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Presentation Transcript
Make No Provision
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I met a young man in my practice once who was addicted to pornography. I asked him at the intake what was it he had done so far to get rid of the addiction. And he explained, among other things, that he mostly watched it on his phone, so he installed some sort of blocking device – an app, maybe. I don't much how to do that. Then he asked a good friend to password protect it. As I listened to him explain more about what he had done, most of it was around the idea of making it hard to access. So a scripture came to my mind. We can find it in Romans 13 – 13:11 through 14. Here Paul says:

Romans 13:11-14 – *Besides this, you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. So yeah, we move through time – from the time we were baptized and first believed up till now. So time is flying, right? We only have so long that we can do the work we need to do and make the changes we need to make. Anyway, continuing on – verse 12 – Paul says: *The night is far gone. The day is at hand. So then, let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. A light causes us to see what we should do. Let us walk properly, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality....* That word *sensuality*, what does it mean? Well, the Louw & Nida definition is particularly graphic. The number there is 88.272 – their definition: behavior completely lacking in moral restraint, usually with the implication of sexual licentiousness; “they have not repented of the filthy things they have done – their immorality and their licentiousness deeds (a quote from 2 Corinthians 12:21)” – to show us how he used it in other places. And then they say: “In some languages, the equivalent to licentious behavior would be to live like a dog, or to act like a goat, or to be a rooster – in each instance, pertaining to promiscuous sexual behavior.” He says we shouldn't be sexually immoral. And then he says: *...not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh – to gratify its desires.**

So here we see that word *sarx* again – the *flesh*. It surely can refer to the body, but there are those times that Paul and others use it to describe something evil within us – “to make provision for the *sarx* – to gratify its desires.” It not only has to do with sexual immorality, but also with quarreling and jealousy. It describes that part of us passed down from the devil though Adam and Eve.

I started thinking about that scripture and what this person was telling me and discovered a whole area of meaning to explore. It’s even a great topic from which to launch personal Passover examination. So let’s do that today. How could we apply the advice of Paul – to make no provision for the flesh – here in the 21st century. And what else does it point to besides that? Sometimes I’m a bit slow on the uptake.

Years ago, when I was fifteen years into pastoring congregations – you think I’d have learned this by then – there was a family whose husband and father was not a member of the church. He was friendly, but not interested. One day while visiting their home, he offered me a drink – a cocktail. I declined because I didn’t want to drive home under the influence. But I asked him what he liked to drink. And he beckoned me to follow him to the kitchen where he opened a lower cabinet to reveal a half-dozen 1.75 liter bottles of Canadian whiskey. And I thought, “Wow, this guy likes his liquor.” It wasn’t until some years later I learned that large supply is one of the indicators of alcoholism. They don’t want to run out. They know they’re dependent. So it took me that long to figure that out, right?

So, he was making provision for the flesh, wasn’t he? He wanted to make sure he had plenty so he could continue to drink. If he were trying to quite, he would better get it out of the house, so as not to be tempted, right? You know, don’t go to the casino with a pocket-full of cash if you’re addicted to gambling. Don’t go with cash or don’t go at all. It’s simple. You can’t do it if it’s not there – or, you’re not there.

It’s simple, though addictions occur because we need to medicate away bad feelings from the past. And not going doesn’t help with the addiction, just the penalty side of it. If you don’t have liquor to drink, you don’t get hung over, or you don’t get picked up for DWI. And, if you don’t have money, or you’re not at the casino, you can’t lose it.

Another area that I think about – because I have a problem with this – is weight loss. All the diet programs tell us to get tempting foods out of the house. Make no provision for the desires of the flesh. “I deserve to eat that pie, drink that beer, etc.” we think to ourselves. Or, maybe we don’t really think it out loud or in our minds, but that’s the underlying thing. “I like to do this, It’s fun to eat or to drink, so why should I deny myself?”

Here’s another one. I was talking to a forty-five-year-old who was telling me about her suicide attempt when she was fifteen. She decided to do it on New Year’s Eve. She made a plan. She would buy boxes of over-the-counter sleep aides, one at a time, so as not to arouse attention,

until she had what she thought was enough. So she was making provision for the flesh, wasn't she? She was getting ready to do the self-centered act.

Another man told me he asked his brother to keep his handgun, because he was having suicidal thoughts. So he was making *no* provision for the flesh. In fact, he was making provision to continue his life.

These two cases point out the difference between someone who is determined to commit suicide and someone who is afraid they might do it during an impulsive moment. Both were depressed – the first more than the latter. People who are determined rarely tell anybody, because they really don't want to be stopped.

I heard recently about someone who took a job so they could be around to encounter someone they hoped to murder. So, if you're planning on killing anybody, don't make any provision for that. But this person laid a plan to do it, and had a way they were going to do it. So, don't go to the bar armed where your enemy goes, and then get drunk while you're there, hoping he will show up. It's so much better just to drop it and move on with life, rather than going to prison with the death of someone on your head the rest of your life.

Here's another one I thought about – quarreling. You know, when the relatives come, or when we see Mr. X at church, when we go on vacation with friends, sometimes hot-button topics can come up. I was talking to a client who taking her children, by herself, to visit her family. Her husband had to stay and work. And she told me that her father was a religious extremist. And I asked her, "Well, what religion?" She said, "Baptist, but it wouldn't matter. The Baptist Church isn't the problem. He is. He thinks it's his job to correct everybody." So I said, "What are you going to do about that?" She said, "I'm staying at my cousin's house so I have a place to get away from him when he gets on my nerves. I'm afraid I might launch on him," she said. And I said, "Good idea." See, she's not making...she knows that he pushes her buttons, so she's going to get up and leave when she's afraid she's going to say something that would embarrass herself or tear down their relationship. So that's good. I wish I was that mature all the time. She, I think, is 28.

