

SEXUAL PURITY: A CALL TO MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL

While hiking in south eastern Utah in 2003, Aron Ralston had somehow managed to get his arm pinned underneath an 800 pound boulder. He was trapped for five days and eight hours. After freeing himself he had to climb down a 65 foot sheer cliff to reach safety.¹ How he freed himself is what is astonishing about his story. It had become apparent that rescuers were not going to find him, and that he would die in desolate Bluejohn Canyon. So, using his T-shirt as a tourniquet, he cut his arm off with his pocketknife. Desperate times! Desperate measures!

Let me suggest that when it comes to the matter of sexual purity, there is a lesson to be learned from this young man's radical surgery. Let me urge you to do whatever is necessary in order that you might be a minister of the gospel who is sexually pure! These are desperate days. We need to be wary of statistics², but the statistics are troubling. According to a Christianity Today survey in August of 2000, about one third of Christian ministers have visited a pornographic website, about 16% did so several times, and about 5% do it frequently.³ Harry Schaumburg, a counsellor specializing in sexual sin in the church, writes: *"Several years ago a seminary professor told me, 'We no longer ask our entering students if they are struggling with pornography, we assume every student is struggling. The question we ask is: how serious is the struggle?'"* He adds that a missions agency representative told him that 80% of their applicants voluntarily indicate a struggle with pornography. (And certainly pornography is readily available, since that perverse industry is the seventh largest business in the US!)⁴ Many years ago now Leadership magazine published an article entitled *"How Common Is Pastoral Indiscretion?"* In the article we are told that in answer to the question, *"Since you have been in local church ministry, have you ever done anything with someone (not your spouse) that you feel was sexually inappropriate"*, 23% answered "yes". In answer to the question, *"Have you ever had sexual intercourse with someone other than your spouse since you have been in the ministry"*, 12% answered "yes". Furthermore, 18% of pastors responded that they had engaged in *"other forms of sexual contact"* with someone other than their spouse. Research done by the Fuller Institute of Church Growth indicates that 37% of ministers *"have been in inappropriate behaviour with someone in the church"*!⁵ And then, of course, there is the anecdotal evidence! Who of us does not know of one, or many a sad story of a family shattered, a ministry destroyed, and a reputation ruined by sexual immorality? Desperate times!

¹ See Wikipedia article on Aron Ralston, or Ralston's book, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (New York: Atria Books, 2005).

² Mark Twain said: *"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics"*. Twain said he was quoting Disraeli.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Set Apart*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003), pages 80, 81.

⁴ Al Mohler, *Desire and Deceit: The Real Cost of the New Sexual Tolerance*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Multnomah Press, 2008), page 28.

⁵ John Armstrong, *Can Fallen Pastors Be Restored?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), pages 17-28.

I need not trouble you with more numbers. I need not tell you tragic stories. I believe that they are all too familiar. But in light of these things, I say again, let us learn from a young man who cut off his arm. More importantly, let us listen to our Lord: *“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.....and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off”* (Matthew 5:29, 30, NKJV). Desperate measures!

Now this paper is a plea for Christian ministers to flee sexual immorality. I intend to say that over and over again, for fifteen pages. There are many texts of Scripture I could point to:

Proverbs 5 – where we are warned about the immoral woman whose lips drip honey and encouraged to drink water from our own cisterns;

Proverbs 6 – where we are urged to keep away from the evil woman and commanded to *“not lust after her beauty in (our) hearts”*;

Job 31:1 – where Job asserts that he has *“made a covenant with his eyes”* and asks, *“how then can I gaze at a virgin”*;

Psalms 119:133 – which tells us that no sin is to have dominion over us;

I Thessalonians 4:3-5 – where the Apostle tells us in no uncertain terms that the will of God for us is our sanctification, and this specifically involves abstaining from sexual immorality;

Matthew 5:28 – where our Lord drives the nail deep by telling us that lustful looks are tantamount to adultery in the heart;

Colossians 3:5 – where Paul tells us to kill sexual immorality before it kills us;

Romans 13:14 – where Paul urges that we make no provision for the flesh, refusing to let sexually immoral desires gain a foothold in our lives;

Ephesians 5:3 – where Paul insists that sexual immorality and all impurity are not even to be named among us – there must not even be a hint of it! Indeed! *“He who commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his soul”* (**Proverbs 6:32**).

