

Confusing the Sensual for the Spiritual

Have you ever been speaking with someone and found out later on in the conversation that you were both speaking at completely cross purposes? You thought they were talking about something that you were talking about, and so did they, but in your individual minds you were discussing completely different things! It's a strange feeling to be talking at completely cross purposes, and yet because of the language and words you use, you don't pick up on the fact until much later in the conversation. A very similar thing is happening in churches today. There is confusion, a talking at cross-purposes, if you will, that makes Christians think they are doing one thing when in fact they are doing the other. What am I talking about? In many Christian circles today, the sensual is being confused with the spiritual. Believers are involved with sensual activities in their churches, and they are seeing them as spiritual. Carnal, fleshly methods are being looked upon as holy and spiritual. The church is calling the carnal consecrated, calling the sensual, *the Spirit*.

Within the music, sensual music is being played and being called 'anointed'. Within the worship, hypnotic techniques are being used and it is being called the Holy Spirit's presence or anointing. Within the service, things as outlandish as people stripping naked and barking like dogs are occurring, and it is said to be evidence of the Holy Spirit. Clearly, the church is getting to a point of such poor discernment, that we are confusing the sensual with the spiritual.

What is the sensual? What is the spiritual? How do we tell the difference?

Here's a simple definition, one we used when examining music. A spiritual person is one who puts his spirit and its needs first, followed by his mind and its needs, followed by his body. Following what Paul says in I Corinthians 9:27, the spiritual person makes sure that he controls their body, not the other way round. Paul says there "But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Notice what Paul says at the end of the verse, 'lest by any means...' Paul says that if he does not do this, he will lose out on rewards. Paul is certain that to be any other way but spiritual will result in his service being disqualified. Paul wants to be spiritual.

The opposite of spiritual is sensual: carnal or fleshly. The sensual man is the opposite of Paul. The sensual man allows his body to reign supreme. His body's needs come first, be they sexual, food-wise, sleep or just the creature comforts of life, such as music, entertainment and so on. His mind is his body's slave, and exists to serve his body. Finally, his spirit, if alive at all, is imprisoned in this self-serving body, to which it must obey.

Sensuality is an obsession with pleasing the physical senses, be it hearing, sight, smell, taste or touch. Thus sensuality is obsessed with sexuality, with experiences of great excitement visually or otherwise. Sensuality wants a visual feast, a musical feast, it wants to taste, touch and smell everything. Sensuality is absorbed by experiences. How does it feel, how does it make me feel inside? Sensuality will not be so worried as to my spirit's communion with God, as it will with a feeling of tremendous warmth that swept over me in the service. So just like the people talking at cross purposes, here you have an individual thinking that their sensual experience *is* communion with God. They have confused the sensual as spiritual.

To really sum it up, a sensual Christian is one who tries to experience the spiritual primarily through his five physical senses. Now we know that spirituality will spill over into all aspects of your being. But the sensual person wants communion with

God to be something that he can physically hear, physically see, even taste, touch and smell. But Jesus insisted, “God is a Spirit, and they which worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth” i.e., you cannot fully understand and therefore respond to an invisible spiritual being entirely through the visible and physical nature. You can only understand God, who is a Spirit, when God revives your spirit through His gift of salvation. Only a spirit can commune with another Spirit. So today there are some very confused believers, who are substituting sensual, physical experiences for the spiritual and considering their experience one of deep communion with God.

There is an example for us to examine this in Scripture. Here we can see the root of confusing the spiritual with the sensual, and the fruit of doing so. If we see the same happening in our churches today, we must stop, repent and return to true biblical spirituality, not the sensual one of our own making.

The scene occurs in Exodus 32. Here Moses has been up on the Mount receiving instruction regarding the Law, and the people begin to doubt his return. Listen to verse 1. So Aaron, gets a collection of gold going, fashions a golden calf. Notice then Aaron’s words , verse 4 and 5. Finally the scene degenerates into rampant sensuality , v 6. The Hebrew word translated ‘play’ has sexual connotations. Harmonising this with v 25 leads us to believe that the whole thing had degenerated into a sexual orgy. V19 further shows us that the scene involved people dancing around wildly. Moses is informed by God what has happened. God is about to destroy them all, and does not after Moses pleads for mercy. Much discipline takes place on the people, and around 3000 people are killed.

Let’s look at this scene a bit closer. The first, and most prominent thing, is that the people were worshipping other gods. They had begun to worship a god of their own making. Now watch closely. Aaron does not say, “Tomorrow is a feast unto our new gods’. No , listen to what he says , v5 “And when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow *is* a feast to the LORD.” Israel’s sensuality has so overwhelmed them that they thought it was completely compatible to have a rampant sex orgy, worshipping images of their own making, and consider it all part of the worship of the true God. They saw no contradiction, just as many churches today see no contradiction between the sensuality in their churches and worshipping the true God. As unbelievable as it seems, some churches have reported people stripping naked, barking like dogs and even urinating in the service, and yet it is said to be worship of the true God!! It is an exact repetition of this scene. Many today have created a god in their own image. They have created a god who enjoys sensual worship , and they say, “This is your god, that saved you from your sin’. But He is nothing like that.

Notice also how the sensual immediately became part of the worship. This so-called feast unto the Lord immediately led into eating and drinking and sexual immorality. Now, there is nothing wrong with eating or drinking or even sexuality within the confines of marriage. The point is how sensuality will always smoke itself out by its fruits. The sensuality of their worship immediately led into completely physical experiences. A pastor told me how he knew of rampant fornication between the members of the musical worship team in a church he was in. It was no surprise; the kind of music they played was sensual in nature. Sensual music feeds the flesh. The sensuality of many churches rears its head in the sexual impurity amongst the

members, and logically so. Sunday becomes a time of feeding the flesh , not mortifying it.

