

# Ungodliness and Worldly Passions

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[ 0 : 00 ] Back in 2003, the National Study of Youth and Religion at the University of North Carolina did a thorough study of the religious beliefs of American teenagers.

What they found. So what is the prevailing religious thought among American teenagers? The researchers didn't call it Christianity or Roman Catholicism or atheism or anything like that.

The researchers called it this. They called it moralistic, therapeutic deism. Moralistic, therapeutic deism.

And they said it could be summed up with five tenets, with five points. Number one, a God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life.

Number two, this God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most religions.

[ 1 : 29 ] Number three, the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.

Number four, God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.

And number five is good people go to heaven when they die. So, moralistic, therapeutic deism. And this is what the report said.

This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath. It's not a religion of living as a servant of sovereign divinity, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, etc.

Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among United States teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace.

It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people. Now, is that just teenagers?

[ 2 : 50 ] Well, the teenagers of 2003 are not teenagers anymore, are they? They're adults, 20s, 30s.

And even the teenagers then didn't pick this up all on their own despite their parents. It wasn't like their parents taught them something else, and then they have rebelled against their parents' religious beliefs.

And it wasn't despite the churches, even, as a whole. Kindra Dean wrote a book called *Almost Christian*. *Almost Christian*.

Not quite, but *Almost Christian*. What the faith of our teenagers is telling the American church. And in that book, she argues that American teenagers have bought into moralistic, therapeutic deism, not because they have misunderstood what the church has taught them, but precisely because it's what the church has taught them.

So no misunderstanding. This is what their parents have been teaching them. This is what the church as a whole in the United States has been teaching. And so she writes this, Moralistic, therapeutic deism has little to do with God or a sense of divine mission in the world.

[ 4 : 08 ] It offers comfort, bolsters self-esteem, helps solve problems, and lubricates interpersonal relationships by encouraging people to do good, feel good, and keep God at arm's length.

That's how this is going to work. Well, the book of Titus is telling us that God is not at arm's length, and he's not staying at arm's length.

So I'd invite you to turn in your Bibles to Titus chapter 2. He's not staying away. He hasn't stayed away. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared.

It's appeared in the person of Jesus Christ. And Titus 2, 11 through 14 tells us that Christ is coming again.

Whether American teenagers, American adults, whether American churches want to keep Christ at arm's length or not is irrelevant. He has come, and he is coming again.

[ 5 : 17 ] And Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth, didn't come to solve my earthly problems and to make me happy here and now as the exclusive thing that he was doing.

John Flavel, the Puritan pastor. And the reason we need to hear sometimes from Puritans is not because they are always right, but because they are a voice from a different time that's not so inebriated with our own time.

And this is what he said. This is, and obviously this is something that people thought back in his day. But this is what John Flavel said. The intent of the Redeemer's undertaking, so why Jesus came, why did the grace of God appear?

The intent of the Redeemer's undertaking was not to purchase for people, for his people, ease and pleasures on earth. There are people that actually teach that, that the cross is for our physical, financial, and any sort of other healing here and now.

They teach that. But John Flavel is saying it's not for people's ease and pleasures on earth, but to mortify their lusts, heal their natures, and spiritualize their affections.

[ 6 : 32 ] And this is why he's doing it. Why did Jesus Christ, why did he come, and why is he doing this in his people? And Flavel says this, thereby to fit them for eternal fruition.

And I think he means eternal life with God. The purpose of Jesus Christ coming, the grace of God, was to so fix our hearts, change our nature, spiritualize our affection, kill our lusts, so that we will be getting ready for that day when Jesus Christ comes and this world is left behind.

And we go into that world to live with God. So the grace of our Lord Jesus, it teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions.

It teaches us to say no to our lust as we wait for that blessed hope, that happy hope, the thing that is going to make us forever happy.

So, moralistic, therapeutic deism. It's probably the first time you heard it, but it's something, at least that title.

[ 7 : 43 ] But it is the predominant heresy of our day that churches and people are believing. But the gospel isn't about living your best life now.

It's about getting you ready to live eternal life with God forever. And so my question is, do you see it? Do you see the difference between biblical Christianity and what Jesus really came to do and the heresy that is being taught everywhere?

And my question is, do you have the real thing? Teenagers, do you have the real thing? Is your Christianity just about feeling good here and now, happy, getting along with people, being nice with people?

Or do you have the real thing? And so, teenagers, you do want something to live for. You want something in your lives.

