

## What'S Your Attitude?

The Importance of Our Overall Perspective

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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My family, along with several other families, have been spending quite a lot of time this past month at swimming pools. June is a swim team month around Charlotte, and I am sure elsewhere in the United States June is also a swim team month. Our teams then—the ones that have signed up—have been going to swim practice or meets four days a week for the past several weeks. I guess it started sometime in May, and now we are about a month or so into it.

It has been fun and exhausting both for the kids and the parents. Those twice-a-week meets are supposed to start at 6 and they run until it is done, and that can be 10:00 or more as there are about “5 million kids” under about 10 and they all swim like snails (well, snails do not swim!). But they swim very slowly and the times are pretty high and you just have to wait until they get through all those kids before you can get to the older kids, the teenagers, who can actually swim and get down in the pool.

This week we had lightning happen during one of the meets and of course you have to get everybody out of the pool area for half an hour from the last time they saw lightning. So you wait around and wait around and then they take you back in and the little kids swim for 20 minutes, and then we all had to leave again and go out into the gym and wait and wait another half-hour or so. If they had done the whole schmear, we would have been there probably until midnight. But they cut out the relay, so we got to go home at 10:00 instead. So we have had some late nights and early mornings too.

I should not forget to mention that these kids have 7:30 am practice every once in a while.

And Beth has been very kind. She has taken Jarod there instead of me having to get up and do that. She is the one that rises early, I rise late. So it is just like normal for her, getting up at that time and taking him down there, and I can get another 40 winks.

But we parents mostly just sit around and watch, cheer, and talk, although we are required to volunteer to do various jobs at the meets. So we do get out there and time the races or collect the time sheets or whatever the job it is that we have volunteered to do.

But since we have been there for such long periods of time (four hours is a pretty good

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chunk of one's life or at least one's day), you have a lot of time to sit there and look and study and think about things. I began to watch the strokes that the kids perform and to kind of analyze them in my mind.

They have four strokes: the butterfly, the backstroke, the breaststroke, and the freestyle.

You are supposed to be able to swim any stroke when you do the freestyle, but because the front crawl—also called the Australian Crawl—is the fastest stroke, most people decide to do the front crawl.

So after watching them a lot lately, my mind just began to construct metaphorical meanings to correspond to each one of these strokes. (Now you think I am really weird.)

It began with the observation that each stroke that was taken by a swimmer is a means of moving forward—it is how they make progress—which led to equating the forward movement with a person's passage through time, that is, the way he goes through life. So each stroke symbolized a different way people live their lives. Here, in church, we often talk about a person's walk with God, and a person's walk with God is the way he lives his life before God.

So instead of walking on our feet, I just transferred a lot of these same ideas to the motion of swimming because that brings out a few different ideas from the looks and the mechanics of the stroke. So those different mechanics—what you do in the stroke—led me to think about and attach it as a symbol to the different ways people live their lives.

So I took it one step further and thought that each stroke identified a different perspective on life; not just that it showed you how they did it, but it was how they did whatever they were doing reflected their internal perspective on life. I also considered that the waterline itself (because you swim partly above the water and partly below the water) symbolized the boundary between what can be seen on the outside versus what is happening on the inside. So let us consider these strokes. We have got four strokes, so it should not take long.

The first stroke is the most common one: the freestyle. The arms alternate reaching forward and pulling the water toward the body and then pushing it behind you. So you go through the water like this and underneath or behind you the feet do a flutter stroke. Actually it is the most powerful stroke and because of that, also the fastest stroke.

The 100 meter world record for men in the freestyle is 46.91 seconds. That is pretty quick. That is zipping down the pool. Our teens are regularly over a minute. So it is that

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quick—46.91 seconds—and that is in a 50 meter pool. It is slightly different in a 25 meter pool which the kids normally swim in. It is a very fast, aggressive, head-down, all-business stroke. You are in there to get across that pool as fast as possible. You hardly even breathe—at least it seems that way. You just motor on down. Everything is busy, busy, busy going forward.

I am reminded in this stroke of the Type A personality. It is the man or the woman who is hard-charging, ambitious, impatient, and driven; the kind of person who makes a big splash in whatever he does because he is in there and he is just going to finish the job. All work, no play. That is the kind of idea I get from the freestyle or the crawl stroke.

