which makes it about half a percent of all words that are used. And it varies among people. Some people do not curse at all, some people curse up to 3.4 percent of their words. Do you realize that would be about 600 curse words each day?

Let us get the comparison here.

We also use plural pronouns like 'we,' 'us,' and 'our' throughout our speech during the day. They make up only 1 percent of our words. And we like to talk about ourselves—the things that we do, things that help, things that are neat to us, or whatever—do we not? One half of that is the number of swear words the average American, Briton, or Canadian uses every day. This is not surprising really though. I would say that cussing has long been a basic part of our culture in America.

In 1776 George Washington issued an order at Valley Forge commanding his soldiers to watch their language. It read:

The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish and wicked practice of profane cursing and swearing, a vice hitherto little known in our American Army is growing into fashion. He hopes that the officers will, by example as well as influence, endeavor to check it and that both they and the men will reflect that we can little hope of the blessing of Heaven on our army if we insult it by our impiety and folly. Added to this it is a vice so mean and low without any temptation that every man of sense and character detests and despises it.

(GEORGE WASHINGTON)

George Washington was a leader. He knew what good manners were. It is something that we have fallen from—that kind of respect for others and respect for oneself and respect for God—precipitously in these times.

American history is full of profanity. Our soldiers and sailors have always been known for their foul mouths. We talk about 'cussing like a sailor' or 'using filthy language like a sailor.' Rough and earthy men, the ones that forged our borders to the sea, inhabited the American frontier. They felt free to use whatever profanities and curses they liked, when they liked.

I just finished listening to an audio book titled 'Lincoln: The Biography of a Writer'. It was mostly about Lincoln evolving literarily throughout his life, so that he could make such

things as the Gettysburg Address and his second Inaugural Address, which are held up as paragons of American writing. But the author, in this book, repeatedly mentions that Honest Abe told vulgar stories and used quite a bit of earthy language, especially when he was younger.

Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky. He moved to Indiana and then he moved to Illinois as the frontier was going. His family was that 'rough and tumble, hewn out of space and the wilderness' type. Lincoln was different from his family in that he was self-taught and he brought himself out of that. But he still had grown up in a culture that demanded crude stories and pretty earthy language. Over the years he toned it down publicly, but still if you got him aside he would tell you a pretty bawdy tale. I guess the Spielberg movie got it right when they put a bit of cussing in a recent movie, *Lincoln*, that was put out this past year.

Victorians used coarse language but they did it in private.

In the 1920s social critics criticized the trend of "slumming upper class men and women who were using a lot more four-letter words than they used to."

In the 1940s returning GIs were castigated for their 'depraved profanity', as one critic put it.

Then there were the foul-mouthed demonstrators and the hippies in the 1960s.

All this, throughout time, has been amplified by Hollywood, rock 'n' roll, hip-hop, and rap so that now we are a society that seems to have lost all sense of stigma or shame about what comes out of our mouths.

So America has always been a profane nation. We are not known for being the sweetest when we talk but considered brash and crude by a great many people around the world. That is because that is kind of the way we are; that is just the way we became because we have forged a nation out of nothing. But that does not excuse us.

Earthy language has become more widespread and more audible than at any time since those frontier days—those early days of Abraham Lincoln.

People could expect that when they went out to a public event they would not hear profanity because people refrained themselves; of course, the people who were putting the public event on would certainly not use that sort of language. They expected that they would not hear it on the radio, on television, or even in most movies.

The production of *Gone With The Wind* was fined (I do not know if it was \$5000 or \$10,000) for the use of the D-word back in 1939 because it was so shocking that it would appear on film.

And of course, gentlemen never cursed before women and children and it was considered a crudity for them to have to hear it.

But today we can hardly get away from it. It surrounds us everywhere. People are profane right and left in their language. Certain words that were once considered to be profane and would have been looked down upon in any situation are now treated as normal language—like the D-word—that can be used just anywhere at any time and people hardly bat an eye. Even the worst of profanities which have had their edges softened over the past decade or so by the use of close-sounding euphemisms, have now have people just insert that word over the euphemism because they know what they mean, and it is done very blatantly, even in children's shows.

