

CURE FOR THE PLAGUE OF PETTINESS

Galatians 5:25-26

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29. December 2013

Ecc 10:1 One dead fly can spoil the scent-maker's oil: a grain of stupidity outweighs wisdom and glory
Song 2:15 Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that make havoc of the vineyards, for our vineyards are in fruit.

Mt 23:24 Blind guides! You strain out a gnat, yet gulp down a camel!

Gal 5:25-26 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become vainglorious, challenging one another, envying one another.

Mt 7:5 Hypocrite! First take the *log* out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the *speck* out of your brother's eye.

Mt 23:26 "You blind Pharisee, first ^aclean the *inside* of the **cup** and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

Prov 24:27 Complete your *outdoor* work, and prepare your field; afterwards, build your house.

Phil 4:11 I have *learned* to be *content* in whatever circumstances I am.

0. INTRODUCTION

- First we have to distinguish: *little sins* [to be fought] vs. *little things* [to be ignored] (Satan's pendulum) → fighting little sins (thorough obedience) we can become oversensitive and judgmental ↔ ignoring little things (Christian freedom) we can fall into the trap of sinful habits
 - ("All throughout the 2012 presidential campaign season, we heard complaints from those covering the election about how nasty and trivial the campaign had become. It would often be compared wistfully to a bygone era of American politics before social media brought *the twin plagues of pettiness and excessive informality* on the unsuspecting American voter."¹)

[BURROUGHS] It may be said of one who is contented in a Christian way that he is the most contented man in the world, and yet the most unsatisfied man in the world; these two together must needs be mysterious. I say, a contented man, just as he is the most contented, so he is the most unsatisfied man in the world.

You never learned the mystery of contentment unless it may be said of you that, just as you are the most contented man, so you are also the most unsatisfied man in the world.

You will say, 'How is that?' A man who has learned the art of contentment is the most contented with any low condition that he has in the world, and yet he cannot be satisfied with the enjoyment of all the world. He is contented if he has but a crust, but bread and water, that is, if God disposes of him, for the things of the world, to have but bread and water for his present condition, he can be satisfied with God's disposal in that; yet if God should give unto him Kingdoms and Empires, all the world to rule, if he should give it him for his portion, he would not be satisfied with that. Here is the mystery of it: though his heart is so enlarged that the enjoyment of all the world and ten thousand worlds cannot satisfy him for his portion; yet he has a heart quieted under God's disposal, if he gives him but bread and water. To join these two together must needs be a great art and mystery.

Though he is contented with God in a little, yet those things that would content other men will not content him. The men of the world seek after wealth, and think if they had thus much, and thus much, they would be content. They do not aim at great things; but if I had, perhaps some man thinks, only two or three hundred a year, then I should be well enough; if I had but a hundred a year, or a thousand a year, says another, then I should be satisfied. But a

¹ <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2013/02/25/hillary-the-inevitable-again> (28-Dec-13)

gracious heart says that if he had ten hundred thousand times so much a year, it would not satisfy him; if he had the quintessence of all the excellences of all the creatures in the world, it could not satisfy him; and yet this man can sing, and be merry and joyful when he has only a crust of bread and a little water in the world. Surely religion is a great mystery!²

1. LITTLE SINS

[SPURGEON] A little thorn may cause much suffering. A little cloud may hide the sun. Little foxes spoil the vines; and little sins do mischief to the tender heart. These little sins burrow in the soul, and make it so full of that which is hateful to Christ, that He will hold no comfortable fellowship and communion with us. A great sin cannot destroy a Christian, but a little sin can make him miserable. Jesus will not walk with His people unless they drive out every known sin.³

[COMMENTARY] Too often we may have been like a boy represented by Theocritus, as set to watch a vineyard, but becoming so absorbed in weaving a chaplet of flowers as not to notice two foxes, one of which was stealthily plundering his food, while the other was making havoc with the grapes.⁴