The next one is very different—the backstroke. The backstroke, obviously by its name, is one on the back. It is an upside-down crawl. I do not know if you ever thought of it that way. But it is like a mirror image of the forward crawl. And so you go through the pool. All you see is a flutter kick, so in that way it is also the same. It is faster than the breaststroke because the breaststroke is very difficult and slow, comparatively, but it is slower than the butterfly and the freestyle, just comparing the times.

Remember, I said the world record was 46.91 seconds for the crawl. Well, for the backstroke it is more than 5 seconds slower, at 51.94 seconds. So that is fairly slow.

The big disadvantage with the backstroke is that the person is on his back. That means that by going backward, he goes forward and the swimmer cannot see in front of him. He is blind. He is moving backwards and he has to feel his way down the lane and crash into the other end.

When I look at the backstroke, at best I see a sentimental person or a laidback person who is just kind of stroking his way through life. At the worst, I see a person who lives in the past because he is always looking backwards. He is moving forward but he has got to feel his way forward because his eyesight, his perspective, his viewpoint is all backward, not forward. So perhaps he is looking back on the good old days and does not want to face the future and very reluctant in moving forward in life.

Now on to the breaststroke, which I mentioned is one of the most difficult strokes. The breaststroke requires greater endurance and leg strength than any of the other strokes because the arms in the breaststroke, even though they do something, it is a very weak stroke—the way the arms have to go. The arms are pushed out together in front and then you pull the water towards you and behind you as much as you can, and most of that movement is under water. And in doing so, you are lurching forward. When you watch the breaststroke happening, you see heads bobbing and depending on how fast

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your stroke is it might go lurching and lurching forward.

It really reminds me of little prairie dogs popping their heads out of their holes and looking around and going back down. By the way, the reason for that is because the kick underneath is a frog kick and it is awkward; it is also called a whip kick. Your legs are just splaying out and it is moving you slowly forward, but it is giving you a very jerky movement and you are not going with any kind of grace down the lane. So, as I just said, it is the least graceful stroke and you have all those lurching movement.

So I compare it to kind of that prairie dog look. It is timid, it is uncertain, it can be very fearful, or it could be a person who just does not know what is going on in his life and he lurches from one thing to another. It is kind of a staggering way of going through life. This kind of person, you could say, does not have real goals or ambitions that he is going for and so he just kind of wanders about.

Finally, my favorite stroke—the butterfly. Not favorite because I can do it, but favorite because of just the way it looks when you see a person going through the water using this stroke. Butterfly, or fly, is swum on the breast, both arms moving simultaneously forward and back. So you get this movement and everything is happening together. And underneath, in the kick—this uses an entirely different kick than any of the other strokes—the legs are together and you do a dolphin kick underneath and it makes the body move in an undulating way through the water.

And because of this—because it is a powerful kick and it is a powerful upward movement using a lot of these core muscles—you spend a lot of your time out of the water when doing this kick. After the backstroke, it is probably the easiest stroke to breathe in because you are out of the water so much.

But one of the things about the butterfly is that it is a very controlled stroke and it is coordinated. If you do not get your legs whipping properly in the dolphin and your arms going forward and back in the right synchronization, you are not going to go anywhere. You are just going to make a big splash and sink to the bottom probably.

It is a very difficult stroke to master, in other words. It requires good technique and timing. And if you do, you go fast. It is the second fastest stroke. The world record time in the 100 meters is 49.82 seconds, which is just a little bit less than 3 seconds off the forward crawl world record.

To me, looking at the butterfly, it pictures a very confident, open, self-controlled, coordinated approach to life with a lot of internal propulsion going on underneath that

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does not make a big splash, but it does its job in pushing the person forward.

(So now that you know how my mind works, you realize what a scary place that is.)

My question is: Do we fit any of these types? I am not going to key in on these necessarily.

But are we a freestyle type—the hard charger, the one that tries to just get from point A to point B, get things done without thinking about anything else, just goal oriented, and go-go-go?

Are you the laidback, devil-may-care, looking backward type?

Are you the fearful type that does not really have a goal and lurches from one thing to another?

Or are you self-controlled and coordinated with a lot of internal propulsion that makes you move toward, let us say, the Kingdom of God?

