

## THE QUESTION that CHANGED MY LIFE

-by David Ryser.

A number of years ago, I had the privilege of teaching at a school of ministry. My students were hungry for God, and I was constantly searching for ways to challenge them to fall more in love with Jesus and to become voices for revival in the Church. I came across a quote attributed most often to Rev. Sam Pascoe. It is a short version of the history of Christianity, and it goes like this:

Christianity started in Palestine as a fellowship; it moved to Greece and became a philosophy; it moved to Italy and became an institution; it moved to Europe and became a culture; it came to America and became an enterprise. Some of the students were only 18 or 19 years old—barely out of diapers—and I wanted them to understand and appreciate the import of the last line, so I clarified it by adding, “An enterprise. That’s a business.” After a few moments Martha, the youngest student in the class, raised her hand. I could not imagine what her question might be. I thought the little vignette was self-explanatory, and that I had performed it brilliantly. Nevertheless, I acknowledged Martha’s raised hand, “Yes, Martha.” She asked such a simple question, “A business? But isn’t it supposed to be a body?” I could not envision where this line of questioning was going, and the only response I could think of was, “Yes.” She continued, “But when a body becomes a business, isn’t that a prostitute?”

The room went dead silent. For several seconds no one moved or spoke. We were stunned, afraid to make a sound because the presence of God had flooded into the room, and we knew we were on holy ground. All I could think in those sacred moments was, “Wow, I wish I’d thought of that.” I didn’t dare express that thought aloud. God had taken over the class.

Martha’s question changed my life. For six months, I thought about her question at least once every day. “When a body becomes a business, isn’t that a prostitute?” There is only one answer to her question. The answer is “Yes.” The American Church, tragically, is heavily populated by people who do not love God. How can we love Him? We don’t even know Him; and I mean really know Him.

... I stand by my statement that most American Christians do not know God—much less love Him. The root of this condition originates in how we came to God. Most of us came to Him because of what we were told He would do for us. We were promised that He would bless us in life and take us to heaven after death. We married Him for His money, and we don’t care if He lives or dies as long as we

can get His stuff. We have made the Kingdom of God into a business, merchandising His anointing. This should not be. We are commanded to love God, and are called to be the Bride of Christ—that's pretty intimate stuff. We are supposed to be His lovers. How can we love someone we don't even know? And even if we do know someone, is that a guarantee that we truly love them? Are we lovers or prostitutes?

I was pondering Martha's question again one day, and considered the question, "What's the difference between a lover and a prostitute?" I realized that both do many of the same things, but a lover does what she does because she loves. A prostitute pretends to love, but only as long as you pay. Then I asked the question, "What would happen if God stopped paying me?"

For the next several months, I allowed God to search me to uncover my motives for loving and serving Him. Was I really a true lover of God? What would happen if He stopped blessing me? What if He never did another thing for me? Would I still love Him? Please understand, I believe in the promises and blessings of God. The issue here is not whether God blesses His children; the issue is the condition of my heart. Why do I serve Him? Are His blessings in my life the gifts of a loving Father, or are they a wage that I have earned or a bribe/payment to love Him? Do I love God without any conditions? It took several months to work through these questions. Even now I wonder if my desire to love God is always matched by my attitude and behavior. I still catch myself being disappointed with God and angry that He has not met some perceived need in my life. I suspect this is something which is never fully resolved, but I want more than anything else to be a true lover of God.

So what is it going to be? Which are we, lover or prostitute? There are no prostitutes in heaven, or in the Kingdom of God for that matter, but there are plenty of former prostitutes in both places. Take it from a recovering prostitute when I say there is no substitute or unconditional, intimate relationship with God. And I mean there is no palatable substitute available to us (take another look at Matthew 7:21-23 sometime). We must choose.

-Dr. David Ryser.