One Saturday afternoon a mother was peeling vegetables for a salad when her daughter came to ask permission to go to an amusement center of bad repute. The daughter admitted it was a questionable place but "all the other girls are going." As the teenager pleaded her case, she suddenly saw her mother pick up a handful of discarded vegetable peelings and toss them into the salad. Startled, she cried, "Mother, you are putting garbage into the salad." "I know," her mother replied, "but I thought that if *you didn't mind garbage in your heart*, you certainly wouldn't mind a little garbage in your stomach."⁵

- [EXAMPLES] pride; exaggeration; selfishness; discouragement; compromise; doubt and fear; carnal lust; resentment and retaliation; gossip, backbiting and talebearing; impatience; murmuring and complaining⁶

2. LITTLE THINGS

Times when a *fly or a mosquito is more annoying than the devil himself*. And the same thing is true spiritually; there are times when little things pester and annoy and there is nothing in us big enough to cope with them. ... Nothing has been done wrong, there is no reason why you should feel your feet like lead and your heart like ice, and yet you seem about three inches high, with the mind of an insect, *irritated* and *annoyed* over everything there is. "What is the good of anything at all? What is the good of having done my duty? of praying, or believing in God?" That aspect of things comes over and over again in the Bible and in our own experience. It happens out here physically; you suddenly feel "knocked out" and you don't know why you should. It is a symbol for what happens spiritually.⁷

- Jonah's wrath: **Jonah 4:6-11** Then the LORD God appointed a plant, and it grew up to provide shade over Jonah's head to ease his discomfort.² Jonah was greatly pleased with the plant.⁷ When dawn came the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, and it withered.⁸ As the sun was rising, God appointed a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he almost fainted, and he wanted to die. He said, "It's better for me to die than to live."⁹ Then God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "Yes," he replied. "It is right. I'm angry enough to die!"¹⁰ So the LORD said, "You cared about the plant, which you did not labor over and did not grow. It appeared in a night and perished in a night.¹¹ Should I not care about the great city of Nineveh, which has more than 120,000 people¹ who cannot distinguish between their right and their left, as well as many animals?"
- [JESUS] gnat ↔ camel (Mt 23:24)
- Gal 5:26 → vain glory

We need to learn how to distinguish between the little sins and the little things.

- Philip 4:11

² BURROUGHS, J. *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, p. 18

³ SPURGEON, C. H. *Morning & Evening*, May 30.

⁴ BURROWES, G. *A Commentary on the Song of Solomon*, p. 311.

⁵ <http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/june-1985/difference-between-gnat-and-camel> (28-Dec-13)

⁶ <http://www.spiritwatch.org/littlefoxes.htm> (28-Dec-13)

⁷ CHAMBERS, O. *The Place of Help*,

1. WHAT IS IMPORTANT AND WHAT IS UNIMPORTANT - TELLING THE DIFFERENCE

1. "LIFE" AND "STEP" IN THE SPIRIT (GAL 5:26)

- *great* experiences and *small* decisions
 - (1) do not concentrate neither think too much about *men's* opinions, ("What do they think?"...)
 - (2) do not study *petty* problems created by human individual idiosyncracies, ("Why do they do such and such, what do they try to say by this?")
 - (3) do not try to *pass judgment* on every act, word or situation... ("I think this is...!")

2. "ONE ANOTHER" → JUST HUMANS

1. WHAT OTHERS THINK

- → faith (religion before men)

2. WHAT OTHERS SAY

- → talk (topics)

3. WHAT OTHERS DO

- → judgment (sitting on the seat of judgment)

3. ELEMENTS OF SPACE AND TIME

- Gal 4:9 (...you turn back again to the *weak* and *bankrupt* elemental forces? Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again the workings of "little things" (wrong steps)

1. DEMANDING COMMENTS ON SELF

- (1) praise, (2) thanks, (3) focus of talk, (4) self-

2. PROVOKING JEALOUSY

- Ezekiah - showing off his treasures
- comparisons

3. CAUSING ENVY

- flaunting abilities, wealth...;
- excessive talking about one's successess

2. RIGHTLY PLACE THE SMALL THINGS

Almost without exception, the complainer is a low producer. The complainer chooses to spend time and energy criticizing the job, the economy, the weather, coworkers, the management or any scenario in which the complainer is cast as a victim. Misery loves company. Any organization is a feeding ground for a complainer, providing both the subjects of complaint and a ripe harvest of shoulders to cry on.

