

## Vacuums

Matthew 12:43-45 - *"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."*

According to the ancient philosopher Aristotle, "Nature abhors a vacuum." Aristotle based his conclusion on the observation that nature requires every space to be filled with something, even if that something is colorless, odorless air.

The same principle is at work in our spiritual lives. When we begin to be convicted of sin, purging our lives of sin immediately comes to mind. We put forth our best effort to defeat our worst habits. But efforts to get rid of unclean thoughts, attitudes, and desires tend to fail because getting rid of one creates a vacuum in our lives. As soon as we empty ourselves of one vice, others take advantage and move in to take its place, and we end up just as bad or worse than when we started.

Thinking about vacuums helps us to understand the importance of what Paul was saying to the Ephesians when he prayed that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith and that they would "know the love of Christ that they may be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:19).

The only permanent solution to the problem of sin in our lives is to replace it with spiritual blessings and good works which fill the vacuum. The more we are filled with these things, the less room there is for evil.

## Parking Lot

Did you hear about the church that didn't have enough room for parking? Fortunately, it was located right next to a store that was closed on Sundays, so a church member asked the store owner if they could overflow into his parking lot. "No problem," he said. "You can use it 51 weeks out of the year. On the 52nd week, though, it will be chained off." The man was grateful, but asked curiously, "What happens that week?" The store owner smiled, "Nothing. I just want you to remember that it's not your parking lot."

It's easy to take for granted all the material and spiritual blessings that God has given us. That's why we need to stop and remember that Scripture says the true owner of all we possess is God: "All that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all" (1Chron. 29:11). Even our bodies do not belong to us: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price" (1Cor. 6:19-20).

As 1Timothy 6:17 reminds us: "God ... gives us richly all things to enjoy." We are so abundantly blessed with good things. Let's never take our Father for granted, but use wisely and gratefully all that He has given us. God gives blessings to us so we can give glory to Him.

## Poison Ivy

Poison ivy looks like many harmless plants, and it keeps company with some beautiful ones. One gardener couldn't figure out why she got poison ivy whenever she pruned her roses. She later discovered that a poison ivy vine was taking advantage of the tender loving care she gave to her rosebush.

Some people are like toxic plants. They look harmless, and they blend in with people who, like roses, are fragrant and beautiful. Simon the sorcerer fit this description. He followed Philip and was baptized, but then he asked to buy the ability to lay hands on people so they

could receive the Holy Spirit. Peter was appalled at his request and urged him to repent (Acts 8:22).

Sometimes people use the favorable environment of a healthy church as a network for selfish purposes. Like poison ivy among roses, they cause much misery. Like Simon, anyone who does this needs to repent, and everyone else needs to avoid contact with such a person. Spiritual look-alikes appear good but their “fruit” is toxic.

### **David’s Questions**

An African proverb states, “The one who asks questions doesn’t lose his way.” That concept can be helpful as we consider David’s questions in the Psalms. He was clearly seeking God’s guidance for the way he should go. Consider some of the questions he asked:

“O Lord—how long?” (6:3). A question of eagerness to see God’s plan accomplished.

“What is man that You are mindful of him?” (8:4). A question of awe that God even cares about sinful man.

“Why do You hide in times of trouble?” (10:1). A question that reveals a lonely longing for God’s presence.

“Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?” (15:1). The ultimate question of who may live with God.

David had some tough questions for God. He had discovered what it was like to lose his way when he excluded God and followed his own sinful path. But as he penned the Psalms, he was a man in search of godliness, which meant he probed God’s mind about difficult subjects.

Questions. Like David, you have them. Keep asking. Then, through faith in God’s Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, listen as He leads you in His way. It’s good to have questions, but it’s even better to search for and accept God’s answers.

### **Forgetting Forgiveness**

A man was filling out a job application when he came to the question “Have you ever been arrested?” He wrote, “No.” The next question, intended for people who had answered “Yes” to the previous question, was “Why?” The applicant answered it anyway: “I never got caught.” He evidently knew he was guilty of plenty!

So was the apostle Paul. He knew he had personally done wrong and sinned against God. He wrote, “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man” (1Tim. 1:13). He even called himself the “chief” of sinners (v.15).

We too were once separated from the Lord because of our sin and were considered His enemies (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). But when we obeyed the gospel of Christ, He cleansed us and made us new. Those who have served the Lord for many years may have the tendency to forget what they’ve been rescued from and forgiven of. Remembering past and current failures and giving praise to God for forgiveness will help prevent one from coming across as “holier-than-thou” to people who don’t yet know salvation. The truth is we’ve all been guilty of plenty, and God deserves the glory for His mercy toward us. Beware lest the blessing of being cleansed from sin turn into the curse of self-righteousness. Grace is everything to those who deserved nothing.