

# (Genesis) 50 - Jacob at Shechem; or Worldliness, Its Character and Cure

by S. Lewis Johnson

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*The sermon discusses the concept of worldliness, its dangers, and the importance of being separate from the world in order to maintain a life of faith and spiritual growth.*

**Duration:** 54:22

**Scripture:** Genesis 34:1

**Topics:** "Worldliness", "Spiritual Identity"

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## Description

S. Lewis Johnson discusses Jacob's journey to Shechem, emphasizing the dangers of worldliness and its consequences. Jacob's decision to settle near the pagan city led to the tragic defilement of his daughter Dinah, illustrating the perils of compromising one's faith and values. The sermon highlights how Jacob's fear and deceit towards Esau resulted in a departure from his calling as a pilgrim of faith, ultimately leading to violence and moral failure within his family. Johnson warns against the allure of worldly values and the importance of maintaining a distinct identity as God's people. He calls for believers to seek a deeper relationship with God rather than succumbing to worldly ambitions and desires.

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## Transcript

We're studying, as you know, in the book of Genesis, and we are at chapter 34 in the exposition of that book. And our subject and the message that will follow later on is Jacob at Shechem, or whirliness, its character and cure. Jacob is now on his way back to Bethel.

He should have gone right to Bethel, but he did not. He was very fearful of his meeting with Esau, but that turned out much better than expected. However, it was evident that he acted with a little bit of deceit toward Esau, because he told him that he would follow him to Seir, to the southeast, but as soon as Esau passed over the horizon, he went to the north and west, the exact opposite direction.

Then he went down to Succoth, and there at Succoth he built himself a house. Now, the patriarchs were pilgrims and dwelt in tents, the scriptures like to remind us, because that is the kind of faith life to which God called them. Not to make a settled home and abode here, or too settled a home on this earth, because after all, we are heavenly citizens.

We are not citizens of the earth, ultimately. But Jacob made himself a house and made barns for his livestock, and then he moved from Succoth to Shechem, and there it is stated in the eighteenth verse of the preceding chapter that he camped before the city. So he's moving even closer to the pagan world that was about him, and as the separated servant of the Lord God, that's a very dangerous position to be in.

It's not surprising then that we read in the next chapter the thing that we read concerning Jacob's child, Dana. So in verse one we read, Now Dana, the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. And when Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her by force.

And he was deeply attracted to Dana, the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, Get me this young girl for a wife. Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dana, his daughter, but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in.

It's rather strange that Jacob did. We'll make a comment or two about that later. Then Hamor, the father of Shechem, went to Jacob to speak with him.

Now the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it, and the men were grieved and they were very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done. It's important that you notice that expression, has done a disgraceful thing in Israel. That indicates that the brothers knew something about their special separated position so far as the world was concerned.

They understood that this was a sin against the calling of the nation. Verse 8, But Hamor spoke with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage, and enter to marry with us.

Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. Thus you shall live with us, and the land shall be opened before you. Live and trade in it, and acquire property in it.

Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, If I find favor in your sight, then I will give whatever you say to me. Ask me ever so much bridal payment and gift, and I will give according as you say to me. But give me the girl in marriage.

The Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor with deceit and spoke to them, because he had defiled Dana their sister. And they said to him, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. You see they do recognize their position as a nation called of God for special service.

Only on this condition will we consent to you, if you will become like us, that every male of you be circumcised. Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people. But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go.

Now their words seemed reasonable to Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. That's rather striking, because of course what they were doing was using an ordinance of believing people and applying it to unbelieving people in order to deceive them. It was of course of an evil thing for the sons of Jacob in an evil situation, dealing with evil people in this way.

In a sense it was like saying be baptized and you will be one of us, apart from any spiritual, true spiritual relationship to the Lord God. And it's not surprising that their words seemed reasonable to Hamor and his father, and to Shechem, Hamor's son, because the world doesn't understand spiritual things. If you say to them be baptized and you're one of us, well that's, that makes sense to them.

The imperative of a spiritual relationship to the Lord God does not grip the world at all, for they do not understand. You should be in the audience this morning, and if you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, the Bible says, the natural man, that's what you are, the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him. Neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.

In fact, the very fact that you don't understand what I'm talking about may be the sign that you're not one of us. And it also may be the way the Holy Spirit would want to prick your conscience, so that you might really discover where you are and respond in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's not surprising this seemed very reasonable to men of the world, but it was very unreasonable in reality.

