

When Love is Wrong

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2 Timothy: Passing on the Faith

2 Timothy 3:1-5

One of the most cherished myths of the modern age is the myth of progress, the notion that the world is becoming a better and better place. We live with the myth that people are improving, that the world is becoming more enlightened, and that we're infinitely ahead of where our ancestors were. Certainly, there are bright spots in the world today. Technology, especially medical technology has improved the life of literally billions of people around the planet. Small pox has all but been eliminated. Polio was nearly eliminated. I read a tragic article in the paper the other day that said polio is making resurgence in parts of the Muslim world, particularly in Nigeria. Many Muslim leaders believe that polio inoculations are really a conspiracy of Western powers to dominate Islamic lands. And so some Muslim leaders are telling people to not allow their children to take Western medicine because Western medicine is designed to poison children. And so polio is making a comeback in parts of Africa.

But as a general rule, there's been fantastic progress in technology, and particularly in the area of modern medicine. You know, in the US, the life expectancy of a person back in the year 1900 was 47 years old. Now, a person's life expectancy is 77 years old. In one century we've gained 30 years of life. If you were an African American living in the year 1900, your life expectancy was 33 years old. Now, it is 73 years old—a gain of 40 years.

Some of you have had your lives saved by heart bypass surgery, by new cancer treatments, or by organ transplants. Thank God for antibiotics and penicillin, and in particular anesthesia!

A number of years ago my wife bought me the Civil War video series by Ken Burns. When you realize how men were operated on during the Civil War, it just blows your mind. Surgeons would come in with a primitive looking saw and a soldier, if he was lucky, maybe had a couple of shots of whiskey. If he were unlucky, he would bite down on a rag while his limb was amputated.

Thank God for modern medicine! Thank God that we have babies in hospitals with tens of thousands of dollars of monitors and emergency specialists.

How often do you thank God for a hot shower? How often do you thank God for central heating or for air conditioning, or for the ability to listen to music by one of your favorite artists simply at the touch of a button? There's been progress in Civil Rights, particularly for minorities and for women over the last century.

But the progress that we've experienced as a society is not uniform. In the last 50 years divorce rates have skyrocketed, the use of illegal drugs, rates of depression, out of wedlock childbirths, suicide and the sexual abuse of children all have gone up. Crime rates of all types have dramatically risen, while educational performance has fallen. Rates of church attendance has also fallen.

Yes, there are more homeruns in baseball, but there's also more performance enhancing drug use by baseball players. Yes, technology has vastly improved our lives, but it has also given us the capacity to more efficiently kill each other.

So, how do you measure whether we are better off or worse off at any particular time in history? What's the standard of a great society? Is it the size of our economy? Is it the strength of our military? Is it the quality of our technology? Is it the number of Nobel Prize winners? What is the standard by which we can measure whether we are moving forward as a country, or moving backward? How do you find out if you are moving forward as a human being, or moving backward? How do you measure whether you are becoming a better quality person, or if you are moving backward? Is the standard of a human being whether you know how to pick a good wine at a restaurant? Is it whether you know where to shop online for the best bargains on travel?

The Bible lays out one standard for societies and for individuals. The biblical standard for measuring progress or regress is simply love. In a passage that is very familiar to any of you who have been to a Christian wedding, the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Without love, the apostle Paul says, an individual or society ranks in the sight of God as a big zero. You may be a person with advanced degrees next to your name. You may have an enormous house. You may be a whiz in the kitchen or on a computer. But without love, God says you amount to nothing. It was love that made early Christian society great. The 2nd century North African Church Father, Tertullian, said that for non-believers in his day the way of describing Christians was that they pointed at them in the street and said, "See how they love one another. In fact, they're ready to die for one another." And then shaking their heads, non-believers would say, "They even call each other 'brother' or 'sister' even though they don't come from the same family."

Now, those early Christians lacked our technology. They lacked our conveniences. But on the scale that God measures people by, those early

Christian societies were greater in the sight of God than modern America is, and I would add, most modern American churches.

