

## Sex and Freedom

*[This is excerpted from a communication to someone, while wanting still to be a Christ follower, who a few years ago knowingly chose uncommitted sex with a partner long since gone. The Cosmic Christ, or Christ the Cosmic Grain of the Universe, or The Cosmic Tuning Fork Christ, or Christ the Cosmic Dreamer, or Christ the Cosmic Lord of the Dance, invites us to embrace the “Way” not out of legalism (a horrible Western Christian scourge and heritage!) but for maxed out freedom and joy. The excerpt is copied below as written then. See final bracketed comments at the end.]*

Please read:

2 Cor 6:14-16

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial [meaning “personification of the bad”]? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”*

This reflects Jesus’ teaching:

Matt 19:4-5

*“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?”*

That is from the Creation Story, which reads:

Gen 2:23-24

*The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

When one has sex with another, one becomes “one” in far more than the physical. “Flesh” means the whole human being: the emotional, psychological and spiritual are all deeply intertwined and impacted. It is the most profound act of relationship known to our humanity, the closest to relationship with the Divine.

Saint Paul picks up on the “unity” the sexual act turns two people into with reference to sexual immorality:

1 Cor 6:15-20

*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a [lover – the original reads “prostitute”]? Never! Do you not know that the one who unites with a [lover] is one with that person in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But the one who unites with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside his or her body, but the one who sins sexually sins against one’s own body. 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 honour God with your body.*

Some points of the passage are:

- Sexual intimacy means uniting with another, implicitly only appropriate in a committed lifelong relationship.
- Uniting with “the Lord” means doing his will: the very opposite of sexual intimacy outside a committed lifelong covenant relationship.
- Uniting sexually with another is sexual immorality contrary to the follower of Christ whose body is in fact the temple of the Holy Spirit, not the sex shrine of a “hot” boy/girlfriend, and not one’s own to give away to just anyone. Your body is a temple belonging to God the Holy Spirit, since you are a member of Christ. If you claim to be a Christian, your body does not belong to you.

Can one join oneself sexually with another outside a covenant commitment, and it be right? In becoming “one flesh” with another, something profoundly intimate happens to the core of our created being that God only intended for two partners in a committed lifelong covenant relationship. Sexual intercourse outside marriage commitment is in fact “sexual immorality” that contradicts our status as children of God (“*You are not your own*” the text says), and redeemed by Christ (“... *you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*”) Do you no longer, as Paul says in Colossians 3:2-3, “*Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things [like sexual immorality]. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*”? The essence of following Christ is death to selfishness in a move to love God passionately and the neighbour as being one’s very self.

Paul writes:

Gal 5:1

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* The Greek word for “yoke of slavery” here is identical to the Greek word for “*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers*” just read, and carries with it the connotation of “servitude” or “bondage” or “yieldedness” to another master than Christ. In short, it is invariably *addiction* when to another than Christ, something brilliantly argued by psychiatrist Gerald May in a book entitled [\*\*Addiction And Grace\*\*](#). (The corollary: “Religion” is arguably the most addictive substance known to humanity, because “God” is on its side!) As Bob Dylan sings, “You gotta serve somebody!” (It is on YouTube: [\*\*Bob Dylan – Gotta Serve Somebody\*\*](#).) We humans have no option and always go through life consciously or otherwise in obeisance to, driven by, serving, something and/or someone. Christians by definition make a deliberate choice to *serve* Christ, to *follow* Christ, not self or the whims of surrounding culture. The decision to follow Christ every day has profound life-shaping implications, not least in creating at times impossible tensions with wider societal norms. As Jesus taught in the context of money:

Matt 6:24

*“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Similarly, choosing Christ means you cannot serve God and Sex.*

The central motif of the Gospel is liberation in response to Truth:

John 8:32

*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* This liberation is amongst other things freedom from the selfishness of sexual promiscuity, freedom from claiming your body is your own to give to whomever in sexual intercourse you feel like. But there is always repentance and forgiveness. One can *choose* freedom! It is always a choice one can make, no matter what, no matter when.

Baptismal vows eloquently say we would faithfully follow Christ. That's what it means to be a Christian. To choose to have sex outside marriage means to choose *not* to follow Christ, to choose *not* to be Christian.

