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The Greatest World-wide Vice

Scripture: Matthew 10: 39

Mr. Lee Bristol, president of the Bristol-Myers Company of New York, used a phrase in his article in the popular symposium, "This I Believe," which gave the inspiration for my sermon today. He referred to the "greatest world-wide vice." Immediately one begins to speculate as to what it might be -- gambling, drunkenness, licentiousness, prostitution, graft, lying, stealing, murder, suicide, war?

If you were asked to cast a ballot, which would you vote for as the world's worst vice?

Quite a problem!

Mr. Bristol not only raises the question but gives his answer, with which I am in hearty and complete agreement. By now I know you are wondering what his answer is. And I am wondering if you too will agree with him.

Well, here it is: "The world's greatest vice is selfishness."

Why is he right?

Because at the bottom of all our troubles, be they personal, social, national, or universal, is selfishness.

War is the most world-wide and universal vice the human race faces. What is its cause?

National selfishness; It becomes a struggle between the have's and the have-not's. The latter enviously desire what the have's possess while the have's selfishly fight to retain it.

Class war within nations is the conflict between the upper crust who are wealthy and the lower stratum who are poverty-stricken. One selfishly fights to hold, the other to get. The struggle between capital and labor is basically selfish. One battles to retain wealth while the other strives for a greater distribution of it.

Social position is another battleground between the blue bloods listed in the social register and those who want to be listed. So those on top because of heredity, wealth, or position fight to stay there and those who would be there struggle up the social ladder. Basically both groups are selfish.

Let us shift now from collective situations to the more personal, individual vices.

What is gambling? A selfish desire to get something for nothing.

What is drunkenness? A selfish habit to satisfy a normal thirst illegitimately.

What is prostitution? A selfish practice to get money by turning a priceless virtue into a horrible vice.

What is graft? A selfish method to get money illegally.

What is lying? A selfish device to protect one's self after wrong conduct or to help one's self to improper ends.

What is stealing? A selfish method of procuring things which belong to others.

What is murder? A selfish crime to eliminate some individual who is thwarting one's personal desires.

What is suicide? A selfish attempt to avoid the responsibilities of life.

What is Sabbath desecration? A selfish practice to make Sunday a day of physical pleasure instead of a day of divine worship.

What is idolatry? A selfish worshipping of things that give personal gratification instead of worshipping God.

Covetousness, envy, jealousy, anger, hatred, animosity, and revenge all find their base and cause in selfishness.

For a moment, look at the Ten Commandments. Idol worship, lying, stealing, murder,adultery, covetousness, false witnessing, dishonoring of parents -- the cause of the violation of any of the commandments or all is selfishness.

Yes, I think it is conclusive and noncontroversial that Mr. Bristol is right -- selfishness is the world-wide vice.

Now we are ready for the final step in this discourse -- What is selfishness?

The answer is sin.
Sin is putting self against God.
Sin is acting contrary to God's will to further one's selfish interests.

Sin is taking advantage of others in order to satisfy personal, selfish desires.

Sin is satisfying normal appetites in an abnormal way to satiate selfish wants.

Sin began in heaven when Lucifer selfishly desired to make himself God.

Sin began on earth when Adam selfishly satisfied a desire contrary to God's known law.

And so it has been since. Selfishness is a sinful expression of a desire, appetite, or instinct in an illegitimate, illegal way.

Happiness never comes from selfishness. In fact, it is a result of just the opposite. Service to God and others results in happiness to self.

Jesus enunciated this great principle of successful living: "He that findeth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10: 39).

Surrender yourself to something bigger and beyond yourself and you will find yourself.

Surrender yourself to Christ and He will give himself to you.
Turn the world's greatest vice -- selfishness -- into the world's greatest virtue -- service --
and if you do you will merit happiness yourself and bring happiness to others.

Sing and pray with the poet

All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give.
I will ever love and serve Him,
In His presence daily live.

Francis of Assisi embodied the truth of this sermon in his famous prayer --

"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

"O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen."

Russell DeLong

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