

## LIFE WITH A GOOD CONSCIENCE

Dr. Samuel Mikolaski, at Bethel Baptist Church, Escondido, CA, January 29, 1997

***Ephesians 5:9: The fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.***

The foundation of Christian values includes the Ten Commandments, the teachings of Christ which focus upon spiritual hunger for righteousness (as in the Sermon on the Mount), and the moral teaching of Paul who says much about wisdom, self-control, courage and justice, as well as the key virtues of faith, hope and love. Christian virtue is not based upon uneasy balancing of conflicting values. It comprises the Fruit of the Spirit (*Gal 5:22-26; Eph 5:17-18*). The life in Christ answers to a good conscience (*1 Tim 1:5*).

Modern wrong accounts of human behavior include:

1. Sigmund Freud: the dark theory which attributes neuroses to anxiety about evil wishes or acts which we would commit if we dared, not from acts we have committed but wish we had not (guilt).
2. B.F. Skinner: the bright theory which claims all behavior is for the purpose of gratification (stimulus-response and need-satisfaction) and that anything which makes you feel good is OK.
3. Joseph Fletcher: the situationalist theory which says that all moral standards are simply expressions of feeling and are relative to time and place; therefore no standard but our own applies; and, that this should probably be the 'love alone' standard.

Biblical virtue includes:

Civic duty (*Rom 13:1-7*).

Social propriety (*1 Cor 8-10*).

Peaceable, loving interpersonal relations (*Eph 5:21 - 6:9*).

Goodness, virtue (*Rom 16:19; Gal 5:22-23*).

Moral correctness (*Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 5:9-11; 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21*).

Nevertheless, the Bible states frequently that we often know what to do but don't have the mind or will to do that which is good as against choosing that which is a lesser good, or wrong, or evil.

Conscience -- the Lord's Lamp: God had built into human nature the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong. Conscience judges *our own* behavior. This is its primary function - not to judge the behavior of others. Note: *Rom 1:19; 2:15*.

But conscience can be conditioned to invert values so that one becomes blind to what is good and can actually justify the practice of evil (to call good evil, and evil good, e.g., *Isaiah 5:20; Rom 1:32*). The New Testament speaks of consciences which are weak (*1 Cor 8:7*), seared (*1 Tim 4:2*), corrupted (*Titus*

1:15), evil (*Heb 10:22*). On the other hand, a redeemed or cleansed conscience can be sincere, clear, good (*2 Cor 1:12; 1 Tim 1:5, 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3*).

The Biblical principle: conscience gets its standards from outside itself. What we allow ourselves to be instructed and conditioned by will in large degree determine our behavior.

Biblical teaching includes five guidelines for living with a good conscience:

1. Avoid that which is distinctly sinful (*1 Cor 6:9-11*).
2. Do not do that which will be a stumbling-block to others, but that which will build them up (*1 Cor 8:12-13*).
3. Avoid anything that tends to condition you into unfreedom (*1 Cor 6:12*).
4. Adapt to society around you for the sake of the ministry of the Gospel, while retaining your Christian standards (*1 Cor 9:19-27*).
5. Recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit who is gives insight and the strength to practice Christian virtues (*1 Cor 6:19; Gal 5:16-26; Eph 5:15-18*).

## **MODERN CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP**

Dr. Samuel J. Mikolaski, Principal, Baptist Leadership Training School Calgary

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I cannot speak of contemporary stewardship without feeling that we are indebted to the past and without recounting personal blessings which I find difficult to put into words. Stewardship is deeply personal to me and completely life encompassing. What I have to say comes from a profound sense of personal obligation. I speak also from the standpoint of constitutional issues, some of which touch on our own denominational and organizational concerns. This is not the usual kind of banquet address I give, yet I feel constrained to give it.

I was baptized in High Park Baptist Church in Toronto by Albert Hughes. Many of you will remember that name. I recall the Christian devotion of men like J. H. Russell, who was president of the Gideons and heavily involved in Christian lay work. I sat in church behind Roland V. Bingham, who was one of the founders of the Sudan Interior Mission, Evangelical Publishers and Canadian Keswick. I remember that saintly man well. I do not suppose any one man has meant more to me in my own spiritual development than A. H. Dancy, who was a prominent, retired Christian layman in Toronto. He really single-handed put a theological foundation into my life in the space of three months, following my conversion through evangelistic meetings at High Park Baptist Church. He taught me the meaning of the first eleven chapters of Genesis and the first eight chapters of Romans. Everything I have learned since is built on the foundation that A. H. Dancy put into my life. His name will be known to some of you because his children were missionaries.

