

Carelessness

An Attitude Typical of Laodiceanism

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American culture has over the past several decades become quite careless. We can observe this carelessness, for instance, in our language. I notice that. I am working with language all the time. I read a great deal. Not only do I read a great deal that is being produced now, but I read a great deal that was produced in the earlier times—historical things. And we no longer speak the same language that we spoke 100, 75, or even 50 years ago.

We no longer speak with precision. It seems like most people do not even try to be well spoken. They just talk without a care for really what comes out of their mouth.

I notice as an editor that split infinitives are allowed in most publications now. That is putting a word between *to* and the infinitive of the verb like *to not go* instead of *not to go*. It used to be that if you had a grammar school teacher and she saw that *not* between *to* and the verb, she would mark you down for that. But, today it is allowed to go.

Another thing that is allowed in a lot of publications is contractions. We are slurring our speech so that the word *not* is now *n't!* Who knows if we were allowed to go on many more years, it might disappear from the language. I do not know.

But, it is a lack of precision, a lack of care with our language.

And the one that I hate the most, and I hear it so often that I even use it on occasion, is to use the word *their* in place of the correct *his* or *her*, as in "each person took *their* turn at the window." "Each person" is singular, but "their" is plural. They do not match. It should be, "Each person took his turn, or her turn at the window." But, it is allowed now even in schools. "Their" is allowed to slide.

This carelessness is also seen in the way that we dress. Dressing down is in. Casual is allowed just about everywhere. People used to dress up when they got on to an airplane to fly across the country. They were not necessarily in their luxurious top hat and tails, but they dressed in suit and tie, or, for the ladies, a dress or nice skirt and blouse.

But today, you go on a flight anywhere, jeans or shorts and T-shirts are the norm. People are very casual about appearing in public. Many seem to go for the baggy, torn, loud or just plain weird styles of dress. People are more likely to wear the jersey from their favorite football team than they are to wear a nice polo shirt for their favorite activity.

It was not that long ago that June Cleaver and Donna Reid wore pearls, dresses, and pumps to clean their houses. I am sure some of that was make-believe. However they were at least expressing what was thought to be the standard for dress. Those times in the 1950s a suit and tie were *de rigor* for any kind of business you were going to do.

My mother has told me about her uncle who had a painting business, and he painted in a nice

white shirt like I have got on today. Did he wear a tie too? Yes, he wore a tie. He painted houses like this!

Now, if you get a painter in, he is likely to have his grungies on, because he knows of all the splatter that is going to end up on his clothes.

But, the people back just a little while ago, took a great deal of care in their dress. They dressed in classical styles.

But today, it is anything goes. Now the trend is *the fewer the clothes, the better* it seems. And I say that with a wry expression, not as truth. That is the way it seems to be going. Many commentators have remarked on the undressing of America. It is almost like we have gone past even bad dress, and now it is to very little dress at all.

Our schools are another example of carelessness.

What schools teach our children is just an abomination. Instead of teaching them knowledge that they will need to succeed in life, our public schools teach humanism, diversity, multiculturalism, social awareness, environmentalism, sex, politically correct tolerance for perversion—you name it. Where did the three R's go? They are so busy pushing their social agenda that there is so little time left for what really is important for them to learn.

This country used to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic, science, history, physical education, and music. And, those programs are all being cut back. I read within the past four to six months that there was a school in some Mid-Atlantic state who was thinking of phasing out their reading program! Because the kids did not need it, I guess! It takes too much time away from their sex education classes, or something—I do not know!

There was an uproar as you can expect from the parents, "What do you mean? Reading is core."

But, in today's politically correct schools, reading is not core. Reading is secondary to the social programs that they want these kids to swallow.

So, these three examples of carelessness are really indicative of a general trend in our society. Americans may sincerely protest that "We care!" "We are interested in our children's education! We are interested in preserving a pure language. We are interested in seeing our children dressed properly."

But, the behavior does not change.

If we really cared there would be change. We would be speaking more precisely; we would be dressing more appropriately; we would be teaching our children the essential knowledge they need to function productively as adults. But, we are not seeing change.

