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TWO

The Immoral “Christian”

By day he works in a downtown office. He’s a hard worker and has received steady promotions. Everyone likes him. He’s trustworthy and pleasant to be around. A model father of three children, no one would ever suspect his dark secret.

By night he stalks through suburban neighborhoods, crouching along fences and behind trees. He looks for modest homes, the kind owned by young couples, and only those that are single-story. That way the bedrooms aren’t on a second floor.

It’s another Friday, and tonight he’s back in familiar territory. His heart beats faster as he nears a house where he “scored” last weekend. Newlyweds recently bought the attractive ranch, and he smiles as he sees a dim light shining through a window from the rear of the house. He draws closer, hoping to hear soft music, which tells him that the window is open on this hot summer night. Yes! It’s faint jazz. This could be another score. Closer he creeps until he’s against the house, where he tiptoes silently to the window. His mind is filled with images of what he’s seen before.

A man such as I’ve just described is known by the familiar term, “Peeping Tom.” His activity is considered criminal, and rightfully so. Most of us agree that such people ought to be in jail. He’s a pervert, and he’s certainly not the kind of

person we expect to see in heaven. Certainly no Christian would ever practice such behavior.

With this, the Bible agrees:

For this you know with certainty, that no *immoral* or *impure* person...has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Eph. 5:5-6, emphasis added).

Are peeping Toms moral or immoral? Pure or impure? The answer is obvious. And according to Scripture, they have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Truly born-again people are not peeping Toms.

A Second Scene:

By day he works in a downtown office. He's a hard worker and has received steady promotions. Everyone likes him. He's trustworthy, pleasant to be around, and a model father of three children. He attends an evangelical church every Sunday morning and even teaches a Sunday School class twice a month. Elected a deacon last year, he's close to the pastor and well-respected among the congregation. His car antenna has a white ribbon tied to it in protest against pornography. It is well with his soul.

After working hard all week, he likes to relax on Friday evenings. So on the way home from work he stops at the neighborhood video store. There's a new release that he's heard about and he hopes there will be a copy still available to rent. There is. It features several of his favorite actors and actresses. It's rated R, and he knows full well that it will contain explicit sexual scenes and lots of profanity.

For a moment, his conscience speaks as he views the provocative photo on the slipcover. But his defense is already planned: When he discusses the movie with fellow believers in church, he will bemoan all the sex and vulgar language:

"Isn't it a shame that movie-makers think all that filth is necessary?"

"Yes! Yes! What a shame!"

Once the kids are in bed, he slides the video into his VCR and sits down on the couch with his wife. She would never suspect how much he is looking forward to seeing the tanned and trim female bodies in various degrees of undress that are about to be paraded before him. He overheard some of the unsaved guys at the office talk about how the bedroom scenes are awesome. It's another Friday night.

A Comparison of the Two Men

What is the difference between the first man and the second? The peeping Tom watched *live* sex in bedrooms. The other watched *filmed* sex in bedrooms. The peeping Tom could only see limitedly through a partially opened window. The other man had a close up and very intimate view. The peeping Tom watched two people who possessed a lifetime commitment express their love for one another. They would have been horrified to know they had company. The second man watched two *unmarried* people who were *paid large sums of money* to undress and engage in sex in front of a potential audience of millions, making them some of the highest-paid prostitutes in the world. In fact, a portion of his money went to them. *In essence, he paid prostitutes to have filmed sex so he could be entertained.*

Of course, the first man was a peeping Tom on the road to hell. The second man was a follower of Christ, on his way to heaven.

Or was he? Didn't we just read that no immoral or impure person will inherit God's kingdom? Which man was more immoral?

Two other points worth noting about the second man, the supposed follower of Christ: By renting a sexually-explicit video, he has financially supported the pornography industry, casting his vote that more of such movies be produced.¹

¹ I realize that in more recent years, many would object to my labeling sexually-explicit R-rated movies as *pornographic*. Pornographic movies, in the minds of many, are only those that carry an X rating. But how would God define the word *pornography*, derived from the Greek word, *pornia*, most often translated "immorality" in the New Testament, and the word *graphic*, a visual display? Pornography is any visual display of immorality. Webster's Dictionary defines pornography as, "The presentation of sexually explicit behavior, as in a photograph, intended to

His dollars will thus provide others the opportunity to watch more of the same filth; thus he has promoted sin in the lives of others. This the peeping Tom did not do.

