

First Baptist Pulpit

The Character of an Adulterer

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

A Sermon

Delivered by

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Like a python who holds its victim in a death grip, sexual promiscuity has wrapped itself around our bodies, minds, and spirits. The serpent "lust" has struck us in our moral jugular, and its venom has permeated every artery, vein, and capillary of our society, poisoning our collective soul. From preachers to presidents, crack-addict prostitutes to Hollywood whores, effeminate sodomites to Wall Street playboys, common housewives to everyday Joes, promiscuous teenagers to perverse child molesters--sexual immorality is so rampant that we no longer shudder when we see it in the media or read it in the newspaper.

Recent public scandals abound, and the list is as repulsive as it is long: a female air force pilot forced to resign her commission because of an extra-marital affair with a fellow officer; a presidential aid and Frank Gifford caught on camera, one with a prostitute, the other with a stewardess; an army general who, because of adultery with a civilian staff member, lost the opportunity of a lifetime to be head of the joint chiefs of staff; another promiscuous Kennedy caught, this time with his baby sitter; Navy and Air Force cadets who plot murder in a sordid teenage sex triangle; accusations of lewd behavior against a President who can't remember but whose lawyer is willing to cut a deal; televangelists who prostitute the gospel publicly while prostituting themselves privately. And we can add to these sensational cases the less public but equally wicked and ugly, day-to-day reality that fornication runs rampant in every city and state and at every level of society.

Fornication refers to any divinely forbidden sexual act. In the Bible, God sharply condemns all sexual immorality, including incest, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, bestiality, bigamy, and polygamy. But our focus is upon one special category of sexual fornication--adultery. Adultery is extra-marital fornication, sexual intercourse outside the boundaries of the marriage covenant. God lists adultery seventh among the ten commandments and first among the Levitical catalogue of sexual sins. Moses' law required that a man or woman who violated the commandment "thou shalt not commit adultery" would be subject to two punishments--either a bill of divorcement or death by stoning, and sometimes both. Why God would ordain such radical punishments as divorce and death against the adulterer? To answer this question, we must come to grips with the exceeding sinfulness of the adulterer, and we can do this only by searching the scriptures to see adultery as God sees it.

More than any other biblical writer, Solomon, ironically, has the most to say about adultery. This is ironic because, although Solomon wrote the most beautiful love song in human history, yet he himself could not live up to this divine ideal and his failure cost him not only his kingdom but also the love of his life. And Solomon's own adultery becomes even more ironic when we remember that his Proverbs provide the most graphic description and poignant condemnation of adultery in the Bible. One who thoroughly examines adultery in Solomon's Proverbs will discover that Solomon's teachings about adultery can be divided into at least three categories: the character of the adulterer, precludes to adultery, and the effects of adultery.

First, let us examine Solomon's writings about what we may call the adulterer's character or nature. Solomon depicts the adulterer's nature as morally flawed, and he delineates at least six character flaws of the adulterer. Some of these traits Solomon attributes to the adulterous man, and others to the adulterous woman; however, this does not mean

that these traits could not apply to both the adulterer and adulteress, but rather that Solomon regarded these individual traits to be more dominant in one gender more than the other.

First, Solomon characterizes the adulterous male as a simplistic fool devoid of understanding. Throughout Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Solomon refers to the fool an amazing forty-nine times, seven times seven, which denotes the fool's complete corruption. In direct contrast to Solomon's concept of the wise man who fears God and keeps His commandments, the fool is destined for "the correction of the stocks"; weaves the cords of his own sin by which he will eventually be ensnared; seeks mischief as a sport; will be a servant to the wise; seeks to justify his sin by rationalizing his immorality; flaunts his sin; rages in self-confidence; despises his father's wisdom and instruction; focuses his eyes upon worldly things; lies and meddles; dishonors himself, God, and his family; returns to his sin over and over again; boasts loudly of his opinions; believes the immoral delusions of his own seared conscience and thus trusts his own heart and walks in darkness; and consumes his own flesh with the fire of lust, laughing while he burns. Indeed, seven times seven, the fool utterly disregards God's wisdom. And as there be sins many, so also is there a fool for every sin, and no fool is more foolish than the adulterous fool who utterly disregards God's commandment, "thou shalt not commit adultery." God describes the adulterous fool as "simple," meaning morally and spiritually naive, and "void of understanding," meaning emptied of wisdom.