*A most powerful Christian witness is in fact one's sexual purity and faithfulness held onto for the one to whom one would ultimately show lifelong faithful covenant love, like God in Christ who demonstrates absolute consistency, purity and faithfulness in his everlasting covenant love towards us.* Put differently again: *God does not screw around with us! Neither should we for sexual pleasure, biblically referred to as "the pleasures of sin for a short time" (Hebrews 11:25).* "For a short time" because all such pleasure for Christians like manna in the wilderness turns putrid outside committed lifelong relationship. The Psalm says of this:

Ps 106:15

*[God] gave them their request,  
But sent leanness into their soul.*

Faithfulness and purity can be regained if lost. Nothing is ever lost for good! The end-point of the entire story of Creation and the Fall is Paradise Regained. There is *indeed* a crack in everything (see [Leonard Cohen - Anthem](#)). That's how the Light gets in. That Light is Jesus Christ.

Central to everything God is, is God is *faithful*. We are called to imitate God in this most central way. Please listen to these texts:

Lam 3:22-23

*Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

Eph 5:1-2

*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Imitating God in Christ is a choice of love most manifested in faithfulness. In church language, our faithfulness to God in Christ is response by us to him, analogous of the bride to her lover. Paul explicates this as he continues in the Ephesians 5 passage first with reference to sexual immorality and the theme of light (that gets through the crack in everything) and darkness:

Eph 5:3-11

*But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can*

*be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-- such a man is an idolater-- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.* For the Christian, the crack in everything is so that we might live in faithfulness to that pure Light streaming through.

Then a little later, Paul talks about the relationship of Christ to the church as husband to bride in a faithful committed covenant relationship, with reference to the two becoming one as above, to the bride intended to be “spotless and pure” meaning utterly faithful, particularly in matters sexual<sup>1</sup>:

Eph 5:15-33

*Be very careful, then, how you live-- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head [meaning nurturing loving source] of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

The only Christian context for sexual intimacy is the committed covenant relationship of marriage, just like Christ's committed covenant relationship to his bride, the church. This is “profound mystery” claims Paul, why sexual intimacy must never be entered into casually or recreationally outside the same kind of committed covenant relationship that Christ makes to the church. Or else the *mystery* becomes a *mockery* of sexual intimacy.

The pain of a broken relationship after sexual intimacy is exacerbated by sexual intercourse: psychologically, spiritually, emotionally – in every way. That's just how we humans are made. This is why lifelong faithful commitment is paramount before sexual intimacy. This does not

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<sup>1</sup> Paul says in another context about sexual lust:

<sup>2</sup> Tim 2:22

*Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

guarantee no failed relationship. It does forestall profound pain and hurt if the relationship remains faithful. Sex before marriage opens oneself to potentially profound psychic pain in one's profession to live "*in Christ*".

When two people fall in love, their relationship is not a stand alone. Each of us is part of a social network made up of extended family and friends. Christ and the Church are deeply significant. Relationship to another rightly *must* take into consideration all of those closest. This is not a legalism, it is simply the only way to honour those relationships. This is why Saint Paul says: Eph 6:2-3

"Honour your father and mother"-- which is the first commandment [of the ten] with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." I'll return to the Ten Commandments shortly, and to enjoying life.

Theologically, we are made in God's image. God is Being in Trinity who is relational to the core. We are made in God's image imbued with that same stamp of relationality. That is why first it is of the essence to be faithful. For God is *nothing* if not faithful in relationship. Human relationality looks back to all human relationships that shaped us; it looks forward to all the relationships that we will be and continue in. It presupposes *faithfulness* as maximization of human freedom – for which, the Apostle Paul declared "*Christ has set us free*" (Gal. 5:1)!

Like all drug abuse however, sex outside marriage is false ecstasy that turns to bitterness and addiction in the very repeated use, and in the inevitable brokenness in every direction that ensues.

The African concept of *ubuntu* captures the human dimensional essence of God as Trinity-in-relationship since it is in God's image we humans are made. It understands that *a person is a person through other persons*. We humans cannot live freely according to the philosophical concept, *I think therefore I am*. This is fundamental individualistic creed and terribly destructive of freedom – ever since a famous philosopher René Descartes enunciated it in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The 5,000 year old Judeo-Christian motif captured in the African concept of *ubuntu* is rather, *I relate and therefore I am (fully human)*. There is no self without the other. No human is a standalone self.