Second, the movie the “Christian” paid to view was filled with profanity. God’s name was frequently used as a swear word. Doesn’t it seem strange that one who prays every Sunday in church that God’s name will be hallowed would use his money to be entertained by people who repeatedly blaspheme God’s name?

Why Hypocrites Act Holy

If the second man in our scenario was more immoral than the unsaved peeping Tom, why is it that so many professing Christians act just like that second man, regularly fueling their lust, viewing graphic immorality as a means of entertainment? The answer is that they are not truly saved.

If you agree that the second man was equally or more immoral than the first, and you believe that immoral people will not inherit God’s kingdom (as the Bible states), then you must agree with my conclusion. But why are so many people deceived in this matter?

It’s safe to assume that the average professing Christian who regularly views explicit sex scenes in movies would never stalk suburban neighborhoods to peek through bedroom windows. In fact, he would consider the peeping Tom to be abhorrent. And why? Is it because he loves God? Is it because of his holiness or inward purity? No, those *couldn’t* be the reasons—or he would be equally abhorred with the thought of personally viewing filmed sex between unmarried people.

His inconsistency betrays what really motivates him not to stalk suburban neighborhoods at night: *pure selfishness*. If he were caught being a peeping Tom

arouse sexual excitement.” Are we to think that God considers the acting in and viewing of sexually-explicit R-rated movies as not being *immoral*?

he might suffer negative consequences. His reputation might be ruined. He would be disgraced before his church. He could even end up in jail.

However, he's found a way to regularly do, with no risk, just what the peeping Tom does. His "holiness" is patterned not after God's standards, but the world's. It has become quite acceptable to watch sexually-explicit movies in our culture, and so he has nothing to worry about. His reputation won't be ruined. He won't lose his wife or job. He won't go to jail. If he were a *true* follower of Christ, however, he would have taken seriously Jesus' very solemn warnings about the dire consequences of lust:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery"; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better *for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell*. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for *it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell* (Matt. 5:27-30, emphasis added).

Whether he realizes it or not, the second man does have something to worry about that is much worse than losing his reputation or job: His lustful behavior will send him to hell forever. Yet he ignores or explains away what Christ clearly taught, trusting in a grace that forgives but doesn't transform him, *a grace that doesn't exist*.

When Virtue is Vice

Yet there is still more to say about the second man. His practice of immorality coupled with a life that outwardly appears righteous makes him a hypocrite. A hypocrite isn't a person who's a mixture of good and evil—a hypocrite is completely evil. The reason he tied a white ribbon to his car antenna is not because he's opposed to pornography. That's obvious, because he regularly spends his money to view graphic immorality and financially supports the

pornography industry, thus supporting the exploitation of women and the corruption of children. The reason he tied a white ribbon on his antenna is because he wants to *appear* righteous. His public life is an act. His motivation is not obedience to God or compassion for those harmed by pornography—his motivation is pure selfishness—he wants others to think more highly of him. All of his “good deeds” are tainted by this same fact. He’s a hypocrite, opposed to “hard porn” but supporting “soft porn.”

Our character is revealed, not by what we do on Sunday mornings, but what we do all week. It is revealed more by “little” things and by what we do when alone. Take the sin of stealing, listed in the Ten Commandments and mentioned as a sin that, if practiced, is a sure sign that a person is going to hell (see 1 Cor. 6:10).

