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SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

Phil Robertson, of Duck Dynasty, was just quoted by U.S.A. Today as saying that there is an epidemic of STD's in the United States, and that one-third of our population is infected, which comes to 110 million people!

When I read that, I thought that he must surely be exaggerating. I read two newspapers and watch two or three newscasts almost every day, and I don't remember seeing anything about this. So I Googled it, and it is true! At least 50.5 million men, and 59.5 million women have a sexually transmitted disease. I say "At least," because many who are infected don't show symptoms but can pass along the diseases. The eight most common STD's are: Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Hepatitis B, Genital herpes, HIV/AIDS, Syphilis, Trichomoniasis, and Human papillovirus.

Some of these diseases have become resistant to antibiotics. 50% occur from ages 15 to 24. The cost to our society financially is \$16 billion a year in direct medical costs, but the cost in human suffering is incalculable.

When there was an Ebola outbreak in Africa and four or five infected people came to America, the news media acted as if the world were coming to an end: scary headlines, feature stories, on-site reports, emotional interviews with victims and their families. But here we have one-third of our population infected with these terrible diseases and there seems to be a conspiracy of silence. Is it because it is Politically Incorrect to talk about these things? It can't be because our society is modest or respectful of our sensibilities. On the 5:00 PM daily newscast of NBC, CBS and ABC, there are two one-minute commercials every day for Cialis and Viagra. Good grief!

One of the major causes for the proliferation of STD's, according to the information available on the websites, is the promotion through pornography of the normalization of oral and anal sex. That is mostly what pornography is about. If you like horror movies, you don't have to go to a theatre, just click on the photographs of the faces and mouths – and other body parts - of the victims of some of these diseases.

This is the ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM in our society. The media is tongue-tied about this subject, likely because to raise the subject might imply that there is something wrong about America's sexual mores. That would suggest that there is such a thing as right and wrong, "But everyone knows that there is no such thing as right and wrong since that is purely subjective."

In the first chapter of Romans it says three times that because men refused to worship God, He "abandoned them," or "gave them up," or "gave them over," *to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired; to their shameful desires; to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done.*

I just called the editor on the city desk of our local newspaper and asked him to please consider working up a special report on this subject. He was very cordial and said he would talk to some of his team about it. Let's do what we can to warn people that there are consequences for turning away from God, and blessings for hearing and obeying Him.

THE HERESY OF NEW AGE, UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY

Last month I reported on the invasion by New Age, Eastern, pantheistic philosophies into society at large and also into the church. Reportedly, some 40 million people, almost 20 percent of adult Americans, have embraced the New Age movement. The *New Age*, or the astrological *Age of Aquarius*, is supposedly the golden age when we come to realize that *man is God*, or *God is within*, or God is the *all in all*. Does that sound a little like the words whispered to a woman in a garden, If you disobey God and *eat the fruit of this certain tree, you will be like God, knowing good and evil?*

The thing that is so convincing to multitudes of people, the thing that “closes the deal,” as it were, is that when people follow the simple instructions: “Sit on your mat in this position, slow your breathing, empty your mind, center your thoughts, chant this word or sentence over and over” - - something really happens! Or someone really manifests itself to them in some tangible way. They may see a beautiful light or colors; they may feel an inner excitement and euphoria similar to a drug-induced high or a sexual experience; they may sense a real presence; they may be convinced that they are in communion or connection with a universal wisdom; they may feel a deep peace and security; they may “hear” words affirming them or directing them to do certain things. These are spiritual experiences, which may be the first genuine spiritual experiences they have ever had, even though many of them may have been attending a church for a long time. So they may be convinced that they are in touch with the God identified in the Bible.

One of the things that make Christians vulnerable is that they may be in a church that is boring and that rigidly excludes any teaching about the Holy Spirit and His gifts. Another thing that makes these kinds of religion so attractive is that they let you live any way your heart desires. They don’t have any commandments to deny yourself, to take up your cross, to obey God, and to repent of sin as God defines sin in the Bible. (Read the book of Romans, or Corinthians, or Galatians, or Ephesians, or Colossians, etc.)

At this point, people may (1) abandon their local church and just practice their spiritual exercises at home; (2) they may join a Unity or Universal type church, which believe that all religions are equal; that Jesus had the “Christ Spirit,” but we all have that Spirit; and that everyone goes to Heaven so we don’t need a Savior; (3) they may get into Zen Buddhism or other types of Eastern spirituality; (4) or they may continue to participate in their local church and simply blend in their New Age practices, thinking they have added something positive to the Christian faith. This practice of blending Biblical Christianity with the New Age or with Occultism and Witchcraft is no more acceptable to God than the other three. The theologians call it “Mixture,” or “Syncretism,” and God hates it. **God hates Mixture (Syncretism)** Moses warned Israel not to mix their worship of Yahweh with the worship of the gods (idols) of Canaan, but that is exactly what they did. Many of the Prophets address this practice: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, etc. God compares this practice to spiritual adultery. Just as a husband does not want to share his wife with another man, God says that He wants His bride to be totally committed to Him. 2 Kings 17:35-41 says, *Worship only the Lord. Bow down to Him alone. Obey His laws.... (But) They worshipped the Lord. They also worshipped their idols.*

The Great Commandment taught by Jesus is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength....and your neighbor as yourself.” God does not want us to worship Buddha, or Allah, or Shiva, or Money, or Sex, or Comfort and Security. God is our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior. He is a jealous God, He wants our hearts all to Himself.

