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Rising To The Standard



Message For The Young - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of Christians rising to a high standard to show others the measure of righteousness they are supposed to follow. He talks about the battle against youthful lusts and how pursuing God's holiness can take care of it. Gregg notes that avoiding temptation is not enough; one must seek purity and righteousness by pursuing godliness and avoiding environments that encourage sinful behavior. He concludes that seeking a heart wholly devoted to Jesus Christ is what makes one an identifiable brother or sister in Christ.

Transcript

This morning I'm going to continue looking at certain themes in the book of 2 Timothy. I started this several sessions ago, largely directing my comments originally to the young people because that's what Timothy was, a young person, and Paul's instruction to Timothy I felt would be very helpful for us. I'm not a young person myself, and it's very helpful for our young people to apply to themselves, but I'm not a young person myself, and it's very helpful for me to apply it to myself as well.

I did apply these things to myself when I was a young person, and that is because I always, as a young Christian, as a teenager, always felt something of an affinity to Timothy. Timothy was taught in the scriptures from his childhood by his parents and grandparents, or at least by his mother and grandmother. I had the same advantage, and I realized that those who have such an advantage have also a greater responsibility to whom much is given of them much is to be required, and I sensed that Paul was putting a high standard before this young man, one that would perhaps be intimidating to a teenager who was maybe recently converted out of a very secular or very worldly background, but Timothy was not of that background.

He was raised at least partially in a Christian home. We do not know if his father was converted. His father was a Gentile.

His mother was a Jew. It does not appear that his father was a Christian, and his mother became a Christian, and so did Timothy. From an early age, he was taught in the

scriptures, and therefore he had that conditioning that made it possible for him to be presented a higher standard than he might otherwise have been given.

I am not saying that we give a lower standard to people who do not have these advantages, but rather we might not wish to intimidate somebody. If they are new to the Christian faith, and they are just working through some of the basic initial victories over gross sin in their recent past and so forth, some of the high standards that are given might intimidate them if given too quickly. Remember when God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, he did not immediately take them by the way of the Philistines.

He did not want them to be intimidated by the sight of battle early on in their newfound walk with God. However, later on, 40 years later, in fact even less than that, he did allow them to become engaged in very severe battles with the Amalekites, and eventually with the Moabites, and the children of Ammon, and then of course with the Canaanites. But initially, because they were new and did not know God very well and had just begun their walk, God led them around some of the greater battles because he accommodated their weakness.

Now, one reason that I feel it is appropriate to give a high standard to young people who are raised Christian is because they have been given an advantage that many have not been given. Many of my generation were not raised as Christians. I was, and I recognized that this was an advantage that I was going to be held accountable for.

And some of you young people, most of the young people here are being raised in Christian families and therefore share something of the background of young Timothy, and it cannot be thought too much to expect a great deal of you. Now, that does not mean that your advantages as your upbringing alone will help you attain these advantages because of course it is the work of God in the life of the believer that causes any of us to perform well. If we obey God, it is because of his work in us.

It is he who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. But some people have greater obstacles and God takes them more slowly on than others. Those of you who are raised in Christian homes or are being raised in Christian homes do not have quite the same obstacles.

And Timothy had these advantages and so Paul called him to a very high standard. I hope that every Christian young person, or for that matter, older Christians who have been raised in Christian homes can easily relate with Timothy and the instructions that Paul gives him. Now, there is one difference, of course, between Timothy and some young people raised in Christian homes, and that is that Timothy was a preacher.

And that might be another reason why I related to him because I was not only raised in a Christian home, but I was a preacher from an early age. And some of you will not be preachers. Some of you are not called to preach.

And that being so, you might say, well, Timothy, you know, there is something laid on him that does not apply to me. He was a preacher and preachers have to measure up to a high standard. Well, that is true.

Preachers do have to measure up to a high standard. But actually, the reason for expecting preachers or elders, as in 1 Timothy chapter 3 Paul lays out the qualifications for church leaders, the reason they have to measure up to a high standard is because they are supposed to show others the standard that all are to measure up to. An elder is to measure up to a very high standard.

But if you read the standard that Paul gives, it is really just the standard that every Christian is supposed to measure up to. It is just that in the congregation there are Christians who do and Christians who do not. Approximate the standard of a godly Christian life.

And the ones who do are to be set forward as leaders to those who are not yet achieving that standard. But the standard is the same. When we go to heaven, there will not be different standards that God has to judge us by.

Jesus Christ is the standard by which we will be measured. And all of us will fall short of that standard in some measure. But it will be the same standard from which we all fall short.

So it is good for us all to see the standard. Even if we are not preachers, even if you have not been raised in a Christian home, this is what there is to aim at. And with the work of God in your life, it is possible, even if you did not have those advantages, to live in this realm as well at this level.

