
“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”
Matthew 10:28

Chapter Seventeen

Betrayal Against Oneself

Insight #17 Twisting the powers to love and bond into powers that hate and alienate inflicts a soul-deadening disease, a disease that shuts down the guidance of conscience, the clear thinking of reason, and the compassion of the heart.

The universe is abundant with signs of divine direction, order, uniformity, growing, blooming, bearing fruit, building nests, spinning webs, spawning, teaching, protecting, exploring, conquering. Each particle of life, from the microscopic to the macroscopic, has plan and purpose. Each has a career--a profession--and pursues it with unwavering dedication. Just as there is plan and purpose for every creature on earth, so there is a plan for the children of God. Obviously, God's plan for us is that we continue as we were created: children of light and children of love, but we have the choice to follow conscience or to reject it and recreate ourselves. However, once we choose, we cannot escape the natural consequences of our choices--to flourish living within the natural laws of happiness, or to fight against those laws and find ourselves dying from the inside out. Simply put, we cannot choose to harm others without first harming ourselves; seducing others begins with ourselves. We can capture this understanding by looking back--to the way we were as children. Of course, seeing the end of the road is helpful, too--the monsters, but for most of us, the point is to become aware of the deadening process itself.

The Way We Were

Children are the peak performers of life--open, loving, free, spontaneous, candid, real, sincere, curious--in short, ALIVE. Their minds are bright and searching; they want to know how this works, and why that doesn't. They want to know who put the moon in the sky and why water freezes. They delight to discover butterflies, ants, bugs, rocks, and rainbows!

Their consciences are extremely sensitive. One time I left our three-year-old Micah in the main house on our property while I went over to the other house to organize some papers I had stored there. I gave him instructions, “Micah, don't eat the chocolate chip cookies; they

are for after dinner.”

After awhile he walked over to where I was working, stood silent for a few minutes, then asked, “Do you smell cookies?”

“Did you eat the cookies that I told you not to eat?” I asked.

He answered, “How did you know?”

Once in awhile our family plays hide and seek through the house. The youngest of our children may go along with the game and hide, but it never lasts for long. Pretty soon, we hear, “I’m here, hiding in the closet.”

Little children are brimming with the capacity to love; they are so tenderhearted and sensitive that they cry over a cartoon character’s pain. Chubby little bodies, spilling over with rolls and rolls of fat, match their *hearts*, spilling over with waves and waves of love. Time after time, my husband and I have returned from a date night to find love-notes pinned to our pillow, taped to our bedroom door, or even stuck on the computer monitor. Our children have given us every token of love conceivable: mustard flowers, love notes left on our pillows, hearts scrawled on our bathroom mirror and candies. Micah--at the tender age of eight--did not have a gift for my birthday so he found a scrap piece of wood, water colored a landscape scene and then wrote “I Love You” in bold print across it. Years later I lacquered it to preserve it.

Just recently, eleven-year-old Jessica put love notes on everyone’s bedroom doors--even our guests whom she barely knew. (What an honor parenthood is! Kings and queens have imprinted their images upon coins, but with time such images are worn away. Through the powers of procreation we stamp our image upon our child, and all the children that come after--what an honor!)

The Way We Choose To Become

We were all once children with active hearts, minds, spirits and consciences, but we can choose for ourselves whether to keep those control centers alive or to allow them to go dormant. We were created to be loving, but we can choose to be unloving and cold. We were created to be guided by conscience, but we can refuse to listen. We were created to reason logically and clearly, but we can choose to live in denial. We were created to unite together in intimacy of mind, heart, spirit and body, but we can redesign the powers of love into powers to hurt and to harm. But when we insist upon shutting down the guidance of the conscience, the arguments of the mind, and the sympathies of the heart that attempt to stop us from exploiting and using others, *a soul-deadening disease begins that rots from the inside out.*

Mush Oaks

After our eighth child, Jennifer, was born, my husband and I decided that it was time to buy a home with property. After searching all over Napa Valley, we bought a farm just across the street. We had admired the property studded with giant oak trees for years, and we were awe struck by the way the trees arched like a canopy over the charming farmhouse.