What we will do, however, is to spend a few moments considering Paul’s words in I Corinthians 6:9-20, and then a few more moments considering how, practically speaking, we may heed his exhortation to *“flee sexual immorality”* (v 18). This is my outline: *An Apostolic Call to Sexual Purity; Some Brotherly Counsel Regarding Sexual Purity*

An Apostolic Call to Sexual Purity

Well, they certainly had their problems in the Corinthian church, not the least of which was tolerating in their congregation something even the heathen world would not countenance (5:1 – sadly, things have changed). A man has his father’s wife! You must deal with this! Church

discipline must be exercised (5:3-7)! It is not a wonder that Paul, after briefly touching on lawsuits (6:1-8), returns to the matter of sexual immorality and calls for holiness (v 9-20).

“All things are lawful for me” (v 12)! This is certainly true of a Christian. God has given us richly all things to enjoy (I Timothy 6:17). Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, says Paul (Galatians 5:1). But the world has its twisted versions of God’s truths, and that certainly was the case in Corinth! Cicero wrote: *“if there is anyone who thinks that youths should be forbidden affairs with courtesans, he is doubtless eminently austere”*! Such a view was contrary to the licence of the age and the custom and concession of our ancestors. *“When, in fact, was it that what is allowed was not allowed?”* So perhaps there were those in the church who took our Christian freedoms and used them to sanction immoral behaviour!⁶ Paul’s response to the sexual immorality problem in the Corinthian church is swift and powerful. He gives *“eight compelling reasons why only extremely foolish Christians would continue to fornicate, giving in the midst of those arguments three binding apostolic commands, ‘do not be deceived’, ‘flee from sexual immorality’, and ‘glorify God in your body’* (v 9, 18, 20)”⁷.

Paul begins with a command in verse 9, *“do not be deceived”*! The world may tell you that this is all fine. Sexual immorality may be “adult entertainment” for them, but in fact it is the kind of thing that keeps you out of the kingdom! They might call it *“friends with benefits”*, sexual partners might be *“(blank) buddies”*, but this is the kind of thing that will damn your soul to hell!⁸ Don’t be deceived! Remember that something radical has happened to you! Remember who you are in Christ (v 9, 10). Such *were* some of you! But you have been washed, but you have been sanctified, but you have been justified! *“But”* – blessed word! In light of that, flee sexual immorality of any kind (v 18) because those who live for such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (v 9, 10).

Now he will give them eight reasons why they should flee sexual immorality.

First, sexual immorality is contrary to their well-being (v 12a). It is not *“helpful”*! Indeed! Sexual immorality won’t make you happy! On the walls of Pompeii you would find pictures of male genitalia with these words inscribed underneath: *“here resides happiness”*, but that was a

⁶ F. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIV Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), pages 143-145; Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson, Editors, *Preach the Word*, (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2007), pages 101, 102.

⁷ Ryken and Wilson, *Preach the Word*, page 101. I am using the outline of the passage set forth by Bruce Winter in his chapter, “Paul’s Paradigm for Preachers”. I found it helpful and difficult to improve upon.

⁸ Don’t tell that to the staff and students of Yale! Every year at Yale there is a student initiated event called “Sex Week”, during which, according to an email from the Yale Dean of Student Affairs, they celebrate the *“glories of consensual sex”* and feature *“titillating displays, adult film stars and commercial sponsors of such material”*! See BreakPoint Daily, November 29, 2011, at www.breakpoint.org

lie and still is today! In the days when he was able to have almost any woman he wanted, Paul McCartney is described by a biographer as “wild and free and desperately unhappy”⁹. As Thomas Brooks said: “Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst; he promises honour, and pays with disgrace; he promises pleasure, and pays with pain; he promises profit, and pays with loss; he promises life, and pays with death. But God pays as He promises; all His payments are made in pure gold”.¹⁰ Great David’s tawdry fling with Bathsheba would have taught him this lesson, and he would surely have concurred that sexual immorality is, at the very least, not helpful.