My contemporaries felt the constraint of the love of Christ, of His coming, and of His call and commission for world missions. I am concerned that we should maintain and reactivate this mood in this generation. The constraint of the love of Christ for our world, expressed through evangelical causes, is our opportunity. Nevertheless, I speak with some diffidence because I have been pained over the years as a pastor and a teacher, about things I have seen and known about. I must confess to you quite frankly that during the past thirty years some of my evangelical idols have come crashing down at my feet. I only would have to cite some nationally and internationally known names to indicate to you the gravity of these deviations in Christian stewardship.

I see the past to be enormously inspiring. The Christian generosity, altruism and heroism of the late 1800's and early 1900's are remarkable. During the last ten years we have at times been tempted to pay too much attention to the negative critics of Christianity generally and of evangelical Christianity in particular. Recently I have been caught up short by some of my friends on the matter of missions expansion. Bob Berry of the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board points out some thrilling facts. He says that more people by far have been won to faith in Christ in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in any other century, and probably more in this century than in all previous centuries combined. Second, Christianity is the

first world-wide religion in history; there is not a nation where a church is not known. The number of missionaries from Western churches continues to grow in this century. Today there are more than twice as many missionaries as there were at the end of World War II. Christianity is not only the world's largest religion, nominally speaking, but it is also probably the fastest growing religion in the world today. I believe this ought to say something to us about our responsibility in respect of stewardship.

To understand the scope of this growth, he adds we might look at three areas. Recent statistics show that Africa which had only 3% of its population listed as Christian in 1900, today claims to be 28% Christian. Even more amazing is that government figures reveal the 37% of the population of all Africa claim Christianity as their religion. Some national leaders in Africa indicate that Christianity will claim almost half of Africa's population of 360 million people by the end of this century, which means that Africa will have more Christian people than any other continent. In Latin America, Protestant Christianity has grown phenomenally since 1945-from approximately two million Protestant Christians in 1945 to well over twenty million today. The growth among our Pentecostal brethren has been very rapid, and Baptists have experienced rapid growth as well. We note a parallel trend in Asia, Taiwan, Korea and Indonesia. There is in Indonesia today the world's fastest growing Christian Church according to some reports. What about our stewardship in the light of present opportunities?

In Canada a changing pattern of giving and of commitment is apparent. This pattern is discernible from the 1920's on, with the invasion of Liberal Theology on the Canadian scene. There were during my childhood, in Toronto and Hamilton and other parts of Canada many multiplied thousands of evangelical Christians in what we call the "larger, established churches"-Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church. Many of those people have died and you know better than I the problems of raising money from a changing Christian constituency. There is not only the demise of the older stewards, but also intense competition for funds from the growing Believers' Churches-Baptist, Pentecostal, Brethren, Alliance, etc. We see a new day in which new attitudes prevail, and there are changes as well in the understanding of altruism in our secular society. In government policy we note a trend toward less altruism and more need-satisfaction.

So much for the past. In preparing these comments I felt constrained to talk about stumbling blocks to giving, because you are in the responsible position of dealing with Christian stewards. I have taken the trouble to ransack my own memory and to discuss the matter with a number of people. I spoke with young people, pastors, missionaries, laymen, housewives and executives about their responses to the appeals of organizations. All with whom I have spoken want to be dedicated and want to be altruistic in regard to God's work. What do they say? Here is a list of some of their comments.

One group of comments concerns the responsibility of Christian agencies. There is the problem of self-perpetuating Boards. As was pointed out to me, there is in principle no difference between the College of Cardinals in Rome in their

procedures of electing a Pope and that of evangelical self-perpetuating Boards in their procedures of electing new officers. ‘There is the problem of the responsibility of such boards to the constituency which they purport to serve. Responsibility is in the forefront of the minds of many people. Responsibility to whom? Responsibility in what way?’

Second, it was pointed out to me that there are grievous problems at times involving immorality, greed and dishonesty. Do you recall such schemes as the promise of getting rich from gold in the Fraser River and thereby also enriching the Kingdom of God? We must do all in our power to preserve the integrity of the Christian cause.