The trees were magnificent; they had stood in the valley over two hundred years. They stood over seventy feet tall; their gnarled branches spread Cathedral-like over an area the size of a football field. Their trunks were over five feet in diameter at the base.

After living under the trees for over twenty years, we have learned to both love and fear them. When a windstorm races through the valley, one or two of the giant limbs, weighing a ton or more, breaks and falls to the ground. Such a crushing blow would be lethal to anyone in their path.

The oak trees that stand like gods across the Napa Valley are prone to a disease that rots them from the inside out--giving them the nickname "mush" oak. When the wind blows, the children come inside and we watch in fear. We love our oak trees. They shade us from the hot sun in the summer, delight us with snow-like leaf flurries in the autumn, surprise us with the explosion of baby green leaves in the spring, but most of all, they warn us to beware of the disease that rots the soul from the inside out.

Betrayal Against Oneself

The idea that we can inflict a disease upon ourselves came to me as I researched for this writing project. It was fascinating and answered many questions that were puzzling to me. I wondered how women and men could not see through the masquerades. I wondered how little boys, who were once tender-hearted towards their girl friends, could grow up and think nothing of saying "I love you" to get sex. I wondered where men could get the idea that they are more manly with each sexual conquest?

Most of all, I was haunted by the monsters--those whose sexual gain always involves another's pain. I found my head spinning with questions, "How do monsters become monsters? What happens to their feelings of sympathy for their victims? How do they become so hardened? What happens to their consciences? What happened to these babies--how could some turn from chubby, soft and lovable beings to cold-hearted monsters?

There are no simple answers, and definitely family and societal conditioning plays a part, but it makes sense that with the right to life comes the right to choose, whether to become more the child of God we were created to be, or less, even less than the animals. Less than the animals, because animals do not have the ability to choose; they follow instinct. We of all the creations of God have with the gift of life as well as the ability to direct that life.

The idea that we can recreate ourselves, and inflict a soul-destroying disease upon ourselves became intriguing. I kept coming across this idea in my research.

Destroyeth His Own Soul

David, an Old Testament king who knew by hard experience, said, "Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding; he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul."

The first part of this sentence, that we err because of ignorance or

“lack understanding,” supported my cause to write this rationale, but I had copied this quote over and over before I noticed--really noticed--the ending, “he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.”

With the first realization, it seemed so strict, so extreme; it no longer does. David uses the term “soul destruction”, and C.S. Lewis spoke of “soul-destroying surrender to the senses.”

Rob You of Your Very Self

The psychologist Viktor Frankl, said that while he was imprisoned in a German Concentration Camp:

“Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstances, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate.” (Man’s Search For Freedom, pgs. 86-87)

There are natural laws that govern the universe; there are natural laws that govern the soul. We can choose to love, honor and cherish the family of God, or we can choose to hate, dishonor and despise, but in doing so we cannot escape the natural consequences. Like the process of adaptation, that which is no longer used, needed, or wanted becomes extinct. It’s called natural selection. It works in nature and in humans.

Turn-of-the-century Christian philosopher Henry Drummond wrote, “This destroying process, goes on quite independently of God’s judgment on sin. . .The soul that is left to itself unwatched, uncultivated, unredeemed, must fall away into death by its own nature. . .It shall die, not necessarily because God passes sentence of death upon it, but because it cannot help dying. It has neglected the functions which resist death. The punishment is in its very nature, and the sentence is being gradually carried out all along the path of life by ordinary processes which enforce the verdict with the same faithfulness as natural law.” Natural Law In the Spiritual World, p. 104

The greatest danger of twisting sex into a tool for exploiting others is not the physical consequences, but the emotional and spiritual consequences. We cannot seduce others without first seducing ourselves and inflicting a disease of the soul; a disease that shuts down the guidance of conscience, the clear thinking of reason, and the compassion of the heart.

The Guidance of the Conscience

Conscience guides us towards happiness and protects us from unhappiness, but if we intentionally shut it down, we inflict a disease that destroys from the inside out. Realizing that the hot stove will cause pain, we avoid touching it, but if we shut away the knowledge that it is hot and touch it anyway, we are flirting with disaster and pain. Remember, conscience is a protection to the soul just as pain is a protection to the body. Previously, it was called the peace/sorrow mechanism. Thomas Jefferson believed, "that the moral sense is as much a part of our constitution as that of feeling, seeing or hearing." "A good conscience," said Joseph Addison, "is to the soul what health is to the body."

