

Spiritual Poisons, part 1
October 11, 2016

Times sure have changed since I was a kid. When I was a kid, most of the gasoline had lead in it. I remember one company advertising that some of their gasoline was lead free. Today, all gas is lead-free.

When I was a kid, most of the paint had lead in it too. That isn't true anymore. There is too much danger involved with lead paint.

When I was a kid, asbestos used to be used as a ceiling covering. It covered the ceilings in the shop classes of one of the schools I attended. That was before they found out how dangerous asbestos was.

When I was a kid, the chemical DDT was used for eradicating many bugs. But that has been banned as detrimental to birds.

Over the years mankind has learned that these and many other things can harm us or the environment. Other things that can harm our bodies include tobacco, too much alcohol, illegal drugs, and even some legal ones. I say legal drugs because some drugs we only take as a last resort. I was once prescribed a medicine that I refused to take when I read the possible side effects. My physical symptoms were preferable to the worst of the possible side effects.

We have to protect our bodies. But we are more than a body. We are spirit. And just as your body can be poisoned, so can your spirit.

Today we are starting a series about things that can poison our spirits. Some examples are pride, anger, and greed. All of the spiritual poisons we will look at can negatively affect your life. For example, a poisoned spirit can affect all of your relationships. A poisoned spirit can rob you of peace of mind. And a poisoned spirit will hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Now, the basis for this series comes from the letter known as 2 Corinthians. This letter was written by Paul, the missionary, who wrote this letter to a very troubled church. This church had more problems than any other we read of in the Bible. Paul had seen, firsthand, the devastating effects of the kinds of poisons we will deal with in this series.

The passage we are going to look at begins with him reminding them of just a few of the great blessings God has promised to us in Jesus. God has made lots of promises to us. Paul mentions just three. Let's see what they are.

2 Corinthians 6:16-18 (NIV) As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

In this passage we see that God has promised to be with us in our daily lives. He has promised us a relationship with Himself. And further, He has promised to make us His very own children. These are just a few of the many promised blessings we have as Christians. The receiving of these blessings calls for a response from us. That brings us to our key verse.



2 Corinthians 7:1 (NIV) Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Every poison we are going to look at in this series is a danger that any of us can surrender to. Each one may not be a problem for you right now. But it could become a problem at some point in your life unless you guard against it. We have to learn how to guard against them.

If you are already contaminated you will have to take steps to purify yourself of this poison. I have already mentioned some things that can contaminate our bodies. And we take practical steps to guard ourselves against those we are aware of. For example, some of you used to smoke tobacco. But when you learned the dangers, you quit smoking. You took action to purify yourself from that poison.

In the same way, there are practical things we can do to guard ourselves against the things that can contaminate our spirits. As we examine each one we will learn what steps to take to purify ourselves from those poisons.

The first poison we're going to examine is quite common today. You may hear it expressed every day. It can affect any age, any gender, any person, in any life situation.

Poison number one is apathy.

Apathy = lack of emotion; lack of interest; unconcern; indifference

You hear people express apathy all the time. You may have spoken your apathy about something this past week. The words of apathy include such phrases as: "So what?", "Whatever!", "I don't care!", and "Not interested." All of these phrases communicate your apathy about something.

You can be apathetic about some things and not others. You might care deeply about your job, but not the environment. You might care about who runs the country, but not care about the poor. You might care about immigration, but not the schools in your community. You might already be thinking about some things you are apathetic towards. And that may differ greatly from the apathies of the person next to you.

This morning I am most concerned about a particular object of apathy.

The most dangerous spiritual poison for Christians is apathy to our salvation.

When we fail to take our salvation seriously, we are suffering from apathy. This is a great danger to us. This will bring many negative consequences into our lives. As I said earlier, it will affect all of your relationships, those with people and with God.

To counter this danger, Paul warns us to...

Romans 12:11 (NIV) Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

He is calling us to intense enthusiasm about the blessings we have received from God. Stay pumped, excited, enthused about your blessings in Christ Jesus.

How do you do this? How do you keep your spiritual fervor so that you are not lacking in zeal? Again, you do this by taking practical steps. The following is the most significant practical step to take to purify yourself against the poison of apathy.

Savor your salvation in Christ Jesus. We must learn to savor our salvation.