The third I call simply mis-alliance. By ‘mis-alliance’ I mean questionable alliances between altruistic and business ventures. The alliance of altruism and business ventures ought to quicken a healthy skepticism.

Fourth, the issue of uncertain purposes. Claims are made that organizations and institutions are working with the churches, when actually the churches begin to feel that they are out to fleece them.

Fifth, exotic projects where there is a failure to distinguish between Christian vision and flashy ideas, which really do not make very much common sense or fulfil the Great Commission. Very often such projects are invented simply to perpetuate an organization.

Sixth, an inadequate kerugmatic (Gospel) residue: that is. insufficient attention to the outcome or residue of the enterprise. This is especially the case in relation to the New Testament meaning of the church and the body of Christ. Some contemporary interests are too specialized or esoteric. In this respect I can give you an example. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century there were in Britain two outstanding contemporaries who were great preachers. C. H. Spurgeon of London and Alexander McLaren of Manchester, whose names are justly famous in evangelical scholarship and Gospel testimony. What was one significant difference between the two men? Spurgeon was not only a great preacher, but also a great energizer. When he died he left behind a powerful group of evangelical churches in Britain, many of which continue to the present day. When McLaren died, although he had been a preacher for two generations, had filled his church and had written many books, evangelism in Manchester just about died with him. Anyone who knows Manchester today will know whereof I speak. What is our kerugmatic residue? What are we leaving behind?

Seventh, it was pointed out to me that at times Christian appeal for funds is based on animosity; an animosity to others’ work whether it is denominational or non-denominational. A lack of trust and co-operation is sensed. Fortunately your conference indicates that there is a growing trust and co-operation, for which I am thankful. It is also said that there is’ often misuse and abuse of the word ‘faith’ in regard to mission ventures and a need to understand the necessary differences which God can utilize in the work of His Kingdom.

Eighth, it is felt there is too often a preying upon ignorance, a keeping of people at

home ignorant and gullible about certain overseas ventures.

Ninth, observation is made about questionable motivation techniques. The arts of coercion rather than persuasion are used, especially to prey upon guilt complexes of wealthy people. I do not know how this appears to you, but I found it deeply disturbing as I talked to people and collated their reactions to appeal for funds.

**In conclusion**, I wish to set before you a four-fold challenge. I speak as an evangelical to evangelicals having evangelical concerns.

*First*, I have a deep concern over the narrowing Biblical base amongst evangelicals. I think we need to look to ourselves about the breadth and depth of the Biblical teaching among us before we start throwing stones at the theological liberals.

If you have observed what is happening in the publishing world, you will know that the publishing houses, with only isolated exceptions, have gone into life situation materials. Have you noted, as I must, that the curve of biblical knowledge of students entering Bible schools and seminaries during the last twenty-five years is downward? We are also going through a new romantic movement in North American culture -- romantic in the technical, literary and philosophical sense. I mean romanticism like Wordsworth's in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in contrast to the rationalism at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The contemporary word is "feeling," rather than faith and commitment in terms of faith. We must be concerned about the shrinking or narrowing biblical base of life amongst evangelicals.

Today there is much emotion and talk of feeling, but how much love is there? Love is measurable by altruistic behaviour. This is Paul's point in I Corinthians 12-14. The Corinthians were concerned about flashy gifts but not about love and its commitment to the work of edification and communication of the Christian Gospel. We shall be hammering against a wall unless we expand biblical knowledge and develop again a life-encompassing biblical perspective. We face the need for a new Christian world-view. It is altogether possible that African Christians will be coming here in this generation not only to evangelize us but to teach us what a Christian world view is.

*Second*, we need to evaluate very carefully a biblical strategy for mission in relation to the Book of Acts. The bodies of believers, the ecclesia in the sense of the soma, the full-fledged kerugmatic thrust, and the altruistic issue will not be achieved until we are less selfishly oriented in relation to group and economic interests.

*Third*, there is the need for a new era of co-operative altruism. There are new levels of co-operation emerging in the foreign fields as well as in North America. We must allow God to vindicate what each of us is doing in the long run. If the romantic mood continues at its present pace, the granular character of individual Christian commitment will be exacerbated. We need a co-operative rather than granular altruism and stewardship. We need a new level of facticity, of accuracy in reporting and in appeal, moving toward a world-wide concern and an open and

generous relationship among all who are concerned with God's work so that our altruism is co-operative rather than granular.