Movies and TV shows that do not use foul language are looked down upon as unrealistic. Their dialogues, people complain, are stilted if they do not use foul language or they say it sounds artificial because people do not speak that way. And they are right. Most people cuss like those sailors.

'Profanity'—if you want a definition (this is one of those definitions that I hate because it uses the word to define itself)—if you would go to Webster's, it would say something like this: Profanity is the quality or state of being profane.

Most commonly it is the use of profane language. When people talk about profanity, they are talking about speech that displays a desecration and debasement of someone or something. That idea of desecration is basic to the term.

It is often thought of in terms of speech, but it can also describe other things. Many other things can be profane. Facial expressions can be profane. Stick your tongue out at your mother—you are being profane because you are debasing her. Gestures—the middle finger is a profane gesture. And there are many more, not just that.

Other social behaviors are interpreted as profane when they are insulting, rude, vulgar, obnoxious, foul, or desecrating (we get back to that word again). The definition then covers expressions that are scatological, meaning 'bathroom words' (derogatory, sexual). More recently, racist and sexist terms are now part of the vocabulary of profanity.

As a sidelight, let me give you a little bit of extra information. The history behind it is interesting. Most American profanities are Anglo-Saxon words. Americans do not curse using French or Latinate words (like 'defecation' and 'intercourse'), but the swear words that they use are the Anglo-Saxon ones—the typical Anglo-Saxon Germanic words for normal body functions.

There is a reason why Anglo-Saxon words became curse words rather than the French words. The French (the Normans) came over the English Channel and defeated the English at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. When they (the Normans) installed themselves in England, they made French as the language of aristocracy and Anglo-Saxon ('normal' English at that time) became the language of the peasants. And so these 'high' words (French Latinate) that the Normans were using became the high society—the finer things of life.

This goes even into things we eat. We do not eat 'cow'—that is the German word for the bovine creature. We eat beef. Those are French words, not English words.

So the same thing happened with cuss words. When you wanted to talk in polite society about private things, you could use the French Latinate words and get away with it because that was the 'high' way of speaking. But if you use the Anglo-Saxon words, then they were degrading because Anglo-Saxon was the degraded language.

Once the two languages came together—the French and the English to form Middle English, and later on Modern English—then those stigmas remained. So when people cuss, they are more often going to be using an Anglo-Saxon term—an earthy peasant word—rather than the high and mighty Latinate French words. So that still hangs over us today.

'Toilet' is a French word that describes the place where we defecate or urinate (I am using French Latinate words). The word 'toilet' originally did not mean anything like a bathroom or a urinal, or what we call a toilet today. A toilet originally was like a doily; in fact, those words are actually related.

'Toilet' was the French word for a covering on the basin in a washroom, and it became known as the place of the toilet. That is where the chamber pot was. Over time, the word ceased to mean the doily and transferred to the chamber pot, and that became the toilet. It is even that way in French (they say 'toilette').

So it is just kind of interesting how these things change over time.

Profanity (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Now 'toilet' is not the word that we would really like to use. So we changed it and made a euphemism for it. We call it 'the bathroom' (Is not a bathroom cleaner than a toilet?). If we think about the cleanliness of a bath, then that makes us feel a lot better. There does not even have to be a bathtub in a bathroom, as long as we do not call it 'the toilet' (because that is gross!).

We have even gotten away from calling it the bathroom anymore. Some people who do not have a shower or a bath in the room call it the 'Powder Room'—because you do not go there to do anything other than to powder your nose, right? And now we have 'ladies' rooms' and 'men's' rooms.' My boys have a 'boys' room' but there is no toilet in there.

So why do you call the bathroom a 'ladies' room' or a 'men's room'? It is a euphemism, so we do not have to think about what actually goes on in there.

This is how language is. Normal words—even the word for 'doily'—get dirtied over time by the way people's minds work and we have to come up with new ways of saying things.