Second, verse 12 tells us that sexual immorality is harmful because it becomes addictive (“enslaving” is a better, less confusing word). Sin enslaves (John 8:34 – “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin”; see also Romans 6:16, 20) and that is why those in the grip of sexual sin do things that seem insane! That is the word used by a pastor who was living in two adulterous relationships: “This was insanity; I’m no sooner finished the sexual act and immediately broke into tears, devastated by what I had done, but I only returned again and again to the same sinful relationship.” Commenting on the enslaving nature of sexual sin, Schaumberg warns us against describing this problem as a “disease”. “The concept of sexual addiction as a disease does not fully identify the seriousness of the problem....the real problem is hidden deep within. The least bit of lust is an indication of vast corruption in the human heart. It is an enslavement that cannot be broken through any form of behaviour management, recovery program, or counselling. The inside is so ravaged by sin that we can do nothing to change it.”¹¹ How wonderful that John 8:34 is followed by John 8:36: “Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed”! When Paul says that he “will not be brought under the power of any” (v 12), he offers encouragement to every Christian who thinks it impossible to overcome sexual temptation and assures that struggling soul that “he who has died has been freed from (the power) of sin” (Romans 6:7)!

Third, sexual immorality is contrary to the Creator’s intention for the body (v 13). You cannot equate eating food with having sex because sex is not to the body what food is to the stomach. Food is essential, sex is not. The stomach was made for food and the body was made for sex, you say? No, says Paul, the body was made for the Lord! Your body belongs to Him, and He uses it for His service and glory. Remember who you are in Christ (v 11). Your body is the temple of

⁹ Peter Ames Carlin, *Paul McCartney: A Life*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), page 166. A new strain of gonorrhoea that is “resistant to the only class of drugs that can reliably treat the disease” will lead to more than unhappiness! See BreakPoint, October 26, 2012, “Better Microbes: Nature Abhors Promiscuity”.

¹⁰ John Blanchard, *Gathered Gold*, (Hertfordshire, England: EP, 1984), page 273.

¹¹ Harry Schaumburg, in an article entitled “Sexual Sin in the Ministry”, found at the following website: <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/sexual-sin-in-the-ministry>

the Spirit (v 19); your body is owned by the Lord (v 19, 20). It is not yours to do with as you wish.

Fourth, sexual immorality contradicts the body's future! What exalted status we enjoy now as the temple of God, and what glorious hope we have for the future! God has raised up Jesus and will raise us up (v 14). Christ will come from heaven and transform our lowly bodies that they may be conformed to His glorious body (Phil 3:20, 21) so that body and soul we may glorify the Lord forever!

Fifth, sexual immorality is totally inappropriate for someone who is joined to Christ (v 15-17). Christians are "*sanctified in Christ Jesus*" (I Cor 1:2), set apart for holy and sacred purposes. Are you part of the body of Christ, as Paul asserts you are in I Corinthians 12? If so, will you take the body of Christ and join it to a prostitute, or a lascivious church member? Will you sit in your office or in a hotel room and allow the glow of pornographic images to defile the body He bought with His own blood? Brothers, what fellowship does light have with darkness? Be separate. Do not touch what is unclean. Cleanse yourself from filthiness (II Corinthians 6:14, 17; 7:1)!

Sixth, sexual immorality is a terrible thing because there is no such thing as casual sex. When you lie with someone there is something extraordinary that happens! You are "*one body with her*" (v 16)! "*When a man and a woman join their bodies, the entire personality is involved. There is a much deeper experience, a 'oneness' that brings with it deep and lasting consequences...Sex is not just a part of the body. Being 'male' and 'female' involves the total person. Therefore, sexual experience affects the total personality,*" writes Warren Wiersbe. Roger Ellsworth add: "*We may not fully understand all that means, but it should be as clear as the noonday sun that there is no such thing as 'casual sex'!*"¹² Indeed! However, the world and the devil trivialize sex in desperately troubling ways! Kent Hughes makes reference to a book entitled "A Return to Modesty" which surveys modern sexual practices. "*Sex on campus, she (the author, Wendy Shallit) explains, is about as personal as 'two airplanes refueling'. In fact, the current phrase is 'hooking up'. At the heart is the idea that the liaison is based solely on physical attraction and implies no suggestion of attachment. Subsequently, a woman should not expect to be called or dated after a sexual encounter.*"¹³ No, says the Apostle, there is no such thing as casual sex.