*Last*, I appeal for a new emphasis upon biblical altruism for modern Christians. Few North American students understand the intellectual heritage which has produced them. This heritage centres on a naturalistic or behaviouristic model. Its earlier modern progenitor was John Dewey; its contemporary prophets Pavlov and B. F. Skinner. The naturalistic system in the West derives from the materialism of Leucippus and Epicurus, but its contemporary form stresses the biological and psychological aspects of reality. Contemporary naturalism sees man to be like other organisms, taking from the environment that which is necessary to need and satisfaction. He is then re-stimulated in the need-satisfaction cycle. In this system altruism is a logical embarrassment. One of my early naturalistic professors claimed that altruism would mark the death of an organism because it naturally is selfishly oriented.

This view underlies much of contemporary education and motivation techniques. Many young people who are recent Christian converts are unable to relate the commitment they have to Jesus Christ to the demands of Christian altruism. Self-giving and self-sacrifice are inconsistent with the behaviourist model, but they are the stuff of Christian experience. I appeal to you to encourage acceptance and development of a creationist, redemptive, and altruistic basis to life wherever you work and witness. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me. let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me," (Luke 9:23).

## REWARD

Samuel J. Mikolaski

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REWARD (Heb. gemul, shillum, recompense; maskoreth, wage; egeb, consequence; sakar, reward; shocad, bribe; misthos, wage, reward; Gr. apodidomi, recompense. The many biblical terms range across the full spectrum of relationships between man and man and God and man which entail recompense of some kind, whether wage, gratuity or judgment, honest or dishonest, moral or immoral. The meaning of the reward derives from the character of the giver, the quality of the act being rewarded and the motive of the doer of the act. The highest sense is that of God himself as the reward of faith and obedience (Gen. 15:1; Heb. 11:6).

Sinful reward or reward for evil-doing include rewards of divination (Num. 22:7), bribery (Deut. 10:17; Isa. 1:23; 5:23; Mic. 7:3), traitor's money (Acts 1:18), punishment (2 Sam. 4:10), harlot's hire (Hos. 9:1), evil instead of good (Psa. 35:12) and the more general sense of the wages of sin or of God avenging evil (Deut. 32:41; Prov. 11:18). An inflated ego is the terminal reward of the self-righteous (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16). Good rewards include children as a blessing (Psa. 127:3), gratuity (Dan. 5:17), proper wages for work (1 Tim. 5:18).

Reward is not antithetical to grace but follows from the mercy of God (Exod. 20:5-6, 12; Deut. 7:7-11). Neither in this life nor in the life to come is God's favour seen as the necessary complement of obedience nor suffering as the necessary consequent of one's own personal sinning. At best, good behaviour is but the expected duty of man (Luke 17:10) not the justification of man before God.

The judgments of the Lord are the divine rewards for good or evil and they justify the ways of God with man (Psa. 19:11; 58:10-11; Isa. 40:10; 62:11; Matt. 5:12; Col. 3:24-25; Rom. 2:6, 11; Rev. 22:12). God will be the final judge of human behaviour and the rewarder of human deeds whether good or bad (1 Cor. 3:8).

Jesus spoke much about rewards, though he correlated this with a call to suffering discipleship. Christians are to love their enemies freely, not merely for selfish gain (Matt. 5:46; Luke 6:35). The parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) shows how diligent Christ's followers must be to maximize the value of their gifts against the day of Christ's call for an accounting. Piety will have its reward (Matt. 5:12). Following and serving Christ will be rewarded (Mark 8:35; 9:41; 10:29-30). Christian reward is never salvation for good works. Rather, it is God's praise of good works which follow from salvation by grace (Eph. 2:8-10). Thus salvation is not a static state but a call to stewardship and service as co-workers with God, which service God will honour. Stewardship entails a final accounting and reward which Paul identifies as the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20; Rev.

2:23).

Reward is coupled to the concept of living faith not to self-justification. Faithfulness and reward are never the instrument of justification; they are its proof (James 2:14-16).

Salvation as entering rest is beautifully expressed as the reward of faith in Hebrews (4:1-3), which faith will be rewarded (10:35; Col. 3:24). Soberingly, unbelief denies entrance to that rest (3:18-19) leaving only the prospect of awful judgment (10:26-31) as the reward of the wicked.