We have been going through several different lessons from 2 Timothy over the past several weeks. And I would like you to look at chapter 2 first of all. We are going to look at a couple of verses in chapter 2 and then a few at the beginning of chapter 3. In chapter 2, verse 22, Paul says to Timothy, Flee also youthful lusts, but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Now, here we have two directions we are supposed to be going. Actually, one direction, but with reference to two different reference points. We are fleeing from something and we are pursuing something else.

That is not really two directions, it is just two ways of looking at the same direction. We are going a certain direction and there is something that is behind us and we are fleeing from that as much as we can. And ahead of us there is that which we are aimed toward.

It is good to know that we do not simply have to fight, we do not have to fight two different battles. One is a battle against youthful lusts and the other is the battle to be holy. If we are going one direction, we will be accomplishing both at the same time.

If we are pursuing God and holiness, then the battle against youthful lusts will be taking care of itself. Because Paul said, if you walk in the Spirit, he said in Galatians chapter 5, you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Now, the lusts of the flesh, or what Paul calls here youthful lusts, because Timothy is youthful, are the things that most young people find the most difficult part of Christian holiness.

Now, that does not mean it is the only problem they have got in their character. It just means it is the only part they recognize as a problem. Young people also have serious problems with other things like pride.

But they are too young to realize that they are proud. When you get older, you look back at the attitude you had when you were younger and you realize you were proud. The proud person seldom knows he is proud.

By the way, I heard a preacher once say that when he turned 30, I think it was the same preacher who said he had never met a humble young man, but he said when he turned 30, he had to repent of being 20. And when he turned 40, he had to repent of being 30. And when he turned 50, he had to repent of being 40.

And he was now 60, he said, I have to repent of being 50. He says, I suspect when I turn 70, I will have to repent of being 60. Now, it is not that being 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 is a sin to be repented of.

What he meant was the attitudes that he had, even as a Christian in those ages, he did not see them the way he did in hindsight, the way he did in retrospect. As he got another decade older, he could see how foolish and arrogant he had been just a decade earlier. And we should anticipate that.

But it is in the nature of arrogance and pride that we don't see it when we have it. We see former arrogance when we have come out of that degree of arrogance. But the more we grow, I suppose the more we will become humble and we will see that we have not really been free of all arrogance.

But arrogance, like I said, is not the sin that most young people are most aware of their struggle with. If they are, then they are exceptionally spiritual or exceptionally spiritually sensitive. Because, as I say, though it is a problem in youth, pride is not a problem that youth are aware that they have.

And yet they are all aware of youthful lusts. Youthful lusts could be... we usually think of sexual lusts, and that could be what Paul has in mind because he says in another place a very similar thing. He says in 1 Corinthians 6.18, he says, flee sexual immorality.

Now here he says, flee youthful lusts. There he says, flee sexual immorality. So it may be the same thing he has in mind, although youthful lusts are somewhat more general.

Because the word lust just means desires. And it is interesting that he says youthful desires. Why doesn't he just say flee sinful desires or flee all desires or flee worldly desires? He specifies youthful desires.

Well, apparently he feels that there are certain kinds of desires that assault a young person at that time in their life more than at other periods in their life. And that older people have other things that bother them. I suspect that people as they grow old maybe have greater struggles with worry rather than sexual temptation.

I don't know that people ever get to a place where sexual temptation is not an issue. But with young people, sexual temptation tends to be a much greater issue than the temptation to worry, the temptation to be insecure. There are different lusts that assault people at different times in their life in greater intensity, it would appear.

And probably the sexual lusts and maybe the lust for peer approval too, that's no greater in the youth than it is in the adult life, probably. I suppose the sexual lusts are the ones that are most intense during youth. And the ones that although they may continue through life, they are much less a struggle to a person middle-aged and older than they are to a person who is youth.

Unless that person who is middle-aged or older has indulged them consistently through their life. If you live in chastity, if you live in celibacy or holiness or purity, then you will find that the struggle with sexual lust, I believe, diminishes. As you get past that peak period in adolescence, that doesn't go away entirely, perhaps.

But unless you have indulged it, if you have fought it, if you have resisted it, I believe that you can get through that period and find it not forever such a struggle. Sometimes when you're in the midst of adolescence, you feel like that thing is going to be so intense, you just don't see how you can live the rest of your life, which seems, by the way, a very long time ahead of you when you're young. With remaining sexually pure.

But it is, to a very large degree, a youthful struggle. And I think that is probably what Paul has in mind, especially in view of the fact that his similar statement, flee sexual immorality, singles out that particular thing. Now, how do you flee from sexual immorality if you're a young person? Or if you're an older person who struggles in that area, you listen in, too, here.

How does a person overcome sexual immorality? Well, one might say, well, you do that by not watching television, you do that by not reading magazines, you do that by not looking at clothing catalogs, you do that by staying away from attractive people of the opposite sex. And that's one aspect of what a wise person will probably do if they're trying to avoid sexual immorality. But the Pharisees tried to do that.

The Pharisees had a touch-not, taste-not, handle-not kind of approach to holiness, too.