You know, we tend to think of ourselves—when we are asked a question like this—in a positive way. We always put ourselves in the best light, do we not? That is just human nature. Are you not the sum of all things, the center of the universe? Well, that is the way we tend to think of ourselves because we are always in ourselves. We are always aware of what is going on with us because that is us. We cannot turn ourselves off. It is very difficult to be totally other person oriented because that is just the human condition. The ego is a big thing. It is very hard to overcome. So we tend to think of ourselves positively whether that is true or not. So we believe a lot of times that we have everything together. But do we?

I am sure if we would bring somebody else alongside and say, “Okay, evaluate this person’s life,” he would probably say that we do not have everything together as we think we do. We are thinking we are moving forward productively getting things done. But are we? Would somebody else make that judgment? We think we live in the present and with our eyes firmly fixed on the future and we are not really concerned about what happened in the past, we have put those things aside. But have we? We may need to rethink.

Do we think that we keep all our fears from making us hesitant and anxious? We think we have conquered the things that tend to pull us down. Have we really? Most people think that they are doing alright, that their approach to life is what is best for them.

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But do you know what? The Bible disagrees. And that means God disagrees. It says in Jeremiah 17:9 that “the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?”

We say we know our own heart, we know our own personalities, we know our own way of life, and we think it is good. But God, in that one little verse, says we do not know our hearts. Our hearts blind us to the truth on many things.

Scripture, we could say, is God’s record and testimony that human beings do not know what is the best way to live.

Mankind’s perspective, as shown through the record of Scripture, is that he has a skewed and perverted idea about what life is all about. And that perspective on life has been skewed and perverted by Satan’s influence, first of all, as well as the heavy load of sin that we cart about with us all the time that constantly influences what we do. And not only that, we live in sinful cultures that we ourselves have built and maintained. So there is a constant presence—whether it is spiritual, physical, or internal—that is trying to move us in a direction opposite to the one that God wants us to move in.

I have four scriptures here taken from all over the Bible. These ones that I have here are from the Old Testament, but they give us a good indication of what God thinks about people—mankind—in this vein.

Ecclesiastes 5:1. I am not going to go there, I will just paraphrase. It says there that people do not know that they do evil.

Psalm 82:5 says that they walk about in darkness. And Jesus says later that men love darkness.

Amos 3:10 says that people do not know to do right. They have not been taught or they have forgotten, or what have you.

And then Psalm 14:3. And I am going to quote this one directly (this is also mentioned in Romans 3):

**Psalm 14:3** They have all turned aside; they have together become corrupt.  
There is none who does good, no, not one.

It is God’s consistent judgment that man’s perspective on life is flawed.

So today I want to talk about attitude. This is what I had been getting to this whole time.

By 'attitude' I do not mean our changeable moods or emotions. They are too quick. But what I mean by 'attitude' is our overall approach to the Christian life (well, I could even take out the word 'Christian'). What is our overall attitude or approach to *life*?

Think of it this way just to simplify: If we could boil down our attitude, or your own personal attitude or perspective on life, to one word or phrase—and I want you to do it without bias (*Can you do it without bias?*)—what would it be? What would you say would be the one thing that motivates you the most? What is the way that you approach things?

I have mentioned a few of these. Are we driven? Are we fearful? Are we scatterbrained? Are we faithful (using a spiritual word)? Are we out for gain? Are we out for glory? What is it that drives us? What is the attitude that we wake up with everyday and through that attitude we face life?

Now let us think of this in another way. Okay, that is the one way that you said that you thought without bias is your approach to life, your attitude. I am counting on you to have been honest. That is why I said 'without bias.'

Now is that one thing that you just said is your approach to life, the same as the one that you *want* it to be? If you said, "Well, I'm fearful," maybe what you wanted was 'bold' but you know that you are fearful.

By the end of this sermon I hope that we can see that if our overall attitude is right, our lives are going to make a huge turn toward the good, the better. But before we go any further, we need to define 'attitude' because it is important that we are all thinking along the same lines.

This is from the *New American Oxford Dictionary*. That dictionary defines 'attitude' as "a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person's behavior."

Notice that the definition that I just gave emphasizes that it is a settled way of thinking or feeling. It is not a mood which is temporary and fleeting; that is more emotion; that is not an attitude. Moods and emotions often depend on recent circumstances, but the attitude is above all that, or should be. It is the way that we normally conduct our lives, our normal perspective on life. And attitude is long-lasting. We could even call it a

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permanent or a semi-permanent perspective that informs how we act, how we behave, how we talk, and how we live. In one respect—if we want to make it slightly more spiritual—we could say that a person's attitude is the underlying essence or even the spirit of his daily walk through life.