Today the solution to every problem is political. But, do you know what this does? This allows the government to care. It is passing the buck to the government to somehow enforce a moray, or whatever the thing that you want done, rather than people taking personal responsibility to change it themselves in themselves, or their community. The political solution is never the real solution. As I said, it is passing the buck.

So, do people really care? They may think they do. But are their actions really showing us, or

anyone else who is watching, that they really do?

Now, of course, attitudes that occur in the world, like carelessness, have a way of creeping into the church. Sometimes they do not creep they barge in to the church. Sometimes, we are so much in the world that the attitudes between world and church are only very thinly separated.

If we are careless in the way that we live in this world, not when we are here on the Sabbath at church, but the way that we live in this world. If we are careless there, we will be careless in our approach to God, and to His kingdom.

Carelessness is not something that we should take lightly. It is not a *minor* problem. I hope that as we go through this you will be able to see that carelessness touches on a lot of areas of our Christian life.

Now, I will admit that carelessness in both myself and in others is a pet peeve. And, I have my father to thank for this, I think, because he drilled it into us as kids to think. And usually when he tapped us on the head to let us know that we were not thinking, we had been doing something carelessly.

If we had thought it through we would have done it right, or we would not have done something stupid, and we would not have gotten in trouble. And it made a life-long impression on me because I have been able to see as I have grown up and lived in the world long enough that carelessness causes a great deal of problems. And it goes from things as silly as spilling a glass of milk at the dinner table—which might not seem to be all that bad, but it is indicative of a habit that may be starting—all the way to something that is very dangerous like where one would string an extension cord. And, you walk over that extension cord, four or five thousand times, just in the natural course of doing something, and pretty soon, the plastic insulation begins to wear off, and you have got a fire, and may not have a house. And, you might not be alive.

It is just a little bit of carelessness. A little bit of not thinking things through.

My kids know this personally because I have carried on my father's tradition. I cannot stand it when my kids do things that are careless. Probably because it reflects on me, that I did not teach them this well enough. But they end up bearing the brunt of it, because they are learning this too. And I have told them many times, and they will probably start mouthing this as soon as I start saying it, that if I teach them only one thing before they go to live somewhere else it will be to be careful.

But, when they leave my house—when they get out from under my authority—I hope that they are some of the most careful people on the planet, because I do not want them dead when they get behind the wheel of a 1500 pound vehicle.

I do not want them to be careless in the way they choose their friends. I do not want them to be careless in the way they use alcohol. I do not want them to be careless in how they keep their homes. I do not want them to be careless with the way that they treat their relationship with God. And that is how far it goes!

Most of the time when the kids get in trouble with me it is as the result of their

carelessness—something that they should have done better but did not think it through.

Now Jared, for instance, just earlier this week, getting my week off to a "wonderful" start, had his remote control car that his Uncle Bill and Aunt Sharon bought for him at the Feast. And, we had not put the batteries in until we got it home.

So, here he had it out for the first time since the Feast, we put the batteries in, and he was off! This car was going everywhere around the house. He had not had that thing out but an hour or so when somehow, who knows how, one of the wheels became permanently bent because someone had stepped on it.

Now, how did this happen?

Well, Jared was doing his thing around the house, and he had to go do something. Well, instead of picking it up, and putting it someplace out of the way, he puts it in the middle of the hallway (we think) where Beth had piled the laundry for sorting. We all know that this is what happens on Monday morning. All of the laundry gets piled on the sides of the hallway, and we just make a path down the center of it, and everything is fine. We all know it. It is not a trip hazard for us.

But, he had somehow (we think) gotten this remote control car buried in the clothes somewhere, and one of us "elephants" came stomping along, and hit the corner of that car, and did not know it. The individual did not hear it because it was muffled in all these clothes, and by the time that he goes back to get the remote control car to play with it, one wheel is messed up.

Well, he kind of got an earful from me, because I tried to bend this thing back. It is a little pin that is about an inch long that runs through a piece of plastic bracing there for the wheel, and I tried my best to get that thing straightened up, but every time I bent it, it was just bent in another direction. It was not straight at all. So, I did not make that thing any better. He is going to have to play with it with a bent wheel.

