

Do not commit adultery! **On 6th January 2008 *or any other day***

Adultery: That seems an unlikely sermon theme for a Sunday morning at the cathedral, and yet....

"Of the 300 *pastors* who responded to a recent [1989] Leadership survey, **19 percent** admitted to having either an affair or inappropriate sexual contact with people other than their spouses. **Nine percent confessed** to having sexual intercourse with people other than their spouses." 1

What did God have in mind when he made one of his ten commandments "Do not commit adultery?"

He had in mind ...

your happiness and mine;
your family and mine;
your spiritual life and mine.

This was not a command to *limit* personal freedom in life but to *extend* the intimacy of marriage, to help us *develop* better lives.

In Proverbs 5 [*quotes from NIV throughout*] we hear the words of a wise man speaking to men, and we can easily extend this wisdom to women: he says: in verse 8 "Keep to a path far from [the adulteress / the adulterer], do not go near the door of her [his] house" 2

1Richard Exley, Mark Galli and John Ortberg, *Dangers, Toils & Snares : Resisting the Hidden Temptations of Ministry, Mastering ministry's pressure points*, 112 (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Books, 1994).

2The Holy Bible : New International Version, electronic ed., Pr 5:8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984).

In Proverbs 5 "The adulteress" is not a euphemism, a word for someone or something else, it is literally a woman who engages with men other than her husband for sex. But this character exists outside the world of promiscuity...

There are people whose chosen role in life seems to be to encourage others to be unfaithful to their promises, to break their oaths.

e.g. **breaking agreements** you have made with your **neighbours,**

refusing to fulfil **obligations** to your **dependants,**

being casual with long standing **loyalties,**

abandoning churches for selfish reasons, [see how I slipped that one in there while you weren't noticing],

and **being unfaithful** to husbands and wives in the **mind,** the **heart** or the **body!**

Let's see what the Proverb writer says about these people:

her lips drip honey, speech is smoother than oil.

we need to recognise when someone's talk is very smooth: warning signals should sound when the voices I hear are silky, seductive, smooth: the sales patter, the get rich quick promise, the slick slogan. Like the adulterer who promises so much so beautifully, the reality is not so good.

Ministers who have broken this commandment have subtly convinced themselves it is not *so* wrong to spend so much time counselling one vulnerable person; it was just an *oversight* to forget to mention the late meeting with the young woman; I was only offering her a lift home, and it was *she* asked *me* to come in....

slipping, sliding, sinking.

Have you **become closer** to a colleague of the opposite sex at work, than you are with your spouse?

Do you speak **more honestly**/frankly with a friend from a competitor's firm than you do with your team?

Are you **more intimate** with someone in cyberspace than with the person with whom you share your bed?

slipping sliding sinking

But whose fault is it?

6 She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not. Pr 5:6

Because a person appears to be acting innocently does not mean "she" is acting innocently. The person contemplating *breaking their promises* may not know how evil it is. "It *seems* right to a man" does not mean it is right. Personal judgement must come into play here: to quote Gandalf the Grey: "all that glitters is not gold and all that is gold does not glitter" Faithfulness to your vows in marriage seems dull and predictable compared to the supposed thrills of unbridled passion outside it: but while self-control does not glitter, it is the golden way.

The verse following "24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. "

comes the warning 25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. N I V Proverbs 16:24-25

The sales person selling you a policy or a product may believe what they offer is good: they may not realise it is crooked in some way: we need wisdom to discern this. God help us. Sometimes we cannot identify what is wrong but we know *something* is not right! Be brave and say so. Say no!

The danger of adultery? Unfaithfulness to vows and promises?

10 lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich another man's house. 11 At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent.

The proverb Writer may be speaking of adultery, but this unfaithfulness goes wider than this one type of infidelity.

He warns that the unfaithful act has a financial impact: we can end up in debt, and we can end up *paying* for a long time.

You sign up to a new phone contract without checking the fine print: it sounded so good! You lost your old contract with the company who had served you well, and now you find you are signed in for 18 months! You want to cancel? Pay for the 18 months and we'll let you cancel!

You play around. You catch an illness. You hide it from your spouse as long as you can, eventually the secret is out and you are in pain for many months. *you will groan*

Not to mention supporting illegitimately born children, paying off the debts raised by the fancy lifestyle you offered your adulterous partner.

Keeping someone else happy with our toil! It doesn't sound so good: hence the warning stay away from adultery.

So what can we do to avoid this, or having fallen into it, to prevent it happening again in a new relationship?

Be the best you can be in keeping your covenant: best husband, best wife, best trader, best customer, best contact, best service

Be open with your spouse about your weaknesses and your needs:

Paul Tournier in "*To understand each other*" provides sound advice to prevent illicit affairs ... in any Christian marriage. He says,

"The best protection against sexual temptations is to be able to speak honestly of them and to find, in the wife's [husband's?] understanding, without any trace of complicity whatsoever, effective and affective help needed to overcome them."

Coupled with a dependence upon God's Holy Spirit to provide help in time of trouble, this sort of transparency can prevent affairs. It can also build a depth of love, understanding, and oneness that I doubt can be experienced any other way this side of heaven. *Terry Muck: Christianity Today*

Be ready to run when danger looms

Be wise to the impact of your looming failure:

The Consequences of a Moral Tumble *quotation fro Terry Muck*

- **Grieving the Lord** who redeemed me.
- **Dragging his** sacred **name into the mud.**
- One day having to look Jesus, the Righteous Judge, in the face and give an account of my actions.
- Inflicting untold hurt on my best friend and loyal wife/husband
- Losing my spouse's respect and trust.
- Hurting my beloved children.
- Destroying my example and credibility with my children, and nullifying both present and future efforts to teach them to obey God ("Why listen to a man who betrayed Mom and us?").
- Losing my wife and my children forever.

- Causing shame to my family (“Why isn’t Daddy a pastor anymore?”).
- Losing self-respect.
- Creating a form of guilt awfully hard to shake. Even though God would forgive me, would I forgive myself?
- Forming memories and flashbacks that could plague future intimacy with my wife.
- Undermining the faithful example and hard work of other Christians in our community.
- Bringing great pleasure to Satan, the enemy of God and all that is good.
- Heaping judgment and endless difficulty on the person with whom I committed adultery.
- Invoking shame and life-long embarrassment upon myself.

Terry C. Muck, vol. 19, Sins of the Body : Ministry in a Sexual Society, The Leadership library, 118 (Carol Stream, Ill.; Waco, Tex.: Christianity Today; Word Books; Distributed by Word Books, 1989).

Proverbs 5:8 Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house

15 Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.

[16 Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares?

17 Let them be yours alone,] never to be shared with strangers.

[18 May your fountain be blessed, and] may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.

19 A loving doe, a graceful deer—*[may her breasts satisfy you always,]* may you ever be captivated by her love.

20 Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man’s wife? Pr 5:15-20

This is a euphemism! Keep sex within your own home and within your marriage.

What errors will we fall into this week, what temptations are you facing at work? The warning for neglecting this is harsh: *23 He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly. Pr 5:23*

Lord help us never to go that way. To do better! To Say No!
To Run away! 3

A catch phrase for this week? Do not commit adultery: Say No, and then run, or just run!