Let me nuance this a little bit. We human beings were created by God to love. The Bible tells us that God is love and we who are made in his image are made to love. A human being cannot help but love. Nevertheless, in the text we are going to read today, the apostle Paul tells us that sometimes love can be misdirected. In other words, God is going to measure your life not only based upon the fact that you love, but God is going to measure your life based on what you love. You can't help but love. Now the question is what is it that you love?

I've called today's talk, "When Love is Wrong." Let's pray.

2 Timothy 3:1-5

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

In this text we read that in many areas, particularly when it comes to love, history displays a spiral down, not a spiral up. The apostle Paul states:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.

And what will make the last days so terrible, so stressful, and so awful? Paul's answer in the following verses is that the last days will be marked by misdirected love. Now, I immediately need to point out by what Paul means by "the last days" in this passage. He's not speaking about the very last days of history, the year, or two, or decade before Christ returns. He's not talking about the tribulation period, as it is sometimes called, or some future time on planet Earth when things will really get bad. By the last days, Paul means the entire period of history between the first coming of Christ and Christ's second coming.

The New Testament writers were convinced that with the coming of Jesus into the world, a new age had arrived. The old age was passing away. And the new age, the age of the kingdom, was dawning. This new age that broke into the world in Messiah Jesus' first coming, is referred to by New Testament writers as the "last days." The last days on Earth have been going on now for 2000 years.

But we see this usage of the "last days" by Peter, the apostle, on the Day of Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit fell on Christian believers on the Day of Pentecost, Peter said in Acts 2 that this outpouring of the Spirit was in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophet, Joel's, prophecy concerning the last days. We read in Acts 2:16-17:

No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

Likewise, the book of Hebrews tells us that with the coming of Messiah, planet Earth has entered the last days. We read in Hebrews 1:1-2:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, who he appointed the heir of all things and through whom he made the universe.

The last days are a synonym for the church age. The time in which the church is commissioned to preach the gospel to all nations before the very last day, the day of the Lord's return and final judgment.

Now, Paul has been urging Timothy to extend the gospel during these last days. And throughout 2 Timothy, we have been urged to extend the gospel to relatives, friends, neighbors, and unreached peoples around the world. But Paul warns Timothy that this task of extending the gospel is going to be difficult in the last days. And what will make it difficult is people's misdirected love.

Look at this with me:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.

What will make the times so terrible? Verse 2, people will be lovers of themselves; lovers of money; and then he gives a list of vices. Then he goes on and says:

Lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.

Misplaced love, misdirected love. That's what makes the extension of the gospel so hard in this world because people love the wrong things. The beginning point of opposition to Christ, what can be described as the root of all of the other vices that we read about in verse 2, 3 and 4, can be found in this phrase:

People will be lovers of themselves.

Let's just stop there. If you were to ask what, at bottom, is the problem with this world, you might get a lot of different answers. Some people might say that the problem of the world is terrorism. You've got these people who are willing to commit suicide and kill hundreds or thousands of people for their particular cause. Others might say that the problem of the world is America's desire to

dominate the world. Marxists might say that the problem of the world is economic. Certain people own everything. Feminists might say that the problem of the world is men. Men are in control. Lots of philosophers have spent a lot of time talking about what is the root problem, what's the bottom line issue concerning what is wrong with the world.

I don't think you can do a whole lot better in figuring out what's wrong with the world than this little phrase, "People will be lovers of themselves." In fact, in Greek, it is one word, "philautos." "phil," which means to love, and "autos," which means oneself. Self-love – that's the open door for all the other vices. The love of ourselves over the love of God. The love of ourselves over the love of others. That's at the root of virtually all the immorality and misery and violence and marriage conflict, and family fights, and wars.

The father of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, said that sin means being curved in on one's self. Instead of focusing in on the needs of others or on God, the essence of sin is focusing your life on yourself.

