

McGregor Baptist Church
3750 Colonial Boulevard
Fort Myers, FL 33912
(941) 936-1754

James O. Holbrook
Senior Pastor

TV-'98
6/11/00 FBCC
7/22/97

I Thessalonians 5:22

"HOW TO STAY IN TOP SHAPE SPIRITUALLY" #7

"Flirting With Disaster"

Back in 1964, Gean and I accompanied my mother on a trip to Israel. Most of the actual time was spent on a French ship, named "Caesaree."

- On the ship, there were only four things to do:
- Stay in your cabin, which measured 8'X10'.
 - Walk the decks in the middle of the December cold.
 - Sit in the bar.
 - Or you could pass the time in the lounge.

The lounge was a large room with couches and tables. In the middle was a small parquet floor for dancing. And there was a stand for a small orchestra, which started around 4 p.m. and played until midnight.

We decided to sit in the lounge and talk and watch the antics of the dancers. There was nothing evil about it--even for a Baptist preacher. It was nothing more than a noisy living room.

Now, of course, I was not about to dance. After all, I am a Southern Baptist pastor, and I had been taught--from the time that I accepted Christ--that a Christian should not dance.

That's right. We were taught that dancing, if you were not married to your dancing partner, was not the best thing to improve ones spiritual life. It was like hugging, put to music. And you shouldn't be hugging someone else's wife, with or without musical accompaniment. We were taught that "a praying knee and a dancing foot can't grow on the same leg."

But I said to myself, "what is it going to hurt to make an appearance in a dance hall, as long as I have no intention of dancing?" So Gean and mother and I sat around in the lounge, to pass the time.

Well, on the way to Israel, it worked fine. In fact, it was kinda' fun. We would watch the dancers and laugh to ourselves at

how odd-ball some of them acted.

There was one lady in her late 50's, who still tried to dress like she was in her 20's. And, as she danced around, she would flash diamond rings the size of marbles. We nicknamed her "The Countess."

There were others, who amused us. And we had fun watching their uninhibited antics. It all seemed tame enough, from our safe seats around the edge of the room.

But, on the trip back, let me tell you what happened one night. We were sitting there, and it was some sort of party night. They passed out paper hats, and the confetti was flying.

All of a sudden, the orchestra leader (whom I had never heard to say anything, except "Twista Twist") stepped up to the microphone and babbled something in French.

We looked at each other and wondered what he could be saying. Then it became obvious. It was "ladies' choice." All the ladies were invited to pick their partners for the next dance. All over the room, each lady began to invite a gentleman to dance with her, until the little dance floor was crowded.

About that time a nice French lady, who looked to be about the same age as my mother, spied that poor lonesome little Americano wall-flower: Me!!

Why, her kind French heart was so stirred with compassion that she came over, held out her hand and said: "Monsieur, babble, babble, babble, babble..." And, although I did not know five words in French, I knew exactly what she was saying. She was inviting me to dance with her!

I pretended not to understand. "No comprende." "No parle vouse France!"

But that didn't wash. Besides that, Gean and my mother (the traitors) went into hysterics, laughing and waving me to go on!

Calmly, in all of my finest fundamentalist Baptist dignity, I viewed the situation. After all, she was old enough to be my mother, and I guess the Lord would forgive me, if I hugged someone else's mother for a few minutes. So, off we went.

Now I had not danced since junior high school, and all I could remember was the two step. I'm sure that dear lady was rewarded for her compassion with mashed feet.

But it was so crowded out there that it didn't really matter. We just went round and round, like bumper cars.

Then, suddenly, the whistle blew. Thank heavens, it was over. This was my chance to sneak off. I tried to thank the lady, while I made a quick exit.

But no, the whistle meant that everyone was to change partners. Somebody grabbed me, and who was it but "The Countess!" I could tell by the blinding flash from her diamonds, which were now propped on my shoulder. Off we went, and I held on for dear life.

Again the whistle blew. Great! This was my chance to get away. But no, I was caught again. This time, it was a young woman from Argentina, who was very nice...but very overweight.