Now let us get some synonyms. Some people do not like definitions as well as they like synonyms because they help to put it in its proper niche.

Synonyms of attitude: Disposition, orientation, aspect, manner, position, point of view, approach, outlook, perspective, way of thinking, mentality, mindset, and worldview.

These bring out very well, I think, that attitude is more than how a person feels that day, and it is not like, as in common lingo, somebody 'cops an attitude.' That is not really an attitude; that is just either a mood or a put-on way of acting with another person.

In other words, we do not have a different worldview every day. Our positions on matters do not change with the sunrise or the sunset. If we feel like this is the right thing to do, we are probably going to think that same thing tomorrow and the next, and it is going to take a great deal of internal change to alter that even in the smallest way.

So one's orientations are often fixed very early in life, sometimes within the first few years. And I am not talking about just sexual orientation, I am talking about orientation toward anything. For instance, we may have a bent toward engineering or art or scholasticism or cooking or nursing or whatever it is. Those things that we orient toward or have a bend toward can come out very early.

In the same way, our approaches to life are long-term and they are very hard to change. For instance, if we tend to be pessimistic in our outlook, it is very difficult to become optimistic, because that is something that has probably been set from your very earliest times in life in the first few years, maybe in adolescence. It is just the way things work out. Or the way you were taught, or attitudes in the family, or what not. Kids pick up on these things and it can go for their entire lives.

Whether a person is oriented toward being the hard worker or likes to play all day, that sort of bent can start early and it might take a lifetime to change.

If you are a person who has definite goals and you strive toward them, you are probably not going to change somebody who is a wandering minstrel that does nothing but go from here to there. It is just not your way. That is not the attitude that you grew up with.



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The same way with a person who seemed like a juvenile delinquent who just tends to be like a magnet drawn toward crime. That is probably part of the environment that they grew up with and it would take quite a wrenching experience to turn that mind toward justice.

The same thing would go whether you pursue wealth, on the one hand, or maybe altruism on the other. Oftentimes the wealthy are in it for themselves. They do not want to give up any to anybody else. They can be misers and scrooges.

What about the one you have all probably done—the Myers-Briggs personality test? That tells you whether you are an introvert or an extrovert. Well, that mindset—that way of approaching life—was probably set early. Maybe it is even genetic. The Bible does not tell me whether that is or not. But we just have a certain attitude or way of living, whether we tend to be introverted or whether we tend to be clowns (Well, not all extroverts are clowns. That is an extreme!)

Even politically, there is conservative versus liberal. People's minds can be changed politically. There have been a lot of instances where a person has grown up liberal and they have been able to see the error in it and then they have become conservative. But that is a tough thing. A person has to really put his mind to it and think things through to make that change.

I think you are getting the idea that attitudes, mindsets, worldviews, perspectives, dispositions, orientations—whatever word we want to use—are set fairly early in life. They are very hard to change and they can say an awful lot about us.

Now those examples I gave you are just a few of them. There are many shades of attitudes in between all of those things. So I do not want you to think that it is entirely black and white in terms of introvert, extrovert, conservative, liberal. There are people all along the spectrums of those things but even so, wherever they are on the spectrum, it is very difficult for them to change to another part of the spectrum.

Winston Churchill once said, "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." Well, maybe attitude was a little thing to him but it is not really as little a thing as he makes it sound.

Another quotation is from Katherine Mansfield. Some of you may know the name. She was a fiction writer in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. She provides a little bit better perspective.

Could we change our attitude, we should not only see life differently, but life itself would

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come to be different. Life would undergo a change of appearance because we ourselves have undergone a change of attitude.

I think she has got it right.

Many of you have heard of Charles Swindoll. He is an American clergyman. He wrote one time on the subject of attitude:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, a home. I am convinced [this is the 'money' part of the quote here] that life is ten percent what happens to me and ninety percent of how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes.

That is enough defining and trying to figure out what we are talking about here.

'Attitude' does not appear in the King James Version or the New King James Version. But the idea is certainly in the Bible and probably on just about every page. Where the subject is a person's spirit, mind, heart, thoughts, or intents, the idea of attitude is present. And modern translators, in some of these other versions of the Bible, often insert the word 'attitude' to give a clear picture of what the word in Hebrew or Greek is trying to convey to us.

