



**PURIFYING PASSION**  
**HOW JESUS MAKES HOLY HIS CHURCH**  
By Andrew Comiskey

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Allen could barely look me in the eyes. He recounted slowly and dispassionately the history of sexual encounters with multiple partners-faceless, heartless relationships that had deadened his soul to real feeling. Allen's faith in Jesus had grown numb as well. He sought Jesus mechanically, with less and less frequently and reward.

I discovered that Allen's struggle with sexual addiction had reemerged after his first year "honeymoon" with Jesus. Ashamed and frightened by his behavior, he refused to bring it into the light of Jesus or His people. His addiction flourished in the dark; it began to outgrow the new growth of God's powerful compassion in Allen's heart. Five-years-later, the lord of sexual brokenness appeared to hold greater authority in Allen's life than did his Creator and Redeemer. Sex compelled him more than the Holy Spirit.

Although entrapped in the web of sexual sin, Allen still struggled to be free. But he wrestled in vain. Without the empowering of God's compassion, Allen couldn't repent. He needed God's love to break in with His mercy and break his heart. Only then could Allen begin to yield and respond afresh to the Lordship of Jesus. Only through the reign of God's compassion in Allen's heart could he topple the idols of perversion.

**Imitating Christ's Compassion**

The church must grasp her need to first and foremost raise high the power of Jesus' compassion. In order to facilitate the repentance of sexual sinners unto God's purity and holiness, we as a church must ask ourselves: How wide are Christ's arms extended here? How powerful is His healing Presence? How steadfast and long-suffering is His mercy? More personally, how deeply do we as ministers drink of His powerful compassion before calling others to repent? We must ask Jesus to search our hearts--why, Lord, do I rail against this sin or that? Why do I get angry? Am I instructed to admonish others out of a genuine concern for their well-being, or out of a fleshly intolerance that we have deceived ourselves into believing is a holy reverence for righteousness?

Chances are, we are weary, dry as dust, and compelled subconsciously by the toll taken by long hours, difficult people, and dashed hopes. Our wounding constrains our compassion. Instead, like embittered war veterans, we lash out at the very people we are called to restore, people who to varying degrees want Jesus! Many of them, like Allen, may indeed need a firm, corrective word. Yet, without compassion, our call to repentance will fall on stony ground, and will only further establish the self-hatred and shame resident in sexual sinners.

**False Repentance**

Some who receive such treatment may rebel immediately. Others may receive the fleshly admonishment and in turn repent in the flesh. But they are not repenting unto God. Instead, in their own strength, they turn toward a harsh, belittling image of God that fails to resurrect the power to obey. It simply keeps alive the old, broken call to some elusive measure of goodness that momentarily ensures one's well-being. The moment will pass quickly. The sinner's false repentance is just one step ahead of a fall back into the old broken way of coping with the enormous pain within via the rush of sexual sin. With no sustaining compassion to turn toward, the sinner will eventually turn back to sin.

Our first goal them must be to convey the compassion of Jesus. We extend the invitation of the Crucified One, who awaits to receive into His own woundings the wounds of sin. But first we as ministers must accept Christ's invitation to us. Quite apart from others' need to confess, we first need to allow Him to cleanse our hearts from all sin and darkness.

### **Restoring Compassion**

At a recent pastors' conference, my heart was heavy with the weight of others' sin. Anguishing over brokenness that marked several loved ones, I couldn't receive the Lord's call for me to repent in certain areas. My own reservation in compassion had long since dried up. No longer alive to my own need for the Lord's mercy, I had none to give others. But His grace prevailed. John Wimber and Jim Kermath addressed several sins from which I needed to repent. When I simply named my sins to Jesus, He released me to come to Him as a child. I gladly shed what had become the hard, brittle shell of my "ministry" self. Jesus took upon Himself my burden of sin and sweetly united me once more with His heart. Slowly, my heart began to beat with His compassion, the compassion that cleansed me from my sin. I found I could contain His love anew. No longer centered on others' sin, I was freed to love out of that merciful center where Jesus dwells in me. Rooted in His compassion toward myself, I found within a steady river of compassion to extend to my troubled loved ones.

