

# Moral Purity

Moral purity covers many areas, but the subject I want to deal with here is sexual purity. While no pastor intends to have an affair, some sadly do. These people have had to leave the ministry, at least for a period of time.

Undoubtedly, the simple fact that we are in a *major spiritual battle* is the primary cause for moral impurity. Let us not be blind to that. Other contributing factors on the pastor's side could be due to one or more of the following factors: an unresolved problem with lust, a need for intimacy because of the heavy pressures that come with pastoral responsibility or the problem of coping with seemingly innocent, flirtatious and often spiritual women within the church.

Many women are drawn to the pastor under the impression that he is wise, caring and sensitive. It is great to have a healthy friendship with people of the opposite sex. This adds richness in our interaction with others. However, we can never be too careful in making sure that our actions and motives are above reproach. A warning from one's wife or husband should not be laughed off as often their insight is correct.

## Root causes

There are four areas in life that we need to guard against so that an emotional affinity with someone other than our spouse does not take place.

1. spiritual unity.
2. mental affinity.
3. personality compatibility.
4. physical attraction.

Believe it or not, physical attraction is the lowest primary cause for immorality to occur. It normally commences with one of the other factors first.

## A typical way it develops

The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about wrong relationships between the sexes. Note that in Proverbs the woman and not the man is shown more often as being in the wrong. Although that is not always the situation why has Solomon written in this way? It appears that women generally have greater influence over men in sexual attraction, than vice versa. It is not that the woman usually plans to be a snare but her ability to attract a man might be highly flattering to her self-esteem.

This is the way a wrong relationship can develop:

1. A person seeks out the company of the other person they are attracted to. Prov. 5:8 'Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house'. This can happen in several ways.

- spend too much time with them in the office.
- hope you will run into them up town.
- look out for them at church.
- gravitate toward them for a conversation.
- find excuses for phone calls, visits.

Remember, the Bible says, 'the heart is deceitful above all things'.

2. Unhealthy conversations can develop.

Prov. 5:3 'Her speech is smoother than oil'.

- joking, empathising and flattery occur.
- you thoroughly enjoy each other's company.

3. Fantasising can develop.

Prov. 6:5 'Do not lust in your heart after her beauty'.

- it can also lead you to consider how things would be different if you were married to another person.

4. A wrong use of the eyes.

Prov. 6:25 'or let her captivate you with her eyes'.

- eyes are the light of the soul and can be very powerful in conveying feelings.

5. A lack of knowledge.

Prov. 6:23 'But a man who commits adultery lacks judgement'.

- they rationalise the situation, e.g.
  - really this is harmless.
  - he/she really understands me.
  - he is my covering, my pastor.
  - my marriage would never break up. This is a delusion that is hard to break through.

Unwise sexual attraction is one of the oldest tricks in Satan's book.

This slide is normally gradual and is like stepping into a river for a little harmless enjoyment with the opposite sex. However, the longer a person stays in that river the more likely they are to move down it. The relationship never stays at the same level. It is possible initially to move back onto the riverbank and break off that growing unhealthy relationship, but pressure and human reasoning can take over. As a person moves further down the river the current flows more powerfully until it is flowing so swiftly, that it is virtually impossible to climb out even if one desires to. A short distance further is a crushing strength of a waterfall, which has destroyed many a person's ministry and family.

## The way of escape

Many people know 1 Corinthians 10:13, but how many remember the verse before it? It says, 'So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall'. Too many men and women of God have fallen because they thought that they were safe.

If you feel attracted to a person of the opposite sex, make certain that these feelings are *not conveyed* to the person concerned. Many a time innocent victims have fallen because of unwise sharing in this way.

Immersing yourself in the *Word of God* is a most helpful way to remain morally pure. Many who have fallen have confessed to having ineffective quiet times with the Lord. 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night'. Psalm 1:2.

*Be accountable* on a regular basis to a friend (as well as your marriage partner) and be prepared to share with them inner conflicts as they occur. Men find it difficult to share in this way, but it is essential to overcome strong temptations. Some elders (but not all) would be very open for us to share with them so that they could support us in prayer. They may then feel free to share their conflicts with you, which they also may be facing. Sometimes, if a person or leader shares with me about some unhealthy attraction, I thank them and mention that next time I see them I will be inquiring as to how they are getting on in this area. This is normally enough of a deterrent to prevent them from being further swept down the river and to make sure they find the bank.

Some leaders who are in a relationship in which they are holding another to account ask these questions:

Have you been anywhere with a woman this past week that might be seen as compromising?

Have you spent adequate time in Bible study and prayer?

Have you given priority to your family?

Have your financial dealings shown integrity?

Have you fulfilled your calling?

Have you exposed yourself to any sexually explicit material?

Have you just told a lie? (!)

In most situations where a leader has an unhealthy relationship, there needs to be a *complete separation* from the person of the opposite sex. For example, if that person is on the staff with you, then one needs to resign. In some cases, one of them may need to leave the Fellowship.

We need each other as no one is exempt from these temptations. If on the other hand you have fallen, bring it out into the light as darkness only brings us into bondage. Have the problem dealt with in the appropriate way. If there is true repentance over time God by His grace may reinstate you into ministry again.