So profanities end up being these things having to do with bathroom words, sexual terms, racial terms, derogatory terms of one kind or another, put-downs, and sexist terms.

However, the word 'profanity' originated in a religious context. We can never get away from that. The idea of desecration underlies the whole concept of profanity. The word 'profane' derives from the Latin 'profanus' which literally means 'before the Temple' ('pro' meaning 'before' and 'fanus' having to do with the Temple). If you are 'before the Temple', you are not 'in the Temple.' So it means 'outside the Temple.'

Others have taken it even further in saying that it is not just 'outside the temple' (standing a few feet away), but 'far from the Temple.' It just depends how profane one happens to be.

Literally, it means 'before the Temple' showing that you are not 'in the Temple.'

In Latin, it originally suggested either desecrating what is holy or having a secular purpose. There is a pretty wide gap, a wide range of meanings, between actually desecrating what is holy and being secular, or having a secular purpose to a thing. So something could be profane and perfectly fine in Latin, but all it meant was that it did not have a religious use—meaning it was secular. On the other hand, it could also describe things that were actually desecrating of religion or a religious person.

There is a difference between 'profanity' and 'blasphemy.' 'Profanity' represented secular indifference to religion. This is normally within the Roman Empire where they spoke Latin. 'Profanity' mostly represented the secular indifference to religion or to religious figures. It was entirely secular. That is how the word was used.

'Blasphemy' though—as the Christians came upon the scene especially, but also in the Roman religions—was a more blatant and offensive attack on religion or religious figures. 'Blasphemy' is a Greek term.

The Greeks and the Romans were pretty close when it came to these ideas because the Romans took a lot of what they thought from the Greeks who were just before them. So it does not really matter a great deal that 'profanity' and 'blasphemy' are from two different languages.

'Profanity', in Latin, was not considered to be a sin. It just means it did not have anything to do with religion. 'Blasphemy' was sinful. It was a direct violation of the third commandment ("You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"). You are bringing on condemnation on God. You are blaspheming His name. That is how the Latins separated the two. 'Profanity' was just something that was outside of any kind of religious circle. 'Blasphemy' was desecration of a religious person or religion, or God Himself.

There is a difference between 'profanity' and 'blasphemy' even in English. Although there are overlaps, 'blasphemy' is considered stronger than 'profanity.' The Greek, as it was used in the New Testament, uses the words 'bebelus' (noun) and 'bebelou' (verb). The verb means 'to desecrate,' like when the Jews said that Paul was 'profaning' the Temple, when he came, and he supposedly was bringing Gentiles; and he was not. But that was the accusation that they made. Jesus also used it when He said, "Do not the priests profane the Sabbath when they do their work?" and obviously the answer is "No, they do not."

The words 'bebelus' and 'bebelou' only appear seven times in the New Testament. 'Bebelus' means 'threshold'—like 'the threshold of a door,' 'the threshold of an era.' It is right there as you come in to an entry. 'Bebelus' particularly describes the threshold of a temple. It is now closer to the Latin meaning, which denoted one who either was or ought to have been banned from entering a temple, or describing a secular worldly person—a person void of religion or piety.

So we are actually getting very close back to what the Latin is. These words are very similar. This Greek term ('bebelus') literally means 'threshold' whereas 'profane' is

‘outside the Temple’ or ‘before the Temple.’

From the New Testament Greek, a profane person was one who had no relationship or affinity to God. He was not able to cross the threshold into the Temple where God was. It is similar to the Latin idea of being apart from deity.

But I am not interested as much in profanity of speech as I am about profanity as a lifestyle or acting profanely as a way of life. Not necessarily what comes out of our mouths, but our actions—what we do.

If we limit profanity just to curses and swearing and obscenities, we ignore a huge and important spectrum of biblical teaching on the topic of profanity—of being profane. It is good for us to understand this.

There is actually a great deal about profanity, profaning things in the Old Testament. It is very interesting that Leviticus and Ezekiel have the most uses of the word ‘profane.’ Leviticus 16 contains instructions to the high priest on the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16:1 Now the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered profane fire before the Lord, and died.