¹² Roger Ellsworth, *Strengthening Christ's Church*, (Durham, England: EP, 1995), page 111.

¹³ R. Kent Hughes, *Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003), page 79.

Seventh, sexual immorality is a unique sin (v 18). Sexual sin is not just sin with the body but it is sin against the body! *“Their sexual sin is the one sin that damages the intrinsic nature of who the person is”!*¹⁴ Pascal said that man is the pride and the refuse of the universe. Sexual sin is to take that which is the pride of the universe and use it in such a way as to make it refuse!

Eighth, sexual immorality is wrong because you are using what God owns for purposes that are offensive to Him (v 19). The cry of the pro-abortion lobby, the pro-euthanasia lobby, and the let-us-fornicate-all-over-town lobby is, *“we can do what we want with our own bodies”!* But the fact is that by virtue of creation we belong to Him and by virtue of redemption we belong to Him. And so Christians are His twice over!

In light of all this, things ought to be very clear for these Corinthians. The three commands come with convicting power! Do not be deceived (v 9). Flee sexual immorality (v 18). Glorify God in your body (v 20). Paul shows the way forward. Rather than being deceived into thinking that this is an innocuous practice, they must realize how deadly it is, flee from it and live body and soul for the glory of God.

Let this word come with clarity and convicting power to each of us. Flee sexual immorality! Flee youthful lusts (II Timothy 2:22). Be an example of purity (I Timothy 4:12).

Now let me proceed and offer some brother counsel as to how we might avoid a fall, or extricate ourselves from soul withering and ministry destroying patterns of behaviour.

Brother Counsel Regarding Sexual Purity

How shall we heed this apostolic injunction?

Be thankful

Before we talk about how to avoid problems or extricate ourselves from problems, let us be thankful for the mercies of God in protecting us and sparing us. Let me suggest that you should be thankful that you are not an evangelical superstar, a sermonaudio phenomenon. Be thankful for the fact that God has not put you in a position where multitudes are not hanging on your every word, a position where you have become something of a reformed and protestant pope. Perhaps some of us aspire to such things, but of course the danger of such “success” is that the adulation and the applause bring with them an enormous variety of temptations, not the least of which is sexual temptation. So if God has put you to work in a context of anonymity, in a

¹⁴ Ryken and Wilson, *Preach the Word*, page 104.

small church, in a struggling work, be thankful. Thank the Lord for the hedge he has put around you, a hedge of anonymity. Perhaps you have, on occasion, been praised to high heaven by some appreciative Christian woman who has been greatly blessed by your sermons. Perhaps the experience has stirred troubling and unwholesome thoughts in the darkest reaches of your soul. This has given you a glimpse of what some of our more prominent brethren face all the time. *“The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise”* (Proverbs 28:21). Thank God for sparing us the fiery furnace of great adulation, lest we fall terribly to the ruination of our ministries and the dishonour of His name!

Let this also motivate us to pray for these men, these great men whom we admire and whom we are tempted to envy. Pray for them. Pray for their groupies. Pray that God will protect them and spare them and deliver them from temptation. Perhaps we shake our bony fingers at them when they do fall – but let us ask ourselves, on such occasions, whether we have ever prayed for them. Perhaps we have benefitted from their ministries, but have we prayed for them that God would keep them from pride and from sexual temptation (so often the former makes them easy prey for the latter).

Be Aware

Be aware of the danger. Take a good hard look around you. Take a good look at David whose dalliance with Bathsheba led to such terrible suffering. Look at the dishonour it brought to the name of the Lord – *“by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme”* (II Samuel 12:14). (I have been told that the most watched episode of “Nightline”, with Ted Koppel, was the one with Jim Bakker after his salacious affairs had been exposed. The world loves to throw stones when saints fall, and shame on us for giving them occasion to do that!) Should you fall in such a manner, it may not be on the national news, but many a heart in your little community will be hardened to the gospel because of your lack of self control. Rather than glorifying God with your body (I Corinthians 6:20) you are bringing shame on the name of Christ. And look at the trouble it brought to David’s family! *“Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house.....behold, I will raise up adversity from your own house....the child also who is born to you shall surely die”* (II Samuel 12:10-14). Like you, I have watched a woman weep as her husband forsakes the wife of his youth for some cheap thrills, and stood by helpless as the little heart of a child is crushed by what Daddy is doing. I’ve taken a good long look into the eyes of such a child and prayed that God would keep me from bringing such agony to the ones I love. Brother, be aware of the danger!