Solomon's second characteristic of the adulterer particularly applies to the female adulterer, who dresses in a style which she knows to be sexually seductive, what Solomon calls "the attire of an harlot." None of us has to guess what Solomon means by this. The harlot's attire is that style of dress intended to seduce by flaunting the female body in such a way as to communicate a sexually implicit, sometimes explicit message which incites male lust.

Peter's prohibition that the Godly woman not adorn herself with plaited hair, gold, or costly array is not an absolute prohibition that a woman cannot wear plaited hair, a golden ring, or an expensive dress; rather, Peter's point is that these things should not predominate the godly woman's outward appearance. He who doubts this truth should recall David's description of Christ's own bride, beautifully adorned with intricate needlework wrought of gold, and her members adorned with precious jewels. God's ideal woman, whom Solomon calls the virtuous woman, dresses beautifully and tastefully; she seeks wool and flax to make herself purple coverings of fine silk and linen tapestry; even her children are clothed with scarlet; but her character is such that her external appearance does not overshadow her inner integrity which is "all glorious within." Spiritual strength and moral honor are her true clothing, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. As Matthew Henry says, "The purity of the heart will show itself in the modesty of the dress." But not so the adulterous woman.

The adulterous woman values external appearance over internal makeup. To her, fashion is everything, even if its trends and styles are dominated and dictated by homosexual men whose hidden agenda is to dishonor the female body and denigrate feminine integrity by sexualizing dress. A word of caution is here in order to all godly women and their daughters. When is the hemline too short, and the neckline too low, the dress too tight, and the shorts too short? Ladies, we would not measure your righteousness by the Pharisee's phylactery, but neither would we exhort you to use your liberty in Christ as an occasion to the flesh. When in doubt about the dimensions of you dress, err on the side of caution; better too long than too short, too high than too low, too loose than too tight. Remember that modesty is the badge of chastity, so be careful, mothers and daughters, about your outward dress that it does not misrepresent your inner beauty. Where a woman's flesh will be exposed a man's lust will be excited. Therefore, let not immodest apparel evidence your own susceptibility to the seductive styles of Madison avenue, or provide the occasion for some man's illicit attention, lest both you and your admirer be fools. Dress like a bride adorned for her husband, not in the scandalous attire of Mystery Babylon.

A third characteristic of the adulterer is subtleness of heart; that is, a stealthy and shrewd strategy to seduce. Freudians wrongly interpret the Genesis accounts of the serpent and tree as sexual images, and the subsequent tasting of the tree's fruit by Adam and Eve as a symbol of forbidden sexual intercourse. But while Freud and his proponents are, for various reasons, wrong in their interpretation of this story, the application holds. Like a subtil serpent, the adulterer employs seductive strategies which cause both man and woman to partake of the forbidden fruit of adultery. Of the four things which Solomon considers most awe-striking and majestic, one is the way of a serpent upon a rock and the other the way of a man with a maid. Like a serpent, the adulterer strategically positions himself or herself in such a way as to wrap around their sexual prey. Solomon's foolish man wilfully passes through the street near the harlot's house, and the harlot lies in wait for him at every twilight corner. The adulteress decks her "bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt, . . . and perfumes [his] bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon." Like a writhing snake, the adulterer will weave an intricate labyrinth of liaisons and lies to taste the forbidden fruit of adultery. Jesus said be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove; but the adulterer is no harmless dove but rather a moral and social vulture, and therefore his serpentine behavior is not wise, but foolish, and will slither and slide and coil around his own heart and life to his own destruction, and sadly, to the destruction of others around him, the victims of his venomous behavior.