Let us go to Ephesians 4. I want to show you an example of this. I am reading the New King James, so you will see that the word 'attitude' does not appear there. He is going through the section about the new man, how the new man is different from the old man.

**Ephesians 4:20-24** But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

The word 'attitude' does not appear there at all. As a matter of fact, none of these

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synonyms (disposition, orientation, aspect, manner, position, point of view, etc.) appear here.

Let me give you what Ephesians 4:23 says in the God's Word translation.

**Ephesians 4:23 (GW)** However, you were taught to have a new attitude.

Here is the Amplified Bible's version:

**Ephesians 4:23 (AMP)** And be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude]

Finally, here is the Living Bible Paraphrased:

**Ephesians 4:23 (TLB)** Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better [in the new man].

Once called and regenerated, the Christian's attitude must change. You cannot be in the church and have the same attitude you had before you were called. Otherwise you are not being converted. That is what conversion is all about. Conversion means change. It is going from one thing to another. There is a transformation taking place and one of the big transformations that have to take place is in our attitude.

We have got to change our attitude from that old man, who with his filthy conduct was full of, as he says here "deceitful lusts" and we have got change our minds, change our attitudes, so that we reflect godly things. And if we get our attitude right at the basis of those things, of those changes, then we have a good trajectory in front of us. Because that attitude is going to make a difference.

I am going to spend the rest of the sermon on examples from the Bible of attitudes. Not just good attitudes but bad attitudes as well. Because I think we will be able to see from the examples how they changed lives, how they made things better for a person, and specifically how they made God look upon a person.

So let us go back all the way to the beginning of the book, to Genesis 4 where we obviously have the story of Cain and Abel. But here, right at the beginning of mankind's history as recorded in the Book, we have God highlighting a contrast of attitudes.

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These two brothers, who some have speculated could have been twins, could have been born at the same time. But they could not have been more different. Cain was one way, as we will see, and Abel was his direct opposite.

**Genesis 4:1-7** Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord." Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Here is this highlight of the contrast of attitudes of these two men. You have Abel's obedient attitude and Cain's careless attitude. God, when He accepts Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's, clearly points to the one that He prefers—which attitude, in giving an offering, He liked.

Abel's attitude conformed to God and His requirements, and this is what we see in the sacrifices. Abel gave of the firstlings of the flock and their fat. He gave a burnt offering to God. He gave an offering of the best of his flock. He gave something that was a living animal, something that had life and breath.

Cain, on the other hand, brought what was probably a grain offering. It was an offering of meal that he had grown, and in that sense it was a little bit of a sacrifice.

But we have to use the rest of the Bible to come to understand why there was such a big difference here in their two offerings and why God was pleased more with Abel's offering than with Cain's. They both brought something, but Abel brought something better.

Abel's offering showed that he understood the requirements of God, on the one hand, and it also shows that he understood the principle of sacrifice and also of generosity toward God. He gave something that was quite a bit more valuable than Cain.

We also know from the offerings that are shown there in the early chapters of Leviticus

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that the offering of an animal of this type stands for one's complete devotion to God. And so Abel was saying by his offering that he was God's man and that he would do whatever God required of him and he was willing to give of the very best that he had, something that was alive that could be given as a substitute offering for himself. So he was saying, "I'm willing to lay down my life for God." So he was laying it all on the line.

Cain, on the other hand, was giving plant matter, a grain offering, likely one that was fine according to the rules for a meal offering. But in giving a meal offering, he was telling God something very subtle about his devotion. What he was telling God by giving a grain offering was that he was not devoted to God necessarily, or may be at all, because the grain offering symbolizes one's devotion to mankind. And when you give it alone, without an accompanying animal sacrifice, you are essentially telling God that you are devoted to mankind apart from Him, that you do not need God.

And is it not interesting that His punishment of Cain was, "You go far away. If you say you don't need God, okay. Go out to the land of Nod, way in the east. You can be away from where God is working." That is what He told him. So He gave him what he wanted.

So we have two different approaches here. And we can see, by the way that God approached these two things (He accepted Abel's sacrifice and did not accept Cain's), that God's judgment of Cain's attitude was that it was totally unacceptable, that man should not live that way.