## RIGHT AND WRONG.

SAMUEL J. MIKOLASKI, in Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973).

Right and wrong stand for objective characteristics which attach directly and inalienably to acts and their consequences. Christians agree with moral realists that we are each subject to an unconditional standard of value. But Christians hold that right and good are judged morally by more than the standard of being conducive to the maximum possible good (conversely wrong and bad by what is inimical to it). Christians are also sympathetic to the idealist premise (as in Plato) that right and wrong relate to the standard of the ultimate good and that it is always better to do right than wrong. But they relate the rightness or wrongness of acts not simply to intrinsic good but to the Biblical revelation that the good and right are what God wills. To ask whether the will of God is good is redundant.

In their efforts to clarify moral language Analytical Philosophers generally accept the language of ethics as meaningful but not as relating to objective moral standards (cf. *Language, Ethical*). Clarification entails for some the prior assumption that the answer be cast in terms specified beforehand, i.e., the measure of our understanding. This does not deny the possibility of mystery and revelation, but gratuitously assumes the impossibility of saying anything about them, as language is the vehicle of revealed truth.

Christians insist that the Bible reveals the will of God in specific terms. Christian morality is not based upon situational ethics (q.v.) in which every man does what is right in his own eyes (Judg. 20:25). Moral judgments are more than culturally fashioned and biologically induced responses. Nor are they simply expressions of feeling so that "That is wrong" really means "I don't like that." Nor do Christians teach that good and right are dictated arbitrarily by God.

In Christian teaching no tension exists between the morality of right and wrong and the concept of growth toward the moral ideal. Redemption from the consequences of our wrongdoing in relation to God's laws is available through Christ's perfect sacrifice. The will of God is revealed personally and historically in Jesus Christ, whose beneficiaries delight to conform to the divine commandments. The Holy Spirit assists the believer's growth into the ideal of our Lord's perfect humanity. Christian morality is not only a matter of right and wrong but also of divine enablement toward the Christ-centered ideal (Rom. 8:11; Phil. 2:13).

A. R. C. Duncan, *Moral Philosophy*, CBC, 1965; C. F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1957; T. E. Hill, *Contemporary Ethical Theories*, New York, Macmillan, 1950; A. N. Prior, *Logic and the Basis of Ethics*, New York, Oxford, 1961; I. T. Ramsey, ed., *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy*, London, SCM, 1966.

## SHAME, ASHAMED

Samuel J. Mikolaski

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SHAME, ASHAMED (Heb: bosh, to be ashamed; kalon, disgrace; hapher, to be abashed; hasad, to reproach; 'roah, nakedness; Gr: aischune, disgrace; atimia, dishonour; entropē, humiliation; oneidos, disgrace; paradeigmatizo, to expose).

Figuratively, it is likened to a wild beast and a covering of reproach (Jer. 3:24-25), public reproach (20:18), and a sin against oneself (Hab. 2:10). Most dramatically it is likened to pagan idolatry and its judgmental consequences (Jer. 48:35-39). Israel does not escape when she errs (Jer. 11:13; Ezek. 7:18; Mic. 7:10; Hos. 10:6). The desolation of conquest as judgment is expressed in the figure of reproach (Isa. 33:9, "confounded" RSV), as is the divine rebuke to those who exalt themselves above God and who trust in earthly power and the show of material strength (2 Chron. 32:21).

Mostly, shame is moral in significance: confusion, disgrace, reproach through consciousness of guilt or of its exposure. The wrong-doer triggers his own embarrassment, and sometimes brings shame upon those near him, through his wrongdoing.

It is bracketed with defeat (Isa 30:3), reproach (Ps. 69:7; Isa. 54:4; Mic. 2:6), confusion (Isa. 6:7), nakedness (Isa. 47:3; Mic. 1:11), everlasting contempt (Dan. 12:2), folly (Prov. 18:13), cruelty (Isa. 50:6; Heb. 12:2), poverty (Prov. 13:18), nothingness (Prov. 9:7 AV), unseemliness (1 Cor. 11:6; 14:35 AV; Eph 5:21), and "them that go down to the pit" (Ezek. 32:25).

