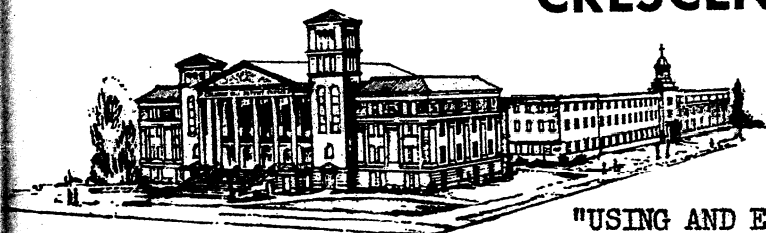


CRESCENT HILL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERMONS



"USING AND ENJOYING"

Sunday Morning, December 4, 1960
John R. Claypool

Down through the centuries there have been any number of diagnoses of what is wrong with our world. Some are quite superficial, scratching only the surface; others are profound and incisive. And I think it is safe to say that no one formula embodies the whole truth. However, one of the most provocative ones I have ever seen was spoken some fifteen hundred years ago by the great bishop of Hippo, St. Augustine. He put it in striking form: "The thing that is wrong with the world is this; men use that which they should enjoy and enjoy that which they should use." Now on first hearing this may sound like so much "double talk," just a play on words. But if you will pause to reflect upon them, their truth becomes clear.

Let me define the terms more clearly. The verb "use" has to do with means. When I "use" something, I have a purpose in mind beyond the immediate instrument. There is an ulterior motive, a secondary reason. I look beyond the object to some other goal. On the other hand, the verb "enjoy" has to do with ends. To "enjoy" something is to stop right there, to find full meaning in the object itself. There is no "looking beyond," no ulterior motive, no secondary purpose. Therefore, we can conclude that the verb "use" has to do with means, the verb "enjoy" has to do with ends. Furthermore, the powers to use and enjoy are exercised within a three-dimensional framework. There is one's relation to God, one's relation to man, and one's relation to things. Thus, to summarize, we use and enjoy in relation to three levels of reality—God—man—things.

With this clarification, let me repeat the dictum of St. Augustine: "The thing that is wrong with the world is this: men use that which they should enjoy and enjoy that which they should use." This is actually a double-barreled indictment.

First, he says we "use that which we should enjoy." From our frame of reference, it is obvious that God and man are subjects of ultimate value, and thus he is referring to them. It sounds strange to imply that men "use" God, but this is sadly the case. As a minister, I have a good opportunity to see men's spiritual lives from a close perspective. And quite often I realize that their religion is just another avenue of self-advancement. Their prayers are absolutely centered in themselves—"God give me this"; "give me that"; "protect me"; "help me"; "comfort me." A typed version of their prayers would resemble a picket fence, because the capital "I's" would be so dominant. This is not altogether the individual's fault. In our modern high-pressure society, there is a real tendency to market religion in selfish terms. You sell it just like you sell everything else—with an appeal to the ego, by emphasizing the values to be received by the convert. "Peace of mind" is dangled before a distraught age; poise is promised to a nervous generation; a sense of security is held forth in an admittedly insecure era. Pretty soon God is looked on as a means toward gaining our own desires. A new book on prayer has these words on the cover: "scientific proof that prayer can bring you what you

want." And so, by the very tenor of modern religion we are tempted to "use" God, to make Him a tool in our hands serving no better purpose than to satisfy our whims.

If you are even faintly familiar with the Christian religion, you know that this attitude is categorically in error. God is an end in Himself; He is the highest Value. As the Westminster Confession says, man's chief end is "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Great benefit does accrue to the one who properly relates himself to God, but this must be a secondary motive for religious endeavor. Any time we reduce our religion to purely selfish purposes, we have contradicted the whole structure of Reality. Augustine's ancient diagnosis is as relevant to our modern situation as the words of Reinhold Niebuhr.

