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Unchastity the Dominant Evil of the Age

By

PRESIDENT JOSEPH F. SMITH



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Unchastity the Dominant Evil of the Age

By President Joseph F. Smith

The character of a community or a nation is the sum of the individual qualities of its component members. To say so is to voice at once an ordinary platitude and an axiom of profound import. The stability of a material structure depends upon the integrity of its several parts and the maintenance of a proper correlation of the units in harmony with the laws of forces. The same may be said of institutions, systems, and organizations in general.

Some of the gravest mistakes of men, in administrative affairs, in politics, in statesmanship, are the consequence of misdirected efforts to strengthen the fabric as a whole instead of applying remedial measures to the defective parts, or correcting the discordant relationship. When citizens can be taught to live right lives, the grandeur and perpetuity of the nation will be assured.

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The voice of the pessimistic agitator is heard in the land today. He is loud in denunciation of existing systems and vigorous in demand for new laws and governmental reforms. Progressive legislation is undoubtedly necessary, and abuse of power, neglect of duty, or other evils in national or local administration, should be promptly corrected; but the crying need of mankind is individual reformation. The thorough purification and effective regulation of society as a system through repressive legislation is a stupendous and well-nigh a hopeless undertaking. The natural and rational plan of improvement must deal largely with the education of the society unit, the individual citizen. Regulatory and prohibitory laws cannot consistently be regarded as other than necessities in the present state of human affairs, but let us hope that these enactments shall become as dead letters in the advancement of the community through individual improvement.

What has come to be known in present day literature as the social evil is a subject of perennial discussion, and

the means proposed for dealing with it are topics of contention and debate. That the public conscience is aroused to the seriousness of the dire condition due to sexual immorality is a promising indication of prospective betterment. No more loathsome cancer disfigures the body and soul of society today than the frightful affliction of sexual sin. It vitiates the very fountains of life, and bequeaths its foul effects to the yet unborn as a legacy of death. It lurks in hamlet and city, in the mansion and in the hovel as a ravening beast in wait for prey; and it skulks through the land in blasphemous defiance of the laws of God and of man.

The lawful association of the sexes is ordained of God, not only as the sole means of race perpetuation, but for the development of the higher faculties and nobler traits of human nature, which the love-inspired companionship of man and woman alone can insure. The word of Scripture is explicit as to the Divine intent and command with respect to the sexes. It is not good for man to be alone; and therefore hath it

been ordained that "a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:18, 24). Of the first parents of the race we read: "And God blessed them; and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28)..

The precept that marriage is honorable is as true today as when uttered by the Apostle of old (see Hebrews 13:4); and who shall deny that the married state is essential to the attainment of even relative perfection in fulfilling the measure and purpose of man's mortal existence? "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (I Corinthians 11:11).

Not alone is it fundamentally proper and in strict accord with both the spirit and the letter of the Divine Word, but absolutely essential to the stability of the social order that the marriage relation shall be defined and regulated by secular law. Parties to the marriage contract must be definitely invested with the responsibilities of the status they assume; and for fidelity to their

obligations they are answerable to each other, to society, and to their God.

Sexual union is lawful in wedlock, and, if participated in with right intent is honorable and sanctifying. But without the bonds of marriage, sexual indulgence is a debasing sin abominable in the sight of Deity.

Infidelity to marriage vows is a fruitful source of divorce, with its long train of attendant evils, not the least of which are the shame and dishonor inflicted on unfortunate though innocent children. The dreadful effects of adultery cannot be confined to the erring participants. Whether openly known or partly concealed under the cloak of guilty secrecy, the results are potent in evil influence. The immortal spirits that come to earth to tabernacle in bodies of flesh have the right to be well-born, through parents who are free from the contamination of sexual vice.

It is a deplorable fact that society persists in holding woman to stricter account than man in the matter of sexual offense. What shadow of excuse, not to speak of justification, can

be found for this outrageous and cowardly discrimination? Can moral defilement be any the less filthy and pestilential in man than in woman? Is a male leper less to be shunned for fear of contagion than a woman similarly stricken?

Oh, the baseness, the injustice, the dishonor of it all! Happily the early promulgators of this shameful conception of a double standard of morals for the sexes are hidden in the oblivion of the past. Let the infamy in which they should rightly share be borne by those who countenance the current acceptance of so vicious a distinction! Visualize the spectacle. Man, who is by nature the protector and defender of woman, ready to stone to social death the adulteress, in whose sin he was partner!

True, there is nothing distinctively modern in this revolting distortion of propriety and justice. It will be remembered that certain self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees came clamoring to the Christ in the Temple courts, dragging with them a woman, of whom they said, "Master, this woman was

taken in adultery, in the very act;" and they asked what punishment should be meted out to her. What of the man in the case? He may have been present, but whether so or not we have no record that judgment upon him was either asked or implied. However, injustice is of no less hideous mien because, as we sometimes say in stultifying inconsistency, it is time-honored.

So far as woman sins it is inevitable that she shall suffer, for retribution is sure whether it be immediate or deferred. But in so far as man's injustice inflicts upon her the consequence of his offenses, he stands convicted of multiple guilt. And man is largely responsible for the sins against decency and virtue, the burden of which is too often fastened upon the weaker participant in the crime. The frightful prevalence of prostitution, and the tolerance and even condonation with which the foul traffic is treated by so-called civilized society, are black blots on the pages of current history.