You want your lives to really matter. The world is telling teenagers to be stupid, to think of nothing but nonsense all day, every day, fill your life with it, be pointless, and I'm just wondering if there isn't some part of you that says, no, I want more than that.

[ 9 : 08 ] I want to live for something that matters, that's real and meaningful, not just for here and now, but forever. And that's what the gospel is.

Jesus Christ came and he says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am what you've been looking for. We just sang that song.

Jesus is everything we've always looked for. But he also said, if you want to follow me, take your cross, take up your cross, and then you can follow me.

Jesus did not sugarcoat the message. And when it comes down to it, I don't think anyone here, teenager or otherwise, wants a sugar-coated message.

You want a blood-earnest message. You want to say, here is real costly grace. With real demands, with real change, with real power, with real life.

[ 10 : 14 ] And that's what Paul is talking about in Titus chapter 2. These people in Crete had lived a very ungodly life. So many months ago now, what we talked about, what life was like in Crete.

It was not a nice place. It was not a great, civilized, happy place. It was a sinful, culturally sinful place.

And into that culture, the gospel had come. And what Paul is saying is, it's not about living your best life now in Crete. This grace that God has brought to you, it means something for your life.

You have to change. And he talks about that. About older women and younger women and younger men and older men. This gospel has a definite, practical effect on the way you live.

It should have that effect. And when it comes in real power, it does have that effect. So we've been camping, so to speak, on Titus chapter 2, 11 through 14.

[ 11 : 22 ] And so far, we've seen a couple of really big points. And the first point is that it is grace that teaches us to be godly. And the second point is we were asking the question and answering the question of, well, why does grace always teach about, teach and lead and train us to godliness?

Why do those things always, always, always go together? And the main answer was because you can't separate Christ from grace. Everything Christ is, everything that Christ has done moves us and directs us towards godliness.

You can't separate Christ from grace, and that's why grace always leads to godliness. If you are growing in godliness, then I can tell you for sure that you are growing in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

You're believing more. You're embracing more of what He is for you. You're coming to terms with, in real active faith, who He is, His demands, what He said, who He is for you.

You're coming to grips with more of who Jesus is. You're relating to Him more completely. You're knowing Him better. It's 2 Peter 3.18 where Peter says, grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 12 : 46 ] As you grow in the, growing in grace and growing in knowledge of who He is personally for you is how you grow in godliness. And so the way of godliness is further up and further in, into Him.

It's not staying away from Him until you are godly. That's something that people do. They say, oh, I've got to clean myself up. Even we as Christians do that. Oh, I can't, I can't come to Jesus.

I need to get my life a little more fixed up before I can come to Him. No, it's not stay away from Him until you are godly. It's get to Him and live on Him more because you aren't and you need Him.

So God has given Him to us to be our all in all. And so, brothers and sisters, let's take Him. Take Him for everything He is.

Receive Him. Believe Him. Lean on Him. Trust Him. Now, what does grace teach us? This is where we get to what we're talking about today. What does grace teach us?

[ 13 : 48 ] What kind of life does it train us in? Well, it teaches us to say no to ungodliness.

And we're just going to cover ungodliness and worldly passions. It teaches us in the first place to say no to ungodliness. Now, what is moralistic therapeutic deism?

Well, essentially, you know what it is? It's a religious form of ungodliness. Remember, at the heart of ungodliness is I'm going to keep God at arm's length.

And guess what? He's okay with being at arm's length. And He doesn't need to be in my life unless I call Him. It's living with God on our terms where we set the agenda.

And if we want Him, we can have Him. If we want Him in our house, He'll come in. But if He stays at a distance and that's where we want Him, that's okay. Moralistic therapeutic deism is a religious ungodliness.

[ 14 : 51 ] Because ungodliness is not first a life. It's not first actions. It's not first sinful actions. It's in the beginning and always at the bottom.

It's a heart attitude. It's a way of thinking. It's ignoring God. It's belittling God. It's the opposite of what Joseph did as we saw this morning.

Joseph's in Egypt and he's still thinking about God. He's aware of God. Ungodliness is ignoring or belittling God. Romans 1 says that the wrath of God is being revealed against all wickedness and ungodliness.

It's godlessness. And what do they do? What does Paul talk about? What is this? What is the heart of wickedness?

What is the heart of godlessness? Well, Paul says men ignore God. They suppress what they know about him.

[ 15 : 55 ] They hold it down. They hide it from themselves. So they know his eternal power and his divine nature. They know he's great. They know he's the creator.

