



Dethroning Immorality

by
Andrew Comiskey

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Sexual immorality breaks into one's personal boundaries and invades the soul. Lust holds the heart captive. The illicit lover--real or imagined--prowls around the boundaries that surround the heart. If no access is found, the lover departs in frustration. Any vulnerable place in the wall will be hit upon until the heart yields to the beckoning lover. Then lust is conceived. The heart unites with an erotic illusion that impregnates the soul with images that can't be shaken and with desires that can't be satisfied. Innocence lost. In the words of James:

Every (wo)man is tempted when, by
his own desire, he is dragged away
and enticed. Then after desire has
conceived, it gives birth to sin and sin,
when it is full-grown, gives birth to
death--James 1:14 , 15

Sexual immorality kills. It perverts the awesome mystery of "two expressing a togetherness already found" (Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians*) into a premature grasp at identity and well-being. Instead of celebrating the hard work of two becoming one, sexual immorality seeks to be a celebration in its own right. Committed love neither precedes nor proceeds it. The result is a rape of the body, soul and spirit. A foreign love invades one's inner sanctuary--a holy place reserved only for Jesus, the high priest, as well as for one's spouse.

House of Prostitution

Instead, like a desecrator of the temple, the lover barrels through the outer courts and pillages the sanctuary. Having diverted one's attention away from the high priest, the lover assumes his own priestly posture--dark and seductive, offering a sacrament of the flesh that wars against the Spirit. The temple of God --one's own inner sanctuary--becomes a house of prostitution. It is fitting that Paul's most potent statement against sexual immorality was addressed to the Christians at Corinth , who daily battled the temptation to make an offering to the gods via sexual intercourse with a prostitute at one of the pagan houses of worship in Corinth . Paul writes in the six chapter of 1 Corinthians:

Do you not know that he who unites
himself with a prostitute is one with her body?
for it is said: "The two will become one

flesh." But he who unites himself
with the Lord is one with him
in Spirit. Vs. 19,20

Do you not know that your body is a temple
of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you
have received from God? You are not your own;
you were bought at a price. Therefore honor
God with your body. Vs. 19,20

Sexual Wholeness

Paul alludes to the powerful nature of sexuality. In its proper context--heterosexual marriage--it liberates life; outside of that context, sexuality burns out of control and even threatens the one-spirit union with the Lord. To further that thought, sexual purity signals a purity of soul and spirit. That sanctuary within contains only Himself. Jesus reigns free and empowered as the Lord of one's heart, its guard, its cover, and its most faithful lover. Any earthly love-source must pass inspection.

Once admitted in that human connection will undoubtedly be refined by Christ. His Holy Presence—alive and dynamically involved in the heart's rhythms and relationships--establishes sexual wholeness. The pure heart becomes sensitized and alert to the threat of immorality. At the same time, Jesus grants the heart a healthy offense in loving and being loved. Granted access are those who draw out and meet real needs and who prompt the pure in heart to do the same; barred from intimacy are those whose broken, rebellious posture ignites a false eroticism which sparks sexual immortality, resulting in spiritual death.

Foreign Gods

The Hebrews understood the strong tie between spiritual loyalty and sexual purity. They understood that God's call to reserve sexual activity for the heterosexual martial covenant. It represented His "marital" covenant with them as a nation. Sexual faithfulness to one marital partner testified of the Hebrew's allegiance to one God. This commitment to monogamy and monotheism contrasted sharply with the sexual and spiritual practice of nations surrounding Israel . Their beliefs in many gods corresponded with a diversity of sexual practices. For example, the Canaanites worshiped the gods and goddesses of nature, especially those signifying reproduction and fertility. The two referred to most in scripture are Baal and Ashteroth.