Uses include: (1) A few times, of actual embarrassment (2 Kings 8:11). (2) Innocence not capable of shame (Gen. 2:25) or the redeemed, no occasion for (Ps. 34:5; 1 John 2:28). (3) Christ not ashamed of "brethren" (Heb. 2:11); nor Christian of the gospel (Rom. 1:16); nor God of men of faith (Heb. 11:16); nor they who trust in God (Isa. 50:7; 54:4; Joel 2:26). (4) Sense of guilt: "I am ashamed for our iniquities" (Ezra 9:6); "of thy lewd way" (Ezek. 16:27, 61); ascribed to idolaters chagrined at worthlessness of idols (Isa. 1:29; 44:9, 11; 45:16; Jer. 2:26); to enemies (Ps. 6:10); to wicked (Ps. 31:17); to all who forsake God (Jer. 17:13); to those who trust in human help, as Israel of Egypt and Assyria, and Moab of Chemosh (Jer. 2:36; 48:13); to a mother of wicked children (Jer. 50:12). (5) Repentance causes shame for sin (Jer. 31:19; Rom. 6:21). (6) Calamities also, and judgments (Jer. 14:3-4; 15:9; 20:11). (7) Capacity for shame may be lost through long continued sin (Jer. 6:15; 8:12), which are exceptionally striking passages on the deadening power of immorality, suggestive of 1 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:15). (8) The grace of Christ delivers from the shame of moral timidity (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:8, 12, 16; 1 Pet. 4:16). (9) At Christ's second coming his followers will "not be ashamed before him" (1 John 2:28); at the final judgment he will be ashamed of all who have been ashamed of him (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; note Matt. 10:33; Heb. 11:16).

Only in cases of complete moral bankruptcy is there no sense of shame (Hos. 4:18; Zeph. 3:5; Phil. 3:19). In a sense of shame there is hope for better things. In pardon God is said to remove shame (Isa. 54:4).

While the biblical revelation is reticent about detail as to the fate of the lost, it is indicated that shame awaits the wicked not only in this life but as well in the life to come (Daniel 12:2). The final embarrassment will be righteous exposure of guilt and its judgment.

In scripture sin is a shameful thing. Part of the punishment of sin is a consciousness of guilt in a painful sense of shame. From this consciousness of guilt and shame there is no deliverance while the sin is unconfessed and unforgiven through contrition of spirit and the grace and forgiveness of God. While the sense of shame persists, that is, while the moral constitution of man's nature remains as it is, there will never be wanting an avenger of sin. See MODESTY.

## **WICKED, WICKEDNESS**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

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WICKED, WICKEDNESS (Heb. ra', evil, badness; rasha', wicked; resha', lawlessness; rish'ah, wickedness; hawwah, mischief; zimmah, wickedness; 'awlah, perverseness; Gr. poneros, wickedness; phaulos, badness; adikia, unrighteousness). The state of being wicked and of transmitting evil: mental disregard for goodness, justice, righteousness, truth, honor, virtue; depravity; sinfulness; criminality.

There are many synonyms for wickedness in Hebrew, Greek and English. Wickedness is evil inclination resulting in wicked deeds which bring disorder, suffering and ruin.

In the Old Testament, God is the standard of the good, and of the difference between good and evil (Amos 5:14). While wickedness may be committed against men, ultimately it is against God whether the evil is done by an individual or by a society (1 Kings 11:6; 14:22). The Old Testament mocks the notion that man is the measure of the good, which may result in inversion of values (Mal. 2:17). The downward sliding scale of perversion in Isa. 5:18-23 dramatically highlights the woeful moral state in which one calls evil good and good evil. This is the awful end of wickedness which first gradually, then totally, desensitizes and distorts conscience. The only cure for this is either reclamation by divine grace or judgment (Isa. 5:24-25). Such persons are called "evildoers" (Isa. 31:2) or "the wicked" (Deut. 22:22; 24:7; Jer. 15:21). They are those who are bad and harmful (Ps. 14:1, 3). The entire personality is infected so that even parts of the body (hand, foot, eye) are seen to be agents of an evil heart (Jer. 23:14; Mark 9:43-47).

Wickedness like all forms and thoughts of wrong, kept warm in mind, seems to be a thing of growth; it begins with a thought, then a deed, then a character, and finally a destiny. Even in this life men increase in wickedness till they have lost all desire for that which is good in the sight of God and good men. The prophets were strong in denunciations of all iniquity, and perverseness, and in announcing the curse of God which would certainly follow.

