

## TOPIC XXVI

### THE PROBLEM WITH EVERYTHING

Jesus identified it clearly. No, it's not sin. Sin is the result of the problem with everything and everyone which is simply a total preoccupation with one's self. Self-centeredness, self-absorption, self-indulgence...mostly at the expense of someone or something else.

I can only speak from my own perspective and that from the Biblical one. I am not steeped in psychological theories (of which there are an infinite number) nor a "trained" psychologist, but have had training and classes in psychology and have some half a century in marriage and personal counseling along with my wife. As the commercial for Farmers Insurance notes, "We know a few things because we've seen a few things."

I know there are a great deal of theories about this topic. The list is endless. I am only going to address one. I have stated for decades that the number one problem in all relationships is self-centeredness. Whether it be politics, business, personal relationships, marriage, parenting, planning, financial considerations, sex, goals, and the list goes on, the biggest problem causing all the evil and chaos in the world is self-centeredness, self-seeking, selfishness... just the self. Jesus said,

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Matthew 16:24-25

And,

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence."

Matthew 23:25

Paul wrote to Timothy,

"But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these." II Timothy 3:1-5

Again, theories about the "why" of self-centeredness are numerous. I will present just one

in a moment. But the matter of self-interest is a major blockade to a successful and fulfilling life because it always seeks for oneself at the expense of another and most folks do not appreciate that.

Jesus made this blockade clear and something relating to this to His disciples, "And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)

Why? Because Jesus did not operate from a base of self-centeredness, but from a base of selflessness. His followers are to be of the same mind, and motive. To actually see this in anyone, including those in the church is rare.

Again,

"...He said to the scribes and Pharisees, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence." (Matthew 23:25)

And,

"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." Matthew 23:12

Self-centeredness presents itself as, "My ideas are more important than yours." "My career is more important than yours." "My thoughts are more important than yours." "My goals are more important than yours." "What I want is more important than what you want." "What I think is more important than what anyone says, even God." "You are in a relationship with me so that I can fulfill my needs and goals at your expense." "You are here to wait on me hand and foot." Or, simply, "I am more important than you are in every way imaginable." And so on. Oh, we don't say this out loud, but the evidence confirms this attitude.

In an intimate relationship whether it be marriage, parenting or just family, the goal in most in these relationships is for one party to hopefully use another for their own benefit. In those considering parenting, how many times have you heard the phrase, "I want to have kids?" Compare that number to the phrase, "I want to be a parent." How about, "I want to have a wife" (or husband) rather than, "I want to be a wife or husband?" Rarely, if ever.

Most people wish for relationships for what they can derive from them, not for what they can give to them. This attitude begins at birth when the infant begins demanding attention - feeding, clothing, care, etc. As the child grows, seldom is it taught to begin to see others as important as he or she is. As a child moves into adulthood the demands become more consuming of those around them. If the emerging adult is not trained to begin to give to

others and meet another person's needs a society like we have is the result. Teenagers are stereotyped as being like this because it is so true so much of the time.

The self is demanding. It uses people to satisfy its cravings and desires. If someone or something in the relationship does not do so they are discarded. I have known husbands and wives who, after sucking everything they can from their spouse, cast them off and look for another relationship where they can continue the "draining" of the new person for their own selfish demands until the other is empty and useless. Then this one is cast off as so much trash and this repeats itself until death, the ultimate emptiness.

Someone wrote, "God made two orders in creation. He made persons and He made things. He made persons to be loved and things to be used. The great sin that man commits is in reversing God's order. They love things and use persons."

If parents do not give the children what is necessary for their understanding, the children will cast their parents off (and blame them from that time onward for everything) and find other sources to suck dry. The problem is that all the rest of the world is looking to them to do the same thing to them. When two people drain each other of all they can get from them, nothing is left but emptiness.

The sense of emptiness will most often stem from a deep seated anxiety or fear. Most fear is the fear of losing something. These various fears are so numerous that they cannot all be named, but for example they may include a fear of losing: love, security, hope, a reason to go on living, what others think about someone, position, money, time, significant relationships, things, properties, retirement funds, protection from threats, and a fear for one's health or life. But you could add many more things to this list. Whatever the cause of this "fear" often results in a person feeling empty. Sometimes there will be an expression of anger, frustration, depression, and a multitude of other emotions and "acting out."