Verse 19, And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now he was more respected than all the household of his father. So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city, and spoke to the men of their city, saying, These men are friendly with us.

Therefore let us live in the land, and trade in it. For behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters in marriage, and give our daughters to them.

Only on this condition will the men consent to us, to live with us, to become one people, that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised. Will not their livestock and their property and all their animals be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will live with us. And you can see of course the spiritual frame of mind that these pagans have.

They are interested in the property and in the intermarriage. But the spiritual relationship with a people who have the Abrahamic promises does not grip them at all. And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised.

All who went out of the gate of his city. Now it came about on the third day when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares and killed every male. And they killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house and went forth.

Incidentally, that verse together with a previous one indicates that the relationship that Shechem had to Dinah was not simply that of rape, but was probably more like seduction. And Jacob's sons came upon the slain and looted the city because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys and that which was in the city and that which was in the field, and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that was in the houses.

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, you have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites. And my men, being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I shall be destroyed, I and my household. But they said, should he treat our sister as a harlot? May God bless this reading of his word.

The subject for this morning in the exposition of the book of Genesis is, as I mentioned in the reading of the scripture, Jacob at Shechem or whirliness, its character and cure. It is not so easy to define whirliness as we often think. The result is that the concept of unwhirliness is often ridiculed and we find ourselves sometimes a little speechless in defending the doctrine of whirliness.

Whirliness is often equated with narrowness of mind, straight laziness, a critical legalistic bent of mind. Those that think that the concept is a scriptural concept are often referred to caustically as bitter people, even as ugly people, self-righteous people. And in the media, often they are pictured as mean.

In fact, the word mean is often used. In kindly notes by the believers, they are put down as out of touch with the realities of the world. Yet the apostles speak of whirliness.

There is such a thing as whirliness. The apostle Paul in Romans chapter 12 and verse 1 and verse 2, after expounding the mercies of God, says, I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship, and do not be conformed to this world. So the apostle does know that there is such a thing as a doctrine of whirliness.

It is taught in the word of God, and we are warned against whirliness. It is a real danger that faces not only the church, but it faces individuals within the church. Church history will show you that whirliness has been one of the reasons why the church at certain periods in its history has been weak.

Some students of church history, for example, have pointed out the striking difference between the church of the first two centuries after the days of our Lord and the apostles, and then the church in the fourth and fifth centuries. Some have identified the causes. One man has traced the causes to three words, Constantine, patronage, and whirliness.

And one also, he goes on to say, can see it in congregations where sensational or other unworthy methods have been used to attract people. With the result that the ministry has robbed of power, prayer meetings and Bible classes yield to concerts, and we could add to bazaars and various other types of so-called churchly activity. The hungry sheep look up and are not fed by the Word of God, and the church becomes indifferent and lethargic and finally dead.

The Word of God is simply now a kind of little brief sermonette in which a certain principle drawn from some passage of the Bible is expounded. You can see it in individual Christian lives, of individuals who were converted, were full of vim and vigor spiritually in the early days of their Christian life. To use Paul's words in the epistle to the Galatians, they ran well, but something has hindered them, and in the meantime they have become dull and dead.

And criticized, and criticized others who are too narrow, narrow-minded, straight-laced, and all of the words used to describe the kind of life that is not very comfortable for them. Well, worldliness may be difficult to define, but it's rather easy to feel and see. And I mean feel in the sense of to understand when it is there.

It's an atmosphere. It's a kind of an innervating, poisoning, luring, deadening atmosphere in which churches often fall. Now when you look at Jacob's life, you can sense that it is likely that that is the reason why Jacob's life at this particular stage of his life is on a low level.

Penal had been a high-water mark. He had wrestled with the Lord God and had prevailed, the Scripture says. He had struggled, and then finally in that awful reserve of strength, the second person of the Trinity, as the angel of Jehovah, had touched his hip socket and dislocated it with a simple touch.

Jacob was lame forever afterwards. There was marked in his body the struggle with the Lord God and the defeat, which really was a spiritual victory, because Jacob, realizing the person with whom he was struggling, began now instead of resisting to cling. And when he was clinging, he was also, the Scripture is saying, weeping and praying for deliverance, for the blessing of the Lord God.

And finally when the Lord God said, let me go, because morning is coming, he said, I will not let you go until you bless me. And he had been blessed. It was a high-water mark.