What had happened there in that situation was that they had had a little bit too much to drink and they needed to light the censers. But the fire had gone out. So they decided to use just regular fire, not fire that had been lit by God Himself out of heaven—fire which was holy, different from what you could just get out of somebody’s campfire.

The Levites had the charge of keeping this fire lit perpetually. But these two sons of Aaron had let it go out in a bit of thoughtlessness and stupidity—perhaps drunkenness—and had to pay the price. God killed them in an instant.

This comes right after that. It is interesting that it follows that. This is talking about what is holy and what is profane.

Leviticus 16:2 And the Lord said to Moses: “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die [the same thing that happened to his sons] for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat [this is very important for this message].

The preincarnate Christ was present in the Holy of Holies. That is how things were situated there. The ark, with the mercy seat on top, was typical of His throne and that is where He was. That is where you approached God. If you wanted something, you had to come before God before His throne. And God is saying: “Not anybody can do this. You cannot, even as high priest, come before Me in My throne room at any time. It has been restricted.”

Leviticus 16:3 Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering.

Therefore, not only was he not to come in at anytime that he pleased, when he did come in, he had to come with blood—the blood of a bull as a sin offering and the blood of a ram as a burnt offering—to gain him entrance. We have learned about the symbolism about these two offerings. So the high priest had to come in with sacrifices and the right attitude, you might say, before God.

We know, from what is stated later in the chapter, that the high priest was allowed to come into that holy place—the Holy of Holies—once a year on the Day of Atonement (and only that once every year).

It states there, in verse 16, that he is there to make atonement for the holy place because of the uncleanness—the profanity—of the children of Israel because of their transgressions for all their sins. No one else is allowed to go in there with him.

So if the high priest is only allowed to go in there once a year, and he has to fulfill all these requirements—with the blood and all—and that there is no man else who is able to come with him, that means that only he, of all the priests and of all the Israelites and of all the people in the world, was allowed to come into the Holy of Holies, and that one time a year.

What this tells us is that the Temple and tabernacle complexes were designed in such a way that there were clearly defined spaces so that as one approached the Holy of Holies, fewer people were allowed to proceed.

Let us take Herod's temple—the second Temple—as an example. There was a great platform on top of Mount Moriah and there was the Temple in the middle of this platform. The Temple itself had a wall around it and it was not anywhere near the size of the whole platform.

Outside of the walls of the Temple was called the 'Court of the Gentiles.' Gentiles can come in there. It did not matter if you are from the Far East, the Americas, Europe, or Africa—if you were a Gentile and were visiting Jerusalem—you could come in and see the Temple. You could come up to that Temple wall and there was a sign there that read "Gentiles: Go no further on point of death." That was as far as they could go. But if you were an Israelite, you could walk through and go in to the next court because there was a next court.

The Temple complex itself was a long rectangle. The first court that one came in was called the 'Court of Women.' Any Israelite (man, woman, and child) could come in to the 'Court of Women' and they could do what they do there—go among the columns, meet their friends, listen to a priest, or whatever.

But as you approached the Temple and those doors there, to go in to the next court—which is the 'Court of Israel'—the women had to stop. They could not go any further. But the men could go through into that next court. That court was where they had the altar and the laver and all that. The men could go in there and watch the proceedings.

There was also a 'Court of Priests' right before the door, and from what I understand, they pretty much barred every other Israelite from going into that little part. That was only for Levites. Everybody in the entire world has been kept out of the Temple except for the Levites as a tribe. They are all being held at arm's length.

Now the Levites were able to go into that first sanctuary to do their work—and only to do their work. The priests were able to go in there more freely.

But if one were just a regular priest, he could not go any further because there was an embroidered blue veil that went across the whole Temple, about two-thirds of the way in, and it blocked the view. It was from floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall. One could not see any further than this blue veil. The high priest alone could go behind that veil once a year—only on the Day of Atonement—with blood.