A decision to enter into the most intimate and significant relationship of all outside God, the sexual, is not ours to make alone. It is only to be made in the context of pre-existing communities of dialogue, of those closest to us in relationship. In this case, in the deepest way, a decision to have sex outside marriage was *profoundly nonrational* for it was to the core *nonrelational* with respect to our two most significant communities of family and faith. It was consequently antithetical to everything respectful, reasonable, biblical and theological. *Loving the neighbour as yourself* (Jesus) means *loving the other as being yourself*. The whole biblical idea of *sin* is shot through with broken relationship of what is quintessential human:

- towards God (theological)
- towards oneself (psychological)
- towards others (sociological)
- towards creation (ecological and cosmological).

Sin is not *wrong* because some *rule* is broken (that's sick and has nonetheless plagued the Church); sin is wrong because *human relationship* is broken. That brokenness in turn robs us of our freedom, a freedom that in turn maximizes joy, for which God created us. God is not about rules! The Ten Commandments are not a bunch of fretful orders by a sick Deity wanting to ruin our (in this case sexual) fun! God created sex and believe me, *he wants it to be fun* – sheer ecstasy indeed! God is nothing if not about freedom with wild and woolly abandon willed on all his children – in our sexual lives, no less than in all other aspects. The Ten Commandments are *not... commandments!* They are rather *Ten Prerequisites* of how to full throttle human freedom. “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Exodus 20:14) is retrospective and prospective principle for how to live life sexually to the fullest and freest. The prerequisite is: *no sexual intimacy outside a committed lifelong covenant relationship*. Throughout the ages this life-affirming, freedom-bringing principle has been the only ticket to that most incredibly elusive of all human achievements: the attainment of full sexual freedom. In turn, this kind of sexual freedom most reflects our faithful relationship to God. The *Song of Songs* is delightful praise-song to our relationship to God, one compared spiritually to exquisite orgasm. “Free” choice of sex outside marriage is not only beginning of a bondage, but of lessening of the joy of sex itself, since outside the only freedom-maximizing context: committed lifelong covenant relationship. There is no freedom without form. Sexual freedom is attained only through the form of committed relationship.

Bondage one is in arises in inability to stop the sex once started, and like a rock thrown into a still pond, in the consequent multiple “brokennesses” with parents, church and beyond. Worst of all, the full joy of sex dissipates with the non-committed sex act.

Such sexual choice that is rampant in Western culture *à la Descartes* is ironically ultimate ruin of sexual freedom, even as the sexual acts and partners pile up. This is the absolute worst choice to make on the human Menu of Freedoms, yet the commonest today. Consequently, there is pervasive “food poisoning” throughout our culture. Every new sex act and partner robs even more freedom, binds like steel cables even more, sucks life out of the joy of sex incrementally, and ultimately destroys life at every level. One could say of sex outside the context of lifelong faithful commitment to one partner: *Enjoy your sex. Feast on every delectable morsel of the repeated sex act. But know in the end that the feast is on your spiritual free self, as you methodically devour all vestige of what most makes one fully human.* The Ancient Israelite wisdom went:

Deut 29:18

*Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.* One of two foremost “gods of [Western] nations” is sexual promiscuity. The other is violence. Both in fact are intimately related in all human cultures and times. Sexual promiscuity is by definition “bitter poison” that one invites intentionally.

*[Lingering wrestling: How does one communicate “truth spoken in love” (Ephesians 4:15) that does not feel “judgmental” while contradictory of uncommitted sex? How does one practise “unconditional love” while rejecting uncommitted sexual behaviour? How does one like God authentically love the “sinner”/“addict” but not the “sin”/“addiction”? How does one deal*

*with accusations that “truth” in this instance was not “spoken in love”, when one tried as carefully and lovingly as possible to do so, without holding back “truth”? How does one lovingly refuse to be “held hostage” by another’s hurt, as in this case, for having experienced “truth spoken in love”?*

*It is a truism: the messenger is often shot. It is a truism, “religion” condemns horribly. Sigh.*

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