

Vanity (Part 2)

Vanity

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I am going to be continuing the subject that I began last week on vanity, and hopefully this will be the conclusion of this subject unless I can think of something else that I feel needs to be gone into a little bit later.

I once read of an amusing and true incident that occurred to a famous personality that I think pretty much gives a description of last week's sermon on vanity in the Old Testament. Now, unfortunately I have mislocated some way or another the source that I got this from, but I do remember exactly what happened, I just cannot remember the man's name. I only remember that he was a pretty strong, powerful political leader at the time that this took place and it took place in the horse-and-buggy era. You will see that in just a second.

But this man arrived in London on a train later than he had planned, because the train was delayed en route to London for some reason. The man had timed his arrival to coincide with a meeting that he was to address by giving a speech. And he rushed off the train, jumped into the first horse and carriage, and shouted to the driver, "Get going and hurry!" Well, after they have been traveling for a while, he shouted to the driver, "Where are we going?" And the driver said, "I don't know, but we are sure getting there fast."

Recall that Moses, David, and Solomon (all of whom we quoted from in the last sermon), all made mention of how brief a man's lifetime is so that it seems as though our days just zip by like the blink of an eye. And while that eye is blinking is a time of frustration, a time of futility because so little seems to be accomplished, and the same endless cycle of problems occur each generation. Each generation seems to be condemned to reinventing the wheel. Now, we are able to pass on technology, but what really matters, like wisdom and like character and like love, cannot be passed on. And so mankind is seemingly condemned to an endless cycle of wars and social problems.

Now, the result of this is a persistent and nagging sense of futility that never quite seems to go away except for short periods of time, whenever we are under the influence of some amusement or some blessing of some kind. In fact, I want you to turn to this in Romans the 8th chapter. Paul makes a statement here. He said,

Romans 8:19-24 For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who has subjected it in hope [every commentator that I have ever read recognizes that Him as God, it is God who has subjected the creation to vanity]; because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only that [that is, the whole creation], but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we are saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

Here Paul personifies the entire creation as groaning under the burden of futility, of uselessness, or we might say, of vanity. And he shows that the creation will not be released from that futility until mankind is transformed into its destiny. So we know that it is going to go on for a while yet.

Solomon clarifies why this futility is an endless repetition of the same mistakes and problems. And he shows that this is so, stating that mankind does not know what God is doing, and thus each person cannot discover a meaningful place for himself within that purpose. I remember seeing a title of a book, and I read small portions of it, but the title of it is, *If You Don't know Where You're Going, You Might End Up Someplace Else*. And that is just about the way vanity determines a person's life.

Therefore, Solomon describes life as chasing after wind, meaning that we are seeking something for which there is no hope of even seeing, let alone being

able to catch! That is pretty frustrating. And this life, in spite of all of its accomplishments, is quickly over, but we recognize that it is transitory, profitless, useless, worthless, illusory. And so when you have a thinking person like Solomon, he comes to the conclusion that there is really no point in living. That is because what God is doing must be *revealed*. And as long as He does not reveal it, thinking people are going to reach the same conclusions that Solomon did.

Paul described what God is doing as *a mystery*. And according to the Greek usage of that word, we are dealing with something that is not a puzzle difficult to solve, but rather it is something impossible to penetrate. Now, in I Corinthians, the second chapter, verses 7 through 10, Paul wrote this,

I Corinthians 2:7-9 But we speak [we being the ministry] the wisdom of God in a mystery [there is that word mystery], the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers [meaning the leadership] of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Does that not agree with Solomon? Certainly it does. Man just does not know what God is doing, and therefore he can find no meaningful role for himself.

I Corinthians 2:10 But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Man can see bits and pieces of the mystery, but not the whole, and what this produces in the mind of anyone who is thinking of more than the next moment's amusement, is in anxiety about what is going on. And this is one of the reasons that I mentioned in the last sermon, why Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, cautions God's people about taking no anxious thought about tomorrow, because this too is a vanity. To be driven by anxiety is evidence that a person is not really trusting God to any great degree. Because if we were really trusting Him, we would know that His ever-watchful eye is on us in order to provide for our needs in any situation.

