

Light and Skin and Soul [Deeper Sheet 2.1.09]

Ephesus was everything. In the First Century, Ephesus held many distinctions. It was the world center for worship of Artemis, the goddess of fertility. Her temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Worship of Artemis was highly sexual in nature, often involving casual sex or temple prostitution. On occasion, Ephesus was also a center for the worship of Caesar as Lord. But Ephesus was more than this. It was also a financial cornerstone in the Roman Empire because of its bustling port and thriving slave trade.

All of this begins to shape what Paul is saying to the followers of Jesus living in Ephesus. In talking of sexual immorality, Paul uses the Greek word "*porneo*", from which we derive the word pornography. It was an economical term meaning "to pass through", as in the way a ship passes through a port. Over time, the word came to be associated with prostitution. Sexuality had become an economic transaction making a person into a product to be consumed. In an overwhelming culture of sexuality, it can be easy to become the kind of person who uses coarse joking as a means of not having to deal with reality as it is. Coarse joking is the turning or twisting of a word or phrase into a sexual metaphor, and some of us get very good at it.

But this darkness is about more than just sexuality. It's also about greed, or "*pleonexia*" as Paul describes it. *Pleonexia* is the process of attaining something that doesn't satisfy and always leaves you wanting more to get the same high. When you are consumed with *pleonexia* there is no such thing as enough. All of this leads to a world so dark that we regularly disregard the honor and dignity of what it means to be human. Everything is about what we can get and fill ourselves with.

But as Paul points out and as the entire Story of God narrates, being a child who shares in the inheritance of God is not simply about scoring some cash on the other side. Inheritance is about partnering with God and honoring the dignity of what it means to be human, in all people and in all circumstances. When God's light comes on in a person the result is always new possibilities to be enjoyed, explored, discovered, and yearned over. God created us to be fully integrated people who can never be reduced to an economic transaction. Our skin and our souls are connected. So in everything we do, we ask God to turn the lights on. We ask God to bring us out from behind the fences we build in order to keep ourselves in the dark. We long for God's light to illumine us so that we ourselves can become light. We affirm all the places where human dignity is honored and preserved, and we ask God to light up our own darkness, so that our lives can become such a place.

If the skin and the soul are connected, then what are all of the ways that we engage in dis-integrating human dignity and honor in our culture?

As you consider Paul's words, what are the things in your life that would cause you to blush if the lights were turned on?

All too often, dark and sinful cravings exert a false power over us, causing us to live in shame. We blush for a reason. Through shame, the enemy seeks to tell us that our identity is bound to our brokenness. Paul is less interested in talking about who we aren't and far more interested in talking about the truth of who we are in Christ. There is an identity that existed before sin. But because the

voice of shame speaks so often and so loudly, we need to regularly be reminded that we are not our brokenness. If you're with a group, look the person next to you in the face and remind them that they are no longer darkness but they are now light in the Lord. If you're studying alone, read Ephesians 5v8 as a reminder that you are no longer darkness.

In what ways has God brought you out of darkness and into light?

If inheritance is an active process in which we participate with God, how has your journey from darkness to light positioned you to participate with God in the redeeming of all things?

What does it look like for you to stand up for the dignity and honor of other people?