Another thing I think about is the area of gain at the expense of others. This isn't quarreling. It's controlling or manipulating. It's a fruit of the flesh, too. It's one thing to have a job, to do our work, receive a paycheck, and be rewarded with raises and promotions. It's another thing to make others look bad so we can advance. It's one thing to start a business, and work hard, and make a good product at a competitive price, and make money – even lots of it. But it's another thing to take advantage of the size of your business to gain advantage over others.

My son-in-law sells products to companies that make shampoos and lotions and cosmetics – all kinds of things. One of his customers told him that he had signed an agreement with a large retailer. It was such a big contract that he eventually dropped all of his other customers, because

he was making a lot of money with this one big contract. Once the large company, that had the contract with him, realized he was dependent on them, they told him they were dropping the price they would pay by 25%. Of course, they didn't drop the price of the products that they were buying from him when it went to the public, but he had to accept it, because they were now his only customer.

So business bullying, strife, manipulation, control – all are fruits of the *sarx* – the flesh. If we ever find ourselves in a place of influence or power, we would be wise to be like Neil Gorsuch and seek to be fair with everybody, which is God's way. I was listening to him on YouTube and his confirmation hearings with the Senate – quite a good speaker and quite a profoundly moral person. So love your neighbor as yourself. That's a fruit of God's Spirit – not putting self ahead of others.

Here's another one: favoritism.

Talking to a nineteen-year-old some time ago, I learned that she had a brother and that her father spent all his spare time with her brother and had ignored her all her life. Having had two daughters, I can tell you this is *not* normal fatherly behavior. We don't know what happened to her father to make him this way, but he has never acknowledged the issue or the damage that he's done to his daughter. So it's impossible for him to make no provision for his favoring tendencies toward his daughter – if he's not even aware of it.

Sometimes, parents *do* have a soft spot for one child or the other and they don't realize it. Or, even if they do, they don't think there's anything wrong with it. We know Isaac favored Esau over Jacob. If we know this about ourselves, then we ought to set some rules for ourselves, so that we treat all our children, not the same, but equally. That would include the will, wouldn't it?

Bias, then, is often a part of the *sarx*, too. So we should not make provision for that, but make provision to overcome it.

So those are seven areas – I didn't count them, but that's how many I talked about. How many more are there? Well, probably as many as there are things people want to do. Anything can become an excess. And this effort to make no provision for our excesses really doesn't solve the problem of the bad part of human nature. It only makes it harder to do it.

There's a passage in Matthew – and also in Mark 7 – where the disciples were being criticized by the Jewish leaders for not ritualistically washing their hands before eating grain that they gathered in the field while on a journey. Back then, it was like the McDonald's of the day. People would deliberately leave some of the grain in their fields, so that those in need could gather it. Why did they do that? Well, because God told them to, and because it became social custom. The difference was that their fast food was much better quality than our fast food today. But moving

forward, the disciples came to Jesus and wanted to know how to think about the criticism they had received. And Jesus said to them:

Matthew 15:17 – *Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes through the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander – and we could add bullying and manipulation and a bunch of other things, too – these are what defile a person – but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.*

Not going to the discussion at the Feast about the calendar, when you know you'll likely say something hurtful, is one way to make no provision for the flesh, but it doesn't really solve the problem entirely. Because the problem is not with the meeting or with the discussion about the calendar. It's with our attitude, which comes out of our hearts.

I heard a word recently that I hadn't heard in a long time. I was listening to the confirmation hearings for Neil Gorsuch, and he was asked what his goals were – what he hoped to achieve. And his response silenced the entire proceeding. He said he didn't expect to make a long term contribution, and that after he was no longer a judge, he would soon be forgotten. He said that he wanted to be a good husband and a good father, mild at home, and courageous for the law, and fair to those who came to him for judgments, rich or poor. The word that caught my attention was *mild*. Mild has nothing to do with being weak. It means to be *gentle* and thoughtful and careful about how we talk to others, especially our wife and our children, or our husband and our children, or our parents.

At another time in the proceedings, a Democratic senator asked him if it was according to American law to target an entire religion with a travel ban – clearly speaking about the travel ban that Donald Trump has tried to get through. After explaining several times to the senator that he would have to know more and deal with the issue in all its complexity, the senator still persisted. And after about four or five attempts by the senator to get him to just *carte blanche* say it was wrong, he answered kindly, but in such a way as to make the senator drop his head and put his hand up to his eyebrows to shield his eyes from the audience. It became clear that the senator – also a lawyer – *knew* that it would be illegal for somebody, who might have to judge an upcoming case, to give an opinion out of court, even if it was for his own political advantage. He was trying to get confirmed, and it probably have sounded to the Democrats to hear him say that, but he pointed out to the senator that it was illegal. And he surely knew that.

So it's so easy for us to get full of self, and our opinions, and our motives, and our desires – to be rough with people – with our mates, our children, our employees, our students. It's part of our *sarx* to be superior to others, and to quarrel, and to judge down, and to be jealous, and to think we're right and so we have the right to put other people down – put them in their place, etc. No! Better to be mild and humble, like Jesus was. Failing that – and we all do – don't go where you might get yourself in trouble. Make no provision for the flesh.

So how about it? Where do you need to make changes? What kind of changes do you need to make? Do you just want to make no provision, which is a good thing to do, or do you want to get to the root of the problem? Well, it's good to think about all of this before we take the body and blood of Christ this Passover. So I hope some of that can stick with you.

Until next time, then, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.