They know he's way, way far above them, exalted above them. But, instead of glorifying and thanking him, Paul says, they neither glorify him nor give thanks to him.

But their thinking, this is where it's at, their thinking became futile, futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Ungodliness in the first place is just living without God in your mind. it's living in the dark. You just live your life. You do what you want with no reference to him. He doesn't weigh anything. He doesn't mean anything. So I have a hypothetical question for you. And I want you to really think about it. If the existence of God was decisively, and I don't know how they would do this, but decisively disproven tomorrow, like, we know, without a shadow of a doubt, without any question, that God does not exist, would it matter in your life?

[ 17 : 20 ] Would it matter? Or can you say, actually, it wouldn't matter that much. Actually, it would be pretty nice. I get on with living how I really want to live.

That's ungodliness. That's ungodliness. See, you can be a perfectly nice neighbor, a good citizen, a good student, and be ungodly.

Ungodliness is the opposite of the fear of the Lord. the fear of the Lord is essentially living in reverence and with God on your heart, where what He is matters, and what He says matters, and what He has done matters, what He matters.

The fear of the Lord is living aware of God, in light of God. Ungodliness is just living in the dark. and that's how we all were.

That's how we all were. You, me, some of you still. But what Paul says is, but when we were in that place with no room for God in all of our thoughts, that's when the grace of God appeared.

[ 18 : 49 ] that's when something came from the outside. The Son of God's grace rose in the middle of our darkness.

The love and the mercy of Jesus Christ appeared. He appeared on the horizon of our life, and all of a sudden, the glory of God, the knowledge of the glory of God started to shine in our minds, and where He didn't weigh anything before, now all of a sudden, He matters.

That's one way that you can know if you're saved is, does God matter? Really? To you? And He came, Jesus Christ came, and Paul puts it here as He came as our great God and Savior.

That's how He's coming again. That's how He came the first time, and everything changed. The light flooded in. He was there. God is alive. He is glorious. He is good.

He is just. He is holy. I'm a sinner. He's kind. He's everything. And so now, we say, as the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for you.

[ 20 : 05 ] We want more of Him. Now, it goes on. It's like the invasion happened.

Jesus Christ is now on the shore of our dark minds, and now forever the light is beginning to shine. But that invasion continues. That knowledge of the glory of God, it goes on throughout the entire Christian's, the Christian's entire life, until every nook and cranny of our dark minds are going to be filled.

with the glory of God. There's more of Him to know. You know more of Him than what you did before. Habakkuk says that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea.

And the same thing is true for our own minds and our own hearts. The knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill every dark corner of our mind until His radiance, the radiance of His glory, and the weight fills us completely.

And that will happen when we see Him. So grace has begun this invasion. But then grace goes on teaching us. That's what I'm saying.

[ 21 : 30 ] It goes on teaching us to say no to ungodliness. in this act of grace, God woke us up to who He was and who we are, and forever more that changed our opinion of God.

But what grace does in the Christian's ongoing life is it changes. It teaches us to say no to those little thoughts about God.

It teaches us to say no to those thoughts about God that says He's not enough, or He has nothing to say about this, or that we ignore Him, we brush Him off, and so we can go through those periods of our life where we say, oh, I'm just not walking with the Lord.

Well, the Lord teaches us to live with Him. And so when Jesus Christ comes into the soul of man, He brings His own heart into that man.

He brings His own heart that said, I always do what my Father tells me to do. The heart that said, away from me, Satan. And because we're to worship the Lord, your God, and serve Him only.

[ 22 : 39 ] That heart, His spirit is now in us, and it teaches us to say no. No to the small thoughts about God. No to the idols. No to the darkness. And bit by bit, the darkness flies away, and we say

yes to God.

We say yes, we say no to the deeds of darkness, and then we say yes to godliness. That's what grace is doing in your life now.

So Satan comes with his temptations, and now in the light, we see them for what they are, and we see them in the light of Jesus Christ, and we say, no. No. No.

I'm not walking that way anymore. how can I do such a thing against God? And then there's part of us that still wants to hide, because maybe we're afraid of God, we're afraid of judgment or condemnation still.

Well, grace comes and soothes our fears. It points us to the cross. all through our whole Christian life. Grace, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ is even pointing to his own cross and saying, he was enough for you.

[ 24 : 05 ] That sacrifice was enough for you. God justifies the wicked, and so come to him. Come to your father. Come into his arms. You don't need to stay at arm's length.