Why will the last days be so stressful? Because more and more people will be self-lovers rather than God lovers. Think about this for a moment. Do you know anyone who is perpetually irritable? Someone who is always complaining about some stupid sales clerk, or this idiot client they had to talk to, or their dumb boss, or the knucklehead in line at the grocery store? Do you know anyone who pounds the dashboard on the car when they are in traffic or is always blowing a gasket at home? Do you know someone who is perpetually irritable, angry, regularly on the edge of losing it?

What's at the core of our anger, our frustration, and our rage? Isn't it self-love? Isn't it the mistaken belief that the world ought to work according to my plan and I'm angry because other people have interfered with my goals and my agenda and my wants? How dare this line of traffic I'm in travel more slowly than other lines of traffic. Why did I have to get into this lane? Why should I have to wait in order to get to my appointment? Why should my time be wasted? Why should I ever be inconvenienced? Our irritableness, our frustration – it all boils down to self-love.

Do you know anyone who is fussy? Do any of you know any total fuss-budgets? You know the person who gives super detailed instructions at a restaurant concerning the preparation of their food? The person who demands eight different substitutes for what's on the menu. Do you know anyone who always sends his or her meal back at least once? What's at the root of so much fussiness concerning what we eat, drink, or the comfort of our beds? What's at the root of so much fussiness concerning what the room temperature ought to be like? Why are we so demanding about what our clothes are made of, or whether the cleaners have gotten a little stain on our clothes, or there's a little snag on the sleeve. We say we're not fussy; we just have well-defined likes and dislikes.

We're not fussy, we just have refined taste. We want what we want the way we want it. Fussiness is a manifestation of self-love.

Do you know anyone who simply will not make up with people who have offended them? Paul speaks in verse 3 about the unforgiving person. He says:

Without love, unforgiving...

Literally, the word "unforgiving" means someone who will not make a truce. Do you know anyone who has cut off a relationship with a family member because of hurt or offense? Do you know anyone who has cut off a relationship with friends or has left the church, or has burned a bridge simply because they would not reconcile with a person who has offended them? What's going on with the unforgiving person? Someone may come to them and try to placate their anger. Someone might say, "Perhaps I can mediate. Will you let me help to restore the relationship?"

"No, leave me alone. I'm never going to have a relationship with that relative again." Or, "I've written that church off."

What is going on in the unforgiving person's life is the love of self. We're talking about a person who takes himself or herself so seriously. Why is an offense to you such a big deal? Why are your feelings so important? Do you treat offenses to God the same way you treat offenses to you? Do you say, "Well, God, not that I've offended you hugely, repeatedly, and continually with knowledge, I never expect you to forgive me." Or do you cry out for mercy from God? And if you cry out for mercy from God, why is it that you will not extend mercy to someone who has offended you? The bottom line: it is self-love. You love to lick your wounds.

You know, as society degenerates to the extent that the love of self is put in first place, Paul says the mark of a terrible society is that people will be lovers of themselves. But we live in such a society. 21st century America is marked by the exaltation of self-love to first place in our country.

Dr. Paul Vitz, who is a brilliant writer and is an educational psychologist at New York University, wrote a hugely important book about 15 years ago titled *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship*. In his book, he says that modern psychology has replaced religion as the organizing principle of people's lives in America. We interpret life today in psychological categories rather than spiritual categories. Instead of worshipping and loving God, contemporary Americans have been taught to worship and love themselves. Self worship, what Dr. Vitz calls, "selfism," is at the root of so much contemporary thinking about how we interpret life.

We are taught in psychology class that we need to be self-actualized. You need to love yourself. Self help constantly tells us to treat ourselves with unconditional self-regard. We are told from nursery school on that the worst thing a person can do is have too low an opinion of themselves. Not that the worst thing a person can do is have too low an opinion of God, and too low a view of other people. No, the worst thing you can do is to have low self-esteem.

You know, they did a study of violent prisoners at a correctional facility some years ago. The theory that dominated criminology, based upon modern psychology, was that criminals became violent and attacked other people because criminals have feelings of low self-worth. So they lash out, it was thought, because they feel bad about themselves. So, in this one prison they had a group to enhance violent criminals' senses of self-esteem. The message was "your feelings matter." "Believe in yourself." "Think great thoughts about yourself."