Be aware of the danger that faces you. You are not exempt. Now I have never been solicited by a woman in any of the churches I have pastored. That may be you too. But never think that it

cannot happen. Well, you say, it won't happen to me because I'm ugly. But even ugly men have affairs because some women are troubled enough to find them attractive. It can work like this. She happens to be married to a knuckle-dragging Neanderthal and you are the wise, loving, sensitive, Bible quoting, sermon preaching, Calvinistic Baptist hero who has take the time to show her something of the milk of human kindness. Finally, here is a man who asks her how she is doing, a man in whom the fruit of the Spirit shines so brightly as to dazzle her. And the feelings of appreciation and dependence almost imperceptibly develop into something stronger. And so beware of the dangerous impact of your godliness on a poor, needy, unhappily married woman.

The dangers of sexual sin are nowhere presented more vividly than in Proverbs! Spend some time reading and praying over Proverbs 5, 6:20-35; 7:6-27.

Be theologically minded

There are a number of areas of theology that we need to be very clear about if we are to put ourselves in the best position to avoid a fall.

Be clear about who God is. For instance, think about the fact that God is holy. It is the *Holy Spirit* who lives within you (I Corinthians 6:19). The God whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil is always with you and sees everything you do (Habakkuk 1:13). Understand that your sin is, at its heart, an affront to this holy God. The awfulness of David's adultery (and the crimes that followed) was that it was against God (Psalm 51:4). The most terrible thing about your affair will not be what it does to your family, your reputation, your ministry but the fact that it grieves the Spirit who lives in you (Ephesians 4:30, I Corinthians 6:19), it desecrates the name of the One who bought you with His blood (I Corinthians 6:20), and it despises the Father who loves you (II Samuel 12:9, 10). Think clearly about who God is, this God you serve and who dwells in you.

Be clear about who you are. You are a changed man (6:9, 10). You are a free man (Romans 6) who is no longer a slave to sin and who therefore is *able* to say, "*I will not be brought under the power of any*" (6:12). The enslaving nature of sexual sin is more than countered by the freedom you have in Christ and the power of the God who is able to raise you up (6:14). Because of who you are in Christ, you cannot rightfully say, "I can't give her up, I can't control my thoughts, I can't discipline myself, I can't do what is necessary to get out of this or to avoid that". Think clearly about who you are.

Be clear about sex. Sex is a wonderful gift. Russ Moore makes the point that all our appetites (including sexual desires) are *“real and good and created, and they are pointing beyond themselves to something beyond all you could ask for or even imagine”*. So, *“don’t let your urges scare you”!*¹⁵

Be clear about marriage. Marriage is the blessed context in which this wonderful gift is to be enjoyed (Heb 13:4) and a good wife is a great gift (Prov 18:22). Marriage, and the privilege of drinking from your own cistern (Prov 5:15f), is God’s provision for overcoming the temptation to sexual immorality (I Cor 7:1, 2).

So these are some areas of theology about which we need to be very clear.