You know, just avoid that, avoid that, avoid that, and you'll be clean. But although they avoided those things externally, they weren't really clean.

They didn't really have a heart that was acceptable to God. Jesus had to even speak to his disciples, who were recently converted to him, and said, you know, it's not just outward sexual immorality, it's even looking at a woman to lust after her, you need to be careful about. What's in the heart is really the issue here.

And so, to really conquer sexual lust and temptation, one needs to have more than just a commitment to keep pure physically, fleeing those situations, those external things in the environment that tempt and that draw in the wrong direction. There has to be something else, a commitment that's more fundamental than just the commitment to not do something. Christians, of course, are called to not do certain things.

And to not do sexual immorality is so much an obligation that we're told to flee from it. And there's not very many things we're told to flee from, by the way, in the Bible. In fact, we're not even supposed to flee from the devil.

The Bible says, resist the devil and he'll flee from you. We don't have to be afraid of the devil, but we have to be afraid of our own lusts. James said, let no man say when he is tempted, I'm tempted by God.

And by the way, he didn't say, but he's tempted instead by the devil. He says, no, every man is tempted when he's drawn away by his own lusts and enticed. You take care of your own lusts, you get those under control, and the devil will not be a problem to you in those areas.

He may be a problem in other areas. Sometimes we think the devil's main concern is to get us to be sexually impure. I suppose that the devil doesn't need, I should say, our flesh doesn't need any help from the devil to draw us into the area of sexual impurity.

The devil probably has more sophisticated sins he's interested in getting us to go off into, although I'm sure he has no problem, no objection to us getting involved in sexual immorality too. But the fact is, the real problem here is us. The real problem is in our hearts, our own lusts.

A man is drawn away by his own lusts and enticed. That's when he's tempted. And so Paul tells Timothy, it's not just a matter of avoiding certain stimuli and certain elements in the environment.

There must be a commitment of the heart toward what? Well, he says in verse 22, the pursuit of righteousness, of faith, of love, and of peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Now, this is a very full verse here. How do I successfully escape from youthful lusts, if I'm a youth, or for that matter, at any age, whatever lusts are of the wrong type that I must overcome, how do I do that? It's not simply by biting the bullet.

It's not simply by becoming a physical eunuch as Origen and some of the church fathers did in order to avoid sexual immorality. They actually became surgically eunuchs. And they managed to avoid sexual immorality so far as we know, externally at least.

I really don't know what goes on in the mind of someone who has that operation, but it isn't the solution that's recommended in Scripture. Paul doesn't recommend that solution to Timothy. We have no reason to believe that Paul took that solution, though both of them were called to be celibate and chaste men.

There was something else, something that was more fundamental, and that was the commitment to pursue something. Now, all people pursue something. And the person who pursues pleasure or pursues self-gratification is going to be assailed by all kinds of lusts and will be surprised to find they can't overcome them because they made a determination to be pure, but their real pursuit in life is their own happiness.

As long as your desire in life, your fundamental desire is to be happy, you might at the same time say, I want to be happy and holy. I want to be happy and pure. I want to be happy and undefiled, but principally I want to be happy.

Well, as long as my own happiness is my basic commitment, I will have no foundation for resistance to anything that presents itself as a boon to my happiness, including temptation to momentary happiness, momentary thrills. Remember how we are told of Esau, that it says over in Hebrews chapter 12, it says, lest there be any fornicator or profane person among you like Esau. It's interesting that fornicators are likened to Esau.

Now, Esau, we do not read in the Old Testament that Esau was a fornicator, unless the fact that he was a polygamist is considered, because he did take three wives, but then some of the betterment of God did similar things, and I don't know that that is what the writer of Hebrews is referring to as Esau's likeness to a fornicator. He does not say Esau was a fornicator. He says, lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau.

Now, a fornicator is like Esau, whether or not Esau fornicated, we don't know. But he was like a fornicator in what? Well, the writer of Hebrews tells us that he sold his birthright for a momentary gratification of his physical appetite. In that case, it was not a sexual appetite, it was an appetite for food, and it was somewhat legitimate.

He had been out hunting probably for a few days, he had had no time to eat very much. He came in exhausted from an arduous time out in the field. There was some good smelling food right there in the kitchen.

His brother Jacob was cooking it. He asked for a bowl. Jacob, being very brotherly, said, sure, if you sell me your birthright.

These guys were not very brotherly toward each other at any point in their lives as far as we know, but he said, sell me your birthright. And Esau said, well, what good is my

birthright to me if I starve to death, probably succumbing to hyperbole there. He probably was not really going to starve to death before he could cook a meal of his own.

But, I mean, he was in the kitchen after all, but if there were kitchens in those tents, but he was where the food was. It was his own home. He could have eaten.

He didn't have to eat what Jacob had there. It was just more convenient and more impulsive to eat what was already cooked and not have to wait. And so he says, what good is the birthright? Well, that's a good question.