It would be manifestly unjust to sweepingly condemn every fallen woman as of equal culpability with the

rest of her degraded class. The published results of investigation, by official inquiries and volunteers in this miry field of research, indicate that many a woman who offers her body for hire entered into this dreadful commerce when she found herself despoiled and betrayed through undue confidence in man; and while her despairing and desperate condition must be considered as an element of cause if not of mitigation, she is nevertheless a criminal under the secular laws and a grievous offender against the mandate of the Almighty. 'In the day of righteous judgment, before the bar of the Great Judge who shall read the mind and interpret the heart, every circumstance will be taken into just account, in her case as in that of him or them who have contributed to her degradation. Others there are, as the reports attest, who aver that they live their lives of shame by choice, preferring the comparative ease and the unnatural excitement of their abandoned mode of existence to the exactions of honest industry.

Horrifying as the condition is, it is

nevertheless a black reality, that hordes of women prostitute their bodies and souls for money and find no lack of eager buyers. Who is the more depraved—the vendor or the purchaser of woman's honor? In many cases a power of discernment and analysis superior to human attainment is essential to a just verdict, but it appears certain that whatever of palliation through stress of circumstance may be found for the woman, guilty lust is too generally the primal motive of the man. If the passions of men were kept in natural and wholesome restraint, female virtue would cease to be a purchaseable commodity in the unholy marts of society.

The low esteem in which strict sexual morality is currently held is an element of positive danger to the nation as a human institution, to say nothing of the wholesale debauching of souls as an offense against Divine decree. With such awful examples as history furnishes, it is a matter of astonishment that governments should be so nearly oblivious to the disintegrating forces springing from viola-

tions of the moral law amongst their citizenry. For, as already stated, while the education of the individual is the basal condition of community improvement, regulatory laws will be necessary as long as crime flourishes.

The grandeur of ancient Greece, the majesty of Rome, once the proud rulers of the world, have disappeared; and the verdict of history specifies the prevalence of sexual immorality as among the chief of the destructive agencies by which the fall of those mighty peoples was effected. The literature of the religious body I represent records an instance of even more striking import, for it comprises the physical destruction and complete extinction of a once powerful nation, and the utter debasement of another. According to Book of Mormon history the American continent was once inhabited by two peoples known respectively as Nephites and Lamanites. The former were progressive throughout a great part of their career; they built cities and cultivated the arts of civilization; and as long as they lived in righteousness they prospered. The

Lamanites were of nomadic habits, and, except for brief intervals of comparative peace, were in a state of aggressive enmity against their Nephite contemporaries. The most blessed period of ancient American history was that of the first two centuries of the Christian era, during which the people lived in purity and virtue. Of that time we read: "And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God" (4 Nephi 15, 16).

But this virtuous and happy state was followed by an era of abominable excesses; and prominent among the sins that led to the death of the nation was that of sexual impurity and general lasciviousness. As the prophets had predicted, the Nephites degenerated, and by Divine sufferance their enemies destroyed them as a nation.

And the Lamanites, though victors in the struggle, have fallen to the present degraded status of the American Indian. Archæologists tell us that the human bones taken from Indian mounds of this country bear unmistakable testimony to the prevalence of syphilitic and allied diseases among the ancient Americans.

Is our modern nation to bring upon itself the doom of destructive depravity? The forces of disintegration are at work throughout the land, and they operate as insidiously as does the virus of deadly contagion. A nation-wide awakening to the need of personal sanitation and of rigorous reform in the matter of sexual morality is demanded by the exigencies of the times. As in combating physical maladies, so in the treatment of moral contagion, the individual should be rendered immune, so far as possible, by instruction in hygienic living, and by inoculation with the spirit of righteousness; and, coincidentally, every possible effort is required to check the spread of the plague by community sanitation. The current and common custom of in-

decency in dress, the flood of immoral fiction in printed literature, in the drama, and notably in moving picture exhibitions, the toleration of immodesty in every-day conversation and demeanor, are doing deadly work in the fostering of soul-destroying vice.

Like many bodily diseases, sexual crime drags with itself a train of other ills. As the physical effects of drunkenness entail the deterioration of tissue and disturbance of vital functions, and so render the body receptive to any distemper to which it may be exposed, and at the same time lower the powers of resistance even to fatal deficiency, so does unchastity expose the soul to divers spiritual maladies, and rob it of both resistance and recuperative ability. The adulterous generation of Christ's day was deaf to the voice of truth, and through their diseased state of mind and heart, sought after signs and preferred empty fable to the message of salvation.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Divinely ordained panacea for the ills that afflict humanity, and pre-eminently so for the dread affliction of

sexual sin. Note the teachings of the Master while He ministered among men in the flesh—they were primarily directed to individual probity and rectitude of life. The letter of the Mosaic Law was superseded by the spirit of personal devotion to the right. “Ye have heard,” said He, “that it was said by them of old times, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:27, 28). The sin itself may spring from the sensual thought, the lustful glance; just as murder is often the fruitage of hatred or covetousness.

We accept without reservation or qualification the affirmation of Deity through an ancient Nephite prophet: “For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before Me. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts.”

We hold that sexual sin is second only to the shedding of innocent blood, in the category of personal crimes; and that the adulterer shall have no part in the exaltation of the blessed.

We proclaim as the word of the Lord:

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

“He that looketh on a woman to lust after her, or if any shall commit adultery in their hearts, they shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith.”

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