

Highway Safety . . . A Spiritual Problem

Sermon of the Month
as preached on the Hour of Decision



By
BILLY GRAHAM

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MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

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Highway Safety . . . A Spiritual Problem

Resort areas of America are crowded with more people on Labour Day week-end than possibly on any other week-end in American history. It is the nation's last fling at a summer vacation. The highways of the nation are jammed and the National Safety Council warns that more people may be killed before Tuesday morning than on any previous holiday week-end.

I am convinced that highway safety is a spiritual problem and that Christians have a definite obligation to drive carefully and safely on the highways. Most people do not associate careful and safe driving with spiritual living, but there is a definite connection as I would like to show you.

One of the menaces of this mechanised age is the wanton waste of life on our roads and highways. Every American knows that in comparison to the rest of the world our record is bad. Since the invention of the automobile more than a million people have been killed in highway accidents and more than forty million have been injured. As man becomes more skilled scientifically he seemingly becomes more deft at destroying. In the space

of a few short years we have seen dirt roads become roaring super highways; we have seen cars developed from one-lung reluctant toys to speeding giants of more than 200 horsepower. But each day we read of the careless and heedless who rush headlong into destruction. The family outing turns into mass tragedy; the speeding tourist takes a trip into annihilation; and a party-goer is carried home on a stretcher to a life of pain, suffering and misery.

We read in our papers about a honeymoon couple who were just starting life together. The young husband was killed and the wife so seriously wounded that she will have to remain in bed for the rest of her life. Last year forty thousand people were killed on our highways and $2\frac{1}{2}$ million were injured. These are just cold, hard statistics, but back of each one of these is tragedy, sorrow, bereavement and suffering. This represents a greater slaughter than the Korean War, and it was brought about in less than one-third the time. Every fourteen minutes someone goes into eternity because of an automobile crash, and every time your watch ticks another person is injured or maimed on our highways.

Although most fatalities in car collisions are classed as accidental, authorities all agree that most of them could have been prevented. Safety experts are also beginning to realise that the basic problem is deeper than they had at first suspected. One authority says, "It is our

conviction that neither science nor engineering, no matter how wisely or widely applied, can provide a permanent solution." They go on to say, "This problem has its roots in the hearts and minds of men and it is there that we must look for an answer." I am convinced that highway safety is basically a spiritual problem and that we will never solve our problem until men have surrendered their hearts and their wills to God.

Sir Winston Churchill said some time ago that our moral development has lagged far behind our scientific development. Unless we can catch up morally to our mechanical and scientific progress these modern gadgets can become a blight instead of a blessing. Most of us are acquainted with the familiar scene: the line-up of cars on a highway, the presence of state police with stern, solemn faces, the sound of sirens and the approach of ambulances, the impatience of waiting motorists who are forcefully restrained while the dead and wounded can be carried away and the debris cleaned off the road.

But the real tragedy is the innocent victim. Most of us have loved ones or friends who have been maimed or killed in highway accidents. One of the dearest friends Mrs. Graham and I have will spend the rest of her life in a wheel chair because of a needless accident. My own uncle was run over and killed by a drunken driver. This problem is close to us all. It is essential that we get at the root of

this problem before the slaughter and wounding gets any worse.

We were told that the greatest causes of highway accidents are: first, exceeding the speed limit; secondly, drunken driving; thirdly, driving on the wrong side of the road; fourthly, failure to give right-of-way; fifthly, passing on curves or hills; sixthly, passing on the wrong side; seventhly, failure to give proper signals; and, eighthly, reckless driving. But almost everyone now agrees that these are only symptoms of something else that is basically wrong. The Pennsylvania Turnpike Safety Commissioner has said, "Highway safety cannot be achieved by engineering alone. Neither can it be brought about by education and law enforcement alone." The basic problem simmers down to a moral and spiritual one. Dr. Herbert Stack, of the New York University Centre for Safety Education has said, "Eighty per cent. of all traffic accidents are due to the faults of the drivers and the pedestrians."