What good is a birthright anyway? Well, what good was his? I don't know that we have birthrights in our culture so much, so we might not even know what's the big deal about a birthright. What's wrong with selling a birthright? What good is a birthright? Well, his birthright in particular, and for that matter, the birthright of most in those Middle Eastern cultures was a very valuable thing. The oldest son, by virtue of being the oldest son, had what was called the birthright.

And that had, in every family, it had economic benefits and social benefits, because the oldest son would, upon the death of the father, inherit twice as much of the father's estate as all the other sons would. He would be divided up into equal parts, and the oldest son would get two of those equal parts, and the others would each get one. That was an economic boon, but also he would be sort of the, after the father would die, he'd be sort of the patriarch of the family, the one who was esteemed as the one who kind of made the decisions when the father was gone and no longer around.

So there was an authoritative role, a place of honor and dignity, a social respect that came with the birthright. All of those things about a birthright are more important than just one meal. But in Esau's case, the birthright in that family had a particular advantage that other families did not have, and that was that God had promised to their ancestor, Abraham, that of his seed he'd raise up one through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

This was like the fulfillment of all God's grand designs for all eternity were to be wrapped up in a line of this family, and whoever had the birthright was the one through whom that blessing would be brought to the whole world. It was a huge cosmic thing, this birthright. It was the right in this particular family, in Esau's case, the right to be God's man and to have his offspring be the people of God.

Now, as it turned out, he sold his birthright to Jacob. So Jacob, it was Jacob's children that became the people of God, the Israelites. Jacob was later named Israel, and his people were the children of Israel, of course.

And so the Israelites became the people of God. What happened to Esau's people? The Edomites? They just became another batch of pagans, eventually to be wiped out

because they were hostile toward the Jews, and they were wiped out prior to the time of Christ. There's no Edomites left.

The last one known is Herod the Great. But Esau didn't value those things. And you can see that there was more than an economic advantage and a social advantage in this particular birthright.

There was something spiritual involved. The question was, will we be the people of God, or will my brother's people be the people of God? And he said, well, what do I care? All I know is there's stew right here, and I'm hungry right now. In other words, that which was a long-term, we could even say an eternal advantage that was his by virtue of his birth as the firstborn, he cared nothing for it.

It says in Hebrews, he despised his birthright. Actually, it says that in Genesis. He despised his birthright, which doesn't mean what we might think of the word despise.

It doesn't mean he had utter revulsion toward it. It just meant that he didn't value it. To despise something means to lightly esteem it.

He didn't assess properly the weight of what he was forsaking in order to have that one meal. Now, what did that one meal represent? According to the writer of Hebrews, it was just like any fornicator. Now, you might say, well, is eating evil like fornication is evil? Not in itself.

Actually, sex isn't evil in itself either. There's a legitimate use of sex. There's a legitimate use of eating.

But there's also illegitimate uses of both. In this case, if to eat means you forsake your relationship with God, if it means you sell your whole offspring for the rest of the generations of those that have come from you, sell them out, as it were, and give the blessings of God that would have been theirs to someone else, you basically betray your family, you betray God, you show that you value God less than you value this instantaneous gratification of some temporal appetite. Then, yeah, food in that case is not a very good thing.

Just at that moment, in that circumstance. Anything that you trade God for is an idol. And the reason I believe that the writer of Hebrews in chapter 12 likens a fornicator, a Christian who fornicates, to Esau, who sold his birthright, is because the Christian also has a birthright.

We have the dignity of being the people of God. And more than that, our birthright ultimately is not just to be saved, but according to the Scripture, our birthright is to be like Christ. That's what it says, of course, in Romans 8, 29, where it says, whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed into the image of his Son, that is, conformed into the image of Christ, so that Christ might be the firstborn of many

brethren.

Christ is the firstborn. He's got the birthright. But we have the privilege of being in Him, sharing in His birthright, being joint heirs with Him, co-heirs.

He is the firstborn. God wants there to be many brethren who are gathered up into that firstborn, who share in Him the same birthright that He has, which is to inherit all things, and to stand in relation to the Father the way that Jesus stands in relation to the Father. This is a great birthright that we have, to be like Christ.

And the writer of Hebrews is suggesting that, you know, if you commit fornication, what are you doing? What you're doing is saying, this appetite that I have at this moment matters more to me than being like Jesus Christ matters to me. That's what it is. My birthright is to be like Christ.

Esau's birthright was much less valuable than ours. But he sold it for an instantaneous gratification of something, an appetite that would have been able to have been legitimately satisfied another way, had he had the patience, or for that matter, had he simply had self-control, the appetite might have even diminished in time. Same is true of sexual lust.

Paul says, flee sexual lust. Well, they're not going to pursue you forever, you know. When you run from something, it's like you're being pursued by it.

Well, if you're fleeing youthful lust, you'll find that it may pursue you a bit, but you keep fleeing, and it'll tire out before you do. Temptation doesn't continue forever. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10, 13, that there's no temptation taking you, but such is as common to man.

