

Young People's Forum (III, 21)

Dear Young People,

In my last letter to you, we were talking about our use of the things of this world and our attitude towards all these things: money, bank accounts, TVs, ipods, hand phones, computers, cars, etc. How is a child of God who is a pilgrim and a stranger in this world to think about these things and use them if he has them?

We considered in my last letter the wrong of pulling up our nose at these things of God's world and despising them. Some people argue that since we belong to a heavenly kingdom, we ought not have anything to do with the things of this earth, except insofar as we absolutely have to use them. They are sinful and the use of them will contaminate us.

We have said that this is a very wrong attitude to take; Paul even calls this a doctrine of devils. We must not go in that direction. This creation belongs to God and all the things that are made from this creation are also part of God's world.

God gives the things of his creation to all men, whether they are people of God or whether they are wicked. In fact, God usually gives more of the things of this world to the wicked than he does to his people. Asaph in Psalm 73 talked about this and even almost lost his faith because the wicked prospered while the righteous suffered. And Psalm 37 warns God's people not to be envious of the wicked who have so much more than God's people, because the things of this world is all they have, while God's people have treasures in heaven that are worth more than a treasure chest full of diamonds and rubies. You should read these two Psalms in your devotions.

Those who believe in common grace tell us that all these gifts of God are God's love for men, whether they are elect or reprobate. In fact, God gives these gifts to everyone to show men how good he is to them, how much he loves them and how eager he is to have them love him in return. This is a very great evil in the churches.

God's people are also tempted to believe the very same thing. You all know how easy it is to think that God's blessing is on us when our life is trouble free. We have no serious problems; our health is good; we have more than enough money to buy whatever we want; we have many friends; we can enjoy life's pleasures. But if all this changes and we become very sick; if we lose our job and cannot find another one; if our friends turn their backs on us; if serious problems come into our lives; then we think to ourselves that God is angry with us and that we have done something wrong. Sometimes even we dare to complain and say that God is not fair. Why does he do these things to us? we ask. As if he doesn't have the right to do with us as it pleases him. And, surely, we do not think that we deserve anything from him, do we?

The important question is this: How does one use these things which God gives him or her? Every gift of God can be used either to sin or to serve God. The strange thing is that we can never be neutral: that is, we can never avoid doing the one or the other. If we do not use what God gives us to serve him, then we use God's gifts to sin.

If we have a computer, for example, and we do not use our computer to travel to pornographic websites, but we use it instead to write papers for the crabby teacher who marks us down when we do not get our papers in on time, then we may not conclude from that: Well, I haven't used my computer to sin, so I have used it the right way. But have you? Is it pleasing to God, do you think, to wait till the

last minute to write your paper, then to sit down angrily at your computer complaining about how demanding your teacher is, hurrying through the writing to get it done as quickly as possible, and worrying more about a good grade than about God – do you really think this is pleasing to God? We all know better.

How are we to use God's gifts? you say. Perhaps you answer, We must use them to glorify God. Indeed we must! But how do you glorify God with a TV, a hand phone, a pocket full of money?

I have to take you back to the Old Testament for this. You probably recall that when the nation of Israel escaped from Egypt through God's mighty power and crossed the Jordan River when it parted and left a dry path, the first city they came to was Jericho. Jericho was a very strong city, but the key that opened the door to Canaan. If Jericho could not be conquered, Israel would never conquer the rest of Canaan. If God gave them Jericho, he would surely give them the rest of the land.

Jericho had high and thick walls, so thick, we are told, that it was possible for two chariots to ride side-by-side on the top, and houses were built on the walls, for Rahae lived in such a house.

But God was fighting for Israel. In preparation for taking the city God gave Israel specific instructions. "And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord" (Joshua 6:17-19).

These are really, when one stops to consider them, strange instructions. How strange they actually are comes out especially when one considers that the Hebrew word for "accursed" can also mean "devoted." The Revised Version, for example, translates these verses in this way: "And the city shall be devoted, even it, and all that is therein And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the devoted thing, lest when ye have devoted it"

It was way back in college that one of my professors called my attention to this strange fact, but he did not explain it, nor did he tell us why the Holy Spirit, in inspiring the Scriptures, used the same word for "cursed" and "devoted." Maybe he didn't know. That is possible, because for many years I puzzled over that strange double (and opposite) meaning for the same Hebrew word.

But in it is an important truth that helps us understand why one Hebrew word can mean "accursed" and "devoted." In the meantime you can think about it yourself and see if you can find an answer.

I think it better to leave the discussion of this till the next letter. I would have to break up the discussion in the middle, and this is never very good.

I hope and pray the Lord will be with you in all your way and bless you richly.

With warm regards,

Prof