What is the matter with us? Why does modern man continue to maim and wound and slaughter when all agree that it is uncalled for? One of the greatest causes for highway accidents is the breaking of the golden rule. Christ said, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. (Matt. 7:12.) The new highway slogan, "Drive unto others as ye would have them drive unto you" is a modern, practical version of this time-tested rule. Let us

examine the golden rule for a moment with the thought of applying it to automobile driving. Do you want others to drive seventy and eighty miles an hour toward you with the possibility of their car getting out of control? Do you want 4,000 pounds of uncontrolled steel hurled at you when you are driving peacefully through the countryside with your family? Do you want others to gamble with your life and the lives of those who are near and dear to you? Do you want others to force you off the highway and leave you in the ditch, wounded and helpless? Do you want others to come at you headlong over the brow of a hill threatening your life as well as their own? Do you want others to mix up a lethal mixture of alcohol and gasoline and drunkenly weave from side to side as they come plunging toward you? No, of course you don't! It is neither Christian nor civilised to drive recklessly, endangering the life and limb of yourself and others. Our terrible record of deaths on our highways is not only a sad commentary of our estimate of life, but a direct violation of the golden rule.

The Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13) and a man is just as dead when murdered by an automobile as he is when killed by a gun, knife or poison. I am convinced that when we stand before God that He will hold thousands of men and women guilty of murder who never dreamed that they were murderers. Your weapon was not a gun

or poison but an automobile. When the first murder of history occurred, Cain (the murderer) said to God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9.) That question contains a built-in answer. We ARE our brothers' keepers. The Bible says that no man lives unto himself and that we are all members one of another. We can't hurt others without hurting ourselves. We cannot injure others without injuring ourselves. One of the saddest men I have ever known is a man who carelessly ran over a little girl and crushed the life out of her. He gave up driving, possesses a deep feeling of guilt and is remorseful all the time. It was an accident according to the law, but the fact that he knows that it might have been avoided has all but driven him mad. Certainly, if you claim to be a Christian it is your duty to keep the golden rule on the highway and "drive unto others as you would have them drive unto you."

Another cause of accidents, and one which has a spiritual and moral significance, is wrong attitudes. Jesus taught that wrong attitudes are just as bad as wrong deeds. The law deals with the effects of sin but Christ deals with sin's causes. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that the law says, "Thou shalt not kill" and that whosoever is angry with his brother is in danger of hell-fire. (Matt. 5:21, 22.) In other words, Jesus was teaching that wrong attitudes are just as bad as wrong actions.

One of the attitudes which contributes to death on the highways is, for example, selfishness. We are all acquainted with the highway hog, the driver who selfishly takes his half of the road in the centre of the highway. The law says, "Thou shalt not cross over the centre line," but Jesus is concerned with the cause of such an infraction of the rules which is selfishness. Stop selfishness and you have done away with a large percentage of highway hazards. When we get behind the wheel of an automobile we must remember that we are just one of millions of people who have the same rights, the same privileges and the same licence that we have. The fact that you are you doesn't make you special. Other people's lives are just as valuable as yours. You have no more right to threaten the other man's life than you have to take your own. If you really want to practise self-preservation, which psychologists tell us is the first rule of life, then save the life that may be your own. And by driving unselfishly with regard to others, you may not only spare other people's lives, but you may save your own. The fact that failure to grant right-of-way is the leading violation in all accidents proves that selfishness is a leading factor in death and destruction on the road.

Selfishness is a spiritual and moral problem and can never be done away with by education or arrests and fines. It is a problem of the heart and can only be met by God. A synonym

for sin is selfishness. The first sin of the universe was the sin of Lucifer who was selfish. The basic sin of our hearts is selfishness. When the human heart is transformed by the power of Christ, selfishness leaves. Christ then takes control of our lives, He directs our minds, our hands and our eyes, and He can even direct our automobiles.

Another wrong attitude is the urge to show off. The fact that 24 per cent of the drivers involved in fatal accidents last year were under twenty-five years of age and that teen-age drivers are involved in more than their proportion and share of accidents would indicate that sensational driving is a factor in death on the highways. This "Look, Mom, no hands" attitude can ironically lead to "Look, Mom, no legs either." This teen-age exhibitionism, which is really a display of immaturity, has sent scores of youth to the cemetery before their time. I know of young people who are blinded for life, hopelessly maimed or in other ways have been incapacitated because of the desire some youthful driver had to show off his driving skill. Thrill driving often turns out to be kill driving. Give youth a lethal weapon weighing two tons, equip it with a motor and 200 horsepower, fill it with high-octane fuel, and turn him loose on a super-highway with a few other youngsters who laud his bravery and courage at the wheel and you have the ingredients for a colossal debacle of death. Drivers under twenty-five constitute only a

small percentage of all licensed drivers, yet they are involved in 25 per cent. of the fatal accidents. The uncontrolled energy and enthusiasm of youth and the unlimited power of the modern automobile is a pretty lethal and often fatal combination. However, when young people have given their lives to Jesus Christ, their attitudes, motives and desires are completely different. They have different attitudes when they get behind the wheel of a car; they want to protect the life and property of others; they begin treating their neighbour as themselves.