But there is a flip side to this, and that is that there is a very powerful tendency to make man put all of his energies into the achievement of carnal goals. And so, if we do not know what is going on spiritually, if we cannot penetrate the mystery, we have all this time (we think), and all this energy, we have this very fine intelligence that God made us capable of, we can think spatially, and so we cannot turn our attention to what God is doing, because we do not know what it is. And so, the only outlet is for us to turn our attention to all kinds of carnal achievements. And mankind has done very well in that regard, I would say, in an overall sense.

Now, because things beyond the grave are an unfathomable mystery, mankind's hopes, drives, and energies are all given over to personal amusement and fulfillment in this world. Here comes the flip side: because this world is not God's world, those achievements are vanity.

There is another perplexity that is attached to this as well. When we do not know the whole picture, a confusion is produced over the very obvious inequities in life. Thinking people, and I will say liberal-minded people, and I mean here in the sense of people who want to do good in the sense that that they understand it, that they see these things and they want to try to change things and they cannot understand this. The good suffer, the evil prosper. The sinless Jesus is barbarously tortured and killed, and the robber and revolutionary Barabbas goes free. The righteous Job painfully suffers in his body while enduring the accusations of his friends, then at the end, even though Job is justified, his erring friends get a little more than a slap on the wrist.

The point is this: Those to whom God's purpose is revealed, and who have the faith to act and conduct their lives accordingly, that is, according to God's purpose, thus know that vanity consists of anything that a man does outside the purpose God is working out. In short, those whose lives are driven by vanity are for all intents and purposes going absolutely nowhere despite their busyness. Their busyness would fit into what we call today, running around in circles or spinning your wheels.

Again, I keep getting back to this and I keep hammering away at this because God evidently wants us to understand this. That if we are going to really

make something out of our lives, and be thinking about what is going on, like some people undoubtedly are (I am talking about unconverted people), and what this does is produce this sense that Solomon is expressing so frequently and so well in the book of Ecclesiastes. I can almost see him, "Vanity of vanities, everything is vanity!" What he is saying is, life is purposeless, that it is useless, profitless, empty, vain.

Now, it does this because mankind seems to accomplish nothing. The same social, economic, family, agricultural, educational, and governmental problems keep recurring in an never-ending cycle, decade after decade, generation after generation, century after century. And any historian can tell you that mankind seems to be trapped in a whirlpool. All of man's efforts seem to go for a frustrating knot because things only get worse. The inequities are never resolved.

Answer this: What war ever brought peace? And yet we seem to be condemned to multiple wars in every generation. What new drug, what new medication ever brought freedom from disease? What new product brought on by technology ever gave sustained joy and freedom from drudgery? What new social program ever relieved oppression, solved poverty, and removed ignorance?

Am I then cynical because we can see these things in the light of cold reality? Well, the answer is resounding "no," because God fills in the missing elements. His calling has revealed to us very much about His purpose. And we know that He has a time and a place, every man in his own order. But right now is *our* opportunity to turn our lives away from vanity, to make our life really meaningful, to fill our lives with things that are going to pass through the grave. I will show you in a minute how important that is.

Now with this, one has to believe because life has to be lived by faith, "the just shall live by faith." We have to believe that God is sovereign over His creation, and everything is actually under control and is moving towards the conclusion to which God is drawing it. Not necessarily the same conclusion that man, even in his most beautiful dreams, in his highest and purest hopes, would want mankind to be to headed toward, but rather in the direction and to the conclusion that God is drawing it. And because He tells us that His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways, that His

thoughts and ways are so much higher than ours, we can understand, we can believe that what He has in store for mankind is so much greater and better than anything any carnal-minded person could even think. There is no comparison.