Another characteristic of the adulterous woman, a two-headed one, is that she is loud and stubborn. A fool's voice, says Solomon, is known by a multitude of words, and perhaps there is nothing more despicable to the sanctified ear than the unbridled tongue, except when it hee-haws like a donkey. Beware of loud women, for they are liable to adultery; how shall the woman who cannot control her tongue, the least member of her body, control the more powerful members of her body which stimulate illicit passions? Moreover, says Solomon, such a woman is stubborn. Watch out for the self-willed, assertive, and domineering woman whose voice is characterized by loudness and her demeanor by stubbornness; if she has a husband, she probably rules him, and their marriage is a hideous monster with both the head and tail in the wrong place. No doubt such loud and stubborn women are the products of disproportionately quiet and meek men who fail to rule their homes--and their wives--as God has ordained. Such a man will be despised by his loud and stubborn wife, and, although his lack of masculine strength does not excuse her sin, her adulterous quest is no doubt motivated by hatred for her weak husband, a hatred which pursues a man stronger than her husband and whom she deems superior to him.

Solomon also characterizes the adulterer as socially overactive. Remember that the foolish man, especially in his youth, is liable to wander into those streets which lead him to the harlot's neighborhood. The harlot, too, is a social gadabout whose feet abide not in her own house but wander here and there through every street to every corner of the city. We live in a socially overactive society which tends to dangerous relationships founded upon worldly pleasures. Our culture craves the sports event, the theater, the party, and the concert. Even over-programmized churches contribute to the expensive time we spend outside our homes. Preoccupation with worldly events turns the heart away from home, which should be our most sacred and desired abode. That man and woman who do not find their greatest satisfaction in the quietness and solitude of their home are destined for marital difficulty. And permit me to here issue a stern warning to young couples, especially about overly involved social relationships with other couples.

Couples should not get too close one to another. Time and again we have seen a too intimate social relationship develop between couples who spend too much time together. Such social "co-dependence" frequently results in illicit sexual affairs among such socially over involved couples. Since one out of two marriages are destined for divorce, then the odds are 50/50 that two couples over involved socially are affairs waiting to happen. Too much closeness between couples is not only dangerous, but it is also a sure sign that the couples lack social (and perhaps sexual) fulfillment in their own marriages. Have many friends, not a few, and close friends at that, but not too close. Stay at home more often, cultivate a deeper relationship with your lifetime spouse, and keep your closest friends at a healthy distance. Remember that one path to adultery is an overactive or overly intimate social life, especially if it focuses upon worldly entertainment or an overdependence upon others to fulfill unhealthy vacuums in your marriage.

No doubt there are other characteristics of the adulterer, but these complete Solomon's list--a foolish disregard for God's law, subtlety of heart, inappropriate dress, loudness and stubbornness, and an overactive social life--and if the wisest man issues such stern warnings about the adulterer, we should heed them. But Solomon also delineates what we might call "preludes to adultery," certain attitudes and activities that predict sexual violation of the marriage covenant. His list includes inappropriate conversation between a man and woman, seething lust, and what we might term the "traveling husband."

Solomon's warning about inappropriate conversation as a prelude to adultery emphasizes the danger of flattery. The evil and strange woman, says Solomon, flatters with her lips, and by her much fair speech she causes, even forces, the vulnerable fool to yield to her seductive lips. Men, too, can be guilty of inappropriate flattery. Compliments paid from a married man to a married woman, or vice versa, are appropriate only in the presence of others, and then they must be offered with discretion. Women, beware of the man who often flatters you with his tongue; and, men, beware of the woman whose compliments come both privately and frequently; for flattery, says Solomon, is the seducer's means to convey the flatterer's illicit interest in the one flattered, and hint at something other than a compliment.