And then his reaction: He got all upset and angry at God for not accepting the offering. His angry attitude afterward just verified to God that He had been correct in His judgment of him. His orientation, his attitude was fixed on pleasing himself and when things did not go his way, he went and had a little hissy fit because his feelings were hurt even though he knew all along what God required of him—if Abel knew, Cain also knew—and if he had only done what God had required, there would have been no problem. But Cain did not. He wanted to do it his own way.

So, these two different attitudes. Cain's was bad. It was oriented toward man. It was humanistic, we would say today, or selfish (toward himself). Abel's, on the other hand, was oriented toward God Himself (sacrificial and obedient and very humble) and God was very pleased with that.

Cain gets angry and it says here that "his countenance fell." So God, being a good Father, wants to know what is going on. So He asks him.

**Genesis 4:6-7** So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has

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your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”

This is excellent advice. God always gives excellent advice. When He talks to somebody about a problem, we had better listen.

The first thing He says here, the first piece of advice that He gives Cain: He tells him that he has no right to be angry. He has no right to be in a snit because he knew what God expected of him. And the fact that God did not accept or respect his offering was not God's fault; it was his own fault. It was his own fault for not doing it as proscribed.

God had a certain way He wanted the sacrifices to be done. Cain knew it and Abel knew it. And Cain did not do it. So he should have known that God was not going to accept it. It was his own fault for not following rules. So that was the first thing. If you do not do what is right in the first place and bad things happen, it is not God's fault; it is your fault. Why are you getting mad at God when it is really your fault for not doing what is right? This is God trying to get him to think about his attitude and make some changes because that is what He gets to.

The second thing He tells Cain: He tells him that his attitude, his anger—what he had been doing here—puts him in danger of sin. Remember that Paul says “Be angry and sin not.” He was angry at that point and he probably had not sinned. If God said that sin lies at the door, then he had not quite sinned yet—not in that way. He had not done what was required for him and his sacrifice had not been accepted, but it was his anger that was really causing the problem. And God said sin is crouching in wait. You almost get the picture of a ravenous wolf just waiting there for him to open the door and attack him and devour him. Peter uses the roaring lion imagery, that Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking those whom he may devour. That is kind of the idea that we have here, that it is just about ready to pounce. You are going to sin if you do not get this under control.

So He is telling him that his inner motivations here, his orientations, his worldview, his attitude was going to get him in trouble unless he changed it. At this point, his orientation or his attitude was anger—he was angry at God. And sin was going to come up, bite him, and devour his whole life.

The third thing that God tells him is that it would be a struggle. Notice what He says here: “Its desire is for you” meaning it wants to attack, it wants to overwhelm you. It is

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going to put all of its power into undermining you and making you sin. So fighting against human nature is not easy. He is telling Cain, “You’ve got to rise up and be a man and overcome this. You’re going to have to put all your strength into it and make sure that it doesn’t control you.”

And then He tells him, “You can and should be able to win. Its desire is for you but you should rule over it.” He is telling Cain that he had what it took—the strength—to win, to overcome, to prevail against sin. He had certainly had weaknesses but he had the inner gumption, as it were, to make the right decisions—if he would only make those decisions. He could put his anger down. He could take on a different attitude. It was not beyond him.

But he did not. He failed. Because the next time he saw Abel, he let that anger that was crouching at the door devour him completely and he killed his brother. He was a failure. He did not overcome.

So this informs us very early in our instruction manual that God expects us to have the obedient and sacrificial mindset of Abel on display at all times, whenever it needs to be brought forward (it should always be brought forward). And if we do not have it, we have the ability to change it and we should change it. Otherwise we are bound to come under God’s judgment as sinners. The proper attitude, as we see here, helps to guard us against sin.

Abel did not have any problem with sin in this sense because he obeyed God and did what was right. And his attitude, in wanting to please God, to sacrifice whatever it took to make God happy to fulfill the requirements that God had given him, kept him from sin.

But Cain was a different story. He did not really want to please God. That was not his thing. His thing was pleasing himself and so he gave a half-hearted offering to God, one that showed his internal mindset that he was all for man and none for God, and it led him into sin.

So a proper attitude helps to guard us against sin. It will not keep us from all sin—it is not that strong—but it will give us a head start in doing what is good and right. If we go into a situation with the right mind, wanting to please God, wanting to do only good things for others, then we are already on the way to making good decisions.

Let us go to another one, the one that you might not have considered, that would have this application. Let us go to the book of Numbers.