One researcher began wondering if the theory of low self-esteem was true. He took on the whole psychological establishment and decided to actually test violent criminals' senses of self-worth. Do you know what he discovered? Far from having a shrunken, impaired, low view of self, violent criminals actually suffered from a hugely inflated, insanely bloated view of self. They had an enormous view of self. The problem with violent criminals was that their senses of self was never checked by other selves. And when other selves got in the way of what the criminal believed was their legitimate claim to respect, to not being disrespected; the criminal's claim to money, to sex, or to something that belonged to someone else, they lashed out and hurt other selves.

Friends, so much self-esteem teaching is just an exercise in self-deception. See, we redefine inner bad feelings. Contemporary psychology teaches us to say about ourselves, "We are really good people. We are really okay. Other people are okay. Our problem is negative messages that we got from our families." The Bible says that the starting point of health is the recognition that I am not okay, and neither are you. There is something dreadfully wrong with me and there is something dreadfully wrong with you. We are broken. We are damaged goods. We are abused and we are abusers.

The list of vices that Paul mentioned in 2 Timothy 3 belong not to someone else out there, but to me, and to you. When I look into the mirror, apart from God's intervention, apart from God's grace, and apart from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, what I will find in the mirror is 2 Timothy 3.

But, Rich, you might say, doesn't the Bible command us to love ourselves? How can you say that the love of one's self is at the root of all the other vices? Why, I was just reading a Christian author who said that I really couldn't love other people, until I first loved myself.

Friend, let me issue a challenge to you. Go through the entire Bible and try to find one verse in which you are commanded to love yourself. There are many verses that tell you to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor. But nowhere are you commanded to love yourself.

You might say, "But Rich, didn't Jesus say, 'love your neighbor as yourself?' Doesn't that mean that you can't love your neighbor without first loving yourself?"

Friend, that's a twisting of what Jesus said. See, Jesus is assuming that you already love yourself. Jesus' statement to love your neighbor as yourself is based on the assumption that we always look out for ourselves. That we always make sure that we get ours. Jesus assumes that we take care of #1, ourselves.

Isn't that true? We make sure that there is enough hot water for our showers. That our favorite foods are stocked in the house. That the video we select is one we want to see. We demand that others keep our secrets. We get upset when our confidences are broken. We demand that others not embarrass us in public. Does anyone want to receive an angry, critical email?

What Jesus is commanding when he says "Love your neighbor as yourself" is that we treat others selves the way we treat ourselves. The command boils down to making sure that others get theirs. Make sure we look out for the interests of others. Make sure you give credit where credit is due. Make sure you save some hot water for someone else's shower. That you leave a tip worth working for when you go to a restaurant. Make sure that you reach for the tab first. That you don't always let someone else pay for you. Make sure you keep other people's confidences. That you don't tell jokes at the expense of someone else.

"Is there no room, Rich, for self-affirmation? Must we always deny ourselves? Should we put ourselves down?"

The great English pastor, John Stott, has a very helpful distinction that I want to draw for you here. Stott distinguishes between two types of self-affirmation. According to Stott, we are to affirm what we are by way of creation. We are to deny what we are by way of the fall. We affirm our selves by way of our creation. You can affirm your gender. You were created to be either masculine or feminine. You can affirm your artistic creativity. You affirm what God created – your rationality, your gifts and talents, your family life, nature, community, our need to worship God.

What we deny is what we are by way of the fall. We deny, we disown, we crucify, and we put to death our fallen selves, our lack of sexual self-control. We crucify our demands to always be noticed. We put to death our sense of entitlement to the lion's share of everything, of setting up an independent standard of right and wrong apart from the scripture.

As Dallas Willard, the wonderful writer on Christian spirituality, puts it, Jesus calls us to be dead to self. The idea of being dead to self is simply that the mere fact that something doesn't work out for you the way you want it to work out doesn't offend you anymore. It doesn't surprise you anymore. It doesn't control your mood. Social slights, physical discomfort, rebuffs, not having your way – those things don't rob your sense of peace or your contentment.

