

PMA

Outreach



Volume 15 Issue 1

The Newsletter of Prison Mission Association

SPRING 2009

THE CORINTHIANIZATION OF OUR CULTURE

The correlation between incarceration and the falling away from biblical standards for sexual morality.

by Don Sommer

The NIV Study Bible has the following comments in the introduction to the book of 1 Corinthians. "Like any large commercial city, Corinth was a center for open and unbridled immorality... So widely known did the immorality of Corinth become that the Greek verb 'to Corinthianize' came to mean 'to practice sexual immorality.'"

During my years in prison ministry I have listened to the stories of literally hundreds of inmates who have described to me the circumstances that have characterized their lives and led to their incarceration. A common theme for the vast majority of prisoners has been drug and alcohol addictions that have resulted in criminal behavior. This has caused me to probe further to discover the reasons behind the addictions, to ask the question, "What drives people to substance abuse?" One conclusion I have come to is that in large measure the unprecedented incarceration rate in our society is indirectly related to a general ignorance and neglect of the biblical standards for human sexuality.

God's Will Revealed

Before discussing the details behind the above stated conclusions it is necessary to review the teaching of the Scriptures regarding sexual relations and discuss how far our culture has departed from that standard. The Scriptures are clear, both from the example of creation and explicit instruction that God created human sexuality as both the means of procreation and as an expression of the uniquely intimate relationship between a husband and wife.

The creation account recorded in Genesis 1-2 illustrates God's design for marriage and family. We learn that after God created Adam He saw that it was not good for a man to be alone, so He created a suitable companion for him, a woman. The fact that God created just one woman as a partner for Adam indicates that monogamy was the initial intention of God for the relationship between husband and wife. That ideal was not always realized, and even though some of the heroes of the Old Testament had polygamous marriages God's perfect plan remains unchanged. Furthermore, the fact that God says that "a man will leave his mother and a woman her home" indicates that the marriage relationship is exclusive and independent of other relationships, even that of the closest family members. Likewise, we are told that God blessed the couple and commanded them to populate the earth (Genesis 1:28), thus showing that God intends that

children be conceived, born and raised within the institution of marriage. All these principles demonstrate the fundamental importance of the sanctity of marriage and sexuality to the most basic fiber of human life and interaction.

There are dozens of passages of scripture that give explicit instructions about human intimacy, however, there are three in particular that I would like to focus on that summarize God's will in this area. The first passage we will consider contains some of the most unambiguous instructions in the Bible and is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Without doubt God is telling us in no uncertain terms that He expects us to control our sexual impulses and have a morally pure and holy lifestyle. In case there is any confusion as to what Paul is referring to when he tells believers to "avoid sexual immorality" he describes it in 1Corinthians 6:13b-20.

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 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 prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you

Continued on Page 4

A Note from the Director

I am excited to report to you about a couple of new developments that impact Prison Mission Association. The first has to do with my role as the director of PMA. For quite some time the Lord has laid on my heart a burden to be more involved in the ministry of a local church. An opportunity arose for me to become the pastor of Grace Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. I am not leaving PMA, however, but rather I will be dividing my time between the two ministries. I will do less travel to churches to represent PMA. I will continue to oversee the administration of the organization, to write new BCF lessons, to correspond with inmates, to prepare the *PMA Outreach* newsletter, to encourage and advise local churches that are involved in prison ministry, to serve on the boards of ministry organizations with which we are closely aligned, and a variety of other responsibilities that are part of the Director's role. I will also continue visiting three county jails in Central Indiana where I have Bible studies on a weekly basis.

The correspondence course ministry will not be affected by this transition. Our office in Port Orchard,

Washington, will continue to be managed by Karen Bodeutsch with our faithful and committed team of volunteers working to correct and mail our lessons to thousands of inmates throughout the U.S. Last year we sent out 5163 correspondence lessons and several thousands pieces of literature and Bibles.