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In their wandering about the Sinai Peninsula, they were led by God to the southern border of Canaan. They were camped there. It was just over the horizon. They can go up there and they could take the land. This was very soon after they left Egypt. They had been wandering for a couple of years, but still that was fairly quick, at least in comparison to what happened.

But here they are, on the border, and Moses sends in the twelve spies and they go throughout the land and they look and they see what there is to see there in Canaan and they come back with the report. And ten of them, as we know, gave an evil report. They said, "Oh, woe is us! These Canaanites, they are a huge people. These Anakim go fourteen feet high and six feet wide and they have got these huge spears and swords. And you know what, they stand behind fortifications that we'll never be able to climb or to bring down. There's big fruit out there. That's wonderful. But the terrain is awful. We just couldn't do it. There's just no way that we can conquer this land."

Caleb and Joshua say, "Hey, no, not at all. We can do this. Look what the Lord has done for us already! They may look at us like ants but hey, we've got God on our side. Let's move into the land. We can do it. God has been helping us all along the way. If we have God for us, who can be against us?"

**Numbers 14:1** So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.

"All this walking through this horrible desert, waterhole to waterhole, God had had to pour water out of rocks; He has had to rain manna; scorpions and what have you; and we come to the entrance of Canaan and we are stymied. Woe is us!"

**Numbers 14:2-4** And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."

Now they are in full rebellion.

**Numbers 14:5-10** Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. But Joshua the son of



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Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread ["We can eat them up"]; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them." And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel [Now you get the impression that if God had not showed up just then, Joshua and Caleb would have been dead men].

That is the situation. The people, with their 'Woe is me' slave mentality, sided with the evil spies and they wanted to rebel. And as we see in the next few verses, if we would read them, because of their very pessimistic and unfaithful attitudes, God condemned them to die in the wilderness. He said, "In the next 38 years, all of you over 20 are going to die. You didn't listen to Me. You didn't listen to Caleb. You didn't listen to Joshua. You didn't listen to Moses. You didn't listen to anybody. And for that, you're going to die in the wilderness. I had it up to here and beyond with all your complaining, your murmuring, your griping, your rebellion. That's it. You're not going to enter into the land. You're not going to get a reward. You're not going to achieve the goal that we had set out for. You were slaves, I freed you, but you want to remain a slave. And so you will all die as slaves in the land of Sinai."

But Caleb was different. Notice verse 20:

**Numbers 14:20-24** Then the Lord said: "I have pardoned, according to your word [meaning, Moses had interceded]; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord—because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it."

Caleb had a different attitude. As a matter of fact, there are more modern translations

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that actually put that word in there. “Caleb, My servant, had a different attitude.” He was not rebellious. He did not have that slave mentality. He was not pessimistic. He was not focused on himself. He did not want just what he could eat and drink. He wanted what God wanted. He had his eye on the goal. He saw what God was doing and he worked for it. He worked with God in it.

Caleb had a better attitude than all the other Israelites. God picked him out from the crowd to give him what he deserved—praise—for his different spirit, his better mindset. He was set apart by that mindset.

Caleb did not see just giant men and rough terrain and impregnable fortresses. He saw God. He saw God’s power. He remembered all that God had done in Egypt and in their wanderings up to that point for Israel and for everyone. He had a ‘can do’ attitude based on his experiences with God, and his outlook then—his attitude—made him confident and bold. He knew, from his hair to his toes, that if they would just go into that land, it would fall before them with hardly any effort (It would take some effort, obviously. Look at what they had to go through ultimately when they did go in). But compared to what it would be without God, it would have been easy.

Now notice how God explains here why Caleb was different: He said, “He followed Me fully.” That was what made Caleb different. That was what his attitude was centered on—following God fully.

Like Abel, Caleb’s attitude put him in the right frame of mind to obey God in everything. He started with the right outlook. His outlook was that he was going to obey God, no matter what. So when God gave him a difficult assignment, he said: “This might be difficult, but I’m going to obey God because that’s what God wants me to do.” And he did it. That was his attitude. It set him up for success, it set him up for praise, and it set him up for reward.

When God gave him something to do, he did not hold back because if God gave him something to do, he was going to follow God despite the entire nation of Israel standing against him with stones in their hands. For that faithful and bold and positive attitude, he was rewarded with entrance into the Promised Land unlike everybody else, except for Joshua. He was rewarded with a long life and he got a lot of land around the city of Hebron for himself and for his descendants.