And God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above that which you're able to endure. And He'll, with the temptation, provide a way of escape that you might be able to endure it and to overcome it. So you don't have to sin.

One of the devil's chief deceptions, and he has many, and they're all related to his attempt to get you to corrupt yourself. One of the chief temptations of the enemy is to tell you that this temptation will not go away until you succumb to it. When you are facing a temptation of any kind, you will have strength against that temptation if your hope is in God, that God will provide a way of escape and that you will not have to fall.

But when you decide, this temptation is never going to go away unless I just relieve it, and then it'll be gone. Then if the devil convinces you that when you're in the throes of a temptation, that the only way you can be free from it is to succumb to it, after all, you can always repent, right? Well, Esau repented, kind of. He wept.

He cried. He begged. He sought his father for a blessing, but there was none that came.

It was too late. He'd given it up. He'd sold it.

And he could have simply waited. He didn't have to eat that meal. He didn't have to sell his birthright.

And the Christian who succumbs to sexual temptation has made the same foolish mistake, only worse, only intensified, because the birthright that the Christian forsakes is greater than the birthright that Esau forsook. And arguably, the pleasure that the fornicator seeks is as fleeting or more so than that of the person who sits down to a good meal. But both have something in common, and that is this, that before you partake, the craving may be so intense that one thinks that they cannot possibly bear it.

If you've ever been fasting, and you're not accustomed to fasting, and some food is cooking, and it's food that is your favorite, and so forth, you know what the devil is going to say to you. He's going to say, listen, you'd better fast a different day, because this is your favorite meal, and you're never going to get a chance to eat this meal, this particular stuff again. If you miss this one, you're going to miss it forever.

That's another thing the devil likes to get you to do, to succumb to lust. He has to deceive you. He's got to make you feel like you're not going to get away from this temptation unless you succumb to it.

He wants you also to think that if you do get away with it, and if you don't succumb, if you do escape the temptation, that you're going to live to regret that, because you have given up an opportunity that you will really regret having missed. I haven't found that so. I do not find myself regretting the times I didn't sin.

Now, young people, you may not have lived long enough to really have much of a track record on this to evaluate, but take it from someone who's older. I can look back at the temptations I have faced. Of course, I don't remember all of them, but all the ones I can remember, severe temptations, the ones I do not regret are the ones that I remained pure in.

If I have any regrets about any temptations, it was the ones I did not remain pure in. And the devil is a liar. He'll tell you, you know, if you don't succumb to this one, if you don't give in to this temptation, you will live to regret it.

This opportunity is only going to present itself right now, and the opportunity is not going to, and if you don't open the door right now, you will be kicking yourself for the rest of your life. No, the opposite is true. You need to flee from that youthful lust.

It is a trap. It is a predator. It is like what God said to Cain, you know, if you do not do well, sin is like a predator crouching at the door, ready to pounce upon you, but he says you must overcome it.

Paul says you got to flee from it. You got to run from that. Now, how do you run from it? It doesn't just mean geographically removing yourself from the video store.

That's a good start. It doesn't mean just, you know, avoiding the stores where the magazine racks are there staring you in the face when you're getting your groceries. That would be a good start too.

It's good to avoid those things. Be very wise to do that, but that alone will not conquer the problem inside, the lusts, because it's lusts in our members. It's not the lusts out there.

It's the lusts in here that are the problem. And how do you flee from what's in here? How do you flee from yourself? Well, you flee from youthful lusts by directing yourself toward something else which is mutually exclusive from the fulfillment of those youthful lusts. You need to have not just a commitment to avoid certain sins.

Now, many Christians probably could make a list of things that if they really want to be good Christians, they know they have to avoid this, they have to avoid that, they have to avoid that, they have to avoid that. Right, good. You have to avoid those things.

But the Pharisees spent their whole life avoiding things, avoiding contact with Gentiles, avoiding things that defiled, but they were not clean. Because Christianity is not a life that's defined strictly in terms of what you avoid. It's defined in terms of what you're pursuing.

Now, you cannot pursue one thing in one direction and the opposite thing that's behind you at the same time. You want to pursue after righteousness, Paul said, and if you do that, you can't be pursuing after the fulfillment of unrighteous lusts at the same time. You need to have a positive direction, a positive commitment.

Remember when Jesus was asked about divorce. Now, Jesus didn't just say, oh, you've got to avoid divorce, that's a bad thing, divorce is a bad thing. Well, it is a bad thing, and he made it very clear, it's a very bad thing.

But he didn't just say, okay, you asked me about divorce, let me tell you about this, avoid divorce. You just really need to make sure you don't fall into divorce. No, he said, remember how God intended man and woman to be? Do you remember how he made them the two, and then he made them one flesh, and God joined them together, and what God has joined together, it's supposed to be joined together, it's not supposed to put us under.

Instead of talking against divorce directly, he spoke positively of what Christians should be pursuing. They should be pursuing a monogamous lifetime relationship. With one spouse, that's how God designed it.

