



Leprosy and Lust

by Dale Fincher

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Malcolm Muggeridge is one of my favorite apologists of the 20th century. Living in every decade of that century, he had a keen eye and a prophetic voice about the modern predicament. He detested the hollowness of political powers and the lies that go along with them. And he found that at the center of that predicament was the individual hearts of humankind, including his own.

Just after graduating from Cambridge, Muggeridge moved to India to teach English. In his early twenties, he strolled down to the nearby river. Bathing in rivers is common in India, then and now. In those early evening hours, the sunset light gliding through the trees and blanketing on the ripples, Muggeridge's eye spotted the silhouette of a woman bathing on the other side. His heart began to pound with "wild unreasonableness which is called passion." Suddenly seized by his lustful imagination, he lunges into the water and crosses the river.

After he splashes over to the other side, he emerges face to face with that naked woman and almost fainted. Before him was a wrinkled woman, her feet deformed, toothless, wracked with leprosy. Her eye-sockets eroded, her fingers stumpy. He threw himself back into the water with a fright, and casually drifted in the stream, shocked over the confrontation. Frightened also at what drew him to the women, he floated along, trembling, in contemplation. What was he facing?

Muggeridge himself admitted that the real shock that morning was not the leper, as mind-bending as that would be. Rather, it was the condition of his own heart, dark, with appetites overpowering his weak will. He writes, "If only I could paint, I'd make a wonderful picture of a passionate boy running after that and call it: "The lusts of the flesh."

G. K. Chesterton said that original sin is as "practical as potatoes." We may try to deny it, overlook it, or re-describe it, but the fact remains. We are capable of many kinds of evil. The diseases of the body are not nearly as hideous and grotesque as the diseases of the soul.

It is not merely external behaviors that vex our souls, but our internal intentions as well. Jesus explained this clearly when he said that if we lust after a woman we commit adultery with her in our hearts; that if we are unforgiving of our brother, it is like murdering him. Jesus brings ethics from the social sphere to the personal one by showing how intentions can be just as wicked as actions.

Have we taken stock of our soul recently? Have we sensed the nuances of evil in our own hearts? We need to stand guard today, and everyday, with humility that we are capable of terrible evil. And at the same time, we need to avoid those things that draw us into it. Sin starts at the heart level and works its way outward.

Comparatively, leprosy on the body is not nearly as ugly as the pockmarks of sin on the soul. The good news is that Christ has broken the power of both and asks us to begin eternity now by building a soul in this world appropriate for our glorified body in the next.

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