Remember what Paul said. God has subjected the same—the creation—in hope! God hopes too. And because God has subjected it to vanity, we have to live understanding that not only does He want it this way, that it is best for us that it is this way, because it is going to produce the most and the greatest for us individually as well. And to fight against this pull in this direction is, in the end, very good for us. Because of this we can have a far greater measure of real peace than those whose hope for advancement or for the advancement and the survival of mankind in this world and its leaders and its institutions and programs and its cultural traditions.

And it is on this point that the far more serious personal consequences of vanity to us consists. Because the New Testament approach is that anything that we do outside the purpose of God is where vanity lies. And so it is on this point that the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament approaches turn.

Recall that I said during the early portion of last week's sermon that if the statement made by Solomon, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," is taken without any other scriptural modification, then it is one of the most astounding statements in regard to life in the entirety of the Bible. But, thanks be to God, it is modified by a multitude of scriptures and principles. And so we can understand that Solomon's statement is true only without the revelation of God's purpose. But once that revelation comes and with it it is coupled with the summons or the calling of God into a covenant relationship, we are given the power to turn what might ordinarily be vanity into something very useful and productive in terms of the Kingdom of God.

God has revealed His purpose to us in order that we get in harmony with it so that when the Kingdom of God comes, we will be in His image and prepared to live in His Family. And then anything outside of that purpose is still vain, useless, transitory, profitless, illusory, unrealistic, and temporal.

So let me clarify something here before we go any further and that is that this is not to say that all of those things outside of His purpose are transgressions of His law, only that their value in terms of the Kingdom of God is virtually zilch. Now if we are completely devoted and dedicated to God, as we might say in another context, if we are really a whole burnt offering, then there is not going to be much of this taking up our time in our life, because we will see it for what it is. It is of no value so why do it?

Let us go back to the book of Deuteronomy. A very familiar scripture.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.

But if your heart turn away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; and you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

What God is doing here is spelling out broadly but clearly what is vanity. Let me say this another way. He is spelling out broadly but clearly what is opposed to His way and purpose, and therefore useless. He is also saying what is in harmony with and therefore worthwhile to His purpose.

Remember that this is a summary statement that we are looking at here, and it follows on the heels of all that preceded it in the book of Deuteronomy, which is a repeating, a second law, a repeating for the benefit of those who are about to go into the land, the practical applications of God's way, of God's teaching, of God's law, for a living *in* the land. And for those of you who were at the Feast when I gave that whole series on the book of Deuteronomy, you remember that the real intent of this is to prepare His end time people for living in the Kingdom of God. That is the real purpose of the book of Deuteronomy, to give them practical application of what is going to be acceptable in the Kingdom of God. not the land of Canaan, in the Kingdom of God.

And so when He says, "See, I have set before you" meaning, I have clearly annunciated to you what is right and what is wrong, what is good towards My purpose, and what is vain and useless towards that purpose. I am not saying that He is specifically saying here in every context that this is vanity, or that is vanity. This is a broad principle showing that God will set before us what is life and what is death. And what is life means that which will continue and is therefore not vain. And what is death means that which is going to pass away and is of no value at all.

Of course, the focus is primarily on the Ten Commandments, because that is what appears at the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy. We also have to understand that when God's law is mentioned that the word is almost invariably the word Torah. Torah, to you and me, simply because it is translated law, tends to mean a written portion of a code, usually something very specific. But most of the time in the Bible, it is not that way. Torah means teaching, instructions, and is therefore must broader. So when He talks about His law, it is good to keep that in mind because He might be talking about His instruction in a broad area rather than a very specific area. And so what He is done here in summary is to tell us to choose between that which is of real value and that which is shortly to cease altogether and is therefore of no value.