Now, you can draw your own conclusions about divorce from that. Once you know what God wants marriage to be, you don't have to ask anyone whether you should get a divorce or not, the answer is self-evident. If you are pursuing righteousness, if you're pursuing holiness, if you're pursuing purity, then you don't have to think at the same time, at least not with the same intensity, of avoiding certain kinds of sins.

Now, you do have to look over your shoulder once in a while. Unlike most runners in races who aren't supposed to look over their shoulder, it probably is good once in a while to look over your shoulder to see if you're being pursued very closely, and seeing if you've taken a wrong turn anywhere. There is a place for looking at the devil.

Now, the Bible says we're supposed to run the race looking unto Jesus, but there is also a place for looking at the devil. Peter said that. He said, Be vigilant, be sober, for your adversary is a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.

To be vigilant means you keep awake, be sober, you're watching around. You're being circumspect, which means looking around. There's a place for looking out for temptation, not walking into those places where you know it'll be.

But, again, your Christian life is not going to be defined in terms of what you avoid. Religion, religious life can be defined in those terms for many people, but the Christian life is defined in terms of pursuing after Christ-likeness. If I want to be like Christ, that'll go a long way to keeping me from some of those temptations.

I may not even feel some of those temptations like I otherwise would if my heart is set in the pursuit of God. Now, Paul said, don't just flee, youthful us. He says, Pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Now, these are big words in the Bible. Righteousness, that's a big word. I don't mean just a lot of syllables.

I mean, it's a big concept in the Bible. Faith, huge concept in the Bible. Love, peace.

None of these are small words. I mean, you couldn't give a short sermon on any of these. In fact, I think that it's so impossible to give a short sermon on these, I'm not going to try to sermonize on any of them.

I'm just going to leave it to you to know what these words mean. Righteousness means doing what's right in the sight of God, doing what's just. Faith, that's trusting God.

Love, you know what that means. Peace. Now, I will say this about the word peace.

The Bible talks about peace two ways, and it's not entirely clear how he means it here. It may mean that inward peace that comes from having a conscience that is clear because you're forgiven and because you're doing those things that are pleasing in God's sight. It

says over 1 John 3, If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

But if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. We have faith toward God if our heart is clear, if we have peace with God. It says in, of course, Romans 5, 1, that therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.

That's an inward peace. But the Bible also tells us to pursue peace with all men. It says that in Hebrews chapter 12 also.

It says pursue holiness and peace with all men. And when he says that you should pursue peace with all those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, there's a slight ambiguity there because it either means that along with everybody else who's pursuing peace, you should be pursuing peace. That is this inward peace, this peace with God.

Those people who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, that's the group of people that are pursuing this and you be with them pursuing that. Or it could mean pursue peace as a relationship factor between you and all other people who are calling on the Lord out of a pure heart. That is, pursue to be in peace with such people.

I don't know which Paul means. Actually, either one really is agreeable with other things Paul said. So again, I'm not going to settle that matter.

I will say this though. That last clause is very helpful. With all, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

This is the fellowship in which we pursue righteousness and peace and love and faith. It is in the company of those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Now, it's not, it doesn't say in the company of those who have the same experience of the baptism of the Spirit we do.

It doesn't say in the company of those who have the same explanation of end times prophecy as we do. It doesn't say in the company of those who have been baptized just as we have in the same way. Now, those things have their own level of importance in the whole scheme of things, but that's not the company we're in.

We are identified not with those who profess a certain mode of baptism. We're identified not with people who have a particular explanation of predestination. We are identified with all who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

This is something that the church in many cases, and the most orthodox church as well as the least orthodox, has been mistaken in. As you know, the burning of heretics was not uncommon in the Middle Ages, and the Catholics were not the only ones who did it. The Protestants did it too.

One of the saddest stories is the story of how John Calvin, who ruled Geneva in his later years, how that he approved of and engineered the burning of a heretic named Michael Servetus. Now, Michael Servetus was a heretic in that he didn't hold orthodox doctrines. He had a number of doctrines that we would all disagree with, and we'd agree that his doctrines were bad, but there is reason to believe that although his doctrines were bad, he did call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

In fact, John Calvin despised this man so much, partly because John Calvin had sent a copy of his own works, Calvin's works, Institutes of the Christian Religion, to Michael Servetus before they ever met, because he knew the man was a heretic and he wanted to straighten him out and send him his book. Servetus sent Calvin's book back to him with marginal notes, which were very derogatory toward Calvin's work. And Calvin hated the man from that point on, and he wrote in a letter that if Servetus ever comes to Geneva, Calvin will see to it that the man never leaves alive.

Well, a few years later, Michael Servetus was fleeing from the Catholic Church, which had branded him as a heretic, and he was fleeing for asylum to Geneva. He showed up in church. Calvin spotted him, had him arrested, and had him burned over a fire of green wood to make it linger longer.