Be hopeful

You are in an adulterous relationship that you can’t seem to walk away from. Or, your computer has become a snare and your days are awash with pornographic images and you can’t seem to stop. I want to give you hope. (Many of the people we minister to struggle in just this area – they feel the situation to be hopeless!) There is hope. I want to remind you that there is forgiveness (I John 1:9). Perhaps you have been caught in your sin, and the ministry is no longer open to you¹⁶, but there is forgiveness. You too can hear the words that David heard: *“The Lord has put away your sin”* (II Samuel 12:13). There may be lasting temporal consequences (as with David), but there is forgiveness. I want to remind you that there is power to overcome. *“Let us walk properly....not in lewdness and lust”*, and you can do this. *“Make no provision for the flesh”* – and you can do that as well (Romans 13:13, 14)! A definitive work of sanctification has been done in you and you are no longer a slave to sin (Romans 6:7, 14, 17, 18, 22). You are a new creation in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). You once were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord (Ephesians 5:8). And with the Spirit’s help, you *can* put sin to death (Romans 8:13). There is only one answer to the enslaving nature of sin in general and sexual sin in particular. To view the problem as a disease is not that answer. The answer is the grace of God in Christ, and the profound change that that grace brings about in a converted sinner. The answer for the Christian is that grace has taught him or her to say *“no”* to ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12, 13) and given him the power to resist temptation (I Corinthians 10:13) and to follow hard after Christ. Lust is *“best described as a desire for sexual pleasure as an end in itself....sexual desire – and the promise of sexual pleasure – is meant to*

¹⁵ Russel Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ*, (Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway Books, 2011), pages 74, 75. This is important because you don’t want to take the steps that Origen took!

¹⁶ See Armstrong, *Can Fallen Ministers Be Restored*. A very helpful book.

*draw us into marriage, toward children, and into fidelity and responsibility*¹⁷, but lust is the perversion of that God-given sexual desire and lust is desire run amok, controlling the person and destroying everything in its path. A secular writer comments: *“Living with lust is like living shackled to a lunatic”*.¹⁸ The truth we minister to others and to ourselves is this: *“He who has died has been freed from sin.....therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body....and do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin”* (Romans 6:7, 12, 13). Be hopeful.

Be Wise

The *“sexual immorality”* of which Paul speaks here in verse 18 covers everything we usually think of. The word Paul uses means *“illicit sexual intercourse”*, and is used generally to refer to any sexual sin.¹⁹ However we need to be wise, because there may be things that we miss or gloss over but which also fall under the condemnation of this passage.

For instance, consider the words of Tolkien. Writing to his son, warning him about the sins of the flesh, he says: *“The devil is endlessly ingenious, and sex is his favourite subject. He is as good every bit at catching you through generous romantic or tender motives, as through baser or more animals ones”*.²⁰ Indeed! And so he can ensnare you through the apparently innocuous as well as by the blatantly grotesque. Russell Moore understands how this works. Discussing the fact that women as well as men are susceptible to sexual immorality – fornication, adultery, and even pornography – he writes: *“Often romance novels or their film equivalents do the same thing for the emotional needs of women that pornography offers for the erotic urges of men....This is not to equate ‘romance novels’ with the grave soul destruction of pornography, but it is worth asking, ‘Is what I’m consuming leading me toward contentment with my husband (or future husband) or away from it’!*²¹

Or there is the matter of *vicarious immorality*. Do we *“secretly enjoy reading about the immorality of other people whose sexual misconduct is reported in our newspapers and weekly news magazines? If so, we are engaging in vicarious immorality”*²².” If the salacious details of the bed-hopping exploits of the rich and famous interest you, you are asking for trouble. “I’m

¹⁷ Mohler, *Desire and Deceit*, page 17.

¹⁸ Ibid., page 13.

¹⁹ See *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*.

²⁰ Mohler, *Desire and Deceit*, page 3.

²¹ Moore, *Tempted and Tried*, pages 85, 86.

²² Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, (Colorado Springs, CO, NavPress, 2007), page 170.

simply trying to understand the culture so that I might preach more engagingly to my generation!" Perhaps. But perhaps not.

And what of modesty? Are Christians too cool to be modest? But there is such a thing as the "*attire of a harlot*" (Proverbs 7:10) and there is the encouragement to be adorned with godliness rather than gaudy apparel (I Peter 3:1-4).

So, perhaps you are not engaged in anything wild and grotesque, but be careful that you are not taking small steps away from the paths of righteousness! Who knows where they may lead? Then again, perhaps we do. Remember, it is the "simple", the one "devoid of understanding" who gets taken in by the crafty harlot (Proverbs 5:6-27).

