

SET YOUR AFFECTION

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Some people are always trying to influence the thinking of others, and so influence their behavior. According to the Oxford Dictionary, *advertise* means “Describe or draw attention to (a product, service, or event) in a public medium in order to promote sales or attendance.” Advertisers work to influence people’s thinking about a product, and advertising has an annual revenue of half a trillion dollars. In the field of marketing, an *influencer* is “a person with the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by promoting or recommending the items on social media.” *Public relations* is “the professional maintenance of a favourable public image by a company or other organization or a famous person.” Public relations is a twenty billion dollar industry. There is continuing controversy about how much influence the Russian government had in the last election of the president of the United States, with some saying that the Russian government influenced many Americans to vote for Donald Trump. Christians must be especially careful of how their thinking is influenced. News media, and other sources, can influence the attitude of the Christian, and can cause him to be discouraged and cynical. Unbelievers try to influence Christians to abandon the Christian faith. The Christian must beware, and he must discipline his mind to think right thoughts about God, about the world, and about himself. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the Christian must wage war against the flesh, bringing “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5)

When God made Adam, the first man, and placed him in the garden of Eden, He gave him a special commandment. He forbade him eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and He told him that if he did eat from it, then he would surely die. (Genesis 2:17) This would be a test of Adam’s faith: would he trust God, and obey Him, or not? Adam was free to choose good, or evil; life, or death. Knowing full well what he was doing, he chose evil and death. So, God made good on His threat, and gave to Adam what he chose: He gave him death. Of course, Adam later died physically, but he later died physically because he immediately died spiritually. He was cut off from the life that is found in God alone. He became “dead in trespasses and sin.” (Ephesians 2:1) Adam, after his fall from grace, was, in one sense, able to obey God. He simply had to choose to do so. However, after his fall, his nature changed. Regarding a man’s nature, Noah Webster wrote, “When we speak of the nature of a man, or an individual of the race, we mean his particular qualities or constitution; either the peculiar temperament of his body, or the affections of his mind, his natural appetites, passions, disposition or temper.” (1828 dictionary) No longer was Adam neutral with respect to God; rather his nature became opposed to God.

Not only was Adam’s nature sinful, but so is the nature of every one of his offspring, apart from Christ. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Romans 5:12) Every person comes into the world an enemy of God, both alienated from Him, and opposed to Him. He is guilty before God because of his sins, and he cannot help but to sin. He is condemned for his sins, and he is a slave to sin. He cannot in this life atone for his sins, and he cannot free himself from his bondage to sin. He needs forgiveness and liberation.

Christian ethics has three aspects: the standard, the motive, and the goal. The standard is the law of God. The Law of God and the law of Moses are not identical. The law of Moses includes the law of God, but it also includes types and shadows that had their fulfilment in Christ. It includes laws that distinguished, and separated,

Jew from Gentile, laws that were done away with by Christ. So Saint Paul wrote to the Colossians, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” (Colossians 2:16, 17) The law of God, based as it is on His unchanging character, is transcendent and eternal, and every one of God’s people is obliged to obey it. The motive of Christian ethics is faith. The Christian obeys God because he believes God. Abraham is a prime example of such faith. When God told him to leave his homeland for another land that He would give to him, Abraham trusted God and did as He commanded. (Hebrews 11:5) When God told Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering, Abraham trusted God, and did as He commanded. So, Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6) Moreover, faith works by love. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 15:15) Saint John wrote in his first epistle, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” (1 John 5:18) To the Galatians Saint Paul wrote, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” (Galatians 5:6) This love is first of all a love for God, but it is also a love for men who are made in the image of God. It is not righteous to obey God because of a mere fear of punishment. Neither is it righteous to fulfill God’s law because of pride and self-righteousness. The right motive for obedience is a loving trust in God who first loved the Christian. Saint John wrote, “We love him, because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19) The standard of Christian ethics is the law of God, and the motive is faith in Him. The goal of Christian ethics is God’s glory. The Christian is to live, not for himself, but for God. He is not to make a name for himself, but is to bring honor to the name of God. Everything the Christian does is for the goal of glorifying God. God is great, whether men acknowledge Him, or not. Yet, just because He is great He demands that men acknowledge Him as such. So, He proved Himself great in the Exodus. When He brought the seventh plague against Pharaoh, He said to Him, “And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.” (Exodus 9:16) After the Exodus, the children of Israel, because of their many sins, brought God’s name into disrepute. (Isaiah 52:5; Romans 2:24) So, Saint Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