Thus we see that only one person in the entire world was able to approach God once every year with blood.

The whole Old Testament system (the Temple, the Levitical rituals, the priestly things) is designed to show us that access to God was completely cut off. Only the high priest could go in. One could not approach God; He was remote. He did all His work through the priests.

What does this show us, in terms of profanity and these definitions that we come to understand from both the Latin and the Greek (the Latin 'profanus' meaning 'before the Temple' or 'outside the Temple'; the Greek 'Bebelus'—meaning 'threshold', meaning 'banned from crossing the threshold')?

This system is designed to show us that we are all profane. Everybody in the world is profane. None of us are holy enough to approach God. Only the high priest had the ability and the permission, with blood, to go before God. Everyone else was profane. So it was a picture of hopelessness. Something had to be done to get access to God, or it was all over because we are all an unclean thing.

Mark 15 contains the account of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This is the solution. This is the High Priest going before God with His own blood, as is explained in the book of Hebrews in more detail.

Mark 15:34-38 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!" Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Jesus Christ, our High Priest, went before the Father with His own blood. He died. He took the penalty upon Himself and the way was opened. It was symbolized by the veil being rent top to bottom, showing that the veil was taken away and there was access to God before His throne made possible (it was not opened to all, it was just made possible) because the High Priest did His job. So Christ's blood became the means by which a called son or daughter of God could approach the Father for forgiveness, justification, aid, and most importantly, to have a relationship with Him. And in having a relationship with Him, we can then put on the image of Christ.

But that was impossible under the Old Testament system. It was only when Jesus gave of Himself that it became possible—that there was a solution to human profanity. That is being forgiven, given grace by God to approach Him and have some of His holiness placed on us by grace. Then at that point—once we have been made holy—we also have the ability to grow in holiness. It is not just what has been given to us, but is able to

be put into our minds, put into our habits so that we become more like Christ. We become holy in fact, and not just holy because He has given us something.

As a summary, let us see how this works.

In Hebrews 10, Paul is concluding his argument (he has not totally concluded, but he is getting to the end). He says:

Hebrews 10:19-20 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way. . .

It is 'new' because it had never happened before. There had always been that veil there. There had always been that distance between humanity and God ever since the Garden of Eden. When God threw Adam and Eve out of the Garden, there was always something blocking the way back to the Tree of Life, as it were. So it was 'new' and it was 'living.' The reason why it is 'living' is because Christ is living. He is the way.

Hebrews 10:20-22 . . . which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

This is where we are. Once we believe God, believe Christ, accept His sacrifice, are baptized, and have hands laid on us, this becomes a reality. We have now the ability to have access to the Father through Christ, through the veil, by His blood. We are no longer profane—we are holy—because our hearts have been sprinkled, as it says here, from an evil conscience and our bodies washed. Our sins have been wiped away. We are a new creation.

So we are no longer profane at this point, no longer of this world, no longer secular.

We now have a relationship with God. We are now religious. We are not godless anymore. We have God in us through Christ, through His Spirit. So now we have this relationship with Him. We have an affinity with Him because we are not just friends, we are children. Our relationship is not just casual, it is intimate. It is as close as 'close' can be.

Our lives are supposed to reflect that. We have this holiness and righteousness imputed

to us through the blood of Christ. But it is up to us, at this point, to make the imputed real in terms of our own character.

After baptism we are very glad to have that imputed holiness because our lives do not reflect that righteousness and holiness as much as it should. We still have profanity in us and it needs to be overcome and gotten rid of.

There has been a change in status in our lives at this point. We have been taken out of the world and, as it says in Colossians 1, we have been conveyed into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. So we have had a status change. We are no longer citizens of this world. We are now citizens of the Kingdom of God. We are now no longer residents. We are strangers and pilgrims on the earth and we look for a City—the Kingdom of God. We are moving through this world. There are a lot of differences.

Once we are baptized and brought into the church—the family of God—there are a lot of changes to our status. We are justified. We are being saved. We are sinless. We are righteous. We are holy. We are the children of God. We can go on and on and on with these things that change once we become a part of God's family.

