

THE THREE P'S

*Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*
(Ecclesiastes 4:12)

Introduction

I grew up in what has been described as the “Depression/World War II” generation. In 1932 we moved to a small acreage we called “The Farm” in order to grow our own food. Sometimes I had the responsibility to milk the cows, the old fashioned way, with a metal bucket and seated on a milk stool next to the cow. There were two ways to make a milk stool. One was quick and easy: just nail two boards together like a “T” and sit on it—but you “wobbled”. The other way was harder: make a seat and put three legs under it. It took longer to make the *three* legged stool, but you were more apt to finish safely!

Later, as a Navigator in the Army Air Corps (later known as the Air Force) during WWII, we learned to find three “points” to give us a “fix” or location. Using one point gave us a single line on the chart. Two gave us an “X” on the line that could be far off the actual location.

But utilizing *three* points usually gave us a small triangle close to our actual position. Or so we hoped!

Lots of things in life seem to be like that. In government, we have found that the three branches of “legislative”, “executive” and “judicial”, produce a much more reliable and stable government, than simply concentrating on one powerful head.

It is certainly true in the Bible. Biblical triplets (beginning with the concept of the Trinity) become readily apparent when we are searching for them. And what a sense of relief it is to find God giving me assurance of reliable Biblical themes in the form of

these “*three cord strands*” that often show me where I am and the way I am to go.

Set forth below is one of these Biblical Trilogies. I call it “*The Three P’s*”. Following its trail through the Bible shows how this one great theme has become a bedrock principle throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

And, it all begins with the first two people who received God’s Original Blessing in the Garden of Eden.

I. In the Beginning (Genesis 1)

God blessed them

God blessed them and said to them,

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it.

They will be yours for food.”

(Genesis 1:28-29)

God’s first act after He created the first man and woman was to bless them. Then God did one more marvelous thing. He entrusted us with His creation. He made us His stewards and placed us in charge of His world. As tools to carry out our trust, He gave us three wonderful gifts: ***Pleasure, Possessions and Position***. ***Pleasure***, including the fulfillment of marital sex and children; ***Possessions*** to use and enjoy; and ***Position*** as the rulers of what God has entrusted to us as His subjects.

As long as we use these three gifts to glorify God and to help others as well as ourselves, they would be a great blessing to us and to all mankind. There was only one condition: we must obey God.

A basic issue in life is whether we are going to seek and obey God's will, or try and use our own will. Every person, in every place and time must make this same choice. If we choose our own will, we may get short-term gratification, but we get long term problems for ourselves and others, and we lose eternal life. If we choose God's will, we may have some short-term difficulties, but we get long term benefits including the gift of eternal life.

And, when we obey God and accept His will for our use of His three gifts, they are blessings to us and to those around us. But they can become a curse if we yield to temptation and try and live in accordance with our self-centered will!

II. Eve (and Adam) (Genesis 3)

Be like God

God gave Adam a virtual free reign in the original paradise we call the Garden of Eden. The single exception was His command not to “*eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...*”, under pain of death.

In Genesis 3:1-5 Satan tempts Eve and falsely tells her that not only will she not die, but also that her eyes will be opened and she will “*be like God*”!

Eve takes the bait. She decides to substitute her own will for God's command and yield to the physical *Pleasure* of food; the eye pleasing excitement of claiming something as her *Possession*; and the **Position** she thought wisdom would bring. And Adam meekly follows along.

Genesis 3:6 records their mutiny in these words:

*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it .
She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

And so, this original couple turned away from God. They decided to try and run their own lives. To use the *Pleasure, Possessions and Position* God had entrusted to them to glorify and serve themselves, rather than obeying God .

As a result, they broke their relationship with their Creator and became lost. And just as children follow in their parents' footsteps, all their descendants became lost as well.

From birth, each generation was alienated from God—frightened, floundering, fighting, seeking meaning but not finding it, as they “*corrupted their ways*”. (Genesis 6:11-13)

Finally, God loses patience and visits a giant flood on the earth which destroys all mankind except Noah and his family. God blesses Noah and his sons and repeats His command, “*Be fruitful and fill the earth*”. (Genesis 9:1)

At first the clans of Noah and their descendants obey God and “*spread out over the earth*” (Genesis 10:32). But then mankind's desire to use God's gifts of *Pleasure, Possessions and Position* for themselves, rears its ugly head again, as shown in our next example.