Another great development has been the initiative taken by one of our newest board members, Steve Moore, to further develop our live outreach events inside prisons. I have worked with Steve and Erin for more than four years as part of the volunteer team that would go into the Washington Corrections Center each year for the annual Revival. They are gifted musicians and they were part of a band, Echoes of Creation, that helped in various aspects of the yearly event. They have formed a new band called Plumline and have made contacts in other prisons in Washington State. Steve is energized about going into prisons to use music as a means to reach inmates with the

Continued on Page 3



Reaching Out by Reaching In



Judy Ayres outside the Carroll County, Indiana jail where she conducts weekly Bible studies for women

Editor's Note: The following report comes from Judy Ayres who has an independent jail ministry in the Carroll County, Indiana jail.

I became involved in our local county jail ministry about 6 years ago. No one was teaching the ladies there. The men had "church" but the ladies did not. I went in for several months and the ladies started asking to do Bible studies because they had nothing to do but play cards all day. I searched for something. Nothing was right. I wanted them to know and study who Jesus was, what He did and WHY He did it. I wanted them to understand the Revelation of the Mystery. I stumbled on to the Bible Correspondence Fellowship's website, printed off the lessons, and started taking them in. They loved the lessons. Each week I would take in more and more. Each week I would evaluate what they had done. Soon they had their friends and family write me asking for Bible studies. Sometimes they circled an answer and asked questions. It became a great opportunity to discuss the Bible and the gospel of the Grace of God.

I have had several ladies complete every course and start over. I also have a "former inmate," Mindy, who is a very good friend now. She has completed Romans with a friend of hers on the outside. They both enjoyed and learned a lot from the study.

A friend I met, Jimmy, who was incarcerated in Florida had already done these lessons and he asked if I would send them to his friends. Now we have 5 men working on them. Jimmy helps on the inside by answering their questions. He is very encouraging to the men there and hopes to start a ministry on the outside when released.

My friend, Carol, asked for something to help her understand the Bible better so she started doing these lessons and has completed them all 4 times in the past couple of years! Carol continues to do these studies every day.

Because of so many enjoying and completing these studies, I had someone print up certificates for a small fee. I feel everyone deserves recognition for what they have done.

Eastern Washington Outreach



PMA Volunteers and men from the Berean Bible Church in Spokane, WA ministered at the Airway Heights Correction facility in October

We praise the Lord for the great opportunity PMA had to minister at three correctional facilities in Eastern Washington State on October 11-12, 2008. A team of volunteers who are veterans from the annual Shelton revival, the band "Echoes of Creation", provided music along with the inspiring testimony of Kelley Maples, were able to go into the minimum and medium security units at the Airway Heights Correctional Facility and the Pine Lodge Correction Center for Women near Spokane to challenge the inmates to take their relationship with Christ seriously and to encourage them to enroll in the Bible Correspondence Fellowship lessons.

The team was joined by a group of first-time prison ministry volunteers from the Berean Bible Church of Spokane, Washington.

More than two hundred inmates were ministered to and exposed to the BCF lessons. Pray for the long-term results of this outreach.

Maryland/WV Prison Outreach Challenged

Grace Bible Fellowship of Ridgley, WV worked hard to establish a Prison ministry at the Federal Correctional Institute in Cumberland, Maryland. (A description of the ministry and a picture of the team can be seen at the PMA website by viewing the Fall 2007 *PMA Outreach* link.) They submitted a mountain of paperwork and wrote numerous letters seeking permission to hold Bible classes for inmates in the facility. Finally they were granted permission to begin in August 2007. The team of volunteers from the church was able to gather a faithful group that attended their study each week and they saw several men trust Christ for salvation and grow in their understanding of God's Word.

The Bible studies were going great for over a year. All they had heard were positive comments about their outreach among the inmates. The ministry team was shocked when the facility chaplain handed them a letter asking them to clarify some of the doctrinal teaching they were presenting. The letter threatened to forbid them access to the facility. The group was being criticized for teaching foundational dispensational truth such as the difference between the gospel of the Grace of God and the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, the distinctiveness of Pauline revelation and that there is only one spiritual baptism for the Body of Christ. Pastor Brent Biller, the team leader, responded graciously in writing to every issue the chaplain mentioned, pointing out that their teaching was in line with orthodox Christian doctrine, while at the same time the facility tolerated radical Islam, Wicca, Occultism, and a variety of other religious teachings that are not widely accepted in American society. He gave sound scriptural reasons for every point mentioned in the letter. The chaplain paid attention to the Pastor Biller's words and has allowed the ministry to continue.