You don't need to ignore him. You don't need to hold him off. You are safe with him. And so grace, the gospel, cuts out every leg that that godlessness rests on, that it stands on.

So it doesn't just teach us that we should say no to ungodliness. It does. It certainly teaches us that we should, but it does something more.

It teaches us to actually do it. It trains us to say no to those thoughts. So, are there definite demands and implications from the gospel?

Titus 2 is full of them. There is a kind of life that fits, that the gospel demands and requires for older men, younger men, older women, younger women.

[ 25 : 24 ] Grace does have demands for sure, but it gives us wings, wings, and then it says fly. So grace trains us to say no to ungodliness, and secondly, it teaches us to say no to worldly passions, worldly passions, or lust.

Now, we generally think of lust as being some wrong sexual desire, but these worldly passions, or lust, or any desire that God forbids, or any degree of desire that God forbids.

So sexuality is certainly a part of it, but lust can be any good thing gone too far. And almost every lust, I don't know if there's even an exception, is a good desire that's out of place, or too far.

So it's good to want to be healthy, to have a healthy body. It's fine to even want to look a little nicer, or to have a little more money, and those things can actually be godly, and pleasing to him.

But lust is when those things go too far, when they take ultimate priority, when they become the controlling motive of our entire life.

[ 26 : 58 ] So why am I doing what I'm doing? It's not because of God, it's because of I want this, whatever this is. And that's how we live.

That's how we live. So what is the world? What is worldliness? this? First John, John answers that question.

Everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does. That's what the world is.

That's what the worldly passions are about. It's about the cravings of sinful man. John said, if anyone loves the world, then the love of the Father is not in him.

Worldly passions are what we love and crave and desire more than God. And that can be anything. Or things that we crave in God's place.

[ 28 : 01 ] That's what we lived on. We didn't know God. We had no taste for him. We didn't like what he had to offer.

We had no taste for heaven's joys. We sing that. We didn't desire anything in God or that he had to give us. And so in his place, we pursued other things.

We lived and we craved for other things. And we said, this is my life and I have to have it. Maybe it was freedom.

I think teenagers can fall into that. I just want to be out of here and I'll be free. Well, but freedom is not something that just teenagers want. Freedom is something that we all want and sometimes it can be to the point of becoming an idol.

There's a whole movement out there in the world where people are pursuing what they call FIRE and that stands for Financial Independence, Retire Early. What they're after is financial freedom and what they mean is, and I guess financial freedom is good, but what they're after is I don't want anyone telling me what to do.

[ 29 : 19 ] I don't want to have a normal job because if I have a normal job then someone else tells me what to do. And so whatever I got to get to this place where I set my hours, I set my agenda, I get to do what I want to do.

And so what am I going to do to get it? I'm going to work like mad, I'm going to save and invest like mad, I'm going to make every decision based on this because I have to have it. It's almost always about me getting what I want.

So there it is. Not particularly wicked in and of itself, but it's become this craving that men live for instead of God.

Maybe it's not freedom, maybe it's entertainment. The world has enough entertainment that we can get as much as we want. And maybe it's just more and more and you can't get enough.

Maybe it's physical looks to have a beach body and a six pack. Maybe it's not just the looks, maybe it's just the health and the strength. So, you know, I can't sit still.

[ 30 : 28 ] I have to be in shape. I need another challenge. I need another challenge. I ran one mile, now I'm doing 5K, and then I'm going to do a half marathon, and then I'm going to do a marathon, and then I'm going to do those obstacle courses, and I just have to be in shape.

And it becomes this craving that you live for. God is nowhere. He doesn't weigh anything. What he wants, what he's thinking, doesn't matter.

Maybe it's sexual passions and where you burn with this desire, and you just can't get enough.

Maybe it's gossip. gossip. Do people live for gossip?

Yeah. To be the center of attention. To have the juicy tidbits. To collect them, to pass them out, to have that feeling of being in on the secret.

Proverbs calls gossip choice morsels. They're the tasty bits that you hear. And maybe you're hooked on those things, collecting them and handing them out.

[ 31 : 35 ] It could be a thousand things. But the point is, it's all about living for something, wanting something, more than you want God.

More than you want to know him. More than you want to live for him. You have to have this. You crave it. You're addicted to it.

And none of it reaches past the horizon of this world. None of those things will get you, will meet you in eternity.

That's what life lived for worldly passions is about. That's the kind of life moralistic therapeutic deism wants you to live for. Just this world, this horizon.

it. But grace teaches us to say no to worldly passions, those worldly cravings. Because when the grace of our Lord Jesus, when he comes into your heart full of mercy for you, he shows you the true end of all of those things.