But flattery is certainly not the only verbal prelude to adultery; discussion of questionable books, delicate topics of current events, or inappropriate discussion of one's own personal problems, particularly marital problems, are traps set by the adulterous tongue. Under no circumstances should a man or woman listen to criticism of another's spouse outside the presence of one's own husband or wife, for such criticism often intends to express not only the adulterer's dissatisfaction with their marriage, but also attempts to gain sympathetic response from the listener to whom they are secretly attracted. Nor should men and women make flirtatious statements, use suggestive language, or tell inappropriate jokes. Flirtatious statements and the language of love should fall only on the ears of one's spouse, and the sexually filthy joke is never appropriate, even between men, for it necessarily taints the conscience and potentially soils the soul. Take heed what words you speak to the opposite sex, and especially beware the lips of a flatterer.

Solomon also lists lust as a prelude to adultery. But none ever spoke so powerfully about sexual lust as Jesus Christ Himself, who warns us that to look upon a woman or a man with lustful intent equates to the act of adultery itself. Though the fire of lust may have been extinguished in the spiritually mature individual, yet we are born unto sin as the sparks fly upward, so that lust's smoldering coals can be fanned and flamed by wicked winds that kindle fire even in David's bosom. Therefore, we should seek to put out every spark of lust--the second and longing look at the beautiful woman or handsome man, the movie or magazine which offends our delicate conscience, or the temptation to dwell upon evil thoughts. He who takes fire into his bosom and walks upon hot coals will burn his feet and consume his soul in fiery passions.

Solomon also considers business travel to be a dangerous prelude to adultery. Some of us must travel out of professional necessity. But we should take special care not to travel away from our wives and husbands more than is absolutely necessary, lest we make foreign business or pleasure the occasion of adultery. Moreover, we should exercise even more caution to assure that, if we must travel, our marriage is strong, for the weak marriage enhances the liability that the traveling spouse will seek affection in the stranger's embrace. Solomon's seductress took advantage of her husband's absence as her opportunity to seduce the foolish young man. "Come," said she, "let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: he hath taken a bag of money with him and will come home at the day appointed." Her husband's absence, to some extent, contributed to her infidelity, and we have seen this scenario lived out in the lives of apparently godly women whose husbands traveled or spent too many nights at the office even when it is close to home. But more often, it is the faithful wife who remains at home while the wandering philanderer trafficks in the merchandise of sin. Let the traveling man learn from the wise Waldensian merchants who always included the Bible among their wares; bind God's law upon your fingers, write it upon the tables of your heart, and keep it as the apple of your eye. "Say unto wisdom, 'thou art my sister;' and call understanding thy kinswoman: that they may keep thee from the alien seductress when you travel near or far."

And although Solomon does not mention this as a prelude to adultery, wisdom warrants that we touch upon a doctrine most delicate which, if neglected, can also be, and often is a prelude to adultery; that is waning sexual passion in marriage. As surely as God has declared that He will severely judge adulterers and whoremongers, He has also decreed that "marriage is honorable in all things, and the bed undefiled." Physical passion within a godly marriage is a like a blazing fire of Divinely lit coals which have a most vehement flame; though an ocean may separate a godly husband and wife, many waters cannot quench their love; and though life's adversities, like roaring waves, may billow over their marriage, the floods cannot drown their burning passion one for another. But if the home fires burn low, this, too, can be a prelude to adultery.

St. Paul reminds us that the godly marriage involves a guarded and self-sacrificing intimacy between the Christian husband and wife. The wife's body is not her own, nor the husband's his. Each should willingly, lovingly, and tenderly render the delights of love one to the other; for in marriage the wife's body is not hers, but the husband's, nor the husband's body his, but the wife's. In fact Paul forbids sexual abstinence in marriage except by mutual consent of both the husband and wife, and then only for a short time of prayer and fasting. And Paul also warns that unfaithfulness to this marital duty makes a husband and wife vulnerable to adultery. Let that woman who uses sex as a weapon against her husband be warned that her husband is God's divinely appointed ruler over her, and that by such foolery she will decapitate her king and, by that, her own head; and if her husband adulterates, then she, to some extent, has contributed to the cause of his sin. And let the negligent husband be warned that, as surely as man is the glory of God, woman is the glory of man, and that to deprive a wife of your fullest affections disobeys God, disgraces your wife, dishonors your marriage covenant, and may even put your wife at risk for public shame. Husbands, bring your brides into God's banqueting house, and hang the banner of love over your bedchambers. Wives, by your queenly administration of the law of love, your kings will be held in their palaces. Let not negligence of the marriage bed become a prelude to adultery.