What does this remind us of? Without question, the church at Corinth. Guess what they had turned the Lord's Supper into? A gluttonous feast , where some stuffed themselves, and some were even getting drunk. Others went without. Is it a shock, then to hear Paul say in chapter 5:1, 'It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you,'? Not at all. Paul described these believers in chapter 3:3 "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions" Carnal is literally , sensual, fleshly. They were still immature believers focused on the physical, the selfish, instead of the spiritual and the soul. This was a sensual church.

Notice also one of the hallmarks of sensuality is its chaotic nature. I find the exchange between Moses and Joshua extremely telling as they come down from the mountain. V 17 "And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, *There is* a noise of war in the camp" Joshua heard the sensual worship going on. Did he say, "Well, listen to that joyful noise unto the Lord!" No, the sound of sensuality to his godly ears was that of chaos , the uncoordinated chaos of armies clashing on the battlefield. I am fascinated by this remark , because some worship music sounds remarkably like the chaos of a battlefield, and yet it is said to be spirituality. Moses knew what was going on, and you can almost hear the anger and heartbreak in his voice as he replies "And he said, *It is* not the voice of *them that* shout for mastery, neither *is it* the voice of *them that* cry for being overcome: *but* the noise of *them that* sing do I hear" How can singing be confused with the noise of war? When it is sensual, carnal singing, music that focuses on the body through its overpowering rhythm, rather than on the spirit and soul through its strong melody and harmony. Isn't it also interesting that Paul had to tell the carnal, fleshly church at Corinth in chapter 14:33 "For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." And again in verse 40 "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Sensuality also has a terrible nature. It can be called the law of diminishing returns. What happens here is what happens to a drug addict. He first starts on something supposedly 'mild' to get high. After that, that drug can only keep him going. He now needs a stronger drug to achieve that original high. Pretty soon, the same thing happens to the stronger drug, and so the drug addict is on an ever-deepening spiral of destruction as he pursues the ever elusive original high. The same happens with sexuality outside of God's will. That so often explains bizarre sexuality , perversions of sexuality, bestiality and child porn , as an individual pursues a sensual experience that eludes him as the law of diminishing returns kicks it. How frightening to see this in churches. To see people literally climbing poles, cutting themselves, writhing around in literal fits on the ground , supposedly under the control of God the Spirit. No, that's not Him, that's the law of diminishing returns. Since the person is trying to experience God through the senses, and they think they have previously, now they must do more and always more to get that same original thrill, or high. Thus you have some people going to extremes to get that original high, while a lot of disillusioned others, who secretly long for that original high, but have settled for a routine and somehow feel like they have lost God. The key is not to get any kind of high; it is to seek God as a spirit, by spiritual means: prayer, the inspired Word, obedience, fellowship and so on. Anytime a church has tried to experience God through sight,

sound, inner warmth, taste, touch, smell and so on , they are going down the route of sensuality.

What caused it, and what will cause it today? Firstly, lost faith. True Christianity is a walk of faith, not of sight. When the Israelites could no longer see Moses, they grew tired of waiting, of hoping, of believing. They wanted the tangible, the visible something to see, hear, taste and touch. Where faith fails, the flesh takes over. Isn't it interesting to hear Jesus parable regarding the servant who grew tired of waiting for his master's return "8But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; 49And shall begin to smite *his* fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; 50The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of, 51And shall cut him asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 24:44. How interesting that the Lord predicts that those who grow weary of waiting for His return, of being faithful stewards, turn to sensuality and divisions. Sensuality in churches today is because of this too. Also, how interesting that in so many churches which have become sensual, they have also thrown off a belief in the return of the Lord, substituting it with theories of man conquering the world.

A second reason why they ended up this way was because they were influenced by surrounding nations. Leviticus 18:24: "Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you:" v30 "Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not *any one* of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I *am* the LORD your God."

So today, the church is being secularized and influenced by the world. John tells us that the world system is the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life , sensual world. From their advertising to their magazines , it all revolves around experiences, appearances, good food, good times, good entertainment, good sex, good times. Sensuality. The church, like Israel, has adopted the pagan customs and made it its own.

"The Israelites never abandoned the worship of Yahweh. They simply added the worship of Ba'al to their worship of Yahweh (called **syncretism**). They had one God for crises and another god for everyday life. The actual worship of Ba'al was carried out in terms of imitative magic whereby sexual acts by both male and female temple prostitutes were understood to arouse Ba'al who then brought rain to make Mother Earth fertile (in some forms of the myth, represented by a female consort, Asherah or Astarte)." , Dennis Bratcher .

So today, the sensual is being grafted onto the spiritual in an attempt to mingle the two systems.

Finally, just like immature believers surrounded Moses, shallow believers seem to be on the increase in churches today, who refuse sound doctrine and embrace what they know. They are not growing and putting off the old man. Paul tells the Corinthians in 3:1 "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ." When Christians refuse the Word as their daily bread, they remain childish, immature, craving for the purely physical, and refusing the deeper things of the faith. Paul warned that this would happen in the last days 2 Tim 4:3-4 "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after

their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. “ If you have a household run by children, what do you think will be for breakfast, lunch and supper? Chocolate cake, biscuits and milkshake. You need mature believers to direct younger ones away from the sensual toward the spiritual, and tragically, these seem to be in short supply today.

May we walk a walk of faith, walking soberly, righteously and godly, looking for His return. May we be not conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds. And may we love the Word above our necessary bread, saturate our lives with it, that we may put a difference between the sensual and the spiritual.