Centralia Washington Outreach

A team of volunteers sponsored by Prison Mission Association had an opportunity to minister at the Maple Lane School for juvenile offenders in Centralia, Washington on February 21st. The program was arranged and coordinated by Steve Moore, a PMA Board member. Steve reported how the Lord's hand was involved in the program in so many ways. The team left from Port Orchard in the morning having forgotten the Bible lessons that are used to lead the offenders through the Introductory lessons. However, one of the volunteers who was traveling separately happened to have a copy of the lesson with her and she was able to make some copies and deliver them after the program had started, but in time to lead the young men through the Bible studies.

The program involved music performed by Steve's band, Plumline, and the testimony of Kelley Maples, who has shared his story several times during outreach events at the Washington Corrections Center in Shelton and other prisons. The audience was then broken up into small groups and the team of volunteers led them in the Introductory PMA Bible study which explains the plan of salvation and some basic elements of the Christian life. Initially the chaplain was skeptical of the Bible study part since it had never been done before with similar programs at the school. By the end of the day he was sold on the idea and invited the team to return.

Continued from page 2

Good news of Jesus Christ and PMA is equally enthusiastic to help him fulfill the calling the Lord has given him.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *PMA Outreach*. Our main feature article discusses the devastating impact of America's obsession with sex outside of God's design. We have news of a woman in Indiana that takes Christ to the female inmates of a small county jail in the Heartland, the story of God's intervention in preserving a prison outreach in West Virginia and a report from the Selfors who work with Spanish speaking inmates in Florida.

Continued from page 1

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 honor God with your body.

Although Paul specifically refers to encounters with a prostitute, the point he is making can be easily extrapolated to include all sexual relations outside of marriage. By examining the full context of 1 Corinthians 6-7 it is very clear that Paul is teaching that sex is meant to be confined to marriage. Furthermore, if we understand the culture of Paul's time it becomes evident that the principle is more inclusive than just commercial sex. In the Roman Empire of the first century A.D. women were more or less considered the property of their husbands, or before marriage of their fathers. Today we correctly regard such an attitude as repulsive. The influence of Christianity over the centuries has been the primary force in transforming that concept. However, that unenlightened perspective did have a positive element to it, in that fathers and husbands protected the honor and sexual purity of the women in their lives. A daughter's chastity was considered precious and was to be preserved and guarded at all costs. The modern idea that a woman's body belongs exclusively to herself and she can do with it as she chooses was foreign to the readers of Paul's letters. Those women that fell through society's cracks; widows, divorcees, and orphans that had no one to protect and guard them would often turn to prostitution as a means of survival. If a man was seeking an illicit sexual encounter he was more or less restricted to finding the company of a prostitute since that was all that was available to him. Therefore, Paul's admonition against sexual immorality, although speaking about using a prostitute, can be easily extended to all sexual relationships outside of marriage in our modern culture where men and women freely give themselves away to others without regard for God's instructions on the matter.

Finally, the Lord's teaching about adultery in Matthew 5:28; "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman

lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart," points out how seriously God takes this matter of sexual purity. It is not just a matter of actual behavior but it reaches into the hidden lustfulness of ones thoughts and desires.

These scriptures demonstrate clearly that God's perfect design for human sexual relationships is that it is to be limited to one man and one woman, bound to each other through the socially recognized and spiritual institution of marriage. God has set very high standards in this area of life, but He has done so for good reason. When we ignore God's revealed will the consequences are devastating.

Social Changes

Readers of this article under the age of 40 years old may find it hard to believe that the biblical standard for sexual behavior was generally accepted not too long ago, at least in theory, by most people in American society. The message sent from the popular media today, however; whether through the movies, television shows, Internet pornography sites or the salacious magazine covers in the grocery store checkout line, tells us that casual sexual relationships are common, appropriate, normal and to be desired. To understand how our culture descended from upholding biblical morality to becoming a cesspool of depravity in the span of one short generation, we must examine the unique mixture of spiritual, philosophical and technological changes that converged in our society around 50 years ago.