And, when they changed partners this time, they also changed music. They began to play this Latin rhythm--ta bum, ta bum, ta bum, ta bumpety bum ta bum.

Now at a certain spot, you are supposed to grab the girl around the waist and lift her into the air. Well, as I said, my overweight partner was a really nice girl. So, when it came time to lift her, she would give a little jump to help me!

Whew! When that song ended, it was the end of ladies' choice. And it was the end of my sitting around in a dance hall!

Believe it or not, this is a true story. And I bring it up to you this morning, because it should help to get across an important point of the Word from God: "Abstain from all appearances of evil."

Or put more directly. If you don't want to end up dancing, then don't even make an appearance at a dance hall! If you don't want to end up doing something that you believe to be wrong, the only sure way to keep from doing it is to stay away from where it is done. You avoid all appearances of evil.

Now I don't think that what I did was wrong. It was certainly educational. In fact, I probably remember it more than anything else on that trip.

But the same lesson, which for me was a comedy, has led some Christians into tragedy. How many Christians have done permanent damage to their testimonies and to their lives, when they have "flirted" with something that even had the appearance of evil?

Oh, if they had only learned and applied the principle, which God is teaching in this verse of Scripture. "Abstain from all appearances of evil." If you don't want to end up doing something, then you had better play it safe and not even make an appearance of doing it. **Don't even flirt with what is questionable.**

A seemingly innocent flirtation with disaster can leave us with deep scars and spiritual handicaps to live-down. These things really do happen to people.

I hear of them all the time. I could give you documented case histories. They break a pastor's heart!

For instance, take the boy who accepted Christ as a child and loved the Lord and tried to live for Him. But, during his teen years, he overlooked what God said about marrying an unbeliever. He began to hang around with a gal, who didn't know Jesus nor care about meeting Him. And they fell in love--a little bit too much in love. And they had to get married.

And now he is "unequally yoked with an unbeliever" and can never be all that he hoped to be for the Lord. She keeps deflating him and pulling him down. And he walks a tightrope between his love for God and his love for his unconcerned wife. Oh, if he could have just avoided all appearances of evil!

Or what of the man, who grows up wanting to be a Christian business man. But he has the chance to get in on a real good money-making "deal" with some guys, whom he later discovered were not Christians and had no ethical scruples. And now his reputation has been soiled. All because he took an unnecessary chance for some quick money. Oh, if he could have only avoided all appearances of evil.

Or what of the girl, who accepted Christ in her early teens. She tried to live a consistent Christian life at school and took a good bit of "ribbing" for it. But, one night she got so tired of the gang's egging her on. She decided that it would not hurt to party with them, once. So she jumped into the convertible with some of them.

Little did she know that they had already been drinking. Little did she dream that they would start speeding recklessly nor that she would be involved with them in an accident, nor that she would end up being paralyzed for life.

It was just a little innocent flirtation with the other side. It was just one careless let-down of her standards. Oh, that she would have avoided all appearances of evil!

Or what of the evangelist, who became the friend of the high society set. And he figured that it would not hurt to go to their cocktail parties. Why, it might even give him a chance to witness to them.

Eventually, he didn't think it would hurt to sip a cocktail. Eventually, he began to crave their booze, until he would be so drunk that they would have to pour coffee down him before a service and prop him behind the pulpit, to preach. But he, like

Samson, did not realize that the Spirit of God could no longer place his hand of blessing upon such a life style. And he died, a defeated alcoholic. Oh, that he would have just avoided the appearances of evil!

Or what of the TV evangelist who started peeping at porno magazines. After all, he had no intentions of being unfaithful to his beloved wife and partner in his ministry. He would just learn a little more about how the other half lived. How could he preach on sin, if he didn't understand what was involved in it? And that seemingly innocent curiosity became an insatiable appetite, until he hired a prostitute to let him leer at her and to talk dirty to him. And he was caught.

He publicly repented on national television. And he was forgiven by enough people to pay for his "ministry" to continue. But that lust kept growing in his heart and mind, until--you guessed it--he was caught a second time, with a prostitute in the front seat of his car and with his porno magazines on the seat beside them.

