

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

So, over the past weeks I learned a new word. The word is “Incel.” It’s a title. I learned it, I suspect, the same way you did. A man committed a horrible crime and claimed to be a member of a group of people who describe themselves as “Incel.”

It worked out something like this: A member of Incel committed a crime. The crime made the news. Then, a new word entered my—our—vocabulary. I suppose I might write a lengthy newsletter about the ever-increasing labels we invent for ourselves, but I’ll save that for another day. For now, I wish to share my ruminations with you, at least for a little while, concerning the title “Incel.”

Only a culture so soaked in sex could invent such a title. Only a culture which makes sexual activity the ultimate definition of what it means to be human could create such a category. “Incel” stands for “involuntary celibate.” It defines people—mostly men—who think they should be doing that “thing” but aren’t. In protest of their “not doing,” these people have turned to violence. To call it what it is, we might state it like this: “Since I cannot hurt others with their consent, I’ll hurt them without it.”

It is obvious, at least to me, that these people are the product of a culture that defines as normal very frequent sexual activity involving a multitude of partners. The obverse is perceived as abnormal, so we get the tension that creates the Incel movement. I also suppose this is the result of constant bombardment through media of all stripes that portray as normal and appropriate frequent sexual activity regardless of one’s station in life (hence the epidemic of porn, sexting, and sexting sites among our children). To speak against such media saturation and the resulting behaviors is viewed negatively. I wish to note also that absent from the media’s definition of “normal” sexual activity is any discussion of the dark consequences of unbridled sex: disease, a skewed sense of self-worth, and a proliferation of abortion—death (I wish to briefly add that the abortion industry—there’s one heck of a euphemism—defines the terms of birth control, so the purported decrease in abortions is likely non-existent).

Now, you may be thinking about why this topic is suitable for our monthly church newsletter. Let me explain. The most intense challenge we face as God’s people is not from the false religions of Islam and Mormonism (both are, indeed, intense challenges and both are growing rapidly on our soil). No, the most intense threat we face is the religion of sexual freedom. This religion retains that dubious honor, and probably will for some time. Make no mistake about this so-called sexual freedom, a religion it is, and this religion tolerates no competition. It should also be increasingly obvious that this religion will violently attempt to crush whatever stands in its path. Hence the birth of Incel. It grows from within us, and, *almost* unwittingly, is accepted among us. Think how Christ’s Church (church?) has almost passively accepted any and every expression of sexuality and sexual activity. Also think about how calling a thing what it is, such as “sin,” “an abomination,” or “earning God’s wrath,” is now viewed as unloving and un-Christian. (Although I find some comic relief in the fact that it’s often the people who know the least about Christianity that seem most compelled to offer these critiques—this is tempered, however, by the sad truth that we listen to them as authorities vs. the pretty darn clear Word of God. If I’ve just described you, I beg you to turn off *The View*, put down your phone, and study your Bible.)

So, what about us? What does this have to do with you and me? First, we belong to Christ. He purchased us with His blood. God's love for us, particularly manifest in Christ's passion, is *our* starting point. The Lord Jesus' passion's entire goal was gaining for God a Holy People—you and me. Therefore, we strive and desire to honor Him with our lives, submitting to His good will for us. Contrary to current cultural practices, we are not involuntarily celibate, we uphold voluntary celibacy before marriage acknowledging that this provides the best environment for our and our children's flourishing. So we strive—or should strive—to practice this in our lives as God's people.

In addition, what about this striving? Striving to live as God would have us describes repentance. Another word we might use is “temperance” (borrowing from our Confessions and C.S. Lewis). Temperance is the learning and practicing of self-denial. It is learning and struggling to curb the natural lusts of the flesh—especially with the welfare of our neighbor in view. There are many passages of God's Word that describe this. Here's one:

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14).*

God's grace, indeed His Spirit living in us, trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. Granted, the training and the renouncing are ongoing, marked with many failures that are—thankfully—washed clean by the ever-abundant grace of God in Christ Jesus. It's when we refuse to renounce and to struggle that we open ourselves to the darkness of this world which results in “Incel.”

Failure to join in the struggle—to exercise temperance—is conducted at great risk. God's Word warns us as follows:

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

*For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:23-31).*

We, as God's people, acknowledge that what He commands us is commanded out of love for us. He commands what's best for us—and for our neighbors that He places among us. We are, after all, the salt and the light. So, great is the insult when we refuse to submit. At the end of the

day, is suppose the thought is this: Do you trust God and His revealed Word to communicate what is best for you, or do you think the world and you own heart knows better? Look around. I think you'll begin to find your answer. Are we to live as God's people or just play at our faith? Trust me, the world sees us for what we are, one way or the other—as does our God.

Now, to be clear, I'm not saying that we are not forgiven for our many sins. As noted above, God's grace abounds without limit. We are free from the accusations of the devil and even our conscience. The point is this: What are we to do with this freedom?

As we enter the season of Pentecost, the season of the Church, pay attention to what the Lord is teaching (of course, that assumes that you'll gather to hear what He says to you). Pay attention to the life He's given you and what He asks you to be. Pray for strength. Ponder how you might grow in the faith you've been given—faith which came to you at great cost. And practice it! You were redeemed not with gold or silver, but with the precious suffering and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I pray our Lord strengthen all of us in these dark and latter days.

Your servant in Christ,

Rev. Leonard. Astrowski, Pastor