By the early 1960's liberal theologies had essentially displaced the historical fundamentals of the Christian faith handed down since the early Church. With this development the basic belief in the Bible as an authoritative guide for life was discarded from the thinking of most mainline denominational churches in our nation. The result was that our entire society was left rudderless trying to maneuver its way through the tumultuous sea of moral choices. The void created by this seismic worldview shift was filled by various relativistic philosophies that to one extent or another told people that there are no moral absolutes, and that mankind is free to make its own choices about right and wrong however it saw fit. At the same time the pharmaceutical

industry began to widely distribute birth control pills, thus for the first time in the history of mankind making it possible for humans to engage in sexual intercourse without the fear of possible pregnancy. The insidious combination of the pill with moral relativism created the misguided belief that men and women could have casual sexual contact without consequences for their behavior. These ideas were popularized by socially irresponsible opportunists such as Hugh Hefner who used *Playboy Magazine* as a vehicle to both enrich himself while at the same time indoctrinating a generation of young men in his "Playboy philosophy," which was nothing but misogynistic self gratification. The result of all this was the Corinthianization of our culture, and here we stand in 2009 facing the cost of a half century of wrong choices that have left people broken, abandoned, cynical and suffering.

Family Breakdown Results in Incarceration

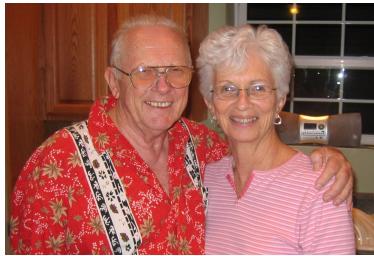
At this point one may wonder what all this talk about moral standards and attitudes has to do with increased incarceration rates. After all, people imprisoned for sex crimes account for only a small percentage of the total number of prisoners in our nation's correctional facilities. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the departure from biblical standards of sexual morality is responsible *indirectly* for people being sent to prison.

As pointed out earlier, 85% of prisoners have problems with drug or alcohol addictions. Something associated with those addictions is responsible for their criminal behavior that resulted in their conviction and incarceration. When asked about why they turned to drugs, inmates almost always tell me it was in order to mask the emotional pain they suffer that doesn't go away in any other way. The cause of that pain can often be traced to deviation from biblical moral standards, often by the parents of the inmate.

For women in prison it seems that the role sex plays in their incarceration is more direct. Most imprisoned women have a history of sexual abuse that has led to promiscuity in later adolescence and early adulthood. Such circumstances leave them with deep emotional anguish, which they try to smother through a lifestyle of drug or alcohol abuse and "partying."

For men the connection between immorality and prison is somewhat more complicated, *Continued on page 5*

THE SPANISH SIDE



This report comes from Arnie and Sally Selfors who direct the Spanish speaking ministry of Prison Mission Association. They live in Largo, Florida and Arnie ministers weekly at the Pinellas County Jail to around 50 inmates.

Volunteering in a Prison is never DULL! We have such a delightful time, and one of those adventures is working alongside the Prison Guards. One can be very difficult and another can be very charming. We have had the privilege of knowing several that belong to the Lord and are very good to us.

One very kind Guard whom I have come to know quite well will just escort me into the Chapel, and wish me Godspeed. At another time the guards have said that we must have a very good meeting, for no other volunteer group ever gets out the number of men that we do. What do you do?, he asks.

One morning when 54 Latin prisoners tried to jam themselves into the 30 chair Chapel, the Guard on duty at that time told us that this was absolutely against the rules. Only the number of men who could sit in the 30 chairs could enter into the chapel. BUT, he said, I don't see a thing, and the rest of you guys can sit or stand where you want. He walked away and permitted our volunteers to hold their service.

Continued from page 4

but a significant factor nonetheless. While some men turn to drugs and alcohol to overcome the pain of direct sexual abuse, it is not nearly as common as with women. More often the problem stems from painful childhood memories of having been abandoned by their biological fathers and growing up with a series of men that enter into their mothers' lives. The insecurity and uncertainty of this type of lifestyle along with the lack of a strong and exemplary male role model often leaves young adults vulnerable to the temptations of substance abuse. As one examines the motivation behind the serial relationships that create such unstable home lives, it often boils down to irresponsible men seeking a convenient sex partner without being willing to make a commitment to a woman through marriage. Furthermore, the people that enter into these relationships tend to be less disciplined about the use of birth control methods and thus have much higher rates of illegitimacy than the rest of the population. Statistically it is clear that children born to unwed parents have much higher potential to become

addicted and in turn incarcerated than those raised by intact families. If people were not so easily willing to enter into sexual activity then many of these unhealthy relationships between mothers and multiple irresponsible boyfriends would never exist.