The guide within says no when we attempt to entice another into bed by empty promises of love; it says no when we use another's body for an apparatus or tool for sexual pleasures, but if we refuse to listen, it eventually goes silent. In other words, when we deliberately feed lies to ourselves in order to silence the conscience, we set ourselves up as an enemy to ourselves. Like a car without a steering wheel, the engine keeps going while the mechanism to guide it becomes defective--and made defective by the driver's own tampering--a self-inflicted craziness! Those who will not listen to their built-in alarm systems--the protective device for spiritual safety and mental sanity-- eventually shut it down.

When we deliberately feed lies to ourselves in order to silence the conscience, we set ourselves up as an enemy to ourselves; fooling ourselves, we eventually create a fool. Like a car without a steering wheel, the engine keeps going while the mechanism to guide it becomes defective--and made defective by the driver's own tampering--a self-inflicted craziness! Those who will not listen to their built-in alarm systems--the protective device for spiritual safety and mental sanity-- eventually shut it down.

"You have to convince your conscience. . ."

A young man, who was caught into the web of the mystique, explained the process of shutting down the conscience, "When you make the decision to take advantage of others for sexual gratification, you suffer from horrendous guilt. Then you have to create a whole bunch of lies to convince your conscience that it's okay to proceed. Otherwise, it keeps bugging you and messing up the whole thing."

We can imagine the conversation. The young man, burning and churning with desire, says, "It's all right; I love you. I will always love you."

"But I don't know that," she sobs. "I'm afraid that you will leave me."

"I'll never leave you," he says, not even believing himself. "We'll be married as soon as we're out of high school, and then. . ."

His conscience attempts to reason with him, "You know you don't love her. Don't say that. Don't take advantage of her; she loves you," but it is silenced with the commands, "I want her now. Leave me alone. Back off."

See the process? He commands the conscience to leave him alone, and in time the conscience does just that--leaves him alone, without protection, without guidance.

Popular psychologist and author, M. Scott Peck has observed that, "All mentally healthy people submit themselves to the demands of their own conscience. In evil people however, in the conflict between their guilt and their will, it is the guilt that must go and the will that must win"(People of the Lie).

This danger to exploitive sex is one of the hidden hazards--it needs more explaining. A thief who steals a car may silence his conscience with the excuse, "I need that car more than they do." An employee who takes money from the boss might say, "He's rich; he'll never miss the money." The husband who berates and belittles his wife may rationalize to himself, "It's the only way to get things done around here." Those involved in an extra-marital affair might excuse their dishonorable behavior by saying, "My husband is not meeting my needs. . . She doesn't love him like I love him. . .That's not what I call a marriage. . .No one will ever know. . .Just this once. . .This is an exception to the rule,.. This is different. . .We love each other. . .I couldn't help myself. . . We're adults, we have a right to. . ."

Notice the deliberate effort to cloud clear and rational thinking: "If you really loved me, you would. . .It's the only way to tell if we're compatible. . .When you're really in love, you can't help yourselves. . .You don't understand men and their needs. . .This is prom night--a special occasion, just this once. . .This is our last date before summer break. . .This is our last date before the end of the summer. . .This is our last date before the Macy's Flower Day sale. . .Don't deny yourself such pleasure. . .We're adults, we can't help it if we married the wrong people; it's the only way. . . No one will ever find out. . . I don't know what's right and wrong, but I know that we're right for each other, so just forget that I'm married."

Such arguments against the conscience eventually silence it and leave a form of insanity in the wake. Again, fooling ourselves eventually creates a fool.

No One Will Ever Know

We see the betrayal of conscience in the story of King David of the Old Testament. He had many wives and concubines, but the woman bathing on the rooftop--Bathsheba--offered the challenge, the fascination. While her husband was off to war, he enticed her to lay with him. When she later announced that she was pregnant, he devised a plan so that her husband Uriah would think that the child was his.