It is going to have to serve as an object lesson for him. If he wants to keep his toys nice, he had better put them away when he is done with them so they do not get stepped on.

Now, if he just thought—I know he is only four, so I was not going to string him up or anything for it. But I wanted to be upset enough at him so that he would know that he should have thought better, or thought about it a little bit, because he tends to be careless with his toys in general. I had to make an object lesson out of this one toy to make it stick. Hopefully he will not be that way for long, however just today, he left toys all over the place, and it is going to be a lifelong thing with him to get him to clean up after himself. But, that is just one of the burdens of being a parent I guess.

But, the key is this: to avoid carelessness in anything we need to take a little bit of time to think—to think things through. A little thought is likely to lead to a proper decision. So, one who is careless—if we want to just make an overall definition of what carelessness is—a *careless person does not make proper judgments*.

It is that simple.

Now, the improper judgments may be in making no judgments at all, not even thinking about it—head in the clouds (whoo-too-doo)—and then suddenly he stubs his toe against something.

Suddenly he is hurting.

On the other hand, it might be not taking enough time to think things through to their ultimate end. This is when you start getting into spiritual problems. Are we not supposed to be thinking about our later end? God says that of Israel, "Oh if they had only thought of their latter end!"

You get the impression that if they only had sat down for a few minutes and thought things through, things could have been so much better for them. But, they just barged their way through the wilderness—tripping from one trial to another—and never giving it enough thought to look back, and say, "You know, if we would only do things this way, maybe things would not be so bad!"

But, they were always getting stomped on from one area to the next, whether a curse or a plague that God sent, or enemies coming, or having these feelings of hunger, or lust, because they were not thinking. They were getting themselves into their own messes.

A little bit of forethought would have helped them to avoid many of them.

The word 'careless' is not found very often in the Bible, believe it or not—careless, carelessness—specifically.

In the New King James Version the word "careless" appears only twice. In the Old King James "careless" appears five times. In Proverbs 19:16 is one of them. There are actually two different words that are translated into "careless." You would think that if they would appear that few times, that there would be only one word that was used for it. But, here in the New King James, and the Old King James—only seven times between the two of them—there are actually two words that mean careless.

Proverbs 19:16 He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, *But* he who is careless of his ways will die.

That is pretty dire! We will get into this verse a little bit more later but I want to give you this word before we get too far away.

The word is *baza* [bayzah]. It does not really mean careless. It means to despise, or disdain, or to hold in contempt. And the translation of careless is figurative. It is the way that it comes out. The spite, the contempt, and the disdain are internal. But, carelessness comes out in the way that we act.

It could also be as in the New King James margin, "reckless." Not just careless, but reckless, which is maybe an intensification of carelessness. Recklessness tends to give you the idea of a great deal more activity, and wildness, whereas carelessness can be more passive.

Now the Theological Word Book of the Old Testament says of this word, *baza*:

The very act of undervaluing something implies contempt.

Now I pulled that out of there because of the word "undervaluing." What this tells us is that

when one despises, or disdains something, or someone, he has judged it to be of very little value to him. And thus, his actions toward that person, or that thing, are thoughtless, careless, or reckless. See? This gets back to the point that I made earlier that carelessness is making improper judgments.

So, when you are careless towards something, then you treat it as if it does not mean anything to you. Now, here is maybe an example that some of you might understand.

I do not like cats. Some of you like cats. I am glad that there are people in the world who like cats because they would have a hard time if there was not any. But, I am not a cat lover. I cannot ever remember being a cat lover. We have always had dogs it seems.

But, if I were given a cat to care for, my disdain for cats in general would cause me to be a careless custodian. I would not care if they got fed or not. I would not care if they had kitty litter or not. Maybe I would after a while. But, I am not particularly a cat person, so my disdain for them would cause me to just shrug them off; ignore them. They could go back and live in the wild for all I care. There are plenty of rats and mice out there for them.