Let us go back to the New Testament now to Matthew the 13th chapter, remembering our responsibility is to choose. Jesus is the speaker

Matthew 13:40-43 "Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be in the end of this age. The Son of Man shall send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into a furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

In the context of this sermon, what do you get from that? Well, I will tell you what I get from it. Everything that is vanity, represented by the tares and represented by "those who do iniquity," it is going to get burned up. What do you do with things that are worthless to your purpose anymore, things that have no value to you any longer? Well, you throw them away. You may actually put them into a fire and burn them up, or it may go to a garbage dump or an incinerator and they burn it up. That is what God is going to do to everything that God finds useless to His purpose. He is going to burn up those things which constitute sin. Iniquity, lawlessness is mentioned right in the context.

Now what is sin? Well, there are a number of applications of that word that we can use. Sin is missing the mark, sin is wandering from the way, sin is the breaking of God's commandments. Now, at its broadest, we bring in this principle from the Old Testament, it is transgressing God's teaching, His instructions. Now, if those things are going to be burned up, we can reach a very solid conclusion. Anything that represents sin, that is sin, is useless, it is vanity, it is going to get burned up.

Again, think about Deuteronomy the 30th chapter, verses 15 through 20. God has already determined what is vanity and what is not. You begin to see where I am headed. Sin and vanity are one and the same thing in terms of the Kingdom of God. And so the instruction that is given in that section is that we are to use our free moral agency to choose to do what God has already determined is not vanity or we are to choose to do what is not sin.

Now in the Garden of Eden, do you know what sin it was that Adam and Eve committed that had the greatest impact on mankind today? Through doing this, they actually created, became the authors of this world. Satan said to them, "You shall be as God, knowing good and evil." What they did that was

so devastating is that they took to themselves the establishment of the purposes, the institutions, and the standards that became the foundation of this world. They took to themselves the right, the privilege, the responsibility of establishing what is sin, and what is not. They took that away from God!

They took the sovereignty, as it were, away from God and took it to themselves. That is where they really turned aside. And mankind, because of that, has been condemned to living, hoping, achieving within the framework of the things that Adam and Eve became the fathers of, are the authors of, and that is why their lives are lived almost totally in vanity. Because what they established and what mankind has built upon, what they established or founded, is not in sync, in synchronization with the God of creation.

I John 2:15 [John says] Love not the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world.

This was the foundation, the heart, the core, the essence of Adam and Eve's sin in establishing the standards of the institutions and so forth that are of this world. It was not of the Father, it was of Adam and Eve and their progeny—you and me. We are the ones that have produced these things, not God.

God's purpose, remember, is the one that is going to be worked out. He is drawing it to that conclusion. He is sovereign over His creation but He has subjected the world—it was His decision—to live under the influence of what Adam and Eve and all of their progeny, including us, have established.

I John 2:17 And the world is passing away, . . .

Tie this right into Matthew 13:40-43. All the offends, all that is iniquity is going to be burned up. The world, this society that is arranged against God, is going to pass away.

I John 2:17 . . . and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever.

That is not vanity. Are you beginning to see a picture here? That which is vanity is going to pass away, it is going to end. And so to do it is useless. And we are seeing the most obvious example of vanity is in sin. On the other hand, whoever does the will of God, that is eternal. It is not futile, it will not end, it just keeps going on and on and on and on and on. That is not profitless. A very clear contrast is appearing here. I am going to read verse 16 to you from a couple of other translations that I think are really rich in understanding. First of all verse 16 from the *New English Bible*.

I John 2:16 (NEB) Everything the world affords, all that panders to the appetites or entices the eyes, all the glamour of its life are not from the Father.

Boy, that is hard to take. I mean, it is hard to fathom. Now from the Twentieth Century New Testament, same verse.

I John 2:16 (TCNT) For all that the world can offer, the gratification of the earthly nature, the gratification of the eye, the pretentiousness of life, belongs not to the Father but to the world.

I John 2: 17 (Philips) The world and all of its passionate desires will one day disappear, but whoever perseveres in doing God's will lives forever.