Another wrong attitude which is a factor in automobile accidents is anger. Jesus said, "That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." (Matt. 5:22.) Many a man has left home after a heated argument or quarrel with his wife and has expressed his rage by reckless driving when he got out on the highway. We have all seen drivers who have swerved angrily and manoeuvred their cars as if in a mad rage. Many a husband who wasn't man enough to control his home situation has tried to prove his manhood by overcontrolling his automobile and thus becoming a traffic hazard. Others become enraged over some trifle, some slight infraction of the rules by another driver, and they fly into a mad rage taking their spite out on everyone on the road. Hotheads and overheated motors just don't go together. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek:

for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5.) What did Jesus mean? He does not mean that we are to cowl or be subservient and never have a temper. He means that our tempers are to be controlled. Meekness is that of a wild force that has been tamed. Give Christ your heart and your temper, let Him control it and direct it, and it can be used for good rather than harm. Anger is a spiritual problem and can only be dealt with by Christ.

Still another cause for death on the highway is carelessness. Driving an automobile is a full time job when you are responsible for the occupants of the car. We must learn that we can't visit and drive, sight-see and drive, make love and drive or read and drive. I know a woman who is deathly afraid of a gun and won't allow one in her home, but she is the most reckless and careless driver I know. It hasn't occurred to her that thousands more are killed by automobiles every year than are killed by guns. An automobile is one of the most deadly machines of destruction ever invented by man. The scriptures teach that we are not to be slothful and careless. (Rom. 12:11.) We are to put first things first, and certainly when we are driving an automobile the lives and property of others are to be given first consideration.

Another cause of death on the highways is drunkenness. A woman from a prominent family in Clearwater, Florida, after imbibing too many cocktails at a club, lost control of

her car on a bridge, hit several fishermen and knocked one of them through the railing of the bridge to his death. A drunken driver in the East turned right out of the centre lane causing a pile up of thirteen automobiles and seven deaths. When you are drinking your reaction time is three or four times longer than when sober. At seventy miles an hour that means that you can't stop until you have gone 308 feet. Long before that it is too late; you are dead and perhaps others with you. The statement, "Death rides with the drunken driver" is more than a safety slogan, it is a terribly tragic truth. The Bible warns time after time against drunkenness. In fact, the Bible says that a drunkard shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (I Cor. 6:9,10.) I have talked to law enforcement officers who have told me that 90 per cent of the arrests that they make have liquor involved one way or another. This is a terrible national disgrace. Many people, after an accident, excuse a man because he was drunk. They say, "He was drunk, he didn't know what he was doing." I want to warn you that God makes no excuses, He makes no allowances . . . He holds you guilty! "But," you say, "what can we do about all this? Is there no answer to this death and destruction?" This problem, like many other social problems, resolves into a spiritual and moral problem. Even the experts say, "In most accidents, the guilty party is the man and not the machine, the mind and not the motor, the reflex and not the roadway."

The major problem is not speed, power or traffic, but man. Selfishness, anger, carelessness, neglect and pride are the root causes of death on the highway. Accidents, injuries and fatalities are only the result. The physical effects are produced by spiritual causes so the cure for this slaughter on the highways is a spiritual rebirth. Then and only then will the old things of selfishness, anger, carelessness and pride pass away and all things become new. Then, because we have the mind of Christ, love will replace selfishness, humility will replace pride, peace will replace anger and we will live and drive as Christians should. How can you get this new birth? By repenting of your sins and receiving Christ as your Saviour.

At this moment you can acknowledge your sins, you can turn your back upon sin and receive Christ. He will give you a new heart, He will wipe out the past sins and He will give you a new nature, new motives and new desires. Then you can live the Christian life as God meant you to live it. And then only can you live by the golden rule and "drive unto others as you would have them drive unto you."

MY DECISION FOR CHRIST

Believing that the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and is now living, I want this to be my "hour of decision." Having confessed my sins, I believe in my heart, and do now receive Him as my personal Saviour.

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