You see, the value that we place on things determines the amount of attention that we pay to them. If we do not place a very high value on something, we are not going to pay it any attention. We are not going to care for it. We could not care less about them.

Now, there is another thing that others of you might understand a bit better.

I have had the same car for ten years. I have been driving it since the summer of 1993. It is a gray, 1991 Dodge Dynasty. We have taken pretty good care of that car over ten years of time. It was our primary family car for many years until we got our van in 2000. So, now we have my car, the 91 Dynasty, 169,000 miles, and two transmissions. The thing has its trim falling off, the seats are beginning to rip. It needs various things here and there. I have come to the point where I do not care much for it anymore. Sometimes Beth will walk me out to the car as I am going to work, and I will say, "I really would like to get a new car." And she says something like, "Well, we still have so many payments on the van," or "this is still running." But, it has come to the point where I do not care if the trim comes off. As a matter of fact, I have this secret wish while I am going down the road that somebody will hit me. Actually I would prefer it while it is in a parking space while I am inside shopping, and they hit me, so I could total it out, and put it as a down payment on another car.

But, that is how we approach things. We may care for something very much when we first get it, but over time our care for it diminishes because familiarity breeds contempt, and pretty soon, we are careless in our way of treating it. That car is what they in Chicago might call a beater. Beater cars are what the men took to the steel mill. It is their bad weather, bad road condition cars. They get rusted out from all the road salt in the winters. My car would be a great beater car.

That is the way that we treat things. Over time we become careless because we become very familiar with them. So, the value we place on people or things determines the amount of attention we pay to them.

In the Proverb here, getting back to Proverbs 19:16, the careless person has not undervalued a

cat, or a car, or anything material. He has undervalued his way, which is very interesting.

He has undervalued his own behavior. He has undervalued his lifestyle, or his manner of living. He has not correctly judged his way, or his manner of living. What he has done, whether consciously or not, is determined that what he does matters little.

So, he takes no pains to do what is right, because it does not mean anything. He takes no pains, and has no care to work toward a goal. He has no reason to improve himself, or to be a good example. He says to himself, "What is the use? It does not mean anything!"

This may not be something that is conscious, but this person just does—he lives, he goes with the flow. There is no control over his way. He is careless about it.

Now, notice in the Proverb here what this carelessness is contrasted to: Keeping the commandments, it says.

The illustration that Solomon gives us here is of two men walking down a road. The one who keeps the commandments is steady. He is sure. He is secure. He is content. And, he has got every hope of reaching his destination.

The other one, however, is all over the place. There is no meaning to his life. He flits from here to there, wherever his lusts or emotions, or just his wandering feet take him.

One man is on a path and he is pursuing that path with all he has got. The other man has no path. He is everywhere.

It is like the cartoon character who is so full of energy bouncing all around the screen, ricocheting off things, finally coming to rest—boom—and he is smashed, seeing stars, and hearing the tweety birds flying around his head. That is what this proverb says. "He who keeps His Commandments keeps his soul." He is secure and steady. But, he who is careless will die, will get smashed, will see destruction. It is not a very pretty picture.

It is the Roadrunner—zoom!—and Wile E. Coyote—boom! Splat!

I want to show you something about keeping the commandment which is emphasized in the book of Deuteronomy. So, if you will go back to Deuteronomy 4, we will take a quick romp through the book of Deuteronomy. I want to show you in fifteen places, God tells us to be careful.

Now, what I have done in my Bible is taken an orange pencil and underlined "be careful" in every one of these situations/passages.

Deuteronomy 4:5-6 "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according *to them* in the land which you go to possess. "Therefore *be careful be careful* to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ' Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.'

Deuteronomy 5:1 And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your

hearing today, that you may learn them and *be careful* to observe them.

Deuteronomy 5:32 "Therefore you shall *be careful* to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

Remember the Proverb? The man walks steadily on the path. He knew where he was going. The other one was all over the place to the right and to the left.

Deuteronomy 6:3 "Therefore hear, O Israel, and *be careful* to observe *it*, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you--` a land flowing with milk and honey.'

Deuteronomy 6:25 ` Then it will be righteousness for us, *if we are careful to observe* all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.'