God loved that man. He loved the example that he gave to the rest of Israel and He just poured it on him in reward for his obedience and his good attitude. He had a different spirit, a spirit that was set to fully obey God.

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Let us go to Philippians 2 and bring this up into the New Testament.

This is another one of those instances where modern translators use the word 'attitude' whereas the King James and the New King James do not.

**Philippians 2:5-9** Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.

It is verse 5 where the word 'attitude' could be used. The Amplified version has:

**Philippians 2:5 (AMP)** Let this same attitude and purpose and [humble] mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.

The New American Standard Bible reads:

**Philippians 2:5 (NASB)** Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.

The Living Bible says:

**Philippians 2:5 (TLB)** Your attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Jesus Christ.

And finally, the Holman Christian Standard Bible says:

**Philippians 2:5 (HCSB)** Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus.

Jesus is our ultimate example in the right way to live and that includes His attitude toward life. Notice that in these five verses that we just read, it shows that the attitude that He lived with as a man—He went all the way to the point of death, the death of the

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cross—was the same attitude that He had while sitting right beside His Father in heaven. It was that same humble, sacrificial, 'I'll do whatever needs to be done' attitude so that it will fulfill God's will. He never varied that attitude. He was always focused on what God wanted Him to do. That was His mindset. That was His attitude.

Like Abel and Caleb, He displayed a sacrificial attitude of humility and obedience and nothing could dissuade Him from that—not men, not points of spears, not crucifixion. Nothing was going to keep Him from obeying His Father in doing the work that He had given Him to do. He was faithful to the way that God wanted Him to be and to act and to live despite the apparent loss of everything for doing that. Because He knew like Caleb knew. He knew the power of God and so He could face anything—because God was stronger than death. That was proved three days later when He raised Him from the dead. Not even death can keep God from bringing us into His Kingdom.

In John 8 we see what that attitude is.

**John 8:28-29** [Jesus said to the Jews that were listening to Him there] “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He [meaning He is the God of the Old Testament], and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone [Why? This, in a nutshell, is His attitude:] for I always do those things that please Him.”

Notice how confident that statement is: “I always do what pleases My Father.” It is a child-like attitude. Is that not what kids do? “I want to do what will make dad happy or mom happy.”

People sneer at that kind of attitude now. “Why should I, as a grown man, try to please anyone? I'm just going to please myself. I'm going to live for me. I'm going to get what I want. I don't care what your will is, I'm just going to go and live my life. And who are you to tell me different?” See that attitude out there? It is all over.

Jesus, though, is the Father's beloved Son, and the Son loves the Father. As a good child always tries to please his parents, the Son always pleases the Father. Jesus, He says in John 14, is the way and the way is founded on this mindset: “Not My will, but Yours be done” (that is Luke 22:42 when He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane). This attitude of doing what God wanted Him to do gave Him the confidence and the wisdom to overcome the world. And it can do the same for us.

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Let us conclude then in Hebrews 12. This comes at the end of a long discourse in which Paul shows us the kind of faith—we could even say ‘the kind of attitude’—that succeeds in doing God’s will and entering the Kingdom of God.

What he shows here, through this chapter 12, is that we have been given a truly special opportunity to be among the firstfruits of God. It is an outstanding honor to have been chosen for this. And here we are. We have come to Mount Zion. We are standing before the Father and the Son and the heavenly host. And they are watching. They are watching to see what we do with this honor, with this calling, with this special purpose that has been set before us.

How will we react in the good times? How will we react to the tumultuous times that lie ahead? Will we remain faithful like Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and all the other patriarchs, and Moses and Joshua and Caleb and on and on all the way down through the New Testament heroes of faith as well? Will we hang on? Will we try to please God? Will we finish our course?

That is what we have been brought to. And so the apostle gives us some advice.

**Hebrews 12:28** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

This is his advice: Be eternally grateful for the opportunity that God has given you, and in response, serve God. And it is the *how* we serve that is vitally important: He says, “with reverence and godly fear.” That is the attitude we need to have. It encapsulates all this that we have been talking about. The obedience, the humility, the doing God’s will, the trying to please Him is in this idea of “reverence and godly fear.”

We should have such awe and respect for our heavenly Father that we aim to please Him in everything—from brushing our teeth to dying the death of a martyr (if you know what I mean). So think on this on Father’s Day: How do we really respect our Father in heaven?