But then Esau appeared over the horizon, and the faith and trust that characterized Jacob seemed to vanish with the appearance of his brother who had threatened him that he would kill him when he saw him. Well now after he has been a little deceitful with Esau, Jacob moves down to Succoth, and there he builds for himself a house. Now that, it seems, is out of harmony with the kind of life that the patriarchs lived.

In the New Testament, great stress is laid upon the fact that the patriarchs lived by faith and dwelt in tents. But now Jacob is building himself a house. He's building himself barns for his livestock.

He's going to take up a settled abode at one particular place. He buys land in the place where God has given him the whole of the land. And then we read, he comes down to Shechem and camps before the city of the unbelievers, right on the edge of the place, very similar to Lot who dwelt in Sodom and reaped also the results of that unhappy move.

So the prevailer, the one who prevailed with God, now has been prevailed against by the world. And spiritual leakage has constantly appeared in his life now until, well someone has said spiritual leakage always leads to spiritual loss. And so Jacob now attached to the world, near the hand, nearby the Gentiles, under their influence.

It's not surprising that we read in Genesis chapter 34 of this tragedy that happened to his family. In verse 1 and verse 2 of Genesis chapter 34 we read of the seduction of Dana. And it seems as you read this that this is directly related to his proximity to the city of Shechem.

Now Dana, the daughter of Leah whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. And when Shechem the son of Amor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her by force. Dana, from the chronology of this account, appears to have been a young girl of about thirteen to fifteen years of age, but mature.

In the east in those days the ladies matured much more quickly than they do in the west today. The results are what one might have expected. One of the commentators describes it very vividly.

He says, poor girl, a moth fluttering about a flame, a foolish fish nibbling at the bait. Was she lonely being the only girl? Did she want to show off some piece of jewelry or dress? Did she long for more admiration, a fascinating society, than she could find at home? Was there a secret drawing to the young men of the place? She went along a path that seemed to her girlish fancy ever so much more attractive than the dull routine of home. She took no heed to the warnings that may have been addressed to her, and it all ended as it has ended in thousands of cases since, in misery, ruin, and unutterable disgrace.

That is something that still happens today. That not only happens in the world, that's common in the world. It happens in evangelical circles.

It even happens in evangelical churches where the gospel is preached very strongly and powerfully. And it even happens in churches where the sovereign grace of God is proclaimed. It is sad.

It was a case of a poor young girl. She was received well in Shechem. In fact, the world always receives us well.

The world loves to have Christians around, so long as we keep quiet about Christ. They welcome us. But once we begin to speak about Jesus Christ, then things change.

The world crucified Christ. The world is at enmity with Christ. It is impossible for a true servant of Jesus Christ to find a home in the world.

If it hated him, it will hate us. If we give Christ a place of testimony for him, but if we clam up, if we say nothing, if we do not make our colors known and our stand plain and clear, the world welcomes us. Someone has said, what evil have I done that yonder whirling speaks so well of me? It's something for Christians to think about.

Now, I don't know, and the text does not tell us why Dana wanted to be in Shechem. Was the society there something that attracted her? Was it because of the men that were there? We are not told. You know, it is possible for Christians who are in evangelical churches to think like this.

They think, of course, about different matters. It's possible even to come to a place like the city of Dallas and say, incidentally, this is not an attempt to have you unite with Believer's Chapel. As you well know, we do not have a membership role, although we have membership.

It's always been interesting to me to see the principles by which people unite with churches. Some unite purely for social reasons. Some even say, they dress well at that particular church.

That's where I want to be. Other men will say, it's there I want to be because there are many business contacts that I could make with nice people who will help me. Still others come and say, I'm interested in a church in which my children may have friends, or in which there may be fellowship, meetings, dinners, concerts.

I'm interested in a church in which there's a strong emphasis on music. Very rarely have I ever heard anyone say to me, I would like to know what church follows the teaching of the Word of God most closely. That's the church I would like to become a part of.

That's rather interesting to me because it would seem to me that that would be the basis upon which we would want to be in a Christian fellowship. And I know that if I had children, I would think, my children are grown, I do have children, but if I were in the condition in which I had young children, I would want to say, I would want to be the kind of person who would say, where is the Word of God proclaimed? Where are the principles of the Word of God followed insofar as we are able? And then I wouldn't say to my children, would you like to go there? I'd say, that's where we're going. And they would go.

