

Do Not Be Deceived

I always try to point out, especially in confirmation class, that the commandments guard particular gifts God gives us. For example, God gives us His name. The Second Commandment guards this gift by teaching us how to use it properly instead of misusing it. We call upon the Lord's name in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.

The Sixth Commandment guards the gift of marriage and purity. In the Large Catechism, Luther said: This commandment is aimed directly at the state of marriage... First, understand and mark well how gloriously God honours and praises this estate... He has approved it above in the Fourth Commandment, "Honour your father and your mother." But here He has (as we said) hedged it about and protected it. (LC I 206)

I also often tell confirmation students that one of the devil's most effective deceptions is to misdirect a good desire to twist and pervert what God has instituted. This is to say, the devil wishes us to be sexually promiscuous. The root meaning of "promiscuous" is to be indiscriminate. As children of God, trusting in His fatherly wisdom and love, we are to discriminate concerning when and with whom physical intimacy is appropriate. The Lord teaches us that a man and a woman are to become one only within marriage. It is good for a man to desire his wife but wicked for him to desire someone else's. It accords with God's creation for a young, unmarried woman to desire a husband but sinful for her to act as if she were already married to a particular man.

Fornication, sexual intercourse between persons not married to each other, is strictly forbidden by the Scriptures. St. Paul sternly warned the Corinthians, "Or do you not know that wicked people will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor people used by homosexuals nor homosexuals nor thieves nor greedy people nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10). While Christians often readily condemn homosexual behaviour and other extreme deviancies, many "Bible-believing" Christians wink at premarital intimacy, living together before marriage, adultery and other forms of fornication.

While there are many reasons why this takes place, I would focus on two in particular. First, many parents and other authorities are indulgent. They often mistake indulgence for love, yet indulgence reflects a lack of love. Solomon said, "He who refrains from using his cane hates his son, but he who loves him has been disciplining him diligently" (Prov. 13:24). Secondly, some parents believe they cannot chastise their children for behaviour in which they also engaged. However, the parents' duty to judge according to the Word of God and warn those in their care is not based upon their own moral perfection. Christ commanded us to "judge with right judgment" (John 7:24). Even if parents have sinfully fornicated, they still have the authority and responsibility to tell their children, "Don't do it!"

Just as lies beget lies, toleration of deviancy leads to further deviancy. Christians should not wonder how our culture arrived at the inability to recognise the absurdity of same-sex "marriage" and transgenderism. We arrived by way of no-fault divorce, toleration of engaged couples "playing house" and glorification of hook-up culture. The culture that surrounds us celebrates promiscuity - indiscriminate physical intimacy. As a people, we no longer know how to properly discriminate.

With the devil, the world and our sinful flesh conspiring against us, we can only turn to God's Word. It shows us how to discriminate rightly, how to distinguish between truth and error. The sword of the Spirit, sharper than any two-edged blade, is "living and active... penetrates even as far as the dividing of soul and spirit and joints and marrow. It also discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

The Law of God cuts us to the heart. We have all failed to keep our thoughts, words and deeds pure. Lust, envy, covetousness and every sort of impurity come from our fallen hearts.

We are to be especially alert to the danger of promiscuity since some of the greatest heroes of the Scriptures fell into great shame and vice through their lust. The fall of David and Bathsheba is probably the best-known illustration. Another instructive example is the fall of Samson (Judges 16). Even before he became involved with Delilah, Samson demonstrated his slavery to sin and his idolatrous rejection of God's Word by visiting a prostitute in Gaza. Samson viewed his great power and strength as things to be exploited to fulfill his lust and self-glorification. Samson's pride and presumption led him to foolishness and ruin. He arrogantly believed he could play with fire, and so Delilah ensnared him for the Philistines.

Fortunately, that was not the end of Samson's story. Even though the Lord delivered him into the hands of his enemies, the Lord worked good through Samson's humiliation and suffering. The Lord brought him to repentance. And in his death, Samson gained a greater victory than any he won during his life (Judges 16:30).

Samson's sacrificial death points us to an infinitely more precious victory. Like Samson, Christ died for the sake of His people with outstretched arms. Unlike Samson, Jesus had no sin, for He is the spotless Lamb of God. Upon the cross Jesus atoned for the sin of the world - including all of our sins against the Sixth Commandment.

As the Small Catechism teaches, we are to lead a chaste and decent life in what we say and do. We are to be discriminating, not promiscuous; we are to be faithful to whom God has called us to love and honour. St. Paul's words for the church in Corinth should likewise spur us on in our lives of holiness, both warning us against sin and pointing to what makes us pure - Jesus' holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death: "Flee from sexual sin! Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body. However, the person who sins sexually sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God and that you are not your own? For you have been bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your bodies!" (1 Cor. 6:18-20).