Very few professing Christians rob banks at gunpoint. Yet many regularly cheat on their income tax, effectively stealing from every American citizen. Some pay their employees “under the table” (or accept such payments as employees) to avoid paying taxes, again, stealing from every American. Many habitually steal small items from their employers. If they are given more change than they are entitled at the grocery store, they keep it. They illegally download music that they don’t pay for. They use pirated software on their computers. They *are* thieves. Thus the obvious reason they don’t rob banks is not because they are basically unselfish or love God—their small thefts prove otherwise. The reason they don’t rob banks is because they’re afraid they might get caught. The “goodness” that they *do* display is really just another indication of their selfishness. If they could rob a bank with as little risk to their reputation and future freedom as they can cheat on their income tax, they would. But the same selfishness that motivates them to steal small things that no one will know about also motivates them to be “good” in big things. *Our true character is revealed when we are tempted to do wrong with little risk of adverse consequences.*

God’s Hidden Camera

Imagine that you are an employer who has a favorite employee. That employee arrives early each day, leaves late, works hard, and is well liked by your other employees.

However, one day you have hidden cameras installed in your business, and to your horror, you witness your star employee conceal a company-owned item under his jacket, take it outside, and, after looking left and right, place it in his car trunk. Do you think to yourself, *Ah, well, he's still a great employee. He just has a small flaw. I'll overlook it?*

No, suddenly your entire opinion of your star employee changes. Now, all of his previous good points are seen in a different light. Now you begin to wonder *why* he comes in early and leaves late. Is it so he can steal from the company when fewer people are around? Is it to make you think more highly of him so you won't be suspicious of him when certain items are discovered missing? Now that you know his true character, all his good works are exposed as evil. That's how God sees every hypocrite. That's how God views the second man in the previous story. His inconsistency reveals his true character. He's not a Christian with a minor flaw. He's a hypocrite who is entirely corrupt. His good deeds don't offset his one minor flaw; rather, they are a damning revelation of just how evil and selfish he is.

One who has been truly born again is indwelt by God's Spirit and is progressively made holy as he cooperates with the Spirit. He will not lead a double life. Certainly he may stumble at times and sin. But that is not his consistent behavior. His life is primarily characterized by obedience to the God whom he loves all the time. As the apostle John wrote: "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). The new birth is the beginning of a new life of holiness. And as the true Christian learns more of God's will, he is transformed more and more to be like Jesus (see Rom. 12:2).

Contrariwise, the one who has experienced only a counterfeit conversion does many things at home and abroad that he would never do at church or in the company of other Christians. His moral principles are patterned not after what God says but by what the world says, and the world's standards are on an ever-downward spiral. That is why the counterfeit Christian habitually does what

would have appalled even non-Christians just a few decades ago. Case in point: Today, multitudes of professing Christians don't even flinch at the worst obscenity, profanity, violence and perversion portrayed in motion pictures—what would have shocked non-Christians in the not-to-distant past. Some nationally-recognized Christian leaders even recommend such films, as long as they contain some “redeeming” moral theme, such as courage, honor, or self-sacrifice!

True Christians are motivated to be holy because they've been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and because they love God. *On the other hand, what motivates counterfeit Christians to be as moral as they are is their own self-interest, the same thing that motivates non-Christians to be as moral as they are.*

Unholy Motives

Why do non-Christians restrain themselves from committing certain sins? It is because they fear adverse consequences. This principle has been proven repeatedly throughout human history during times when the usual moral restraints, such as governmental law or public opinion, have been removed. When brutality becomes acceptable, brutality prevails. The piles of human skulls in Cambodian killing fields and crumbling incinerators of Nazi concentration camps stand as mute testimony to the true nature of unregenerate human nature. What happens when murder is legalized, when the law of the State or public opinion says it's OK to exterminate Jews or rip the unborn to pieces in their mothers' wombs? No one has to speculate on the answer to that question.

How many professing Christians are motivated, in their limited morality and holiness, not by love for God and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, but by ever-changing public sentiment, the continually-revised law of the land, or peer-pressure of their fellow church members? Only God knows for certain. But through honest self-examination, each one of us can determine what truly motivates us. If every professing Christian would do that, many would be shocked to discover that all their goodness is really wickedness, motivated by nothing higher than self-interest.