And then there is the matter of fruitfulness. Sometimes ministers are being used of God in public while they are abusing their office in private. A Christian writer asked his mentor, "why is it that so few men finish well?" The answer: "*They learn the possibility of being fruitful without being pure. God is slow to remove His hand on a man he has anointed. One day that man may sin, and then experience God's blessing. Then it happens again and again and he begins to believe that purity doesn't matter. Eventually, he becomes like a tree rotting inside that eventually is toppled by a storm.*"²³ So be wise. Don't be deceived. Purity does matter. Sin does grieve the Spirit, even though He may deign to bless your ministry for a time. In due time you will reap a harvest, though perhaps not the one you had hoped to reap.

Be Cautious

First of all, watch your heart. "*Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life*" (Proverbs 4:23).

Watch your walk. Be a man of Word and a man of prayer. Do not let your busy schedule take you away from the throne. Do not let your labours steal your away from His presence. As you strive to be a useful and mighty instrument, do not forget to be an Enoch. South African pastor Martin Holdt told me once that over the course of his long ministry he had witnessed many fine man fall in terrible ways. One thing he had learned was this: long before they fell publicly they had fallen privately; long before they were unfaithful to their wives, they had drifted from their God. I beg you then, watch you walk with God.

²³ Michael Oh, "*The Danger of 'Fruitfulness' Without Purity*", an article found at the following website: <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/the-danger-of-fruitfulness-without-purity>

Watch your thoughts. Do not fantasize. Stop thinking about that woman in the church who is more attractive, nicer, more complimentary about and more appreciative of your ministry, than your wife. In those moments before you drift off to sleep, do sermon preparation, meditate on that verse you are memorizing – but whatever you do, do not think about her. Now you cannot just stop thinking about her; you must start thinking about something else. (We will touch on that later.) For now, just stop! When you are driving along listening to a romantic song, make sure that you are thinking about the right person – and if you are not, skip the song. Don't commit adultery in your heart on your way to visit the sick.

“Do not forget the culture of the inner man – I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his sabre clean; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's instrument – I trust, a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God” – Robert Murray M'Cheyne

“Every unclean thought would be adultery if it could” – John Owen.

Second, watch your practice. *“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine.....be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love” (1 Timothy 4:16, 12).*

Watch out for counselling situations. It may be that only hurting and troubled women are going to be prey to your less than considerable charms. Well, you will meet them in counselling situations. And so I urge you to put policies in place that can, as much as is humanly possible, guarantee that nothing untoward will happen.²⁴ Limit the number of times you will counsel a woman. (After you reach that limit, pass her on to a mature and godly woman in the church.) Be wise about the context in which you meet with her. If you meet with her in your study (which is in your home), only do it when your wife is there and with the knowledge that she can walk past the French doors at any time and see, through the clear glass, what is going on. Watch out for any sense of dependence on you that she might develop and run for the hills if you spot anything. Be careful about any inordinate sense of appreciation that is being expressed. The afore-mentioned Martin Holdt once rebuked a woman for the praise she was heaping upon him. In his estimation she was flirting. Watch out for that.

²⁴ Please feel free to take issue with *any* of the practical suggestions I will make – in your view I may be too picky, or not picky enough – but don't let any of those disagreements distract you from the big picture: flee sexual immorality and anything that might lead to sexual immorality.

Watch out for hugs. Make absolutely sure that all physical contact is circumspect and cannot be misunderstood. And then be careful about hugs in particular. Now there are some situations where you may be taken by surprise and there may be some humour in it. A good friend in the ministry, a venerable English gentleman pastor, was preaching at a church in Michigan. After the service a very large, amply endowed African American woman came towards him, effusive in her expressions of thanks for the sermon, and with a booming voice said: *“I’m not a shaker, and I’m not a kisser, but I am a hugger”* – *“and then,”*, said my English friend, *“I disappeared into her bosoms!”* Well, that’s fine, but in all other circumstances, hug with your shoulders!

Be Determined

Resist!