Again, I say this with all affection, but isn't your discontentment and your moodiness, your sensitivity, your over sensitivity just a manifestation of self-love? What is wrong with the world? What is wrong with me? What is wrong with you? People will be lovers of themselves.

As Paul speaks about misdirected love, he goes on and says:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money...

Because of the recent corporate scandals over the past few years, we have so many examples of successful, admired corporate executives about whom it could be said, "This person is a lover of money." Consider, for example, the case of Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric. A few years ago Jack Welch was voted the most admired executive in America. His books on leadership and business became instant best sellers.

When Jack Welch retired from GE in 2001, he was worth about \$500 million dollars. Some people would say half a billion dollars at age 65, that's probably enough to see me through a comfortable retirement. In fact, \$500 million dollars is probably enough to provide a measure of security, a nest egg for my family. Well, \$500 million dollars, apparently, wasn't enough for Jack Welch. It came out in his divorce proceeding that Welch negotiated an insanely generous retirement package for himself. Apparently, despite his fabulous wealth, he wanted to give his wife only \$400,000 a year in alimony. So, Jack Welch's wife did what lots of angry wives do. They air all the dirty laundry in court. And all the details of Welch's agreement with his board were spilled out in public. Listen to some of the provisions of Jack Welch's retirement package:

First of all, he gets \$16 million dollars a year as a pension. And GE on top of that, allows him the use of a Boeing 737 business jet 24 hours a day for life. It costs about \$300,000 a month. Jack, have you ever considered flying commercial? You are retired now.

GE also pays all of the expenses, literally all, for a \$15 million dollar Manhattan apartment that was bought at company expense. They pay for his food and wine bill every month, which come to about \$9000 a month. \$9000 a month for food and wine!

Jack Welch's clothes cost \$2000 a month. He gets floor level seats for Knick games. Courtside seats at the US Open, and box seats at Yankee Stadium and also a box seat at the Red Sox games.

Now, that's where I just drew the line. I said, "OK. All the rest makes sense, but to get box seats for the Yankees and the Red Sox? There's something wrong with that. Nobody gets box seats at both the Yankees and Red Sox!"

They pick up all of Jack's restaurant bills. GE even buys his daily newspapers. They pay for his dry cleaning. They pay for his video rentals.

Do you know what his defense was for such extravagance at shareholders' expense? Jack Welch was quoted in the newspaper as saying, "What I am receiving is a lot less than I could have received. I actually sacrificed millions of dollars in striking this deal." In other words, "I actually deserve more."

I forgot to mention, according to court documents, Jack Welch also gives about \$600 a month to charity.

The love of money. Over the last few years famous celebrities have filed for bankruptcy or faced massive debts. The newspaper reported just this week that Mike Tyson, who made \$300 million dollars in his boxing career, is down to his last \$5000 dollars. Michael Jackson faces \$200 million in debt. He's decided to lower his monthly expenses by renting a 37,000 sq. ft. house for only \$100,000 a month. He's on an austerity budget.

A few years ago Elton John ran up debts at the rate of \$2 million a month. Over a 20-month period, he spent over \$200,000 just on flowers. What was his excuse? He said, "I'm a single man. I like spending money. I'm not a nest egg type person." \$200,000 in flowers. The love of money.

But you know, you don't have to be a big time corporate executive, or a famous athlete or celebrity to love money. Many people who are struggling just to make ends meet, love money as much as Jack Welch loves money. And then some of the most giving, generous people I know are people whose income is well up into six figures. I've known businessmen who give away more than half their income each year to various charitable causes and to the work of the kingdom of God.

So let me ask you an affectionate question. Do you love money? Of course, you might say, "Definitely not! That's not where I am. I'm not like Elton John or Jack Welch." But let's break this one down a little bit. Let's see whether you've picked up your attitude concerning money from meditating on the Bible, or whether your attitude is really more formed by America's perspective, the kind of thing that you see in an airline magazine. Do you love money?