[ 32 : 50 ] Because you get so blind and confused, you've drank the Kool-Aid, you're absolutely convinced that this is what you have to live for, and Jesus Christ comes in and he shows you it's not worth it.

It won't last. Grace teaches us that God is better than that. Jesus Christ came to bring us to God, to introduce us, to connect us to God, that we could live with him.

And when we see him as he is in the face of Jesus Christ, all of those desires that we used to live for, they get all turned upside down and turned around and up backwards and actually they get put the way they're supposed to be.

And so now we want him. And grace invades our heart and he gives us new desires and through the whole of our life he's showing us that's a dead end.

There's no satisfaction there. There's only satisfaction in him. Have you been tasting it? Have you been seeing that in your life where you were living for this and you came to the end and just had gravel in your mouth.

[ 34 : 01 ] You're like I thought this was better but it's not. And you turn your heart again to Jesus and you want him. So grace shows us how temporary it is.

How temporary it is. Because for all of it it will end in death. And it will be useless.

It will be pointless. It will be godless. And you will step into an eternity. And the world that you live for, the only world you ever live for, will be forever behind you.

And there's no going back. And you will step into eternity to face a god you haven't cared about at all. You haven't lived for him at all.

All your best things will be behind you. Everything you wanted will be completely out of reach. And the only thing in front of you will be the one that you've shirked and ignored and said I don't want.  
[ 35 : 24 ] Grace saves us from that awful, those awful circumstances. Grace teaches us how futile this is.

And it prepares us for what is real and what is lasting. So how can I live for money? And for looks? And for popularity or freedom or sex?

When Jesus Christ has taken a hundred, a thousand poisoned arrows for my sake? When the Father loves me and calls me his child, when the Holy Spirit comes and lives with me and calls me his home, what is the world?

And what is everything in the world compared to him? And again and again, Jesus Christ by the gospel, by that bloody cross, is saying, behold your God.

He is the one that you want. He is supremely valuable. He is supremely desirable. And so here he is. And then when we are weak and when we sinned, does grace leave us on the side of the road all beaten up?

[ 36 : 45 ] No. Jesus Christ comes in and he picks us up. And he goes on with us. He's the long-suffering teacher.

And we are those wayward pupils. But you know what? He stays on it. He stays on his task. And he goes on preparing us and teaching us and leading us to the place where we will walk into eternity. We will be ready for it. We will be willing it, wanting it, and we will receive it. So, two questions to think about as we leave.

The first is, are you saying no? Are you saying no? The Christian life is not all about saying yes. There is a big part of it that is about saying no. No to ungodliness. No to those worldly passions. Are you saying no? And if you're not, I want you to check your heart.

[ 37 : 50 ] Where do you stand with God? And I can tell you, if you're not saying no, there is a disconnect between you and Jesus Christ. Maybe it's just a temporary one, Christian.

Maybe it's just a distance. but there is a disconnect. And you need to press into Jesus. And so are you saying no?

The second question is this. What do you this week, right now this week, need to be saying no to? what bit of ungodliness, what bit of small thoughts about God, no thoughts about God, pushing God out of your mind, what kind of worldly passion, wrong desire, idolatrous desire?

I'm asking, what this week do you need to say no to? Put your finger on it. Put your finger on it. And start saying no to it.

[ 38 : 55 ] And when you say no to it, at the same time say yes to Jesus. Yes to his grace.

There's enough in him. We sang about that. There's enough in him. And so say yes to him and say no to ungodliness and worldly passions.

So are you saying no? And what do you need to say no to? This week. Let's pray. Father, we need your teaching.

We need your instruction. So thank you that you come to us through the word and in the word and you teach us as a father teaches his children. You train us.

You instruct our minds. You clear away the cobwebs and the confusion and the darkness. And so we thank you for your word. we thank you for the clarity of it.

[ 39 : 56 ] For how it cuts through all of our lies and our confusion and our unbelief. And it gives us something solid to hold on to. It puts the light on the road in front of us and encourages us to walk in it.

So thank you for your word. Holy Spirit, thank you for your own, your ministry in us, that we would receive your word and in us we would find this part of us that wants to obey, that rises to walk after you.

So I pray that you would put strength in every stride and help us to follow hard after our good shepherd. Please send us on our way with your blessing.

thank you that we are your people and we know we have your smile. Help us to live in it, to maintain a good conscience, to maintain a close walk with you.

Pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.