Flee, and keep on fleeing. You need to be like Joseph, not David. Fleeing is the Biblical way. *“Flee youthful lusts”*, says Paul (II Timothy 2:22); *“make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts”*, he adds (Romans 13:14). *“Resist the devil”*, says James (4:7). You can’t stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from making a nest in your hair. So banish evil thoughts. John Piper has some very helpful advice. *“Say ‘no’ to every lustful thought within five seconds. And say it with the authority of Christ. ‘In the name of Jesus, no!’ You don’t have much more than five seconds. Give it more unopposed time than that, and it will lodge itself with such force as to be almost immovable. Say it out loud, if you dare. Be tough and warlike!”*²⁵ Five seconds! After all, how long would you keep fire in your lap? (Proverbs 6:27) The five second rule: good for the soul not just for food fallen on the floor!

Pray! But don’t just pray. Don’t pray *“passive prayers”*, says Piper. Pray and fight. Pray and resist. Pray and gouge out eyes and sever hands. Pray and avoid certain people and certain situations. Pray and be Aron Ralston-like, and do whatever you need to do to avoid sexual immorality.

Replace!

Piper is helpful here again. He understands that the New Testament, whenever it takes something away, replaces it with something else. Don’t lie, but rather speak edifying words; don’t steal, but work with your hands what is good; don’t be bitter, but rather be loving (Ephesians 4:25-5:2 as an example). He understands also the psychological necessity of replacement. We simply can’t stop thinking about something. We must start thinking about something else, otherwise we will inevitably think about what we don’t want to think about. And so he counsels:

²⁵ John Piper, *ANTHEM: Strategies for Fighting Lust* – an article found at the following website: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/anthem-strategies-for-fighting-lust>

Picture this. You have just seen a peek-a-boo blouse inviting further fantasy. You have five seconds. "No! Get out of my mind! God help me!" Now, immediately, demand of your mind - you can do this by the Spirit (Romans 8:13).

Demand of your mind to fix its gaze on Christ on the cross. Use all your fantasizing power to see his lacerated back. Thirty-nine lashes left little flesh intact. He heaves with his breath up and down against the rough vertical beam of the cross. Each breath puts splinters into the lacerations. The Lord gasps.....(he continues for some time)

Now, I am not thinking about the blouse any more. I am at Calvary. These two images are not compatible. If you will use the muscle of your brain to pursue - violently pursue with the muscle of your mind - images of Christ crucified with the same creative energy that you use to pursue sexual fantasies, you will kill them. But it must start in the first five seconds - and not give up.²⁶

Part of replacement therapy is of course to cultivate a good marriage. If God has blessed you with a wife, remember to drink water from your own cistern (Proverbs 5:15f). Remember that God gives you a wife for many wonderful reasons – but one of them is so that you might not fall into sexual sin (I Corinthians 7:1, 2). I would add though, that a healthy sexual relationship is not all that is necessary. If she is not your best friend, confidant, and one with whom can laugh and giggle and with whom you want to spend time, then it may not be too long before you find yourself in trouble of some sort!

Be Accountable

Make sure that your wife has access to your computer and its history. Put a filter on the computer. Do something so that you would have to be insane to visit pornographic sites.

Have an accountability partner. In most cases, that will be your wife. You can lie to her far less easily than you can another pastor.

I would suggest, however, that such partners have limitations. The man of God must be able, with the help of God, to stand on his own two feet. He must walk with the Lord – no one else can really help him. He must be in the Word – nothing else can really sanctify him. He must pray – no other weapon is adequate against the world, the flesh and the devil.

Conclusion:

Some years ago I knew a pastor who felt that it was important that he read Time magazine. This would be one way to stay in tune with the culture and remain informed about the world. But

²⁶ John Piper, A Passion for Purity vs Passive Prayers, an article found at the following website:
<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/a-passion-for-purity-vs-passive-prayers>

lest he be tempted by the occasional immodest picture in the publication he would have his wife go through it before he would, and cut out any offensive material. I know of some who, at the time, raised their eyebrows at that, but it is now many years since those days now, and he has finished the course without falling. I suppose that I would rather be thought odd and reactionary than fall.

At the funeral of Martin Holdt, a year ago no, I listened to the testimony of one of his sons who is also in the ministry. Jonathan Holdt said: *“when I began my ministry my father warned me about three things, pride, covetousness, and sexual immorality. I have never forgotten that and daily make that my cry too.”* With God’s help, may we do likewise! And may God make us and keep us holy – *“a holy minister is an awful instrument in the hand of God”*