It was three hours. During that time, Michael Servetus called out to Jesus Christ and said, Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, and so forth. I mean, he called out on the Lord.

Was he a brother? Calvin didn't think so. Although since the Bible says no murderer has eternal life abiding in him, I'm not sure Calvin was a brother. But the fact of the matter is, Christians have often defined the fellowship very narrowly.

In terms of, well, does a person explain the Trinity the same way I do? Now, that seems like a pretty important doctrine. Although it's interesting, in the first 300 years, they never defined it enough to make it an issue of fellowship in the early church. It was defined later on more clearly.

But the fact of the matter is, Paul identifies the communion that we are in, the fellowship that we are in, as all who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. A pure heart is one that has unmixed motives. Pure water is that which is just water.

There's nothing mixed in with it. Purity means unmixed. And the only thing that makes a person identifiable as my brother or my sister is if their pursuit of Jesus Christ is from an unmixed heart, that their heart is wholly the Lord's.

They might see many things differently than I do, and almost all the brothers do see many things differently than I do. And that's fine. I don't have any objection to that.

But the issue here is, do I define who I am and, therefore, what assembly I belong to, what fellowship I'm a part of? Do I define that in terms of the things that God defines it in

terms of? I define my fellowship as part of the brotherhood of all who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, and not on the basis of, you know, creedal agreement and things on a lot of issues. And Paul, obviously, was that way. And he told Timothy, listen, anyone who's pursuing righteousness, faith, love, peace, those people who are pursuing the Lord like that out of a pure heart, stick with them, run with them.

You're in the same race. You're seeking the same goal. They will be your support group, as it were.

They will be your encouragement. And if you are going to overcome the battle with the youthful lusts, you're going to need their company. You're going to need their help.

And this is something that I'm going to close with here. And that is the great assistance that is afforded by a company of pure-hearted believers in the struggle against youthful lusts. You know, many of us do not have the opportunity to live in a Christian compound.

You know, all our neighbors are not all Christians. And we don't do all our shopping among Christians. And we don't do all our banking among Christians.

And the post office is not, you know, full only of Christians. And everywhere we go, the radio stations are not all Christian. The billboards are not generally Christian in orientation.

And we are surrounded by cultural pressures that are contrary to Christianity. And this matter of sexual lust is one of the major messages that those media are hammering us with day by day. I mean, we're continually confronted by magazine covers and, you know, songs that you hear over loudspeakers when you're shopping or whatever.

The messages of the world that cater to these youthful lusts, these sexual lusts. I mean, the world adores sex. The world worships it.

It is the god of our culture. And we pick up things from our environment. Now, hopefully we don't pick up too much because we're supposed to be able to resist this.

But I mean, in realistic terms, we are encouraged in one direction or another by the environment. I mean, if you're walking against a stiff wind and it's blowing in your face, it is not encouraging you in the direction you want to go. You can still walk against it, but it's more difficult.

And in some cases, if the wind is strong enough, even if you stand still, it'll start to push you back. Sometimes you have to lean into it and push against it. The environment can be very much contrary to the direction you want to go.

And it is. So, you young people need to learn this early on. It'll do you a world of good.

You need to identify yourself with another world, another kingdom, another citizenry, an

alternative society. And that is the society of those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. The ones who are pursuing righteousness and faith and love and peace, those who are in that pursuit, there is a company of such people.

It'd be awfully difficult to walk against that stiff wind alone and to be the only one doing so. You would have absolutely no encouragement from any source except whatever you got internally from God, which is not nothing. That's a lot.

And there have been people like Daniel who've had to stand alone without fellowship against an incredibly hostile culture. But unless you're as strong as Daniel, and I've known very few Christian youth who are, I was not. Unless you're as strong as Daniel, you don't want to be in Babylon alone.

You want to be in the company of people who are pursuing what you want to define your pursuit in terms of. You need to, and I don't mean just going to church. Being in this congregation, hearing some old guy teach like this, singing a few songs, seeing an even older guy lead the songs, you young people might say, this is the society I'm in.

Well, yes it is. It's a multi-generational society. And it may be that you can't relate exactly with some of the people who are up front because we are older people.

But you know, it's not coming to church that's going to fortify you completely against the world. It helps. It can.

I mean, some churches don't help much, but it helps me when I come to this church, and there are other churches, that when I've been there, what I've heard there, what I've sung there, what I've heard prayed, what I've prayed in the services, those things are helpful. Those are very helpful. But there's a long time between those meetings.

In the meantime, I'm associating with people. And the people I associate with six days out of the week, or even seven, with the exception of a few hours put out Sunday morning, is going to have a lot more to do with defining how easily I am drawn to the things of God, and how easily I can put behind me the lusts that are raging inside me to do the wrong thing. Because when you're around people who, everything they say, everything they sing, everything they joke about, is affirming the worldly ideas of sensuality, of self-gratification, of using people of the opposite sex for emotional toys.