### **Roots**

Allen needs that compassion badly. But unlike myself, Allen interprets that call to repentance through the lens of his own shame. He can't help but read into his need to turn from his sin unto Jesus as just another reminder of his worthlessness. Playing upon Allen's dysfunctional family-of-origin and several tragic encounters with legalistic ministers, Satan deceived him into believing that repentance meant death. By death I mean a withdrawal of love that threatened the core of Allen's very being. Over the course of Allen's life, significant others (e.g. parents, teachers, ministers, peers) had ridiculed his weaknesses. Instead of forgiving his failures, and bolstering him in underdeveloped areas of his personality, Allen recalled being shamed by others time and time again. By that I mean others belittled Allen, made him feel bad, for not being good. Objectively we know that Jesus doesn't shame His children. But Allen didn't know this. Satan used the groundswell of his sexual addiction to terrify Allen into believing that he was reprobate, disqualified from the mercy of Jesus.

### **Breaking Shame**

I wanted Allen to be free from this lie. I wanted him to understand the goodness of repentance, its beauty apparent in transferring the sinner's focus from off the power of sin and unto the greater glory of Jesus (Romans 2:4). I wanted Allen to embrace the truth that liberates real grace, namely, turning from sin unto to compassion of Jesus. In order for that to happen, Allen's shame mechanism needed to be disconnected. We began with scripture. John 8: 1-12 describes a woman guilty of adultery. A throng of accusers bring her before Jesus and demand that he penalize her by allowing them to stone her. Christ's response is simple and profound. "You who are without sin cast the first stone,"

He says. Each sheepishly drops his blunt object of "justice"; Jesus pronounces her free from the condemnation of each one, then calls her to repentance.

### **Stone Throwers**

Unlike the adulterous woman, Allen was not yet free from his accusers. His heart still labored under the weight of others' "stone throwing." One-by-one, we prayed through each memory in which he had been shamed. I helped him to recognize the difference between Jesus' response to him in those situations and that of others. Where necessary, he confessed the past sin to Jesus and began to experience the release that occurred as he experienced his failure flowing out of his heart and into Jesus. He also began to accept Jesus' advocacy in these weak and vulnerable parts of himself.

### **Judgment**

Another prayer session involved Allen confessing the sin of others' judgment upon himself. As he confessed their sin against him unto Jesus, and agreed with Jesus dying for that sin, the stone of others' accusations and judgment began to be lifted off and out of Allen's heart. Slowly, he emerged out of that broken place. No longer constrained by shame, he could receive the powerful compassion of Jesus. Mercy poured out of Jesus and into his parched heart. What had been an abstraction became a loving reality to Allen that day. Jesus made a new home in Allen, one swept clean from sin and shame and established aright in compassion.

### **True Repentance**

In turn, the eyes of Allen's heart were opened to perceive repentance anew. Instead of rendering him a non-person, or at least a belittled child, repentance enabled him to become free of that which was truly belittling him. It enabled Jesus to be strong when Allen was weak. Repentance revealed to Allen the heart of Jesus. Instead of yielding to self-hatred and shame in the light of his sin and weakness, Allen yielded to compassion and restoration. He repented unto Jesus, the only way to genuine purity and holiness.

This was only the beginning of Allen's healing. But what a start! As he continued to seek Jesus, Allen began to realize the profoundly destructive nature of his sin. His heart began to break as he became aware of how violently he had assaulted himself and others through sexual addiction. This was not a neurotic sorrow; rather, his grief reflected accurately the devastation wrought by his sin. Jesus led him through the mourning process and consoled him. The result was a greater capacity for Allen to contain God's powerful compassion. Allen's grieving also prompted him to become to others in his vulnerability toward sexual sin. Soberly aware of sin's death and his own tendency toward it, Allen forsook any residual pride and shame and made known his need for accountability. That process of knitting into the Christian community as a professed sinner (and saint) continues for Allen unto this day.

### **Pure Devotion**

Allen reflects the need of every person to know compassion through encounters with Him. That in turn established the basis for turning from sin and into holy union with Jesus. One becomes as pure as the object of his devotion. Allen can now devote himself wholly to Jesus. Therein lies his authority to resist sin. Allen's devotion to Jesus is greater than Satan's power to bind him! Compassion Himself released Allen. Now he repents quickly and forthrightly unto Jesus, the only lover worthy of his devotion.