That's the way you ought to choose a church. You should seek from the Word of God to discover just exactly what the Word of God says about a local church and seek to be in as close conformity to that as

possible. What others think and what your children think, of all things, that's not really of great significance.

That same principle is the principle that we found here. We often act on worldly principles. Our decisions are made on worldly principles.

Donna probably was fascinated by the city of Shechem. She probably was fascinated by the males there. She was at that age.

Shechem seduced her. Perhaps it was rape. The Bible does not make that very plain because he took her home.

But one thing you can be sure about as you look at this, you will notice that the Scriptures say that he humbled her. He defiled her. And in that, you can see the stark biblical view of unchastity.

The Bible has some very strong words to say about unchastity. And you can see, while this is not a lecture on that particular doctrine here in Genesis chapter 34, it's evident that that's the attitude that Holy Scripture gives to unchastity. It was the old, old story of, on the one hand, a young man of rank, wealth, unbriddled appetite, and on the other, beauty, weakness, dallying with temptation.

Whose fault was it? Well, of course, it was Shechem's fault. And of course, it was Donna's fault. But it was also Jacob's fault.

Jacob should never have been near that city. He should have been in Bethel. It's not surprising that that happened here.

And I would imagine that Jacob forever reproached himself because of this. And later on in the 49th chapter, he speaks about Simeon and Levi and speaks about the violent deed that was brought about by virtue of this whole situation. Well, let me very quickly run through the remainder of the chapter.

One thing you can say that seems to be true, in spite of the fact that this was a seduction and perhaps a rape, it also was a love story. Because it's clear that Shechem was deeply attracted to Donna. He said that his soul clung to her.

He loved the girl. He spoke to her heart, spoke tenderly to her. And he asked his father to get the young girl for a wife for him.

And the result was that Hamor approached Jacob and his sons and sought to get them to intermarry with them. He proposed intermarriage in order that the two people might be united. But of course, this was a crime against the calling of Israel.

They were called to be separate from the world. They were selected out of the world. They were given a holy calling and great promises, and they were to be different.

For they had come to know the Lord God. That's incidentally the nature of the church of Jesus Christ. That is exactly what we are.

We are called out of the world. We are in the world, but we are not of the world. We are not motivated by the world's values, by the world's aims, by the world's goals.

We are not, our lives are not operated according to the principles by which the world operates. We are of the Lord. Our citizenship is in heaven.

We are different. Now Shechem didn't understand that. Hamor did not understand it as well.

And when they proposed intermarriage and unity, they were proposing something that was a crime against the calling of Israel as a nation. Now when the sons of Jacob heard about it, they were not so generous as Hamor and Shechem. And they realized that since they were in the minority, the only way in which they might get the best of this community by which Jacob was camped was by deceit.

Now they were right on one thing. They were right in believing that Israel should not unite with the Shechemites. And they were also right in condemning the act of Shechem.

But of course they were wrong in the way that they carried it out. It is a case of two extremes. And so after the offer of marriage and union by Shechem's father and Shechem, they make a counteroffer.

And their counteroffer is, and in this of course they were wrong, for they took a religious right and made it the means by which they would ultimately murder the men of that city. They said, if you will be circumcised, all of the males circumcised, then we will unite with you. We'll take your daughters for ourselves.

We'll live with you and we'll become one people. But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go. They were right, but they were also wrong.

One might ask at this point, how is it possible for them to fool the Shechemites so? Perhaps it was for this reason. Circumcision was not simply a Jewish practice or an Israelitish practice. It was also practiced among other peoples at that time, and it signified that a person had reached marriageable status.

And so consequently, the proposal of this to the men of the city might well have been understood as simply a cultural thing. But at any rate, we do read that they accepted the terms. Shechem, very quickly.

We read in verse 18, now the words seem reasonable to Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. Of course they were reasonable to them, for they were men who did not understand spiritual things at all. And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter.

And so he and his father then went to the city gate and persuaded the men of the city to have the males circumcised in order that they might unite with the Israelites and become one people. It was a very human kind of thing. And the covenantal sign of circumcision, marking them out as the children of Abraham, is used carnally in order to unite people who have no real inner harmony at all.

And then follows the treachery of the sons of Jacob. This is a crime that Jacob never forgot. And when he prophesied concerning the future of the sons, he singled out Simeon and Levi for special mention of the violence that they committed upon this occasion.

