

3. A Matter of Life and Death (1Q 2015—Proverbs)

Biblical material: Matt. 5:21–30; Prov. 6:21; 7:3; Prov. 6:23; 7:2; 6:24; 6:30, 31; Prov. 7:26, 27.

Quotes

- Cheating is easy. There's no swank to infidelity. To borrow against the trust someone has placed in you costs nothing at first. You get away with it, you take a little more and a little more until there is no more to draw on. Oddly, your hands should be full with all that taking but when you open them there's nothing there. *Jeanette Winterson*
- I liken an affair to the shattering of a Waterford crystal vase. You can glue it back together, but it will never be the same again. *John Gottman*
- Adultery is a disguised detour en route to your personal demise. *Paul Davis*
- No adultery is bloodless. *Natalia Ginzburg*
- Adultery usually follows a law of diminishing returns. *Tom Robbins*
- Passion is the evil in adultery. If a man has no opportunity of living with another man's wife, but if it is obvious for some reason that he would like to do so, and would do so if he could, he is no less guilty than if he was caught in the act. *Augustine*

Questions

Why is infidelity “a matter of life and death”? What are the deeper issues involved in adultery? How does such unfaithfulness impact our spirituality? In what way are we unfaithful to God? How do we demonstrate we are trustworthy? In what way can we counter the general trend in society to glossing over adultery?

Bible summary

Prov. 6:20-35 and Prov. 7 warn against adultery and “wayward women.” The disastrous results of sex outside of marriage are made clear, impacting as it does both the physical and the spiritual life. Jesus adds to this in the Sermon on the Mount, defining adultery and other sins as far more than the physical act, explaining that actions begin in the mind. Jesus says, “You’ve heard that the law said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that everyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matt. 5:27, 28 FBV.

Comment

In these warnings against adultery, while not forgetting the immediate and practical aspects, let us not miss the spiritual issues—both those that result from cheating on a spouse and also those from cheating on God. The dictionary defines cheating as practicing fraud or trickery, being dishonest and violating rules, and being sexually unfaithful. All these apply here—if you cheat, the one you cheat the most is yourself. You cheat yourself out of a trusting, committed marriage relationship, out of being a dependable and trustworthy person, and out of being a true friend of God.

The issue is one of the breaking of trust. At its heart, like all sin, adultery is self-centered and self-serving. It trades transient pleasure for a committed relationship—a

giving of what cannot be given. The result is not an enhancement, but a degrading of what is true love, squandered for physical pleasure. This is the reason for the title of the lesson, “a matter of life and death.” For if in our human relationships we can be so deceitful and unfaithful, what of our spiritual relationship with God? For ultimately whatever the “delights” of sexual sin, self-gratification ends up in self-destruction. The reason not to go this route is not because it cannot be pleasurable in the short term, but because you destroy yourself and your future. As Robert Farrer Capon comments, “The reason for not going out and sinning all you like is the same as the reason for not going out and putting your nose in a slicing machine: its dumb, stupid, and no fun. Some individual sins may have pleasure still attached to them because of the residual goodness of the realities they are abusing: adultery can indeed be pleasant and tying one on can amuse. But betrayal, jealousy, love grown cold, and the gray dawn of the morning after are nobody’s idea of a good time.”

How stupid we are to fool ourselves about what is “fun”! As Joseph Newton has observed, “Only God is permanently interesting.” Adultery runs its course from pleasure to bitterness, and all sins have no lasting pleasure or value. We need to rediscover the delight in right relationships with each other, and with God—being trusting and trustworthy, honest and committed.

Ellen White Comments

Those who profess to be sons and daughters of God should represent Him in character.... Opportunity is now given us to form characters that will fit us for an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Those who keep the commandments of God will have a right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the city. In love, God has given us a law, that we may know and put away those traits of character that cannot be tolerated in heaven. No one can enter there to whom is charged robbery, adultery, evil-speaking, or false dealing, for this would lead to another war in heaven. The law of God was given to lead men away from these practices, that their characters might be fashioned after the character of God. {UL 105}

I hear you have said, "I love Walter J." What business have you to love Walter J, when he belongs to another? Will you ruin and break an innocent wife's heart for the sake of gratifying your guilty love?... You are willing to sell your soul cheap, disgrace your brother, disgrace your children, to satisfy your lustful heart.

After you have gotten Walter J, what then? You have a man who fears not to break God's law, who fears not to break the heart of a kind wife who has borne him many children and laid them in the grave—a wife who has given him the warmth of her affections in youth—a wife he has lived with until they are on the decline of life! Think you after you get this Walter J for yourself entirely, after you steal him from the wife of his youth, he will ever remain constant and true to you who have accomplished so much evil to satisfy your guilty love?...

You have sowed to yourself misery, misery. Evermore will a guilty conscience haunt you. Is it possible now for you to retrace your steps?... How dare you love Walter J, and add to your sin that of breaking his wife's heart? Oh, you have sold heaven very cheap. You have shown what is your choice... {TSB 132}