(Next month I will share how Oprah Winfrey became a world-wide influence for the New Age. Many Christians, especially Christian women, have stated that they have learned far more about God from Oprah than from their own pastors or churches!)

GOD IS AWESEPIC!

In January I attended a missionary conference at Good Shepherd Church in Loveland, the church I formerly pestered, I mean pastored. It was a wonderful time. I just received thank-you notes from two little Sunday-School kids at Good Shepherd.

One of them, unsigned, thanked me for coming, and it had a big star and the words, "God is awesepic."

The other reads as follows: "Thank you Glenn Brown for telling all the people all over America the story of God. Sincerely, Destiny."

Isn't that awesepic!

PURSUING GOD

(Just received a newsletter from precious friends, Paul and Gretel Haglin, in St. Louis, who wrote:)

"Years ago, our daughter, Alexis, received a vision of the narrow road that we are all invited to walk on with Jesus. She saw the road getting narrower and narrower, and steeper and steeper, and the ditches at each side of the road got steeper and deeper as well. The Lord said to her that they were the ditches of pride. As she went further up the narrowing road of righteousness, she began to see bones strewn along the sides of the road. She was frightened and asked the Lord what they were. He said those were the bones of saints who had traveled there before her but had stumbled into pride when the real power of God started flowing through them.

We do not find any instructions in the Scripture to seek God's power with all our heart, but we are exhorted to seek love, peace, faith, prophecy, and unity in the Spirit. We also are exhorted to seek righteousness, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness....seek peace and pursue it....pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace.*

Not one of these verses mentions power. These words of God say that His power comes from pursuing Him. Jesus is the model for God's power. Receive it humbly. Release it for the right reasons, for His glory.

Then, beloved, the power of God will flow through you to work and to will for His good pleasure in the lives of all those around you that He wants to touch, to change, to heal, and to deliver for His glory."

WHAT ISIS REALLY WANTS

(There is a sobering article in the March issue of The Atlantic which quotes Bernard Haykel, the foremost secular authority on the Islamic State's ideology. I am quoting, and paraphrasing, only a tiny bit of the article):

"Islamic State has supplanted and eclipsed al-Qaeda in its commitment to the early, violent days of Islam. ISIS rejects peace as a matter of principle; it hungers for genocide; it will not change even if it must suffer martyrdom; and it considers itself the lead player in introducing the apocalypse; that is, the end of the world. The theology of ISIS, as publicly stated by its leaders, requires them to exterminate 200 million Shia Muslims as well as the population of every nation that does not bow to the new Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and submit to sharia law. Fighters of Islamic State are faithfully reproducing the norms of war prescribed in the Koran, including slavery, crucifixion, and beheadings. They have published on the internet their justification for doing these things.

The majority of Muslims clearly reject the extremism of ISIS. ISIS is sincere in trying to replicate the beginnings of Islam and striving to return civilization to a 7th-century legal environment. Mr. Haykel says that the practice of the U.S. government in denying that ISIS is Islamic is utter nonsense and leads to dangerous decisions on the part of our government. For instance, it led directly to the beheading of a diplomat that the U.S. tried to use as a negotiator.

Properly contained, the Islamic State is likely to be its own undoing. No country is its ally, and its ideology ensures that this will remain the case. The land it controls, while expansive, is mostly uninhabited and poor. As it stagnates or shrinks, its claim that it is the engine of Allah's will and the agent of the apocalypse will weaken, and as reports of the misery within its borders leak out, fewer believers from abroad will join them. But the death of Islamic State is unlikely to be quick, and if it was joined in allegiance by al-Qaeda, it could become a far worse foe. A vast ground invasion would certainly make the situation worse."

JONAH AND THE GREAT FISH

We all know the story: God gave a clear commission to Jonah, one of His prophets, to go to Nineveh, a wicked city, and warn them of God's coming judgment. Nineveh was to the north-east and could only be reached by land. Jonah went down to the port and got on a ship headed west! What was he thinking? God sent a big storm, the crew figured out that it was Jonah's fault and threw him into the ocean. But the Lord had prepared a "great fish," not a whale, to swallow Jonah. He was inside the fish for three days and three nights. (Jonah 1:17) Jonah repented and cried out to God for help, a very wise move.