You can't tell whether someone loves money by the size of his or her income, or what size home you live in, or what kind of car you drive, or how many pairs of shoes are in your closet. Instead, the scripture searches us more closely. It searches our hearts concerning the love of money. And just parenthetically, a leader in the church is not permitted to be a lover of money. 1 Timothy 3 lays out a qualification for leadership in the church and it says that an elder must not be "a lover of money."

What are the more searching questions? Well, are you content with what you have? Maybe you live in an apartment that's furnished with hand-me-downs, or you drive a 14-year old Ford that's held together with duck tape, that someone else fixed up for you. Maybe you've got a huge house that is just furnished to the hilt. Are you content with what you have? Do you thank God for what you have, or do you inwardly burn over what you don't have?

You know, we're so mistaken concerning how contentment comes. It almost never comes by material possessions. What do you think brings more contentment? Having a new car that you get bored with in about one month, or coming home at night and having your child or grandchild run over to you and leap into your arms and hug you?

What brings more contentment, buying a new piece of furniture or having a loved one come to Christ?

Or here's a question that Pastor John Piper wrote in a book called *Desiring God*. Who do you think has the deepest, most satisfying joy in life? A man who pays several hundred dollars for a suite downtown and spends his evenings in a half-lit, smoked-filled lounge, impressing some strange woman with \$10 cocktails, or a man who chooses to stay in a Motel 6 by a vacant lot of sunflowers and spends the evening watching the sunset and writing love letters to his wife.

Have you learned the secret of being content? Have you ever sat in your apartment or in your house and looked around and just began to thank God for what you have, instead of grumbling over what you don't have?

Here's another way for you to figure out whether you love money. Do you play the comparison game? You feel okay about your situation until you see what your brother or sister drives, or you visit the home of a church member. People who love money focus on what other people have. People who love people focus on what other people are. What are you focused on?

Here's a third question: Do you honor the Lord with what you have? No matter what your income is, as you stand before the Lord, would you say, "I am very generous towards God's church and towards the work of the kingdom with my giving. I have a free hand because I don't love money. So it is easy for me to give money away." I'm not going to make it easy for you by giving you some

standard, the Holy Spirit needs to speak to you about whether you are being generous towards the work of the Lord. But as you fill out your taxes, take a look at what you gave last year. As you get out your year-end statement from your credit card account, consider what you gave and what you consumed. For many folks, who are making six figures, 10% is not generosity.

Let me give you a couple of stats:

- According to the website of Mission Frontiers, the total global church member annual income is \$12.3 trillion dollars. If you took all the Christians in the world and multiplied their income, it would be \$12.3 trillion dollars. Of this, \$213 billion, or 1.75% goes to Christian causes. And of this \$11.4 billion, 5% of the 1.75% goes to foreign missions. 1/10 of 1% of Christian income goes to foreign missions.

What do you love?

Do you love seeing people come to know Jesus? Do you love seeing the world changed?

Finally, Paul talks about misdirected love when he says in verse 4 that people will be:

treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...

When a person turns away from finding meaning and love through God, they virtually always turn towards pleasure, especially bodily pleasure for satisfaction. Pleasure, especially bodily pleasure, is the great substitute for interacting with God. That's why Paul says, "They are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." Because generally speaking, we are either worshippers of God, or we become worshippers of our bodies.

Why in America, do we currently have the insane emphasis on sensuality? Why are the adjectives erotic and sensual splashed over every other movie title? Why does every magazine have a screaming headline about driving your partner crazy in bed—we already do that by snoring! Why the obsession with abs, buns, and body fat? Why so much plastic surgery and idealized versions of men and women? Why are so many of our culture wars fought simply over sex and sexual expression?

It is because we, as a society, have turned away from worshipping God. You can tell how far you are from God, by how much you've turned toward your body and toward sensuality. How obsessed are you with sensuality? Corrupt cultures and corrupt subcultures are obsessed by sex. You see, when a society stops worshipping and loving God, we turn toward the human body as a substitute.