Some seek to fill the emptiness with material possessions or other pursuits to soothe the emptiness or allay the fears. The problem is that in the case of accumulating possessions assumed to bring some sort of fulfillment also drain the owner.

When one finds that they are empty they will seek fulfillment in all sorts of ways, and many of these pursuits are described in the Scripture and we see these all the time in our society.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes it goes as far as criminal behavior. Murder is a way of disposing of a person who either has nothing more to give or has drained the murderer to the point of the ultimate disposal of the empty shell.

I have known many "Christian" marriages that continue to be made up of couples who are constantly trying to manipulate each other for their own gain. Miserable, but unwilling to alter their thinking and practice, they fill their lives with "stuff" thinking it might make a

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<sup>1</sup> See Romans 1:18-2:11; II Timothy 3:1-7; etc.

difference in their relationship. But, falling deeper into debt, they now claw and gouge each other both verbally and physically. Any children are likely not to be well adjusted exacerbating the social problem for us all.

I was told of a couple, who, having marital "difficulties" decided the best thing to solve the problem was to move to a new place and start over. So they bought a condo in Hawaii. It was beautiful. The weather was gorgeous. It was indeed paradise. But there was just one small problem. They were there.

Wouldn't it make more sense is people could just give to each other rather than take or expect something for themselves from the other? I always caution people to never expect anything from their spouse. Because if they fail to meet those expectations, then disappointment, criticism, anger, blame, judgment, condemnation and a host of very negative emotions, outbursts or actions by spouse will ensue. Why do this?

Paul writes in Philippians 2:3-11,

3: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4: do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5: Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6: who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7: but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8: Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9: For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10: so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11: and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The response of most people who are prompted to give a little of themselves to another is often, "What's in it for me?" So people seldom go into any relationship with the mindset to give. Why not? Because they themselves are empty. Emptiness is like a vacuum. It demands to be filled. It seeks to suck life from others. And who steps up to fill it? Self. I propose that all evil, even the most heinous acts of history find their cause in this very matter of "self."

The Bible states clearly, without apology, that every evil, ungodly, immoral, sinful, wretched, filthy act if mankind is rooted in self. John wrote, " Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." I John 2:15-17

John's statement points directly to the "self" interest of people. He also offers a simple but effective solution, "... but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

This "love" of the world and its offerings is simply due to the emptiness of one's life. In seeking some sort of reason for living or to find some sort of "happiness" people resort to every possible form of debauchery or crime they believe they can get away with to fill the emptiness. It all fails to work.

The demand of the self is likely due to fear. People are either afraid they will lose something or afraid they will not gain something and their life is a waste if they don't. Their emptiness, like the vacuum, demands to be filled.

I am in whole hearted agreement with Blaise pascal (mid. 17th century mathematician and philosopher) who noted, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made know through Jesus Christ."

This is in total accord with the teachings of the apostle Paul who wrote in the Book of Romans, chapter 1:18-32;

18: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19: because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20: For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21: For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22: Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23: and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

24: "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25: For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26: For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27: and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28: And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29: being filled with

all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30: slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31: without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32: and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."

It is interesting that the first thing the Apostle mentions is the drive to sexual gratification regardless of the form including homosexuality and all forms of bestiality, fornication, adultery, prostitution, and all the rest. We all know what happens.

Again, Paul wrote to Timothy these words,

"But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (II Timothy 3:1-7)

This sums up the entire issue, in my opinion...and I believe I am not alone in that. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 2:4-11, the following challenge:

4: "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

Here is a glimmer of hope. God is kind, tolerant and patient. His love and grace awaits those who would turn from their past lives and cast themselves on Jesus for His mercy and saving grace. But...

5: "...because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6: who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: 7: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8: but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation."

Stubbornness, an unrepentant heart, selfishness and unrighteousness are the hallmarks of self-centeredness.

9: "There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10: but glory and honor and peace to everyone who

does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11: For there is no partiality with God."

Once again, the answer is to be found in Pascal's words, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made know through Jesus Christ."

But one must actually believe this, act on it, learn of Him and become His disciple or we will continue to see the mess enlarge.