

## ANCHORED IN REALITY

Charles Felss

*Where there is no vision, the people perish, but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.  
(Proverbs 29:18)*

As I lay in my bed trying to fall asleep, I begin to think about all the choices that I have made in my lifetime. I think of all the times that I have rushed out into the cool of the night, searching to fulfill my innermost desires, searching for significance, searching to find meaning for my life. Each time that I went searching, I would come back realizing that the one thing that I thought would deliver the ultimate has only left me less fulfilled, feeling less significant, and less satisfied with life. As I continue to lie in bed I start to think about how these issues affect many decisions in life.

Why do we rationalize our sin and act like it really isn't sin? For the believer as well as the non-believer this may come from either a lack of knowledge of what is right and wrong or an unwillingness to accept what God has deemed to be right and wrong. God has definitely delineated between what is right and wrong and has told us repeatedly in the Bible what is acceptable behavior: yet we continue to not believe Him. Why do we think that by sinning we will be more satisfied with life? For the believer, the answer is obvious: we won't. In this respect, we can't change who we really are. We need to confront the reality of our Christianity and understand that we truly will never be happy except living our lives in accordance with God's word. For the unbeliever, the answer is clear also, but the search is never ending. Consider the following quote from former American Psychological Association President Hobart Mowrer:

For several decades we psychologists looked upon the whole matter of sin and moral accountability as a great incubus and acclaimed our liberation from it as epoch-making. But at length we have discovered that to be "free" in this sense, i.e., to have the excuse of being "sick" rather than sinful, is to court the danger of also becoming lost. This danger is, I believe, betokened by the widespread interest in Existentialism which we are presently witnessing. In becoming amoral, ethically neutral, and "free," we have cut the very roots of our being; lost our deepest sense of self-hood and identity; and, with neurotics themselves, find ourselves asking: Who am I? What is my destiny? What does living (existence) mean?"<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, Mr. Mowrer wrestled with these various questions the rest of his life until finally committing suicide. I wonder why he could never accept the answers that are given in the Bible about sin? I wonder if anyone ever shared God's view of sin and God's answer to it with him? The Bible is clear that every man is a sinner (Romans 3:23; 5:17) and all must repent of this sin before we can have fellowship with a holy God (Acts 2:37-40; 2 Corinthians 7:10).

The struggle to find significance today is a very real one. In the postmodern world this

can be clearly seen by the rise in “alternative” lifestyles and the various counter-culture movements. It would appear that only in nonconformance is there acceptability and significance. One only has to look at the current moral bankruptcy in the dating scene to understand this desire of wanting significance. Currently, any type of behavior is deemed acceptable as long as it is in a “committed” relationship between two consenting adults. Still, there is the sense that people aren’t connecting; people aren’t committed. Too many people today get involved in relationships just to be in a relationship. Why are we so unwilling to wait for the right person? As more and more Americans believe in sexual activity before, during, and after marriage, and as divorce rates rise one has to ask himself why it is so difficult for a person be a “significant other” to someone else. Why don’t we find significance in being a parent, spouse, or someone’s best friend? I think that the answer lies in the following excerpt from a book I recently read.

I [the author is talking] remember finding a shoe box of letters that a boyfriend had received from a previous girlfriend in Italy. I remember reading the words “I love you” scrawled in blue ink at the bottom of each page of creamy stationery and thinking about how many women had written the same words to him and how impersonal the words become when you say them over and over again to different people. It suddenly hit me—the sense of my own letters occupying only one shoe box in my boyfriend’s emotions. Of course this particular form of jealousy is not unique in our own time and place. W. H. Auden wrote in 1939 that every man and woman craves precisely what they cannot have: “Not universal love/But to be loved alone.” But there is something in our current circumstances, in people marrying later and having more intimate sexual relationships with more people, that seems to draw attention to just how impossible it is “to be loved alone.”<sup>2</sup>

Auden’s words are very appropriate for today’s dating scene. Too many people are just another boyfriend/girlfriend. Not many are a significant other. I wonder how different many relationships would be if they didn’t have the baggage of former relationships? It is clear that sexual liberation isn’t very liberating. It only makes one captive to the physical act and only leaves one asking questions like: Does he/she really love me? I find it very reassuring that in God’s economy of love and personal relationships that one can attain this “impossibility.” The Bible is very clear that we are only to have one significant other in our life (1 Corinthians 7:1-6); we are to find significance in being a parent (Exodus 20:12) and in being a best friend (Proverbs 17:17; 27:17).

What then, one might ask, is the meaning of it all? According to King Solomon, a man who possessed all a man could desire, meaning can only come by “fearing God and keeping his commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). I would agree, in that true meaning and purpose in life can only come from having an intimate relationship with God, expressed through reverential obedience. Other intimate relationships with immediate family members and friends will develop properly in concert with the extent of our devotion to God. The way to communion with God is clear in the Scriptures: that way is Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5; John 14:6). After that I would like to propose that developing an intimate relationship with God is much like doing so with a human being, only with more intensity. The qualities that appear most lacking in most people’s relationships either with God or man are time, transparency, and listening. Spending time in God’s word and in prayer are essential in establishing a relationship with Him. How can anyone

truly know God or someone else unless they spend time with them? The other part of the time issue that most people miss is the longevity factor. How many times do we see people give up on God and others after several days or weeks and claim that it is just not working out? (Compare Matthew's account of the parable of the sower in Mt. 13:3-23.) In any intimate relationship, we should be able to express our utmost desires and feelings to the other person without fear of being humiliated or exposed. I have found that it should be that way with God also. Why are we so afraid to show our real self to God? He sees us to the core anyway, and we're not really hiding anything. Finally, when was the last time that we truly listened to God and others? Too often we are busy telling God what we want and when we want it. Too often we are busy telling others what our needs are and not truly meeting someone else's need. Most times, just listening will meet the other person's need.

Well, time to get some sleep now. I can only imagine what choices lie ahead for me in the future. But, the one thing that I know is that the search is now over. For, as the song says, "I have a Christ that satisfies, since I have been redeemed."

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<sup>1</sup> O. Hobart Mowrer, "'Sin': The Lesser of Two Evils," *American Psychologist* 15 (1960) 301-304.

<sup>2</sup> Katie Roiphe, *Last Night in Paradise: Sex and Morals at the Century's End* (Vintage Books, 1997), p. 138.