When we lose a sense of God's presence, and we lose an experience of God's love, then we turn toward our body in order to feel something, in order to feel anything. When we don't feel like we are connecting heart to heart, and spirit-to-spirit with God's Spirit, then we end up turning to our bodies for a bodily experience.

Do any of you know this one – the substitution of your body and sensuality for the satisfaction that you can find in God?

According to the great historian, Will Durant, the study of history indicates that virtually every great society did not decline because of external attack. Rather, they were destroyed by internal rot and mainly allowing sensuality to run riot. Whenever you see a society get off the sexual rails, that's a society in severe decline.

And, of course, the love of pleasure, especially bodily pleasure, never satisfies. As we go after pleasure, as we're lovers of pleasure, pleasure actually becomes more elusive. Bodily pleasure, sensual pleasure and the pursuit of that, actually deadens our experience of pleasure. God built in our nature the need to limit sensual indulgence. And if you pursue indulgence, you'll find yourself needing an increasing and an increasing level of stimulation. It's built into us by God. You'll feel deader and deader and deader.

Do any of you know this one? If you do, how do you become a lover of God, instead of a lover of pleasure?

Dallas Willard, the Christian philosopher and professor at USC, suggests in his wonderful book titled "The Renovation of the Heart" three things you can do to turn away from your body and turn to God.

First of all, he said, "Stop idolizing your body." Stop treating your body as if it was of ultimate importance. So what if you're aging. So what if you look in the mirror and you have a wrinkle, or you sag where you didn't before? You can care for your body. You can exercise and watch your diet. But the care for your body is in order that you might use your body to serve God and to serve other people. Stop making an idol of your body. Worship God.

Second, stop misusing your body. Stop using your body to satisfy what can only be satisfied in God. I say this with all affection, but men and women, at all costs, stop trying to be sexy, especially if you are a follower of Christ. Stop trying to be sexy. Stop trying to illicit a sexual response from other men and women, who are not your spouse. Stop dressing in a sexy way. Stop carrying yourself in a sexy way. You can be lovely. You can be handsome, without manipulating the responses of others. And if the marketers don't like your avoidance of their products, or their clothes, then let the marketers find more legitimate lines of work. Stop misusing your body.

And finally, start dedicating your body to the Lord. If you feel like your body is out of control, that you've become a lover of bodily pleasure, then dedicate your body to the Lord. The Bible says in Romans 12, "Therefore, I urge you brothers [and sisters] in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship." Dallas Willard suggests this little spiritual discipline. Lie down on the floor, face up or face down, and explicitly and formally surrender your body to God. Go through the parts of your body, what you do with your eyes, your mouth—what you eat, what you say, your ears—what you listen to, your hands, feet, your whole body and specifically dedicate the parts of your body to God. And if your body is out of control, you may want to do this every day for a month, or several months. Give your body over to God, to be used by his power and for his purpose. And then when you are done, stand up, lift your hands to God, worship him, walk, dance, shout, pray psalms out loud.

Friend, you were created not for the love of yourself, or the love of money, or the love of your own body. You were created to give and receive love from God and to give and receive love from others. Direct your love to the proper objects of your affection. Be a lover of God. Be a lover of other people. Let's pray.

When Love is Wrong

Rich Nathan

February 14-15, 2004

2 Timothy: Passing on the Faith

2 Timothy 3:1-5

I. Love Is The Measure

II. Love In The Last Days (2 Timothy 3:2)

A. The Love Of Self

1. What Is Wrong With The World?
2. What Is Wrong With Modern Psychology?
3. What Is Wrong With Loving Yourself?

B. The Love Of Money (2 Timothy 3:2)

1. Do You Live With A Sense Of Contentment?
2. Do You Make Comparisons?
3. Do You Honor The Lord With What you Have?

C. The Love Of Pleasure (2 Timothy 3:4)

1. What Is Your God-Substitute?
2. How Can You Be Satisfied?
3. What Should You Do With Your Body?