That says it about as clearly as I think any verse could state it. Vanity is conduct that produces nothing. It is profitless, meaningless, transitory. It misses the mark in terms of God's Kingdom, and it is what will be burned up when judged by God. It is what will pass away. Again, tie this into that giant principle there in Deuteronomy 30 that God is commanding you and me to choose what He has already determined to be eternal.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy again, this time in chapter 32, which is the Song of Moses. We are only going to look at one verse, which has something very interesting in it that applies to the sermon.

Deuteronomy 32:21 [God is the one who is actually speaking]
"They [meaning the people] provoked Me to jealousy by what is

not God; they have moved Me to anger with their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation."

This word idols [vanities in the KJV] is again that word *hebel*. You will see in some modern translations that instead of putting in the word vanities, which is what it is literally in the Hebrew, they have inserted the word idols, "They have provoked Me to anger with their vanities." Now throughout the Old Testament idols are referred to quite frequently as vanities so that you can begin to see why our vanity is anything that is useless. What good is an idol? If you can think of a leering statue of a man, or a statue of something that is a joining together of an animal and a human, or a statue that is totally and completely from the animal world, or to a body part or whatever it might happen to be, what good are they?

We can readily agree, we can see that. They cannot think, they cannot talk, they cannot hear, they cannot move—they are absolutely helpless. And yet people in times past have been given over to those things and worshipped them in all sincerity that what they were doing was right and good. They believed that they were going to receive a blessing or a benefit as a result of it. The *New English Bible* renders that portion of that verse, "That they roused me to jealousy with a God of no account." The Knox translation says, "Phantoms have been my rivals." What good is a phantom?

Now we need to think about this idol thing. Are idols in the Bible restricted to a statue? They are not. Let us look at Jeremiah 2, verse 5 where he speaks again in regard to idolatry.

Jeremiah 2:5 Thus says the Lord: What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me, have followed idols [vanity], and have become idolaters [vain]?"

Well the subject there is very clear. I do not think we can go wrong. Picking up on the last thought, I said in regard to the previous verse that an idol does not have to be a statue. An idol is the devotion, or what is important, is the devotion to a concept. That is what is important to God, because that devotion motivates our actions, the use of our time, and our choices.

Idolatry is the worship of or the devotion to a "no god." That is what we can get out of that verse. Moffat translates that this way: "That they went far from me, and they went after empty idols and became empty themselves." Now, are we beginning to see why God is so against vanity? That if we give our time, our energies, our life over to a vanity, what does it produce in us? Emptiness! *We* become empty. *We* become vain. Brethren, that is stunning in concept to think about that. What we give our thinking over to—and conduct will then follow from that—*we* become.

I think you can begin to see why God is so against and so adamant in regard to idolatry. Because in doing them, people are left, and they themselves become nothing that reflects the image of God. God gets angry about seeing His children waste their lives. Anyone of you who is a parent knows how upset you get whenever you can perceive that your children are wasting their lives on something that is not going to produce anything good that you can see, because you are older and you are wiser and you have had more experience. And I know that you get beside yourself because of this.

Tell me something: Would you be pleased to watch your children take drugs? I say drugs because drugs are an obvious example of a vanity to both God and man. I mean we can see from our position that to take drugs is what it is absolutely useless. It enslaves, it destroys, and a person who takes that drug, and if they take it consistently to a certain degree, what is it going to do to them? It is going to destroy them, They become nothing. Are you beginning to see why God is so concerned about vanity? What good thing towards family relationships and good citizenship is born from or produced from drug taking? Well, the result is empty, destroyed lives.

And if you are thinking, you will remember this verse. This whole world and this way is a drug to the sons of God! That is why there is that strong admonition: Stay away from it! It is so plain and clear that the great whore in the book of Revelation is described as drunk on the wine of the wrath of her fornication with the world. Worldliness is a drug that destroys and yet it is so alluring. But it is going to pass away. Now the great whore is hooked on the drug of her own way—confusion.

