

Observing Lying Vanities

Jonah 2:8 – “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.”

In the context, Jonah had been fleeing God to avoid obeying him. The lying vanity was the idea that he could physically get away from God’s presence. The result was being cast overboard to all but certain drowning. In spite of this, God spared him by the prepared fish. It was in the midst of the fish that he was repenting and praying.

For us, surely there are other applications for Jonah 2:8. What can it mean to “observe lying vanities”? To “forsake our own mercy”?

“Vanity” means emptiness, or self-centered pursuits. It applies especially to our valuing of things in this world, which

- perish with the using (food, raiment, vehicles)
- fade with time (strength, beauty)
- can be stolen (physical goods, reputation)
- cannot be taken with us at death (physical goods or gratifications)
- everything that will be burned up in the day of God’s wrath (idols, pride, good works or intentions)

A “lying” vanity is an empty pursuit that promises happiness or satisfaction, but takes us away from God, who is the only true source of mercy.

God’s mercy is specially shown to the believer, in forgiveness of sins and acceptance as God’s sons. But there is a more general mercy that is shown to all, even unbelievers. He allows men time to repent, gives food and breath, and rain, etc. This kind of mercy is really a delaying of the judgment which is deserved. So there are some kinds of sins (“observing lying vanities”) that allow that judgment to fall before it otherwise would.

Ac. 17:28-31 - ... the times of this ignorance God winked at (tolerated); but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world ...

Sometimes the sin is so grievous that it results in death, disease, psychological disturbance, etc. But there are other ‘forsaken mercies’ that people may not notice until it is too late.

Isa. 44:20 – a deceived heart hath turned im aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?

What are some of the lying vanities and forsaken mercies of the modern world?

Lying Vanity	Examples	Forsaken Mercy
That perpetual youth is desirable and attainable	Botox, plastic surgery, hair coloring, toupes, faddishness, aging movie stars that look silly	The process of growing old with grace and dignity; the godly contemplation of death and the shortness of life, and what to do while there is time
Ideals of bodily strength and beauty	Immodest dress, extreme body building, tanning beds and nail salons, crazy diets, emulation of Hollywood stars or “teen idols”	Being loved by spouse and friends for who you really are instead of a painted and paraded exterior
Desire for “greener grass”	Divorce, job-hopping, constant search of a new hobby	No endurance; no reward from persistent effort
Desire for gain without labor	Lottery tickets, marriage to old rich people, crime (theft, bribery, extortion, ...), “pyramid” marketing	The satisfaction of learning a trade, earning a reputation for honesty, diligence, and service from a loving heart
Wealth brings happiness	Overwork, get-rich-quick schemes, crony capitalism	Godly contentment, peace of mind
Desire for acceptance and approval	Dressing, talking, acting like the “in” crowd, bullying, talkativeness, sexual promiscuity	Being accepted of God, and knowing his approval
Addictions	Gambling, alcohol and tobacco, drugs, sex, social media	Freedom from physical, mental, and spiritual slavery; ability to think clearly
False religious doctrines	False gods/idols, belief in purgatory, reliance on good works, “Give-to-get”, disbelief in eternal punishment, perversions of the doctrine of Christ	A confident and bold but humble relationship with God
Reliance on human institutions	Government, employer, labor unions, “scientists”	The ability to believe and trust God

It is of God’s mercy that we were born here instead of a country where the name of Christ is unknown. That we didn’t get killed in some accident, or gang violence, or that we didn’t abort a baby, that we aren’t getting a fourth divorce, or dying of some horrible disease. Paul said he had “obtained mercy of the Lord” to be faithful in a state of celibacy (1 Cor. 7:25). Don’t forsake that mercy – forsake the lying vanities in your life and live.

Other lying vanities:

1. I don’t need God.
2. I will repent later (when I am too old to sin).
3. I am too bad for God to forgive me.
4. Lightning hasn’t struck me yet, so apparently God approves of my life.
5. I’ll be OK because my good outweighs my bad.
6. Hell is OK because that is where all my friends will be.

If you have observed lying vanities, you may already be suffering some of the consequences, but the fact that you are alive and here listening to this means that mercy is not out of reach. Repent now, and let God rebuild your life while there is time.