Is it really possible to do good things, yet be motivated by pure selfishness? Absolutely. As I've already pointed out, most of the "virtuous" deeds done by non-Christians spring from selfish motivations. Consider the words of Paul in this regard:

If I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing (1 Cor. 13:3).

Jesus, Exposer of Hypocrites

Most modern, professing Christians are opposed to pornography. But vocalizing disapproval of that evil is not the litmus test of authentic Christian conversion. If a person is motivated by love for God and fellow man in his opposition to this evil, his *actions, thoughts and words* will be consistent in that regard; he will practice in his own life an opposition to these sins and those sins which are closely related. Again, if the second man in the previous example had truly been opposed to pornography based upon his concern for the victims of pornography or love of God's law, he wouldn't be regularly watching sexually-explicit videos. His attitude toward all immorality would be consistent.

Jesus exposed similar hypocrisy among religious people of His day, revealing a timeless principle applicable to everyone who thinks he's on the way to heaven. Let's consider again His words that are found in a sermon about salvation, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. See if you can find the significance in His teaching for modern professing Christians who are vocally opposed to pornography, but who indulge in other forms of sexual immorality:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery"; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from

you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell (Matt. 5:27-30).

First, note that Jesus is warning certain people about hell. Contextually, they are people who are not *physically* committing adultery. They are, however, *mentally* committing adultery, and Jesus said that unless they repent, they are heading for hell.

The Letter and Spirit of the Law

Was Jesus adding extra requirements to the Seventh Commandment? No, He was closing a loophole that existed only in people's minds and revealed the full implication of what God meant from the time He first gave the Ten Commandments. Contained within the commandment that forbade adultery was also a prohibition against lust. Obviously, if having a sexual relationship with your neighbor's wife is a sin, then mentally undressing your neighbor's wife is also a sin. Any honest, thinking person would have to admit that.² But Christ's audience was like so many today—they keep the letter of the Law but ignore the spirit of it. *They are vocally opposed to specific sins of which they aren't guilty, yet practice the same sins in other forms.* God's will for our sexual purity far exceeds just abstinence from adultery, fornication and homosexuality. He expects that we be sexually pure in our minds, as Jesus made so clear, as well as in our mouths. For example, Paul wrote,

But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks (Eph. 5:3-4).

² Not to mention the fact that the tenth commandment forbids coveting one's neighbor's wife. Most men don't covet their neighbor's wife because of her personality.

The *New Living Translation* clarifies the sins of filthiness, silly talk and coarse jesting as “obscene stories, foolish talk and coarse jokes.” Obscene stories and coarse jokes are obviously speech that convey sexually-immoral ideas in a positive or humorous way, and “foolish talk” may well describe the sexually-perverted conversations of people whom the Bible characterizes as fools. Paul’s point is that no follower of Christ should be involved in sexual immorality, any impurity, or anything even related to those sins, impure conversation included. What do you suppose Paul would say to Christians who entertain themselves by viewing today’s sexually-suggestive television sitcoms? What would he have to say about most PG-13 and even many PG movies being produced today?

Modern False Teaching

Sadly, some (so-called) Bible teachers use the above-quoted verse from Ephesians to counteract the “guilt-inducing” and “unbalanced” teaching that is being broadcast by teachers such as myself. Their logic goes like this: “It’s obviously possible for true Christians to commit sins of immorality and impurity, otherwise Paul wouldn’t have addressed the issue.”

I’m not saying that it is impossible for a Christian to commit adultery or fornication. Of course it is possible, because Christians are still free moral agents. A true Christian could fall into immorality. Paul’s purpose, however, in writing the above-quoted words was not to assure people who were committing sins of immorality and impurity that they were truly saved in spite of their lifestyles. Rather, he was writing to warn Christians to steer as far away as possible from any shadow of such sins, because they are sins that characterize hell-bound people. As Paul went on to say in the next two verses,

For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Eph. 5:5-6).