Do you know how to savor things? I don't mean save things. I know some of you are really good at saving things. No, I am speaking of savoring your blessings.

Webster's New World Dictionary (Second Edition, 3rd answer) defines it this way:

Savor = "to enjoy with appreciation"; "dwell on with delight"

When we savor something we are giving it focused attention. We are thinking about it, and doing so with pleasure.

For example, most people like ice cream. Scientists say we like ice cream because of the "mouth feel" of it. We like the sweet creaminess of ice cream. I agree. That is why I don't like really cold, hard ice cream. I don't sense that creaminess if it is frozen solid. It is when it is about 30 degrees, and some of it is slightly melting that it feels best and gives the most flavor. I savor it then, eating it in slow, small bites. I have learned to savor my ice cream.

I am also learning to savor coffee. I can savor a really good cup of fresh brewed coffee. I will take a bit into my mouth and let it sit on my tongue, feeling the warmth, sensing the different flavor compounds as they make contact with my taste buds. However, if there is something else on my mind, I can drink really good coffee and hardly notice it. To savor the coffee, I have to be thinking about the coffee, about how it tastes and feels when it warms me.

You too probably savor something. You savor it when you think about it with appreciation, gratitude, and delight.

I have a reclining chair in my living room, and there are times that it is comforting. But I have found that when I am really tired, not sleepy, but physically worn out, the easy chair isn't the thing I need. Instead, I need to take off my shoes, get on the bed, lie about half reclined, and stretch my legs out flat. That feels so much better than the easy chair. And I savor those first few moments with the load off my feet.

Whenever I get on my bicycle and start pedaling down my street, I am reminded of how much I enjoy that. And in those first few moments I savor the flat, easy riding, and cool breeze it creates.

I bet there are things you savor as well. Again, this isn't just enjoying something. It is being focused on the thing itself and taking pleasure in it.

Perhaps you have memories you savor. You savor certain memories that you bring back up to your conscious mind. I have always enjoyed remembering my dad playing catch with me with a ball and glove. I have always enjoyed remembering making cookies with my mom, or dying Easter eggs. I savor the memories of the whole family spending a Saturday raking the leaves in our yard. I savor the memory of taking down a tree in our yard with just axes and hand saws.

I savor the day I found out I was going to be a dad. I savor the day the boys came off the plane.

I savor the memory of walking around the seminary campus in the evenings with my wife when we were dating.

I savor memories of my conversion and my call to ministry. I savor times when the Joy of God's salvation has washed over me.

Such memories I can intentionally recall to my mind and give thanks for them anew. You can do this too. You can purposely recall how Jesus saved you and all the benefits you have experienced since then. Recall your blessing with delight. Savor them. This is how to guard against apathy towards your salvation.

So, I encourage you to spend some of your daily meetings with God savoring the blessings you have in Christ Jesus. If you don't yet have a daily prayer time, I encourage you to begin one. This is the best habit you can form as a Christian. Start your day by meeting with God.

In this prayer time you want to savor your blessings. Recall to mind God's promises. Think about one of them. Think how it benefits you now or will benefit you in the future. Savor it. Delight yourself in it. And give God thanks for it.

Savoring your spiritual blessings prevents apathy towards them. This is SO important, because apathy to your salvation will kill your gratitude for it. When that happens, sin is sure to follow. And that apathy and following sin can become a habit.

Apathy can become a habit. It can become a way of life. You can easily slip into apathy about anything. And soon, it will be of little importance to you. When something is no longer important to you, you will be in danger of losing it.

Some people reach a point of apathy towards their marriage. That leads to divorce. Some people reach a point of apathy towards their health. They quit taking care of their bodies and lose their health. And some people reach a point of apathy towards their salvation.

Apathy can become a habit, if you let it. Instead, form the habit of savoring your salvation.

To savor your salvation you must hate your sin. Your sin has ruined you. So grieve your sin. Grieve what it has done to you. Grieve how it dishonors God who made you.

Your sin has ruined you. You need a Savior.

But God loves you. And in His love for you He sent you the Savior you need, Jesus. Jesus died for your sins.

Your only hope from the consequences of your sin is to receive Jesus as your Savior and your Lord.

(Other passages that guard against this apathy: Ephesians 6:11; Colossians 4:2; Hebrews 2:1)