

What America Has in Common With Rome Before Its Fall

Society's influence on the church is very alarming. In times past, the hero was the father, not Edward (from *Twilight*). The greatest influence was the mother, not Bella. Kids once quoted Scriptures; now they are casting spells. What a sad commentary on the state of the family today. Hollywood, not the Holy Spirit, is guiding us.

An important question for all Christians to ask is: "Are we 'affecting' the world, or is the world 'infecting' us?" A.W. Tozer reminds us: "Where does Christianity destroy itself in a given generation? It destroys itself by not living in the light, by professing a truth it does not obey."

The church should not reflect or imitate the world, but lovingly confront it. We do the most for the world when we are the least like the world. We are to love them but not learn from them (cf. Ps. 107:35-37). No other decision will impact our lives more than who or what we choose to follow ... what we choose to love.

Americans give approximately \$4 billion, but spend over \$150 billion a year on pleasure. A serious misplacement of priorities.

In biblical terms, fulfilling unhealthy pleasures (or pushing healthy ones to the limit) leads to poverty—financially, relationally and spiritually. He who loves the things of this world will destroy his own soul. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

When pleasures, even good ones, draw us away from God—when they crowd Him out—we are in danger of "loving the world."

God is in the background while pleasure and self-focus are in the foreground. Granted, finances, relaxation and healthy balanced entertainment are God-given resources that aid in rest and recuperation. This is not the problem; it is the “love” of pleasure and entertainment that leads us away. We cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve the god of this world and the one true God. John Owen, the prolific Puritan author, wrote, “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.”

Carnality and lukewarm living wage war against the soul. The carnal person wants to live without God’s restraints. Do you struggle in this area? Here is a test: Does this article anger or convict; are you upset or repentant? The old adage reminds us, “When a rock is thrown into a pile of dogs the one who yelps was struck.” If this article upsets, it applies.

J.C. Ryle in his book on holiness wrote we must stand guard as a soldier on enemy ground. The problem is many who profess to be Christians love the world and have a hard time separating. They believe in heaven, but they don’t truly long for it. They “say” that they fear God but they don’t live like it. They indulge temptation rather than fight it. They enjoy sin rather than confront it. The lukewarm church avoids the heat of conviction. They don’t like many of these articles. Holiness, to them, is outdated—old-fashioned.

Please don’t misunderstand. We all fall short, but our lifestyle should reflect our faith. It’s not about perfection, but direction. Galatians 5:16 reminds us that if we “live by the Spirit,” we will “not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

What we feed grows, and what grows can quickly become the dominating force in our lives. Sin is never static; it either grows or withers depending on whether we feed or starve it. A daily diet of violence, lust, anger and depression will fuel those very things in our lives. Pay close attention to what you watch and listen to, what you take pleasure in—the force

controlling it ultimately controls you (cf. Eph. 2:12).

What entertains you? Are you drawn to things honorable and excellent or dark and depressing?

Do you prefer programs about vampires, witches, zombies, the occult, illicit sex and perversions? Do you listen to music that stirs and motivates ungodly lusts and attractions?

This isn't rocket-science: "To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). "The more we follow that which is good, the faster and the further we shall flee from that which is evil" (Matthew Henry). A Christian should not be entertained by darkness. If we are entertained, our heart needs spiritual resuscitation.

We, like the mighty Roman Empire that collapsed centuries ago, are crumbling from within. Historian Edward Gibbon once wrote about the conditions of Rome before her fall. The spending of public funds on food and entertainment as well as the mad craze for pleasure and sport topped the list. Sound familiar today?

I believe that anyone who suggests that carnality and lukewarm living are not propelling us in this same direction, does so in sheer ignorance or is in denial because they love the things of this world more than the things of God.

"The gratification of the flesh and the fullness of the Spirit do not go hand in hand" (R.A. Torrey). We cannot feed the flesh and be filled with the Spirit. "No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Matt. 6:24). You and I cannot serve both God and the god of this world.

Are you willing to do what it takes to protect your relationship with the Lord? It all begins here: "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

Watch my sermon, "Lord, Remove My Guilt and Shame," on Vimeo.

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