The fish vomited Jonah out onto the beach, he proceeded to Nineveh and marched through the city shouting that judgment was coming in 40 days. The whole city heeded the warning. The King humbled himself with fasting and prayer and decreed that everyone in the city should do likewise. God was pleased that they repented and canceled the threatened destruction. Rather than being pleased, Jonah was so angry that God had not destroyed them that he wanted to die, and God had to deal with his attitude.

First, what are we to think about this bizarre story? Is it a parable? A myth? An allegorical tale? It is presented in the Bible as a historical account. It starts out, *The Lord gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh," etc.* Jonah was a historic character. 2 Kings 14:15 says: *Jeroboam 2nd recovered the territories of Israel between Lebo-hamath and the Dead Sea, just as the Lord had promised through Jonah, son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-hepher.* So Jonah was a known prophet with a proven track record. He was a man who heard from God.

More importantly, the Lord Jesus referred to Jonah twice, in Matthew 12:40 and Matthew 16:4. In debating the Pharisees, Jesus said, *For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.* Jonah was actually a very important prophet, and God used his sojourn in the belly of the fish as the "sign" to the Pharisees, although I assume that at the time of the discussion they didn't have a clue what Jesus meant. If we truly believe the first sentence in the Bible, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,* then it is not hard to believe that He can do anything He wants to do.

Second, why did Jonah dare to directly disobey God, and why did he have such an attitude toward Nineveh? The answer is that he hated and despised Nineveh and the Assyrians, and he wanted them all to suffer and die. He had good reason to hate them. The Assyrians were ancient enemies of Israel, and periodically they invaded Israel and decimated them. They had a reputation for cruelty: they delighted to flay the people they captured; i.e., they skinned them alive. And they invented other fiendish ways to torture their victims. And they concluded their invasions by stacking the heads of the captured cities' residents into a pile, like a big pyramid, outside the city gates.

Jonah knew all these things. Possibly some of his loved ones, family and friends, had been victimized by those Assyrian devils. Imagine that toward the end of World War 2, God had told a Jew who had escaped from Auschwitz to go to Berlin and preach to the Nazis. Or that he told an Iraqi whose family had been crucified by ISIS to go and preach to them.

Jonah knew that God was merciful, and he was afraid that the Ninevites would repent and that God would spare them, and much to his chagrin that is exactly what happened. Apparently Jonah hadn't really repented when he was in the fish. God corrected his rebellious prophet. He said: *Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?*

Jonah and me

About 15 years ago I was in the great city of Morelia, Mexico. As was my practice, I preached in the evenings and during the days spent six or eight hours ministering, with an interpreter, to one counselee after the next. One morning I ministered to a lady, whom I will call Lydia, with a horrible story. Her mother was not married and lived with a succession of men. Her mother had loved a particular man who was evil and lived with him for ten years or so. That man was angry, violent, and committed incest regularly on Lydia and her sisters - - with her mother's knowledge. On one occasion this terrible man was arrested and Lydia's mother coerced Lydia into lying in order to get him released. The abuse continued.

As you might imagine, Lydia had all sorts of spiritual, emotional, and physical sicknesses and bondages, and I spent a long time praying with her. I think she was helped spiritually and emotionally, but nothing much happened physically, and I was very sad for her.

My next counselee was a much older lady whose body was twisted with arthritis, osteoporosis, and a variety of disorders. She said, "That was my daughter you just prayed with." I was astonished. I had assumed that she had died long ago. I kept thinking about what this woman had done to her children, and I was having a hard time feeling anything but contempt for her, so I ministered to her in a half-hearted way. Much to my surprise, her back and bones started cracking and straightening up, and right before my eyes I saw God heal and redo her body. It was truly a miracle. I just stared at her in amazement.

In all honesty, I was not pleased. I said, "God, why did you heal that evil woman and not heal her daughter, who was her victim?" God did not answer me, but I think a part of the answer gradually came to me in subsequent days. I believe God communicated something like the following to me: "Glenn, you don't know what kind of home that woman came out of or what she went through in her life. She came to you in a church. She has repented of her sins, and I have forgiven her. I love her. And, Glenn, who are you to judge that woman? I forgave your sins and called you into the ministry, and you turned your back on me and went back into your vile addictions. I had mercy on you again and rescued you from the judgment that was coming to you. Since I have had mercy on you again and again, can't you have mercy on the broken people that I bring to you for ministry?"

Oh, my! I repented again and asked God to forgive me and help me to act more like Jesus. There is still a lot of Jonah in me. For instance, I have a difficult time feeling loving and compassionate toward Muslims and especially toward the homicidal maniacs in ISIS. I continue to ask God for His mercy and grace.

Glenn

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