I mean, that's the message the world's going to give you all the time. When you're around people like that, you can, but you'll find it difficult to remain pure. But when you're around people whose, their very lives, the way they're living, the choices they're making, the values that they embrace, that dictate their speech, the things they talk about, the things that they pursue, when those are things that are going the same direction you want to go, that's where you need to immerse yourself as much as possible.

Because you can't, don't worry, you're not going to get out of the world. You're not going to become so engulfed in spiritual fellowship that the world, you won't even know what's going on out there. No, you'll know, unless you go off to some compound, unless you go off to some monastery somewhere, you're going to have the world continually hammering you with those messages.

And you may not always have the benefit of the kind of fellowship you have now. Use it, exploit it, embrace it, be strengthened by it while you can. Build foundations in your life of the right values while you're around such people.

Because, I mean, we could all be taken from each other. We could all be put in solitary confinement in different cells and not having fellowship at all. Never know what the future holds.

But right now we are in the midst of those, many, who call upon the Lord out of pure heart, whose stated and demonstrated pursuit is that of righteousness. And rather than thinking, boy, is this a strange crowd, you know, compared to the world out there, realize that it's the world that's strange. It's the world that's in darkness.

It's the world that's blind. They don't know anything. Like the people of Nineveh.

God described the people of Nineveh to Jonah. He says, these people, they don't know their left hand from their right hand. Which is probably just, some people think he's referring to little children who haven't learned left and right yet.

But I think it's more of a Hebraism that means they don't know right from wrong. They're totally moral imbeciles. And some of us are kind of imbecilic ourselves.

But the fact is we're at least learning. We're at least being informed by God. We're in the light at least.

And we're seeing some things. And don't think it a grievous thing to be, as it were, largely isolated to a group of people who are going the right direction. I know young people can often look outside the perimeters of that fellowship and see all those people out there doing something else.

And say, I wonder what it's like out there. I wonder if they're having more fun than I'm having. They might be.

There's a good chance they are. There's a good chance they aren't too. I don't know any unbeliever who has as much fun as I have.

But, depends on what you call fun. But the fact is, you may indeed not be having a lot of fun. And they may be having a lot of fun.

As long as that's important to you, you're very vulnerable to sell your birthright. But

there are some things more important than having fun. And one is that when you get to the end of your life, you can look back without regrets and say, I have retained my birthright.

I've retained my chastity. I've retained my good conscience. I have, as Paul tells Timothy later in this same epistles, I've fought the good fight.

I've run the race. Paul did not succumb to youthful lust or old man lust. He lived his whole life as a celibate.

And he knew very well the temptations. But when he got to the end, faithfully, he said, I have finished my course. I was fleeing from that.

I was pursuing that. And I'm now at the finish line. He says, I've finished my course.

I've run the race. I've fought the good fight. Henceforth has laid up for me a crown of glory.

And not for me only, but for all who love the Lord in his appearing. And so Paul gives Timothy these instructions to put behind him the pursuit of the lusts. And to put before him the goal of being righteous and holy.

And to employ the assistance of the Christian environment, of those in this alternative society. In which you have the privilege of being. Of others who are seeking to be pure.

Now you older people, you might be saying, you're nodding your head saying, yeah, young people really need to hear this. But you need to hear this too. Because you older people, more than they, are out in the world.

Our kids mostly are home schooled in this church. I mean, in some churches the kids are out in the world as much as the adults are. It's a disastrous formula.

But in this church, most of the kids are at home with Christian parents. They're not out in the world as much. But you adults are out in the world.

You're out relating with unbelievers. And you need more than they do. The fellowship of the saints.

And don't forsake it. Because it is one of the greatest resources God has given us. In a world that will not encourage us to flee from youthful lusts.

And will not encourage us in the pursuit of righteousness. Why don't we pray and we'll close out this meeting. Father, I thank you that there is a high standard.

And that you do not lower the bar for us. But you call us to learn to attain to that standard that you've set. And you've called us not to be satisfied with what we have thus

far attained to.

But to pursue on. To pursue on. To be more like Christ.

To be more righteous. To be more loving. To be more trusting.

More at peace. To be more an element of this company that pursues you. That calls on you.

Out of a pure heart. That we would not only benefit from the presence of such people. But that we would be some of the people that others benefit from being around.

I pray, Father, that you'll help us. As you know very well. The way that our sensitivities are assailed by the present culture.

And the messages of our media. And you know very well the stirrings within our bodies. And our souls.

And the temptations of those lusts. Whether youthful or otherwise. That war against the soul.

And I pray, Father, for our young people here. As they are even more than my generation. Going out into an exceedingly corrupt world.

My generation rejected traditional morality. Their generation has never heard of it. And I pray, Father, that you will help those who are in our families.

These young people. To be the voices and the visible lights through whom their generation will hear of it. And will see it.

And will become convicted of their rebellion against God. And I pray that we might be light enough that others can see that. And can benefit from it.

And we ask these things for Christ's sake. In his name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.