How the Church Can Fight Back

It is likely that while reading this article many are thinking that the conditions are so hopeless that it is pointless to try to make any effort to try to stem the tide of immoral behavior that has engulfed modern American culture. When I teach men during Bible studies in jail, I often feel somewhat foolish expressing these principles knowing full well that I am speaking to men that in many cases have had numerous sex partners and often have fathered multiple children from different mothers. I suspect that many of these men look at me and think I am some Pollyanna dreamer with my head in the clouds who is hopelessly out of touch with the realities of life. Nonetheless there is no need for the Body of Christ to adopt a defeatist attitude and simply allow unchecked the continued moral decline we witness all around us.

Here are some suggestions that believers can implement that can have a positive impact on our cultural attitudes toward sexuality.

Stand up for moral absolutes.

The biblical principles regarding sexual purity remain true whether people adhere to them or not. These are universal truths that apply to all people. There is a modern tendency for Christians to buy into the lies of the world that say only people on the fringes of society need to be more careful about their sexual choices and that there is such a thing as "responsible and safe" illicit sex. Christians must not allow themselves to be ensnared by such thinking. The fact is that anyone that deviates from God's standards in this area will experience emotional anguish (feelings of guilt, abandonment, having been used, etc.) and most likely physical repercussions as well (such as STD's or unplanned pregnancy).

Support for organizations that promote biblical morality, such as *Focus on the Family*, and similar ministries can help propagate the message of biblical family values through a variety of means unavailable to individuals. *Continued on page 6*

A more detailed and scholarly discussion of this topic can be read in an article by Mary Eberstadt entitled "Is Food the New Sex?" in the February/March edition of *Policy Review* published by the Hoover Institute (www.hoover.org).



Prison Mission Association

P O Box 2300
Port Orchard WA 98366-0690

Inside This Issue:

***THE CORINTHIANIZATION OF OUR CULTURE
REACHING OUT BY REACHING IN
MINISTRY UPDATES
THE SPANISH SIDE
A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR***

Continued from page 5

Practice what we preach

If believers in Christ are truly serious about these issues, we must do all we can to make sure we lead by example. This includes committing ourselves to maintain biblical standards in the area of sexual purity. We must instill these values in our children and model them in our own lives to counteract the sinister message of modern culture. We should not expose ourselves to the temptations of pornography or movies and television programs that undermine biblical standards and denigrate and dehumanize women.

Christians must be proactive in strengthening their own marriages. This includes believers developing fulfilling sexual relationships with their spouses to be examples to the world and demonstrate that the biblical design works and is something that others would desire to emulate.

Emphasize the power of forgiveness and redemption through Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ came to this world and died on the cross to save sinners. What

He accomplished made it possible for anyone to experience a new life through the power of his resurrection. God has forgiven the misdeeds of all that call upon Him and place their faith in the death of Christ as a payment for sin. According to God's Word "old things have passed away...all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17) and we have "become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The impact of this truth, once it is fully understood and applied has the power to dramatically transform attitudes and behavior in every area of our lives, including sexuality.

The temporal consequences of previous wrong choices oftentimes cannot be erased. When I counsel men that have fathered children with different women I tell them that now that they know God's standard they must step back and evaluate their circumstances and determine how best to align their life so that it conforms as close as possible to the Lord's revealed will. Specifically, that they determine which of the mothers would be the best partner and marry her, or if none are believers, simply marry none of them and pray for their salva-

tion. Likewise, in the meantime they must do the best they can to be loving and involved fathers in their children's lives and do all they can to raise them in the ways of the Lord.

God created sexuality as a precious and beautiful gift. Yet, like any good thing, when it is misused and abused it can result in heartache, distress and unnecessary difficulties in life. As described in this article, the impact of wrong attitudes toward sex, marriage and family extend beyond the individual pain produced in peoples' lives but has far reaching social, economic and public welfare implications as well. Ultimately the solution is the power of transformation and redemption through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and obedience to His will.

**How can a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed according to Your word.
Psalm 119:9**