Deuteronomy 8:1 "Every commandment which I command you today you *must be careful* to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers.

Put the Kingdom in there for the "land."

Deuteronomy 11:32 "*And you shall be careful to observe* all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.

Deuteronomy 12:1 "These *are* the statutes and judgments which *you shall be careful to observe* in the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth.

There is no slacking. God wants us to be careful to do His commandments every day of our lives.

Deuteronomy 12:32 "Whatever I command you, *be careful to observe it*; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

Deuteronomy 16:12 And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and *you shall be careful to observe* these statutes.

Deuteronomy 17:10 "You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. *And you shall be careful* to do according to all that they order you.

This is the administration of justice within the land.

Deuteronomy 17:19 "And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life [the principles that kings were supposed to govern by], that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and *be careful to observe all* the words of this law and these statutes,

This was specifically to the leadership that they had to be careful to do the law all the time.

Deuteronomy 26:16 "This day the LORD your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; *therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul.*

This is not just observing the statutes by rote. This is putting heart and soul into it, mind and body, you might say, in the keeping of God's commandments.

Deuteronomy 28 is in the midst of the Blessings and Cursings. This particular one is in the blessings—verse 13:

Deuteronomy 28:13 "And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, *if...*[biggest little word in the English language]...*if* you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and *are careful to observe them.*

If you heed the commandments, and are careful to observe them, not just listen to them, and know they are there, but actually doing them.

Now, for the last one, Chapter 32, this is within the Song of Moses, verse 46:

Deuteronomy 32:46 ...and He said to them: "Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which *you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law*

The last one is about teaching them to the next generation. Not, just that we are supposed to be keeping them carefully, but that we are supposed to teach them to our children to observe them carefully.

The point is obvious after fifteen verses, and within each one He says, "Keep God's law, His commandments, His statutes, His judgments carefully.

God's way is not something that we can follow easily. I think that we have seen enough to know that following God's way—observing them—takes work. It takes focus. It takes attention to detail. It takes prioritizing the important from the not so important. It takes dedication. It takes perseverance.

And it is not just that we need to do these things to get on the path, but it takes all these things to stay on the path. That is one reason why Jesus says that the violent will take the kingdom by force. Those people who are aggressive, and energetic, and single-minded with God's way are the ones who are going to enter it. It is almost as if they have to conquer it.

But in reality they are conquering themselves, and making sure that they stay on the right way.

I decided to go to Luke because Luke's version of this is quite a bit longer than Matthew's. He puts things together a little bit differently. This is the narrow way:

Luke 13:22-23 And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?"

That is a good question. It is almost as if the way that the question is asked the person knows that this way is not easy because he has been listening to Jesus, and the things that Jesus has been saying seems to exclude just about everybody.

Notice Jesus' reply:

Luke 13:24-30 And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' " then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' [remember that for later] "But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. "They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. "And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

This is interesting because the very next thing that He says is that He talks about Pharisees. The very day some Pharisees came saying to Him, etc.

I get the impression that they were Pharisees out in this audience. And maybe the one who actually asked this question was himself a Pharisee.

Now, one would think that of all people the Pharisees would be among the most careful of people in following God's way. But, if were to take anything from this, Jesus has a far different perspective.

Now, the people here in Judea had been taught by the Pharisees. And so, I know behind what He said is a message to the Pharisees, not just to the people. He is telling the Pharisees in this

particular way that they were careless in their approach to God. Sure, they cared a great deal for their rules, their regulations, their self-imposed restrictions, but they cared little for the truth! They were not careful to observe all that God had commanded them to do.

They were not observing the way of life, as He mentions here, of the Patriarchs, and the Prophets like Moses, David, and Isaiah. They were following their own religion.

What did He tell them? "In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." They were careless in their reading of the scriptures. And they were certainly careless about the application of it. All you have to do is read Matthew 23 and you know for sure that they were not applying the law of God.

Now this tells us something. Just to bring it into our day and age, this tells us that we can be careful people in some areas, and be careless in others. It is most important that we are careful in the right areas. The Pharisees were super-careful about