And his fall has brought God-only-knows how much disgrace to the cause of Christ and unnecessary suspicion on every legitimate Christian ministry. Oh, why couldn't he have abstained from the very appearances of evil!

Now these are not "scare" stories. They each show us the fact that we can get ourselves into a lot of trouble, when we flirt with things which have "the appearance of evil."

Listen to me, my friends. Even with all of the glorious "liberty," which we have now as the sons of God...even with all of the freedom we have from legalistic regulations...even with the assurance that we can "walk in the Spirit and we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh"...God still cautions us to "abstain from the very appearances of evil." **Don't go flirting with disaster!**

"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good..."
(Romans 12:9)

"Let not then your good (intentions) be evil spoken of..."
(Romans 14:16)

"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not (helpful) expedient..." (I Corinthians 6:23, 10:23)

"Flee youthful lusts..." (II Timothy 2:22) Quickly get away from the things which might turn-you-on sexually, outside of marriage!

Jude tells us (vs.23) that we should be "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." We should avoid, like the plague, any carnal activities, which might soil our lives, our

consciences, or our reputations.

Now you can call this sort of talk "old fashioned and puritanical...even unpractical," if you wish. But it is still a part of God's lovingly-inspired Fatherly advice to His children. God knows that those, who have not paid attention to this advice, have really hurt themselves and the cause of God, in this world. So, I must sound the trumpet and remind you not even to flirt with disaster.

We cannot be of much help to this sin-sick world, if we get trapped and defeated by sin, ourselves. Instead of looking to us for hope and direction, the world will ridicule us.

Let me give you **three practical and Biblical reasons why we must "abstain from the appearance of evil":**

I. Because **THE LOST WORLD NEEDS OUR TESTIMONY.**

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, urged us to "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). He is depending on us, in whom He lives, to "be blameless and harmless, children of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom **you shine as lights** in the darkness" (Philippians 2:15).

If we flirt with sin and get snared in its grip, then we will no longer have a shining testimony, so that we can offer this world something better. That's why there is too much at stake to even flirt with sin.

How many people are going to go to Hell, hiding behind some hypocrite! But they are just as lost, and they will be just as tormented for eternity.

In Philippians 1:27, God asks us to "let your conduct be as it becomes the Gospel of Christ."

Peter really drives this home: "Dearly beloved, I beg you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your behavior honest among the heathen, so that, even though they may speak against you as evil doers, yet they may--because of your good works, which they shall behold--glorify God..." (I Peter 2:12).

He even tells Christian wives, who are married to men who are not Christians, "that, if any obey not the Word (of God), they also may without the Word be won by the behavior of their wives" (I Peter 3:1).

His clincher seems to be in chapter 3, verses 15-16: "But be committed to the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope

that is in you, with meekness and reverence, having a good conscience, that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good manner of life in Christ."

With our Lord depending on us like this, we cannot allow ourselves to blow our testimony by flirting with even the appearances of evil? We must be disciplined soldiers of the cross.

A story tells of the time when Jesus had finished dying, to save us, and had risen from the dead and finally ascended back to His Father in heaven. One of the angels asked Him if he had a back-up plan for winning back His lost world.

Jesus had given this job, of witnessing and winning a lost world, to some pretty weak and vulnerable human beings. Didn't He have some alternate plan, in case we humans blew it.

Jesus' answer was: "I have no other plan!"

My Christian friends, we are the ones on whom He is depending to shine the light into this world's darkness. He has no other backup plan. We must not fail. We must abstain from even the appearances of evil!

We also must abstain from all appearances of evil...

II. Because **OUR SAVED BROTHERS NEED OUR INSPIRATION.**

In Romans 14, Paul tells us that "no man lives unto himself" (verse 7). In other words, we can't just all do what we "darn well please" and what we have a "right" to do, because we are not the only ones to think about. There are weaker Christian brothers, who may see us doing something that doesn't really bother us spiritually. But then, because of our example, they may try doing it, also. But it does harm their conscience, and it does lead them eventually to fall into sin.