Complainers feed on pettiness and, left unchecked, will drain the energy out of an organization. Complainers are needy people and demand constant attention. High producers work to grow and expand their horizons, thriving on the challenges the company provides. Low producers work to fill emotional holes in their lives. What they lack in themselves they seek to borrow from others. High producers fill their tanks with their own achievements. Low producers fill their tanks complaining about the achievements of others.

The evidence is in behavior. When what brand of office supplies to buy or how to decorate the place become higher priority than productivity and growth, it's time to start counting who's contributing to the bottom line and who's riding on it. Who calls unofficial lunch meetings to discuss the down side of company policies? Who travels the office corridors to spread the news of personal lives? Who feels threatened by every decision handed down from above?

Dealing with difficult people is never pleasant. Many managers, without solutions, tend to close their doors and ignore *the plague of pettiness* outside. The effective leader gets involved with his or her people, if only to protect his or her high producers from distraction and lost productivity. One difference between a true leader versus a mere manager is the willingness to get involved with people in the organization.⁸

1. WHEN THE LITTLE IS GREAT

- Jesus washing of the disciples' feet – the dinner could have taken place without Him doing this, but when He did it, it became a great thing

⁸ <http://www.chrmglobal.com/Blogcomments/126/1/Why-do-we-always-Complain-.html> (28-Dec-13)

- Jesus taking children in the arms

2. WHEN THE LITTLE IS DECISIVE

There are moments in life *when the little thing matters more than anything else*, times when a critical situation depends upon our attitude of mind to another person.⁹

- the first sin → *EATING!!!* – seems like a little thing, but it's become a great thing (decision)
- little duties → faithfulness
- routine work done thoroughly

3. WHEN THE LITTLE IS TO BE IGNORED

- little inconveniences
- less than perfect services
- bad manners not touching the substance of relationship

[PRECIOUS] Aiming at or affecting distinction or choiceness in conduct, manners, language, etc.; fastidious, 'particular'; esp. in mod. use (after F. précieux: cf. précieuse), affecting, displaying, or using careful and fastidious delicacy or refinement in language, workmanship, etc.; often with an implication of being over-nice or over-refined.

- annoying circumstances

[C.S. LEWIS] Your patient, thanks to Our Father Below, is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbours *sing out of tune*, or have *boots that squeak*, or *double chins*, or *odd clothes*, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous.¹⁰

4. WHEN THE LITTLE IS TO BE FOUGHT AGAINST

- self-congratulating thoughts; self-serving ideas
- expectations in conflict with the will of God
- annoying thoughts;
- disturbing talks (disseminating doubts)
- negative predictions (performance; health; events)

3. VIEW EVERYTHING IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF ETERNITY

1. LIFE

- John 3:3 → forgiveness; assurance; calling;
- Gal 5:25 → life in the Spirit
- Mt 23:26 → begin with the inside
- **Lk 11:41** → giving self before giving things ("But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.)
- abide in Christ

2. ATTITUDES

- **Lk 12:5** But I will show you the One to fear: Fear Him who has authority to throw *people* into hell after death. Yes, I say to you, this is the One to fear!
- **2Cor 5:7** we walk by faith, not by sight
- **Rom 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- Be careful to distinguish between the important and the unimportant "little things" in life
- Do not be controlled by what people think, say or do.
- View everything in its relationship to God and eternity.

⁹ CHAMBERS, O. *The Moral Foundation of Life*,

¹⁰ LEWIS, C.S. *Screwtape Letters*, p. 6.