We read in verse 25 and 26, now it came about on the third day when they were in pain. Crudely performed circumcision could incapacitate a man. And they evidently were incapacitated, all of the males, and it was possible for the two men, Simeon and Levi, to come into that small village.

No doubt it was a small village, and murder all of the men of the village. And then the other brothers came also and looted the city because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks, their herds, their

donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which is in the field.

They captured it all. They looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, and everything that was in their houses. They made a total catastrophe of the city of Shechem.

Jacob, all this time so far as the record goes, has been silent. He hasn't said a word. Now he speaks.

And notice how he speaks. It's very revealing. He says, You've brought trouble on me.

You've made me odious among the inhabitants of the land. My men are few in number, and they'll gather together against me and they'll attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household. What was his real motive in saying, You've brought trouble on me.

You've made me odious among the inhabitants of the land. Was it because he felt that this would be dishonoring to the Lord God? No. He's interested in himself.

Jacob has not recovered yet. Did you notice the first person? He says, You've brought trouble on me. He said, My men are few in number.

They will gather together against me and attack me and I shall be destroyed, I and my household. He doesn't say anything about the sin of camping near the city of Shechem. He doesn't say anything about the fact that I'm to blame, perhaps, for what has happened.

He has no repentance so far as we can tell, no regret, no remorse for what has happened. He has no sense even of God's promises to him and how this action is a contradiction of that. But on the contrary, the only thing he can speak about is Jacob.

Jacob, whose name has now become Israel, God's fighter, is living like Jacob again. No sense of the divine blessing and the divine calling. It's a sad fact but it's true that people who live on the borderland of the church and the world are never happy.

Do you know why? Because the world attacks them and the church does too. In Great Britain, they have a part of Great Britain that is called the borders. The Scots speak of it as the borders and the English speak of it as the borders.

It's in the northern part of England where Scotland and England touch. Scotland and England have fought constantly. There's only one good thing about the fights over there and that is the southerners generally defeated the Yankees.

The English have generally defeated the Scots. But they call that the borders, down by the border. It's the border for the Scots, it's the border for the English, it's the border country, the borders.

They just use the term the borders. And the people who live in the borders are subject to the attacks of the English and they are subject to the attacks of the Scots. They're on the way.

And so they've suffered through the years from both north and south. The man who has one foot in the church of Jesus Christ and one foot in the world can never be happy. He is subject to attacks from the church and from the world.

Now the sons of Jacob have the last word. Should he treat our sister as a harlot? Now it might seem that that's an ideal thing to say, but just remember this, that Hamor and Shechem have agreed that what they have done may be sealed by marriage and furthermore they were willing to give the Israelites anything that they ask. And so what we have here is the extreme, two extremes really, fearfulness on the part of Jacob and fury on the part of Jacob's sons.

Well let me say a few final words. The major lesson of Genesis chapter 34, if we were to try to sum it up, is the peril of degeneration into worldliness and the violent wrongs that occur as a result of it. Jacob, you see, as we said a moment ago, has become Jacob again.

The Bible speaks of the world in several different ways. The Bible speaks of the world as, well, of the physical world, planet earth we might say. The Bible also when it speaks of the world speaks of the world of men.

They are called the world. And then the Bible speaks of the world in the sense of the spirit of the age. The world system and the things that dominate it, the kinds of goals, the kinds of values that the world possesses, that's called the world.

And we are told not to love the world. And in that sense there is a great deal of admonition in the word of God against the world. Listen to what John says in his first epistle verse 15 and 16 of the second chapter.

He says, do not love the world, not the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life is not from the Father, but is of the world.

So what is the world like? Well, the world is characterized by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. Does that remind you of anything? Well, I'm sure it reminds you of the fall in the Garden of Eden. For it was there that we read in the third chapter, this very book of Genesis, that when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, the lust of the flesh, and that it was a delight to the eyes, the lust of the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, the pride of life.

And as a result, she fell. Now she had already fallen in heart, but in the actual falling, she took of the fruit and died. Those three lusts are characteristic of the world.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. Now, there's nothing wrong with desire. Something that's just a desire may be our servant, but a lust is a desire that has become our master.

The lust of the flesh, means to be dominated by your physical appetites. Hunger, thirst, the need for sleep, the desire for sex, or for physical exercise. Obviously, physical appetites are wholesome, necessarily part of us.

And generally, they're meant to be satisfied. But we live in an age in which eating and drinking and the great sexual experience are presented to us as goals in themselves. People bow down and worship them.