Now Paul tells us here in chapter 6 of Romans that we have got to change our lives to match it. He says:

Romans 6:17-19 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

We have just been called into the church. Things are different now. We have all these things—all these blessings, all this grace—that have been given to us. What we have done, to put it in human terms, is we have changed masters. We were slaves of Satan—slaves of that sinful way, slaves of the evil—and God delivered you out of that. Now since He redeemed us, gave His life for us, we are now His—lock, stock, and barrel.

The one status that we have not changed is our status as servants. We were servants of the one, but we have now changed masters. We are now servants of the Great One,

the Holy One.

So we have to align ourselves under His rule. We were very good at aligning ourselves under the rule of our former master. We did it willingly. We did it happily because it was so much fun. We thought that was the life. But then we learned the truth and we have become different. We have become Jesus Christ's slaves, His servants, and now we have to do what He says. We do His will, not Satan's will.

Elsewhere it is put this way: "Your old man has died." So we are to put on the new man. None of these things are supposed to stay in stasis. There is movement here. The old man is dead. The new man has to be created, nourished, completed in us. The new man, of course, is Christ in us—His image in us. We are called and set apart to quit conforming to this world and to be transformed into the image of Christ. That is essentially what Paul says in Romans 12:1-2.

We are to reflect our Master's mind in everything and be able to not only follow His commands, but know exactly what He wants us to do before He even asks us. We are supposed to have that mind of Christ so that we can be just like Him in every way. This is Christianity 101. I am not stating anything new.

But doing it is so hard. We learn this before we are even baptized. We know that once we are baptized and come into the church, we have to make changes. We have to make changes even before we come into the church because we believe and repent and then we are baptized. But the repenting does not stop, the overcoming never ends, the growth never ends, the producing fruit never ends because we are never going to come up to the image of Jesus Christ in this life.

So it is a constant struggle to do this because the simple fact is that we are very profane people, and holiness is so high and above us and wonderful that we cannot attain it. Even with the help of Jesus Christ and His Spirit in us, we still do not do it. We fail all the time. We get better at it. But which one of us is perfect?

God understands this, and so He has told us (hints here and there) that He does not expect perfection. He puts it up there as a goal—"Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." He wants us to do it, but makes allowances for our flesh and gives us grace. God says: "Instead of absolute perfection, I want you to be complete. I want you just to be finished. You don't have to be absolutely perfect (I would like you to be; try to be) but your flesh—there's always those pulls of the flesh." He is willing to forgive them. So He gives us grace.

But it is difficult and it makes life difficult, and we can be discouraged because it *is* so difficult. When we see the perfect standard and see the way Jesus Christ just seemed to be able to pirouette through life almost—He always had the right answer, He always knew what to do—but we forget that He had no end of the Holy Spirit to draw from. He had the mind of God *a/ways*. He had all that wisdom to draw upon. He had strength of mind and character that we are not ever going to come close to. So we look at that and compare ourselves to Him and say, “Why do I even try?” That is the wrong attitude to have and it can get us down.

What is in these next verses just makes it all the worse. Peter gives us the basic concept and then he takes it a few steps further and we feel even less worthy.

I Peter 2:4-5 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones [we are compared directly with Christ; He is a living stone in this Temple and now we are living stones], are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9-12 But you are a chosen generation [I mean, he is laying it on thick here], a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people [His treasure], that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

God has called us through Christ and is building us up into a spiritual house. We are a core of holy royal priests, a holy nation, another race of people, separate people from the rest, different because we are God's. All the rest are still under the curse, but we have obtained mercy and we have been placed beyond that. Satan cannot get at us in the way that he could before. We have been protected by God. We have been given all these graces. And he tells us why: He says all these things have been given to us to witness to the world and to bring God glory. So He says, “Get on the stick.”