The unbeliever does not have a Christian ethic. He may borrow some of it, as God has revealed it through the creation, or as he finds it in Christian cultures. His laws are not God’s laws. More than this, however, the unbeliever does nothing by faith in God. In the nature of the case, he does not believe God. He rather refuses to acknowledge God. (Romans 1:28) He does not believe God, neither does he love God. He is hostile to God. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” (Romans 8:7) God and the unbeliever are natural enemies. (Romans 5:12) Of course, because the unbeliever does not love God, he cares nothing for the glory of God. He not only refuses to honor God by obeying Him, but he rather seeks to dishonor God by his disobedience. So, the unbeliever takes pleasure, not in the sinful act merely, but in rebelling against God.

The man apart from Christ stands condemned for his sins. He cannot make things right with God, and He cannot free himself from his bondage to sin. The only hope for such a man is Christ. Christ died so that he might be forgiven his sins, and might be freed from the grip of sin. Saint Paul wrote to the Colossians:

[Ye were] buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the

uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. (Colossians 2:12-14)

Christ has died for the Christian, and has risen from the dead. Through baptism, the Christian is joined to Christ in a mystical union, and so has died with Him and been raised with Him. He has died to his old life, and been raised a new man with a new life. Christ not only rose from the dead, but He also ascended into heaven, and there He sits at the right hand of the Father, the position of authority. Saint Paul wrote to the Colossians:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

Saint Paul tells the Christian to set his affections on the things above. Webster defines *affection* as “A bent of mind towards a particular object, holding a middle place between disposition, which is natural, and passion, which is excited by the presence of its exciting object.” Christ is in heaven, and not on earth. The Christian does not see Christ with his eyes, nor hear him with his ears. Yet, he sets his affections on Christ in heaven. That is to say, he fixes his mind on Christ, and what Christ has accomplished for him, namely, His death and resurrection. The Christian has died with Christ, and yet he lives with Him; his life is bound up with Christ’s own life. While on earth, the Christian’s life is hidden with Christ. Yet, some day Christ will return to earth from His place in heaven, and appear in all His glory. He will reveal Himself, and the Christian also will be revealed to be like Him. Saint John wrote, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2)

Christ has died for the Christian so that the Christian’s sins might be forgiven, and so that he might be free from the bondage of sin. The Christian, by virtue of his relation to Christ, is freed from sin and is able to obey God. He is able to be pleasing to God. He must choose, however; for the Christian in this life obedience is not automatic. Because the Christian has died with Christ, he ought to mortify, that is to say, he ought to put to death sinful human desires: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5) The sinner, because of his sins, incurs the wrath of God. So, if a man would not be subject to the wrath of God, then he must not sin. He must crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts. (Galatians 5:24) The Christian convert did once live in sins, before he was united to Christ. When he was united to Christ, however, he died to sin, and was made to live for God, and so he stopped living like a sinner. Because the Christian has died to sin, and has been given a new life, he ought to put off the sins he committed before he believed in Christ. So, Saint Paul says, “Ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another.” (Colossians 3:8, 9) And why should the Christian put off his sinful ways? Saint Paul explains, “Ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” (Colossians 3:9, 10) The Christian came into this world united to Adam, and was united to him in his death with respect to God. He was “dead in trespasses and sin.” (Ephesians 2:1) When he received Christian baptism, however, he was united to Christ, and his union with Adam was dissolved. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the

glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4) In Christ, Adam, the old man, is cast off, and Christ, the new man, is put on. The Christian has a new identity. He is a new man. In Christ, not only are his sins forgiven, but he is free from the bondage of sin so that he may live for God. The Christian is to think this way. He is to set his affection, his mind, on this reality. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” and “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 6:11; Romans 12:2) The Christian must not think of himself as a depraved sinner, one who is in bondage to sin. He must rather think of himself as a righteous saint, one who is forgiven by God and free to obey Him. The Christian must not allow himself to be affected by the world and its corrupting influence. He must rather allow himself to be affected by the truth of the Word of God and its sanctifying influence, and the Word of God says that the Christian has died to sin, and is alive to God. He must think of himself this way because it is true, and because, if he thinks this way, then he will act this way.

Let us not allow ourselves to be influenced by the world and its evil ways. Let us not allow the world to inform our opinion of ourselves. Let us rather think of ourselves as God tells us we should: as them that have died to sin, and been raised to new life in Christ. Let us think this way, and so let us live this way.

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. *Amen.*