They don't eat to live, they live to eat, or to copulate. Instead of accepting food and the other blessings of life as gifts of God, they make the principal goal in their life often, the pleasures of an Epicurean palate. And if that's true, then you can say that person is a worldly person.

C.S. Lewis, in one of his works, points out, to lust for food does not mean merely to overeat. It can equally well manifest itself in the spirit of the dilettante, who discriminates against any food that offends the susceptibilities of his finely tuned palate. In the same way, any bodily appetite for sleep, for physical recreation, yes, jogging.

Jogging. That's right. It can be lust of the flesh.

Or for sex becomes a bodily lust at the point where to satisfy them interferes with the, in the smallest degree, with serving and glorifying Jesus Christ. It is possible. It is very possible.

In fact, it is likely to have happened many times that the desire for physical recreation for jogging is worldly. Because there is no question but that in the lives of some, it has interfered with the place of Jesus Christ in the life of the individual. Often it's not recognized, but nevertheless it's sadly true.

I was reading a book this week in which there was an interesting story in it because I know that it's so true to life. Speaking about the lust of the eyes, that desire for things that are beautiful. Oh, that means this morning I mentioned this and someone came up to me and said, Dr. Johnson, I agreed with everything you said until you said this.

The lust of the eyes. Beauty. You can conceive of beauty in the terms of a Maserati.

That's where he objected. He said it with a smile on his face because he didn't mean it. He was joking, but nevertheless it is true.

It is possible for people to have such a love for an automobile that it's a sin. A black tulip or an original Picasso. There's nothing wrong with liking a beautiful automobile or a beautiful picture or loving flowers, but the passion to possess and hoard beauty can become a lust that destroys the Christian living of an individual.

This author went on to say that he had lunch with a Chinese businessman not long ago who was in his sixties. This man had a beautiful house. It was so beautiful he called it breathtakingly beautiful.

A tree whose leaves were semi-precious stones dominated the foyer. They sat down in the dining room and they ate with not silver, gold utensils. He said his host revealed a profound knowledge of biblical doctrine.

Do you know what his ambition was? His ambition was to have enough money to preach the gospel without being a burden to anyone. His spiritual activity at the time was nothing and his heart was as dry as dust. That was a worldly man.

That was a worldly man who actually used his worldly activities in order to speak spiritually about some spiritual goal that he had. Now when we talk about worldliness, we're not talking about separation from the world in the sense of isolation. Christians are not to be isolated from the world.

They are in the world. Now we are not of the world. Our desires, our tastes, our goals, our values are totally different if we follow scripture.

But we are in the world and we are sent into the world for a specific task of being a witness and a testimony to the world. So we're not talking about separation in the sense of isolation. We have to be identified with the world in which we are.

But we are talking about separation from the goals, from the values, from the kinds of activities that dominate worldly living. Monasteries and abbeys are monuments to ascetic isolation. We are not suggesting that believers' chapels should become a monastery or any kind of abbey, of which there are too many in ruins today.

But we are suggesting that there should be something different about a Christian wherever he goes. Now Jeremiah has an interesting word. He says, Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek it not.

What's he talking about? Well, he's talking about the pride of life. Ambition. What's wrong with ambition? Please, Dr. Johnson, don't tell us there's anything wrong with ambition.

Isn't it important that we excel? Isn't it important that we really reach the top of our profession? As an insurance man, should I not be the best insurance man that I possibly can be? As a lawyer, should not I have a brilliant legal mind and the experience to go with it, to be the kind of man who stands out in his profession? As a real estate man, should I not be the best in the business, a doctor, whatever it may be, even a preacher? Should I not be the best preacher, the finest teacher of the Word of God that I can possibly be? Ambition. Surely there's nothing wrong with ambition. You know where ambition comes from, by the way? It comes from the Latin word *ambio*, which means to kind of move around, to walk around.

It means, it refers to a circuitous method. In fact, ambition is perfectly all right so long it is ambition directed toward a specific task that glorifies God, that is in the interests of the Lord God. But the endeavor to obtain some great thing for personal advantage, ah, that's different.

If my ambition to be the finest insurance man is for the glory of God and not for the glory of Lewis Johnson, that may be different. And further, if it does not mean that God does not have second place in my life, but if it means that really what I'm talking about is in order that I might be known as the best lawyer or the best doctor or the finest insurance man, and if it also means that the Lord God has second place in my life, then ambition is not only wrong, it's deadly. Deadly.