But if there is a tendency to "use" God, there is a greater tendency to "use" our fellow man. One of the most familiar notes of history is "man's inhumanity to man." All about us is that sinister practice of taking the life of a human being and manipulating it to serve a selfish purpose. I have seen men "use" women, and women "use" men. I have seen parents "use" children, and children "use" parents. I have seen employer "use" employee, one race "use" another race, one nation "use" other nations. And the whole process is evil in its most vicious form. Quite often it exists in the most respectable surroundings. We make a mistake in limiting sin to the gross physical acts; some of its most powerful expressions may be found in socially accepted people.

I went to high school with a young man who is now a young surgeon in a southern city. He is a bachelor and quite prominent in the social life of the city. I ran into him a few years ago and we had lunch together. During the conversation he spoke rather boastingly of his conquests with the ladies. He said with a cynical smile: "I look on everything I give to a girl not as a gift, but as an investment. I always get my money's worth." Here was as sinful an attitude as you could find—not from a derelict or a bum, but from one who ranked high in the social register.

Yes, mark this down and underline it for emphasis: there is no greater wrong than to use people. To take individuals who have dignity and worth in their own right and twist them to suit one's self is as serious a sin as one can commit. It is an affront to them and to the God in whose image they are made. It is safe to say that if this one wrong could be eliminated, you would hardly recognize our world, for it would be immeasurably better. Therefore the first indictment is true: "men use that which they should enjoy."

But there is the second mistake: "men enjoy that which they should use." Here again the obvious reference in our framework of relationships is to the world of things. In short, men set up material objects as absolute ends in themselves. This is a particular problem to modern Americans, because of our unprecedented prosperity. The phrase "rat race" is familiar to us, and we understand pretty much what it means: the rush for things, for sportscars, boats, sophisticated vacations, town houses and country estates. And sadly enough, this more and more characterizes our culture. I saw a cartoon not long ago in the New Yorker. The surrounding was an ultra-modern apartment—raised fireplace, suspended staircase, Danish furniture. The man, nattily dressed with a cocktail jigger in his hand was angrily exclaiming, "All right, all right; so Albert Schweitzer has gotten out of the rat race; name me one more!" And it would be hard to do, for we all participate, we are all tinged with it. As one young man said: "We're not involved in materialism; we're trapped—hopelessly, helplessly trapped."

Now let me make clear that things are not inherently bad. There is no automatic sin to being rich or possessing the objects of this world. The point is one's attitude toward things. As means to higher ends, things are indispensable. They are the tools by which we fulfill our true destiny. They only become evil when we set them up as ends and try to extract from them the ultimate meaning of life. When will we ever recognize that life at its deepest level is profoundly personal? We human beings are social by nature and therefore social in need. We can only realize ourselves in relation to and in fellowship with other people. We who are personal can never fulfill our deepest needs in relation to a thing. Over and over I have seen people set up things as an ultimate goal, attain them, and then experience the emptiness of mere material possession.

I went one day to call on a church member who had just built a fifty thousand dollar home. It was magnificent, and I made the statement that it must be a great source of joy to them. To my utter surprise, the wife burst into tears. Then she began to describe the lack of love and warmth that characterized the family. And with a voice that was strained with emotion, she said, "What's a new home, really? Brother John, four walls cannot love, a house cannot care." And as I stood there on wall-to-wall carpeting, surrounded by mahogany paneling, I realized that here in the midst of everything, there was nothing; for things are not enough to answer our deepest needs. Reality at its deepest level is profoundly personal, and we fulfill ourselves not in relation to things, but in relation to people. One of the greatest mistakes of the sixties is our effort "to enjoy that which we should use."

Therefore, I am inclined to agree with St. Augustine. He spoke these words many centuries ago, but they "speak" to today with relevant force. "The thing that is wrong with our world is this: we use that which we should enjoy (God and other people), and we enjoy that which we should use (things)."

And, I wonder, if this is what is wrong with the world, could it be that this is what is wrong with you...?