We often think of our overcoming and growing and producing fruit in a narrow, personal, and even a selfish way. This is the way a lot of us tend to look at it because we are not

thinking straight. We think of it as this is how we become qualified to enter God's Kingdom. We know that is not true because it is totally by grace that it is all going to happen. But we go through all these changes, we think, as a way to get God's attention—to get a better reward. Notice that I keep using 'to get'.

Because we forget, Peter reminds us that all of our efforts to do good—to grow in character—are for God's glory, not our own. How is this used?

Peter says here all those things that you grow in are to be used as examples, as models, for others so that they will be drawn into that Family and Kingdom, because it says His government will never end. He is going to be constantly expanding and He is going to be using us to do it, and one of the things that He is going to be using is our growth as an example of how it is done. Of course, He will use us in other ways in His Kingdom, but He is forming a people to bring Him glory and to be an example.

What was Israel's job in the Old Testament? To give God glory and to be the model nation to bring the Gentiles to God.

What is the church's purpose? What is the individual Christian's purpose? To bring God glory and to bring others into the Family.

God is taking care of the salvation by grace. We have things to do, I do not want to minimize that at all. But I want to get us to change our attitudes about why we are doing this.

I gave a sermon titled "It's Not About Us" several years ago at the Feast. God is taking care of us. It is about God and His glory. That is where it is. That is where our minds have to be—that our lives glorify God and not ourselves, and that we provide an example for our children and for those out in the world, so that they can see how God's way is lived in the human spirit.

We have a tendency, especially when things begin to go bad, to concentrate on 'our' problems, 'our' trials, 'our' hurts, and 'our' afflictions. They do not come up to what Christ suffered. Our complaints must make God's ears hurt. Our feelings are constantly being hurt by others. We really begin to feel sorry for ourselves. That is how we feel. It is all about us.

We look at other's people's lives out there in the profane world. They seem so happy and productive. They have fun. They go to all the good movies. If they have cares, they do not show them. They have money to spare. They have nice cars, beautiful homes.

They go on fun vacations. They go to all the big games. They see all the wonderful shows that come through, all the rock bands. They can afford 200 bucks for a seat that is up in peanut heaven. They rub elbows with the coolest people. They get together on Friday evening. They go down to the bar and they dance.

Paul says that making such comparisons is not wise. What we are doing—when we compare ourselves to each other or to people out in the world—we are comparing ourselves to the wrong standards (II Corinthians 10:12). And wanting these things, wanting what other people have—wanting that life—can make us begin to make compromises.

We begin to make compromises with the Sabbath. We can begin making compromises in terms of our sexual relations. Our speech starts to degrade because the people that are out there having all that fun speak that way. We lie. We steal from the office.

We can do this because we start to feel sorry for ourselves that we give in a little bit. So we think we are recapturing the spice of life when we are actually killing ourselves spiritually.

If we do not go that far, then a lot of us like to live or walk as close to the edge of the cliff as possible just to grab a little bit of fun that the world offers. We bank on our Christian freedom and on God's mercy and grace to return to Him if we should slip up. We succumb to the 'just this once' ploy to give us permission to do what we want. Inwardly, we are being profane. That is what profanity is—the lifestyle way of looking at it; it is becoming like the world again. It is refusing the holiness that God has given us and turning right around and going back into the world and acting like we used to, as Peter so bluntly put it (it is like the sow going back to the mess and the dog to its vomit). We are repudiating all those wonderful things that God has done for us.

If you want to do some studying, study the life of Esau as a profane person and see what you get in there.

II Corinthians 5:14-17 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore [Paul says], from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh [meaning, we should look on each other and our lives as spiritual. We have been taken out of the flesh and put into the Spirit, and our concentration has to be on those spiritual things]. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh [meaning that we knew Him humanly, on

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human terms], yet now we know Him thus no longer [we have an even greater bond—a spiritual bond, spiritual eyes to see Him, and a spiritual mind to understand. Things have changed drastically in our lives]. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; [those] old [profane] things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

In II Corinthians 7 are our marching orders. This is what we do. This is how we remain free of lifestyle profanity in our lives.

II Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.