Yes, a Christian could yield to the temptation of immorality. But those who do so with any regularity mark themselves as being immoral and impure, and thus expose themselves as being counterfeit Christians. Because of the addictive nature of sin, particularly of sexual lust, the wise follower of Christ will avoid and resist any thought, word or deed related to sexual immorality. A very young Christian, perhaps, may not know God's standards of sexual purity, but as soon as he reads Ephesians 5:3-5, his excuse of ignorance is no longer valid. That is precisely why Paul wrote what he did.

Other Cloudy Questions

To further cloud the issue and make meaningless the clear warnings of Scripture, some people ask, "What constitutes the *practice* of a sin? If I committed adultery once this year and once three years ago, does that make me a practicing adulterer who is thus proved to be a phony Christian? Or did I just stumble twice?"

The first question to ask is, "Did you repent and ask God's forgiveness after you sinned?" There is a vast difference between the person who does and the person who does not. If a true Christian yielded to temptation and committed adultery, he would feel extremely guilty and should cry out for God's forgiveness. If he does, God will forgive him.

Was his salvation in jeopardy before he asked for God's forgiveness? What if he had not asked for God's forgiveness and repeated his sinful act? How many times must he commit adultery before he is considered to be "practicing" adultery? The answers to these questions have been hotly debated. I don't pretend to have the sure answer.³ But any person who wants to know how many times he can commit adultery without repenting and still go to heaven should question his salvation. Those who have been truly born again desire to be holy—body, soul and spirit. They are striving to be *completely* pure, in thought, word and deed.

³ Later, we will consider what Scripture teaches regarding the possibility of a believer forfeiting his salvation.

Others object, again, in an attempt to make the clear warnings of Scripture meaningless, by saying, “I want to be free from the practice of immorality, but I can’t. I love the Lord, and I truly and sincerely want to be free, but I’m not.” They are hoping that the determining factor is not what they *do* but what they say they *desire*.

They are, in an indirect way, saying that sin’s grip on them is more powerful than God, and that His salvation provides forgiveness but not transformation. The New Testament repeatedly affirms, however, that believers in Christ have been set free from sin’s power (see Rom. 6:6-7, 17-18, 22). Scripture also testifies of the complete deliverance from certain grievous sins and the dramatic behavioral differences experienced by true believers (see 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 2:11-14; 1 John 3:7-10).

Moreover, God has promised us that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to resist, and will always provide a way of escape (see 1 Cor. 10:13). In light of such clear and abundant truth, one’s excuse that he wants to stop sinning but can’t rings hollow. I’ve often found that those who claim they want freedom from sexual immorality or impurity are unwilling to remove from their lives what causes them to repeatedly stumble, whether it be discarding their TV, canceling a magazine subscription, avoiding certain places of business, breaking off wrong relationships, or disconnecting from the internet. Paul wrote that we should “make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:14), and Jesus said that we should cut off what often causes us to stumble. Those who refuse to obey Jesus’ clear command reveal that He is really not their Lord at all. They have no intention of obeying Him.

Sin loses its grip when we repent, because that is when God forgives and delivers us. But repentance involves a turning away from all known sin. It is an attitude of our heart and an act of our will. People who truly repent demonstrate their repentance by their actions (see Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20).

If you’re convinced that you are a born-again person who can’t break free of the practice of immorality or some other sin, perhaps a simple question will help you understand your self-deception: Would you stop your sinful practice if someone offered you ten million dollars to stop? If you *would*, that proves you *could*; and if you *could*, you *can*; and if you *can*, you *should*! The problem is not

that you can't stop, but that you won't stop. *Why would you do for money what you will not do for love of Christ?*

Of course, there is no way to avoid all temptation, and no Christian should think he's abnormal because he's tempted, struggles against sin, or has a healthy sex drive. As has been so well said: "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair." It is when we yield to what we know is wrong that we should be concerned.

Every Christian should strive for perfect sexual purity, in body, mouth and mind. Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, pornography of any degree (including advertisements and short bedroom scenes in "good" movies), "dirty" jokes, immoral fantasies, and reading about or listening to something sexually immoral for the purpose of entertainment are all wrong in God's eyes. If we claim that we are continually stumbling but don't remove the stumbling block as Jesus commanded, we are fooling ourselves.

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