

## What's it about?

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March 24, 2008

"It's not about sex." That's what the john said in his interview with 20/20's Diane Sawyer. He had hired a prostitute *for* sex, but it wasn't *about* sex. For my part, I believe him.

Sawyer's interview with the young man aired this past Friday, March 21, on 20/20's exposé "Prostitution in America: Working Girls Speak." It was one of the saddest television programs I've ever watched. I couldn't watch everything. (Remote controls are not sacramental, but I'm convinced they are a means of grace.) What I could watch told the heart-breaking stories of several young women trapped in "the world's oldest profession." Why would beautiful and intelligent young women throw away their lives this way?

"Glamour" and "money brings happiness" were prominent answers. Promises of glamour and happiness – the Devil's counterfeits for holiness and joy – lured these young women into a lifestyle of emptiness and untimely death. Most prostitutes die by the age of thirty four.

Reflecting on this program, I first thought of Harvie Conn. Dr. Conn gave the early years of his ministry to serve as an Orthodox Presbyterian missionary to Korea. There he lived the gospel and preached the gospel to prostitutes. It was a difficult and dangerous ministry. He angered pimps, but he rescued girls. Harvie rescued them from abuse and early death; Jesus rescued them from sin and guilt. Souls were saved. Lives were rebuilt. Christ was glorified.

"Lord, give us more, many more Harvie Conns."

I then thought about Augustine. It wasn't his immoral lifestyle (he lived with a woman prior to his conversion) that made me think of him, it was his theft of pears. As a teenager, Augustine had crept into an orchard under the cover of darkness and stolen some pears. Why? He confessed, "It was not the pears that my unhappy soul desired. I had plenty of my own, better than those, and I only picked them so

that I might steal. For no sooner had I picked them than I threw them away, and tasted nothing in them but my own sin, which I relished and enjoyed. If any part of one of those pears passed my lips, it was the sin that gave it flavour" (*Confessions*, 2.6). Had Diane Sawyer interviewed Augustine, his face blurred on the television screen but clear to the eyes of God, he would have said, "It's not about pears."

So if it's not about sex and it's not about pears, what is it about? To answer this question we must consult Conn's and Augustine's mentor, the apostle Paul, and Paul's mentor, the prophet Jeremiah. First, the prophet. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it" (Jer. 17:9)? When the john admitted that sex wasn't the ultimate reason he hired his companion, he also confessed that he didn't really know the reason. He could get sex. He had a girlfriend. He was afraid of losing her. He didn't want others to know what he had done. He didn't understand his own actions. Ignorance of his motivation does not lessen his guilt, but it does reveal the depth of his deceitful and desperately sick heart, the sinful heart we all possess.

The apostle explains this doctrine of indwelling sin. "If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness" (Rom. 7:7-8a). The law of God says, "Thou shalt not covet. Thou shalt not hire prostitutes. Thou shalt not steal pears." But sin lies deep in my heart, the sin of idolatry. This sin deifies my supposed independence. I want to be God. I want to set my own rules for living and terms for happiness. Sin transforms God's holy "Thou shalt not" into my stubborn "I will."

Young women become prostitutes for many reasons. Most were abused as children. But the pursuit of glamour and the desire for money reveal the thrones at which they worship. Men visit prostitutes for many reasons, known and unknown, but at the heart of them all lies the resolve to cast off God's law. Men take great risks

when they hire prostitutes. They risk their health, possibly their lives, their families, their public offices. Just ask Eliot Spitzer. But they calculate it's worth the risk to be in charge. It's the very same reason boys risk climbing orchard fences to steal pears.

By God's grace I've never hired a prostitute, and I don't remember ever stealing pears, but I want to be God. The problem is that God consistently refuses to share his glory with me (Isa. 42:8).

So, Diane, it's not about sex, or pears, or money, or glamour, or happiness – it's about God. I, a man, want to be God. He, in his righteous jealousy, will not allow it. But in his gracious love, God became a man to rescue me from myself.

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