These deities were worshipped by the "sacrifice" of sexually-perverse activities, and were symbolized by huge, genitally shaped altars. Jeremiah decries these practices throughout the book that bears his name. Most heinous to him was the fact that the Hebrews began to perversely worship these gods alongside their relationship with Yahweh! As God's prophetic spokesman, Jeremiah cried out to the nation:

You have set up detestable idols in the house that bears
my name and have defiled it
--Jeremiah 7:30

You have forgotten me and have trusted in false gods...
...resulting in adulterous, lustful
neighings and prostitution
--Jeremiah 13:25,27

In Bondage

Jeremiah clearly grasped the strong tie between sexual spiritual faithfulness, as well as the link between sexual perversion and spiritual darkness. Israel's perversion of faith--tragically expressed in sexual immorality--signaled judgement. Babylon took her captive and demanded that she bow her knee to that nation's faith and practices. We too face the captivity wrought by sexual immorality. Our hearts become apathetic to the true God when empowered by sexual lust. The altar to Jesus becomes crowded out by offerings to Baal and Ashteroth. We cease to seek Him with a whole heart; our spiritual attention span drastically decreases. Perversion masters us and renders us spiritually dark—more hungry and vulnerable to the Evil One than to Jesus.

Gratefully, we have a powerful advocate, Christ Jesus. Unlike a mere high priest "who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are--yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). We thus can cast down the lie that sexual immorality renders us unable to embrace Him as our deliverer. We boldly take hold of Him and His authority to cast down every evil thing inside and outside of us that wars against His Lordship! (Heb 4:16)

Willingness and Confession

But He won't deliver us until we really want it. Only when sexual immorality is soberly acknowledged as the life-threatening evil that it is, will one allow Jesus to assume His rightful place as Deliverer. A person needs to be awakened to the darkness in order to embrace the light. Jesus inspires that awakening. But He demands our willingness to squarely face the reality that He reveals.

The confession of sin follows. We agree with Jesus, according to His Word, that sexual immorality assaults one's body and soul and ruptures the one-spirit union with the Father. We also agree that Jesus is sufficient to cover our sin. Hand-in-hand with confession comes deliverance. The heart under siege needs to be dethroned of all the false gods rooted in immoral pursuits and practices. Jesus insists on cleansing that inner sanctuary; He desires to live singularly within us, without competing with demonically inspired thoughts and practices. Through the power of His Spirit, He binds the stronghold of lust as we willingly relinquish every vestige of sexual immorality of which we are consciously aware.

With each confession and renouncement before God and others, freedom is liberated. Each time we decline lust's invitation--be it in thought or deed--freedom progresses further. We practice His Presence--the reign of Jesus as the Lord of our hearts and Lover of our souls. We begin to be motivated out of the power and clarity and joy of His reign in our hearts. The foul residue of perversion eventually gets swept away. Christ's heart alone beats with ours, and out of it flows living water that continually refreshes and renews those parts formally held by the evil one.

Repairing the Hearts

Once the heart is cleansed, it needs protection. The temple walls require rebuilding. Jesus supervises their reconstruction; He does so as we learn to submit to Him every relationship, every social setting, every vulnerable moment to Him. We must understand that the formerly ransacked temple may have been cleansed in its inner courts but continues to be under the siege of the evil one. As a result, we enter into a season of deliberately seeking sanctuary in our environment. Not yet able to effectively ward off illicit in the heat of battle, we seek protective, healing encounters with God and others. The walls can't be rebuilt if the heart is continually submitted to lures too powerful for us to withstand.

Confession and prayer with others is key; non-erotic relationships that convey love without seductive intent are critical to nourishing the heart while respecting its boundaries-in-the-making. Equally vital is one's personal pursuit of Jesus. Learning to listen to His voice, and obey it, makes all the difference in discerning the heart's vulnerability, and in turn submitting each immoral thought and motive to Him. In so doing, perversion is cast out of the temple and onto the other side of its newly restored walls.

Slowly, but surely, these walls begin to function protectively, much like skin protects the heart from outside bacteria, or at least warns the heart through pain provoked by forced entry or attack. Illicit lovers beckon but are refused; periods of intense temptation prompt the walls to signal the heart its need for reinforcement, e.g. prayerful, protective encounters with God and others. Each act of responsive obedience further strengthens the walls.

The loving reign of Jesus within the inner sanctuary flourishes. One begins to be increasingly sensitive to what (s)he can or cannot handle in potentially threatening relationships and social environments. New boundaries birth new kinds of relationships. Instead of feeding off of false eroticism, one learns to give to and receive from others the holy love of Jesus, thereby establishing the foundation for inspired intimacy.