Deadly for you and deadly for your family and deadly for your children sitting by you. It's pride and self-exaltation under the good name of ambition. It's folly.

That's what it is. It's folly. It's folly because in the first place, what you're aiming for is never really attained.

You say, well, if I can just, I don't want to make a million. I've got a friend who wants to make a million. I just want a half a million.

If I can just make a half a million and have it all laid aside, that's all I want. Have you ever noticed men who want a half a million? There was a time when I wanted a half a million. In fact, I wanted more than that.

I wasn't satisfied with a half a million. I wanted to be the best insurance man and also the wealthiest. But I've noticed this about us, us men.

When we get the half million, that's not enough. It's a million. And when we get that, it's not enough.

In fact, it becomes a game. It's kind of a test, you know, and that's what makes it exciting. It's not really the money we say.

It's the thrill of the activity. It's the competition. It's exciting.

And so we spend all of our activities. In the meantime, the interests of the Lord God are wasted. And finally, the effects so touch us that we cannot do the things that we ought to do.

We cannot. Our minds have become blinded. Our wills have become rebellious and blunted and dead.

And consequently, we cannot even change. We chase the horizon and we think we've caught it and there's another one. We try to jump off our own shatter and there it is with us.

Look at Alexander, one of the greatest illustrations of this. He conquered the whole world and he said, got sat down and cried, there are no more worlds to conquer. You can never be satisfied.

You can never attain what you're seeking for. And furthermore, if you did attain it, it would ruin your soul. Think of a man like Hitler, Napoleon Bonaparte.

Bonaparte started as a poor little Corsican boy, simple-minded, simple goals. The closer he came to doing what he hoped to do, and that was to control the world, the more of a madman he became. And Hitler, who cannot remember Hitler.

You see, the character of a man worsens the more he obtains the things of this world. It's always true. As a matter of fact, most men who attain great wealth attain it accidentally.

They look back and say, I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. It was the providence of God, really. Another thing, if you've got some great ambition, when you don't get it, there's great sorrow.

There's only one kind of aspiration that is really worthwhile, and that's the aspiration the psalmist speaks about in Psalm 42. This is what he says about his own ambition. As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for thee, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Goethe, a remarkable man, a man noted for presence of mind, with an equable mind. The kind of person that if you looked at, though you knew if you were a Christian he was not a Christian, an enemy of Christianity and reality, he said when he reached, I think, the age of 80, he said, there has never been one moment in my life when I have had repose.

Men don't have repose in seeking the things of the world. So the sinfulness of ambition. Have you heard people talk about holy ambition? That's like talking about holy adultery.

Ambition in which the aim is to build up myself is not holy, it's unholy. There's no such thing as holy ambition in that sense. There's no such thing as holy pride.

Oh, the blessedness of those that are free from the selfishness that characterizes a great deal of what is called ambition. May God give us the ambition to possess the one thing that is worthwhile, and that's the Lord God. As the heart pants after the water brooks, so my soul pants for thee, O God.

Give me that ambition. Give me that gold. Give me that gold.

And I'll be happy. And not only will I be happy, but my children will be happy too. And the chances are that my grandchildren will also be affected by it.

So my dear Christian friends in Believers Chapel, let me as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ warn and admonish you in the sense of Scripture. Those children sitting by your side, under your care, their

lives are often ultimately dependent upon your own attitude to the things of the Lord God. May He deliver you from worldliness, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

And may you give yourself to seeking the face of the Lord God. If you're here and you have never believed in Jesus Christ, well, your first responsibility is to look after the cross where the blood was shed that you may have the forgiveness of sins and have the assurance of everlasting life. Come to Christ.

Put your trust in Him. Turn to Him who shed His blood that sinners might live and be delivered from the sins of the flesh, of the eyes, the pride of life, worldliness. May God speak to your heart.

Shall we stand for the benediction? Father, we are grateful to Thee for the words of admonition that come to each of us, parents and children, from Holy Scripture. Deliver us, Lord, from worldliness. Deliver us from isolation.

Enable us to move in the world as genuine lights whose holy ambition is for the face and the possession of our great God who loved us and gave the Son of God as a sacrifice for sinners. How wonderful it is, Lord, to belong to the family of God. And if there are some here who do not, O God, work in their hearts, draw them to Jesus Christ and the atoning sacrifice.

May the grace and mercy and peace of our triune God go with us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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