Thus far we have noted not only the nature or characteristics of the adulterer, but also several potential scenarios or preludes to adultery, such as inappropriate conversation, lust, business travel, and the unpassionate marriage. But now we must ask the question, "What are the effects of adultery?" Again we turn primarily to Solomon's wisdom for our answers.

To say that the effects of adultery are anything less than horrible would be a gross understatement. Let us consider first Solomon's straightforward language about the effects of adultery, and then, secondly, his terrifying poetic images of adultery's bitter fruits.

Obviously, "he that goeth into his neighbor's wife . . ." Solomon says, "shall not be innocent." By this Solomon means that God by no means will clear the guilty adulterer, and that the adulterer who sews to his flesh will reap at least a threefold harvest: "A wound and dishonor shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away."

Adultery leaves the adulterer wounded, as well as everyone around him or her. The adulterer wounds himself morally in that he has broken God's law and thereby sinned his conscience with the hot iron of sexual sin; the adulterer wounds himself physically by defiling God's earthly temple, the body, and by opening himself to disease; the adulterer wounds himself psychologically by deeply intermingling his emotions with someone other than his own spouse, by which the adulterer is liable to feel the emotional drag of his sin throughout his life, and, moreover, he who commits adultery will bear the inner psychological scars of guilt, regret, sorrow, and hate. Spiritually, the adulterer ruins himself, for although "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit . . . he that is joined to an harlot is one flesh."

But let us not forget that the adulterer inflicts wounds upon not upon himself alone, but also upon everyone associated with him. The adulterer wounds his adulterous partner by dragging her into the mire of his moral filthiness, exposing her to sexually transmitted diseases, defiling her conscience, disgracing her womanhood, destroying her emotions, and polluting her spirit. And what of the adulterer's family poor family, his wife and children? Who can tell the irreparable damage the adulterer inflicts upon his own house? Not merely the private and personal wounds of the body, mind, soul, and spirit, but also public dishonor and reproach. The adulterer dishonors himself and everyone around him, and brings reproach upon not only his own head and family, but also his nation and religion. And though our mighty God can heal every wound, sin always leaves its scars. As surely as the Puritans labeled Hester Prynne with a scarlet "A" which she wore upon her breast throughout her entire lifetime, so also Adultery leaves its indelible scars of dishonor and reproach upon its victims. But Solomon's language exceeds even this awful picture.

The adulterer, says he, is no longer a man, but is reduced to a piece of bread; his lust like leaven risen and his life like bread consumed by a whore's mouth. Like an ox brought to slaughter, the adulterer has sacrificed his life for a bloody sin; like a hunted beast whose liver has been pierced by a sharp arrow, the adulterer has been struck through his moral and spiritual vitals by the sharp and deadly arrows of hell's most fleshly sin; and like a bird caught in a snare, the pitiful end of the adulterer is to be holden by the cords of his own sin, tragically ensnared by his own wily devices.

But of all the bitter fruits of adultery, the bitterest is the eternal destruction of the soul. He who commits adultery, Solomon says, ". . . destroyeth his own soul." To him or her who imagines that the stolen waters and secret bread of adultery are sweet, remember this bitter truth, "Neither fornicators nor adulterers shall inherit the kingdom of God," for . . . a whore is a deep ditch, her house is a chamber of death, and its guests go down to the depths of hell.

My son[s] [and my daughters], attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding:

That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge.

For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil:

But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword.

Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. . . .

Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth.

Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house:

Lest thou give thine honor unto others, and thy years unto cruelty: . . .

And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed,

And say [to thyself], "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof;

And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me.

1. Exodus 20:14
2. Leviticus 20:10
3. Deuteronomy 24:1
4. Leviticus 20:10