David ordered him to come home. After pretending to be interested in the happenings on the battle front, David suggested that Uriah go to his home and he even sent dinner with him. But Uriah refused to go home, and slept with the servants at the king's door. When David found this out, he was shocked and asked Uriah why he

did not go to his house.

Uriah answered, "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my Lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing."

I have always been touched by this! Uriah reminds us of the untouched Sir Lancelot of Camelot--so dedicated to the cause! He refused to enjoy the pleasures of food, drink or the marital bed so long as his buddies were roughing it out in the fields.

David tries one more time to get Uriah to go sleep with his wife; he gets him drunk and sends him home the next night, but still Uriah sleeps with the servants on the doorstep. Now David orders him to be sent to the front lines of battle where he is sure to be killed--and he is. After a decent period of mourning, David marries Bathsheba and thinks the whole thing is over. No one will ever know. Then God sends Nathan the prophet to confront David with his great sins. (2 Samuel Chap. 12)

David's descent may have begun with pride. I can imagine that he may have attempted to shut down the whisperings of conscience by saying to himself, "I am the king. Should not the king have the most beautiful woman in his kingdom? If I keep it a secret, no one ever needs to know. Her husband will believe the child is his. So what if he dies in battle? This could have happened anyway, had I not intervened."

While nothing is as painful to the human soul as an uneasy conscience, nothing is worse than the silence of it.

David may have shut down his conscience, but afterwards the guilt was crippling. John Calvin said, "The torture of a bad conscience is the hell of a living soul." We can feel the "hell of a living soul" in David's own words, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

"Create in me a clean heart, O, God; and renew a right spirit within me.

"Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." (Psalm 51: 1-3, and 9-11.)

David not only suffered from pangs of guilt, he feared the loss of the spirit, when he cried, "and take not thy holy spirit from me." Losing the spirit--the energizing force of the Higher Power--means losing life,

feeling drained, weakened, and to a man who had known the glory of God's presence in his life, feeling terribly alone. This is important. Disconnecting with conscience is also disconnecting with God and that life force that rejuvenates, and restores spiritual strength, enhances love, peace and joy; this factor alone makes all virtue tremendously worthwhile and rewarding.

Just as David attempted to cover for his wrongdoing, we do the same thing when we make war with ourselves to feel good about doing bad.

Deliberately altering the clear thinking of our minds in order to proceed with an act of self-betrayal or other betrayal sets a course to shut down the conscience and rational thinking. We cannot become an enemy to others without first becoming an enemy to ourselves.

“I still possessed my soul.”

In a scene from the novel, *Jane Eyre*, we see one woman's battle to hold onto virtue, conscience and powers of reason to protect her soul. As a young woman, Jane goes to work for a wealthy man, Rochester. They fall in love, he proposes marriage. She accepts, but then discovers that he has a mentally ill wife hidden in the attic. When she tells him that she will not be a part of the masquerade, he pleads for her to become his mistress. Using the rationale of the current “situation ethics,” he tells her he isn't really married. Besides, “you have neither relatives nor acquaintances whom you need fear to offend by living with me.”

She battles within herself, “Oh, comply! Think of his misery...soothe him; save him, love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for you? Or who will be injured by what you do?”

She gives her answer to herself and him with these words: “I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God and sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad--as I am now.

“Law and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation; they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth? They have a worth--so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane--quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I count its throbs. Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations, are all I have at this hour to stand by: there I plant my foot.” Then she says to herself: “I still possessed my soul, and with it the certainty of ultimate safety.”

I loved the expression that with her soul, she was “certain of ultimate safety.” Jane Eyre knew what so many do not know today--that happiness comes mainly from ourselves, and being true to ourselves. We cannot be happy with someone else, unless we are first happy and at peace with ourselves. Being true to herself--and her conscience--

she was assured of the “safety of her soul” and an inner happiness.

Summary

We are free to be conscious or to force unconsciousness upon ourselves. We are free to follow the gentle voice of conscience within or to ignore it, but we are not free of the consequences of ignoring it. Piecemeal dismantling of our vital and God-given control centers--mind, heart, conscience-- eventually destroys not just one's positive self-image, but any image at all.

The expression “abuse it and lose it” applies to both the conscience and the heart. Next we explore the damage to the heart, when it is used as a pawn for exploiting others--sexually or otherwise.