In Romans 1, which we are going to get to just a little bit later, there is a common Greek word used there and is translated in the *King James Version*

as vain. "They became vain in their imaginations." If you care to, you can look it up in *Strong's* and you will see that that word is used for idolatry in the New Testament as well. What I am driving at here (I am going to make it very plain), is to make the connection, the cause and effect factor. And that is that vanity in action or conduct begins with vanity in the thinking processes. Therefore, the product of that is idolatry, or vanity, is a factor in both thinking and action, or conduct.

Now there is no doubt that idolatry is the most serious of all sins. It is listed first; the first four commandments directly impact on it. The tenth commandment brings us full circle and the apostle Paul says in Colossians 3: 5 that covetousness *is* idolatry. So it is listed first in order to draw attention to it and then it is listed last in order to help us understand that there is idolatry that is involved in any sin that is practiced.

If you care to take time to think through the motivation for why the Worldwide Church of God did what they did in changing so many doctrines, you are going to find the coveting, the favor, and the approbation of the world is right near the foundation. The leadership did not want to be different from the world, they wanted to be the same, they wanted to be accepted. They did not want to be seen as being weird, strange, on the outside; and the only way that what they wanted, what they coveted it, what they desired was to begin to do what the world does. Well, unfortunately, unless there is a change, they are going to earn what the world is earning: it is going to pass away.

There in Romans 1 some modern translations will use the word futile rather than vain. That of course is not wrong because the people's thinking that Paul is writing about was futile, it was going to produce no good thing towards God's purpose, and it was therefore worthless. It was an exercise in futility devoting themselves to false gods, to no-gods. So I wanted to get to this because vanity is primarily a function of the mind, but it reveals itself in a wide variety of ways. I want to rehearse before we go any further, Mr. Armstrong's definition of vanity, at least most of it.

An often unrealized craving for the adoration of other people, which springs from feelings of inferiority, and asserts itself in a natural effort to rise above the feelings of inferiority.

In other words, it is self-exaltation which is driving this.

But I want you to notice he used the words "craving," "feelings," and "rise above." Now, it is this which drives us to be competitive in the wrong way, that is, against others, and eventually leads to fighting wars. Remember what James said in James 4, "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires . . .?" Cravings of vanity that it produces, competitiveness against others. This is what is important. What is that going to produce? Division! Not unity, division. Guess who is behind all this? Well, you already know.

This occurs because vanity creates an image in us, a picture, an idea, a concept of what we think we ought to be and how we ought to be treated and accepted. I will tell you, it can make us very defensive unless we are truly humble. It can drive us to seek out things like where we want to live, the car we drive, the kind of job we hold, the type or kind of grooming we adopt.

Vanity, like everything else, had a beginning. We are going to look at this beginning back in Ezekiel the 28th chapter, because there is something very interesting in regards to this sermon there. There is a cause- and-effect relationship, and when vanity begins to work in us, it is going to exact a price, and brethren, it is a price that I do not think that any of us willingly want to pay.

Ezekiel 28:17 "Your heart [Satan's heart] was lifted up because of your beauty [self-exaltation was involved]; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they may gaze at you."

Satan was the first one to express vanity in the form of vainglory. And it was conceit, in this case, about his beauty, about his wisdom. Remember I told you that vanity begins to create, first of all, in our mind, a thought that we will take action on unless it is checked. Undoubtedly, Satan was moved to think that he was not being treated acceptably, that he deserved more and better because he was so wise, and because he was so beautiful. Now, what

happened? The vanity led him unerringly into war. Mark this down in your mind. And what is so sad in this case? Who did it lead him to war against? His Creator. Now here are some alternate translations to portions of verse 17.

The first is from the Spurrell translation: "Proud was your heart on account of your beauty." The *New American Standard*: "You became haughty of heart because of your beauty. For the sake of splendor, you debased your wisdom." Remember that one. The *New English Bible*: "Your beauty made you arrogant, you misused your wisdom to increase your dignity." That is a good one.

