

What Is Your Heart Pursuing?

Joe Slater

Comedian Rodney Dangerfield immortalized the line, "I don't get no respect!" The prophet Ezekiel could certainly empathize. God told him from the first that his people would oppose and ignore him. By the time of the 33rd chapter, however, Jerusalem had fallen just as Ezekiel had predicted. As the third and last wave of captives arrived in Babylon from Jerusalem, some people began to give this man of God at least marginal respect.

People were talking about Ezekiel. Preachers get a little nervous when folks are talking about them, but in this case it was good (on the surface, anyway). *"Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord"* (Ezek. 33:30). Affirming that Ezekiel's words came from the Lord was a good beginning.

But hearing and doing are different things! *"They sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them"* (v. 31). It's an age-old problem. The foolish man who built his house on the sand heard Jesus' words but didn't do them (Matt. 7:24). James, the Lord's brother, exhorts us to *"be doers of the word and not hearers only"* (James 1:22).

The people enjoyed Ezekiel's preaching! *"Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument"* (Ezek. 33:32a). Unfortunately, enjoying was as far as it went. *"They hear your words, but they do not do them"* (v. 32b).

What, then, was the root problem? *"With their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain"* (v. 31b). This, too, was neither new nor unique. Before Ezekiel was ever born, Isaiah wrote: *"these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me"* (Isa. 29:13). Jesus quoted that text in Matt. 15:8, applying it to the Jews of His day.

Sin still originates in the human heart. What is your heart pursuing?

When The Good Becomes The Enemy Of The Best

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42 NIV).

Mary realized that the Messiah was in their midst teaching them precious, eternal truths, while Martha was preparing dinner. Martha complained to Jesus that Mary, her sister, had left her alone to prepare the meal. Jesus defended Mary, and kindly admonished Martha for her misplaced concern.

No one would suggest that being a good hostess is a bad thing. No one would look at preparing a meal for others as sinful. So, why did Jesus reprove His friend, Martha? Well, in the first place there is what we call a priority of values. If we are able to make a wiser choice and fail to do it, there is room for Jesus' disapproval.

So often people are satisfied with their level of commitment because they are not doing anything sinful. Parents often put their children in sports, and see this as a way to help keep the children out of trouble, and to help them develop social skills needed in adult life. Children also learn by experience how to be humble in both victory and defeat. But if these "good" activities take children away from worship and Bible study then these good things are the enemy of the best.

When people choose concerts, guests, or other wholesome activities over the Lord's Day worship, is it not the truth that the good has become the enemy of the best? Today people are so wrapped up in the political and governmental issues of the day that they have no time for Bible study, private devotions, or Christian deeds. There's nothing wrong with being a responsible citizen who seeks the good for our country. But, again, don't they become wrong when these things displace what God wants for us? The good has become the enemy of the best.

Cooking a meal is a fine thing to do for others. Very commendable! But what if that becomes more important than listening to the word of God proclaimed? This is about priorities isn't it?

Have we "chosen what is better"?

--Rob Redden (Arroyo Grande, CA)

MISSING OUT

It seems that there are at least three books bearing the title *The Joy of Missing Out*. One is subtitled *Live More by Doing Less*; another, *Finding Balance in a Wired World*; yet another is subtitled, *The Art of Self-Restraint in an age of Excess*. I wish that I had time to read all three, but I guess attempting to do so would contradict the thesis of the books.

I am glad to hear that some folks are waking up to the danger of doing too much. None of us can do everything. Few of us will learn to excel at more than a few tasks. Keeping life simple would likely be better for all of us. But the key question remains: "What should be eliminated?"

Several years ago, I studied with a young man who was not sure that he believed in God. He was unusual in that he kept an open mind and was willing to give the Bible a chance. He read it, and as he read the Bible the Bible also read him. He found that the Bible spoke clearly to his inner thoughts, fears, and failures. A short time later something happened that convinced him absolutely that there is indeed a God.

But this young man never comes for Bible study anymore. He never attends worship. He explained to me that there is not time for everything in life. He and his wife decided that they wanted to devote their Sundays to playing with the children. In answer to the question "What should be eliminated?" He chose to eliminate the worship of God.

We cannot give our kids everything. We cannot enjoy everything ourselves. We must make choices. It is good to have a hobby. It is not good to have twelve.

There are a few things that should not be eliminated. Meals, for both the body and soul, are served every day at our house; and it is going to stay that way. I may miss out on a lot of things in life, in fact I intend to do so. I will miss out on many things because that is the only way to find joy in the things that really matter.

Everyone misses out on something. Those who try to do everything end up missing the most important. What are you missing?

--Thayer Salisbury (Toledo, OH)