Well, if our careless example might lead a weaker brother to sin, then we have "put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in our brother's way" (verse 13). And Paul concludes that we are "not walking in love," if we cause our brother "to stumble or be made weak."

Now the case in point had to do with eating meat, which had been offered to idols. In those days, all the meat was first consecrated to false gods at the heathen temples. A choice cut was burned on the altar to the false god, and the rest was sold to the public as a local meat market. Kind of like a Publix, at the back door of the temple of Zeus.

Now, if you were a strong Christian, you could eat that meat and never think anything of it. You knew that the god, to whom it had been consecrated, was not a reality. It was just something,

which had been dreamed-up by misguided people.

Paul could eat it and never be phased. In fact, to him "nothing is unclean of itself" (verse 14).

But what if Paul had a Christian brother, who used to worship that false god, before he got saved. And he still had a hang-up about anything to do with that god...even the meat, which they sold out in back of the temple? If he saw Paul eating that meat, he might be tempted to do it also, and his conscience may stumble.

In fact, it may start him on the road to going back into a lot of his old ways.

That's why Paul says, "if my right to eat meat might cause a weaker brother to stumble, then I will never eat meat. I will not destroy my brother...for whom Christ died (verse 15). For there is more to life than just eating and drinking (17). We then, who are strong (in our faith) ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to (simply) please ourselves" (15:1).

If we flirt with things, which have the appearance of evil, we may encourage a weaker Christian to try the same thing. And they might stumble and fall into some sin, which could ruin their Christian lives. And our carelessness may be responsible for their fall.

Now, of course, we don't have meat markets annexed to heathen temples. But the principle applies to many modern day things.

In verse 5, Paul talks about "esteeming one day above another." Now I esteem Sunday as the Lord's Day. I worship on it. I don't like to go to restaurants nor buy gas nor anything else that may cause another Christian to have to work and not be able to get to church and eventually backslide (and this happens frequently).

Now I have a "right" to do these things. I certainly won't go to Hell, if I do these things on Sunday. But, if I do them, a weaker brother may think that keeping the Lord's day doesn't matter. And eventually my "rights" may be a stumbling block to my brother.

I could drink booze, if I wanted. It would not send me to Hell, if I did. Perhaps I would be one of those who could handle it and know when to stop.

But what if a brother Christian saw me, having a cocktail somewhere. So he decided that it must be O.K. for him to have one, too. What if he is one of those with an alcoholic tendency; and, the next thing you know, he is a helpless "lush" and ashamed to even try to live for Christ anymore?

My "rights" to do questionable things would have caused a weaker brother to stumble. That's why I will never take a drink.

Oh I know, for a lot of you, this all seems very idealistic...but totally impractical or unacceptable. But I simply point out to you what Paul says in verse 15: "If your (Christian) brother be weakened by your exercise of your `rights,' now walk you not in love. Destroy not him (with your rights), for whom Christ died."

That's why a lot of Christians seem a little "prissy." That is why a lot of Christians seem to go out of their way to abstain from even the appearance of evil. They realize that the lost world needs our testimony, and our saved brothers need the inspiration of our example.

But there is one more reason why we must abstain from all appearances of evil...

III. Because THE LAST THING WE NEED IS TO BE TRAPPED IN A SIN.

Many Scriptures imply that we are never to get cocky. "Let him that thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10:12). If we have, indeed, accepted Jesus as our personal Savior, then we have been saved from the penalty of sin (Romans 8:1). But God wants to continue to deliver us from the power of sin, which can mess up our lives and keep us from being the kind of people, which this world needs to make a difference.

That's why He tells us to abstain from even the appearance of evil. Don't get careless. Don't think you can be footloose and fancy free. Take your Christian life seriously.

You and I can still get caught in the Devil's snares. I Peter 5:8 tells us to "Be sober (serious), be vigilant, because your enemy, the devil, like a roaring lion walks about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith..."

Please, let's be sober and vigilant. Let's remember that we have an enemy, who is just as dangerous as a lion on the prowl.

God wants us to have a healthy respect for the power of sin to get a hold on a person. God doesn't want us to be flirting with sin. God wants us to "abstain from even the appearance of evil!"