III. The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

Not be scattered

The story of the Tower of Babel reads as if it could take place today.

As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

(Genesis 11:2-4)

Even though these events took place thousands of years ago, every generation, including ours, seems destined to repeat the process! We seek the **Pleasure** of an easy place to live; the satisfaction we feel as we build buildings and cities that we claim as our **Possessions**; and the **Position** we can enjoy with a sense of pride and self-glorification as we see our name paraded with pride on our institutions and buildings.

But God was still in control and showed His displeasure that His people refused to “scatter”. Genesis 11:4-6 concludes:

*But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower
that the men were building.
The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language
they have begun to do this,
then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.
Come, let us go down and confuse their language
so they will not understand each other.”
So the Lord scattered them from there all over the earth...*

God’s command that we *scatter* across the earth became evident again in the New Testament with Jesus’ final Commission to His followers recorded in Matthew 28:19:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...

In Acts 8:1 we see God’s hand causing this to happen:

*On that day a great persecution broke out
against the church at Jerusalem,
and all except the apostles were scattered
throughout Judea and Samaria.*

Biblical history, including our next example, makes it clear that God’s Blessings and the Satan’s Temptations have been happening since time began. And it seems equally clear that, left on our own, most of us will try to use His blessings of **Pleasure**, **Possessions** and **Position** primarily for own benefit.

IV. Solomon (Ecclesiastes 2)

Chasing the Wind

King Solomon probably had as much or more ***Pleasure, Possessions and Position*** as any person in history. Yet, in writing Ecclesiastes toward the close of his life, Solomon speaks nine times of, “*chasing the wind!*”

Did you ever think of chasing the wind and trying to catch it? I believe Solomon was simply saying, “I spent my life chasing things I could not catch!” When we read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, we can hear the cry of futility voiced by this renowned, wealthy and wise king because he finally concluded he had been “*chasing the wind*”.

(Pleasure) *I thought in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. “Laughter”, I said, is foolish. “And what does pleasure accomplish?” I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.*

(Possessions) *I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slave and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man.*

(Position) *I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.”*

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was

meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.”

Fortunately, after years of frustration, Solomon finally ends his frustrating life and letter as he realized the need to let God be in control as he concludes with these penetrating words:

*Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.
(Ecclesiastes 12:13)*

V. Jesus (Matthew 4)

It is written

Jesus is the change point in history. His response to the devil's temptation, in Matthew 4:1-11, to embezzle for Himself God's great blessings of “**Pleasure, Possessions and Position**”, was a shining illustration of that change. It also gives us a vital key to the action which we can take when we are tempted: rely on God's Holy Word!

First came “**Pleasure**”: “*After fasting forty days and forty nights*“, Jesus was hungry. But when the devil tempted Him to turn the stones into bread, Jesus responded:

*“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

Next, came Satan's temptation to Jesus to prove His “**Position**” by intentionally throwing Himself off the highest point of the temple. Again, Jesus answers from scripture:

*“It is also written:
‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

Finally, the devil showed Jesus “*all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor*”, and tempts Jesus with “**Possessions**” by urging:

“All this I will give you...if you will bow down and worship me”.

Again, Jesus replied:

*“Away from me, Satan! For it is written:
‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”*

Unlike Eve and Adam, the builders of the Tower of Babel, and King Solomon, Jesus remained steadfast. By so doing, He broke the power of sin for those who would follow Him.

VI. What About Us?

Thy Will Be Done

The Apostle, John, clearly warns each of us about the stark choice we must make if we want to follow Jesus into Eternal Life rather than listening to Satan and selling Eternity for **Pleasure, Possessions and Position** in this temporary world:

*“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love of the Father is not in him.
For all that is in the world—
the lust of the flesh (**Pleasure**),
and the lust of the eyes (**Possessions**),
and the pride of life (**Position**)
is not of the Father but is of the world.
And the world passes away, and the lust of it;
but he who does the will of God abides forever.”*
(1 John 2:15-17 RSV)

The key is simple and the blessings are wonderful and lasting—if **we choose Him and His will!** But we have to stop trying to be “Boss”. We must admit that God is God, and that only Jesus can restore our relationship with Him.

If we will do this, He will begin replacing our desire for **Pleasure, Possessions and Position** for ourselves, with a desire to use these blessings to love and glorify God and to love and serve others.

**What a Blessings that will be for Us
And for Everyone around Us!**

From Grandpa With Love

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