Pride, which we all recognize as sin (in fact, many feel that it is the father of all sin), is an expression of the underlying vanity. See, pride, conceit, arrogance, haughtiness. That is what we see on the outside. The vanity is working in the mind and telling this person, "I need to be exalted. I'm not being treated as I should. I should be being treated better because look how worthy I am, look how great I am." Well, pride is worthless in God's eyes, profitless, useless thinking that takes a person away from the direction of God's purpose, and away from keeping God's commandments, going to war. I do not see reading that anywhere that that is one of the things that we shall do.

Now, let us look in Isaiah the 66th chapter, verse 2 so we get something positive in here.

Isaiah 66:2 "For all those things has My hand has made [God says], and all those things exist," the Lord. "But on this one will I look [pay attention to]: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word."

God looks with favor upon the humble person. The proud He will destroy.

Again, let me give you some alternate translations. It is kind of interesting the way these people do it because there seems to be actually more that is contained within these words than is actually *in* the verse itself unless you put several translations together, and one tends to emphasize other things that others did not. From the Rheims translation, he says, "But for this one I will look around [that is, search for], for him who is humbled and smitten in

spirit, and cares anxiously for my word." That has a lot more expression to it. Moffat says, "What I care for are humble, broken creatures who stand in awe of all I say." Remember that in relation to Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

Vanity is an exalting of the self at the expense of someone or something else—and it will produce no good. Now remember that verse in Ezekiel the 28th chapter, verse 17 and what it said about Satan, "For the sake of your splendor." Here is the reason why he did it, there is the exaltation. In order to improve this, and what this was was being accepted on his terms: personal acclaim. "For the sake of your splendor, you [God says] debased. . ." Here comes the payment, this is what it cost him, "You debased [corrupted] your wisdom."

What is wisdom? It is the true, right, practical application of truth. For the sake of self-exaltation, Satan paid for it by giving up his right way of life that he got from God. Why did he have it? Because at one time he had the fear of God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, but vanity drove the fear of God from him and so the for the sake of his self-exaltation, he gave up his wisdom. That is where he paid the price.

Please get this. Vanity will always have a cost. It does not come cheap. And again, this is why God is so concerned. And again, let me reflect back on the use of drugs. Unless a person stops, they pay for it by getting involved into drugs more and more deeply. And what do they pay for it? For the sake of a thrill, for the sake of amusement, for the sake of feeling good, for the sake of a momentary sense of well being, they give up their lives because they turn themselves into a slave willingly, and later willfully, because they cannot help themselves. They are absolutely addicted. That is what vanity does. Because a vanity continually practiced becomes an idol, and idolatry is the worst thing there is. And it is going to be cast into the Lake of Fire because it is profitless.

Satan has tried very hard to inject in us the same attitude, because in its seeking for exaltation of some kind, what pays the price, brethren, is our relationships with other people, and above all, with God. This is exactly what happened to Satan, because in his search for what his vanity convinced him that he deserved, he went to war against God and destroyed his relationship with God. Thus God describes the carnal mind as being enmity against Him

because it is not subject to the law, the teaching of God, and neither indeed can be—because vanity exalts itself against God and His way. And you know who is going to win that battle. It is going to be the same one who won when Satan fought against Him. And that is why it is useless. We cannot win against God.

Vanity gets right down into the nitty-gritty of everyday life.

I Peter 1:18 Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, . . .

You might recall in last week's sermon, I mentioned the two words in Greek that are translated vain or vanity. This one is the noun form of *modeodicy*. And I want us to note that it took the blood of Jesus Christ to provide forgiveness and cleansing from vanity. This is not a minor thing. Vanity is sin and therefore vanity has very serious consequences. Now, the thrust, as it is used here in this context, indicates aimlessness, not going anywhere. So whatever the actions were within the context of what God refers here to as vanity, it was conduct going nowhere in the direction of the Kingdom of God. If you care to look it up in Acts 14:15, Paul used the same word in reference to idols, saying that they were useless, they were vanities.