In the New Testament wickedness, malignity, evil in thought and purpose, are presented chiefly by the word poneria (Matt. 22:18). Jesus points out the origin of all wrong: "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed ... wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness ... all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man." (Mark 7:21-23). This is the essential definition of the wicked person (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Jer. 11:8; 16:12; Matt. 15:19). This is a moral not merely a physical or behavioural issue (Matt. 6:23). It is in a profound moral sense that bad men are designated to be the wicked (Matt. 5:45; 1 Cor. 5:13), the Devil is the wicked one (Matt. 13:19; 1 John 2:13-14) and evil itself is identified as a malignant power (John 17:15).

Evil men prefer darkness to light (John 3:19; 7:7) and evil to good (Rom. 1:28-31). Pre-conversion deeds may be seen as evil (Col. 1:21). God's word and truth challenge wickedness (Matt. 12:39; Luke 11:29) in a confronting and indicting way (Rom. 1:32). Thus scripture teaching about wickedness addresses the reality of human radical evil, which is an unpalatable and frequently ignored concept. Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant have drawn attention to the moral abyss of wickedness, as have modern writers such as M. Scott Peck (People Of The Lie, 1983).

Deliverance from wickedness (Isa. 59:12-13) in scripture can take place only through God's grace and action, as forgiveness and restoration re-orient the heart and will to the standard of moral good which is God's own will (Ps. 32:5, 7, 10; Isa. 55:3, 7, 11).

## WRESTLE, WRESTLING

Samuel J. Mikolaski

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**WRESTLE, WRESTLING** In both testaments wrestling is used to symbolize spiritual struggle and victory rather than actual warfare or mortal combat. This highlights wrestling as a popular sport in early near-Eastern and Greek life though later Jewish practice eschewed Greek sports.

Rachel saw her barrenness as a struggle (pathal, wrestling) with her maid Bilhah until Rachel bore Naphtali, whose name is a play on the same word (Gen. 30:8).

Jacob's famous wrestling match (Gen. 32:24-32) is crucial to his spiritual development and identity. The term (abag, to wrestle) is probably a play on Jabbock, the brook where the event took place. The match idealizes struggle, persistence and new identity. Jacob's opponent subdues him only by spraining Jacob's hip (i.e., a blow "below the belt"), a suggestion that Jacob was wrestling according to the rules. Jacob can no longer wrestle, but he can hang on to his opponent and insist upon a divine blessing because he perceives his opponent to be more than a mere mortal. In the exchange Jacob receives the new name "Israel," which means one who perseveres with God. No longer the crafty supplanter getting by on his wits, Jacob becomes the one who perseveres with God.

In its various forms wrestling was an honourable sport. Among the Greeks in both its upright and ground forms it was among the most popular of the Pentathlon, the quintuple games. Mesopotamian belt-wrestling -- of which Japanese Sumo wrestling is one form -- predates Greek wrestling. It allowed no hold below the hips. In the University of Pennsylvania museum there is an elegantly crafted pair of copper belt wrestlers in fierce embrace, which dates from before 2000 B.C. At Beni Hason in Egypt there is a full series of pictures depicting Egyptian belt-wrestling which dates from the Middle Kingdom period (c. 2500 B.C.). Illustrated are many belt-wrestling holds which remained unchanged for centuries. The object of belt-wrestling was to throw one's opponent, not unlike later Japanese Sumo wrestling and Swiss belt-wrestling.

Judah left three identifying personal items in pledge with Tamar, one of which was his cord (wrestling belt, Gen. 38:18, 25). The deadly combat between the young men of Abner and David may have commenced as a wrestling match (2 Sam. 2:12-17). The girdle (wrestling belt) of Messiah was promised to be righteousness and faithfulness (Isa. 11:5), the symbol of spiritual armour not the sword.

Paul employs the Greek games as symbols of spiritual training, endurance

and triumph (1 Cor. 9:24-27). One must train and perform according to the rules (2 Tim. 2:5). "Girding up" (1 Pet. 1:13), a frequent biblical metaphor, suggests readiness for action. The goal is not a garland which withers, but an incorruptible crown (2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4). Christians wrestle (pale) against spiritual powers (Eph. 6:12), hence the early patristic tradition of the Christian spiritual hero who battles the forces of evil. The Christian's struggle is fought out not with mere men in the physical arena, says Paul, but against evil powers in the arena of life with Christ's help.