Zodhiates, in his lexicon, said that this word in Greek, *modeodicy*, the adjective form has the same sense as the phrases in English as follows: building one's house on the sand, a useless enterprise; shooting at a star, can never hit it; chasing the wind, or chasing your shadow. And that is what sin is, and this is what vanity is, and why God is going to burn them up. Whereas vanity is primarily seen in the Old Testament merely as being worthless, in the New Testament, vanity clearly becomes sin and therefore absolutely *deadly*. Now the reason for this, at least a pretty good indication of it, is given when Paul was speaking to the Athenians in Act the 17th chapter

Acts 17:29-31 [Paul said] Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands men

everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

In short, a major reason why vanity is approached differently in the New Testament and the Old Testament, is because Paul said God is now playing for keeps. The days of His "overlooking" sin are over. I will tell you, in a way that can be scary. If we did not have the assurance that He is patient and merciful, and He will work with us, I will tell you, I would feel as though I was being dangled over the fires. The days of Him "winking at sin" are over—at vanity.

Let us conclude in Ephesians the 4th chapter. It is interesting that this paragraph should appear in the book of Ephesians because Ephesians primary subject is on unity and vanity divides people. Because there has to be a price paid for vanity and it drives people apart.

Ephesians 4:17-24 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you [Christians] should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility [vanity] of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness [vanity is lewdness, lawlessness], to work all uncleanness [vanity is unclean] with greediness [vanity is greediness]. But you have not so learned Christ, and 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 vain traditions of this world], 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 [not after worldliness].

And then he goes on to a detailed step by step expose of what he means by vanity.

Ephesians 4:25-32 "Let each one of you speak truth to his neighbor," . . . "Be angry [he said], and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with your hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, . . . Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, . . . Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. [but on the other hand] Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

We could go right on because chapter 5, which eventually gets to marriage and the family, is all predicated upon what preceded it: The vanity of Gentile minds and therefore the vanity of the way that they lived. *Barnes Notes* said (and I am paraphrasing this), "it shows that when read in context [this is verse 17], with what follows, it is that vanity in the scripture means more than emptiness. It denotes moral wrong being applied, usually by those who worship idols and those alienated from God."

That is why Paul says that the vanity of the mind must be overcome because understanding becomes darkened by indulgence in sin. That is, the vanity of the mind. God's Word says in Psalm 111:10 that, "A good understanding have all those who *do* His commandments." It then follows that those who follow after vanities, their minds become darkened. Just the opposite direction, the opposite fruit.

Well, brethren, and if we would go back to Romans 1, beginning in verse 20, God shows so clearly what happens to those who indulge in vain thinking. But you can read that from verse 20 to the end of the chapter.

Vanity, in summary, is anything that is useless towards producing the image of God in us. Somewhere in the inner recesses of our thinking processes, we can learn from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that things of the mind, like hatred and lust, are sins, and that we too can cross the line, and once it becomes sin, it is no longer benign. And it behooves us to stay as far from that point as is possible.

That is the lesson. That is why God has said to choose this day to obey what I have revealed is good, because anything else that we choose to do is going to be useless. Along the way it is going to produce a darkening of the mind and it is going to divide us because the cost is going to be in injured relationships, complete division in relationships, both with God and man.

Vanity is a very important subject. And as I said earlier, that it is huge, one of the largest subjects in the entirety of the Bible once we begin to get a handle on it. We do not *have* to go that way. God's truth has been revealed, and we can begin where we are to get rid of the vanity that we can see. As we do that, we will be strengthened, the truth will clarify, our understanding will increase, our wisdom will increase, and our favor with God will increase. We have everything to gain and nothing to lose from turning aside from these things.