

Guidelines to Freedom Part 6 - Life Is Sacred

by Alistair Begg

The sixth commandment emphasizes the sanctity of human life and the importance of respecting God's gift of life.

Duration: 1:33:17

Scripture: Exodus 20:14, Matthew 5:27, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Freedom"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher highlights the increasing violence and moral decay in society, using examples such as bombings on freeways and child abuse. He emphasizes that shouting louder or resorting to violence will not solve these issues. The preacher then shifts to discussing philosophical and theological questions posed by children, such as the existence of God and the nature of the soul. He explains that one's worldview, or how they answer these questions, shapes their understanding of the world. The sermon concludes by asserting that a mind hostile to God rejects His authority.

Transcript

Now turn with me, if you would, to Exodus chapter 20 and to verse 13, where we find the sixth commandment. There are four words in English, two in Hebrew. The two words in Hebrew simply say, no murder.

No murder. In 1963, in Scotland, there were two convictions of murder. I remember I was 11 years old.

You can remember one of them in particular, but there were only two in the whole year of 1963. Last year in Chicago, there were 18 every week. The sixth commandment is phenomenally relevant in our world today.

The sixth commandment does not negate the death penalty. I'm not going to address that now, but the death penalty is actually found in Exodus 21 and verse 13. And Exodus 21, 13, which points out that anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death, is clearly not contradicting Exodus chapter 20, verse 13, but that's another matter for another time.

I'd like to tackle this subject under four headings this morning. First of all, considering with you the matter of authority, and then the problem of hostility, and then the issue of sanctity. Actually, just three will be fine.

First of all, then, the matter of authority. The matter of authority. Fundamental to this sixth commandment, as with all commandments, is the issue of the existence of a personal Creator God.

In Exodus chapter 20, in verse 2, you read, I am the Lord your God. And then in verse 3, the phrase begins, you shall have no other gods before me. And the ability of God to bring this divine pronouncement upon his creation is directly founded upon the fact that he himself is none other than the Creator.

I am, therefore, you shall. The Bible tells us that the universe exists, and the reason that it has form and meaning is because it was created personally and purposefully by a Creator God. The very fact of all that we see around us is, says the Bible, as a result of the existence of a God who personally and purposefully created each part and each aspect of all that is his own.

The Bible goes on to say that mankind has been made in the image of God, and that there is a continuity between our finite selves and our infinite Creator. And this infinite Creator stands behind the universe and provides for it its final source of meaning. It is on account of God's creative handiwork that we have personality, that we have morality, that we have dignity, and that we have value.

There is no other basis for the personality, morality, dignity, and value of man save than that it is founded in the fact of this personal, infinite Creator God. Consequently, the Bible also teaches that there is a qualitative distinction between man, that is men and women, I use men generically, and other organic life. We are not simply part of the animal kingdom.

We are certainly not part of the flora kingdom. Our manishness, as Francis Schaeffer put it years ago, points out the very fact of our distinction with the rest of created order. The manishness of man.

What does Schaeffer mean by that? Well, he means a number of things. For example, he points to the creativity of man. He points out that it is man rather than the animals who have created art.

We are the ones who do the flower arrangements. We are the ones who have created all down through history these magnificent objects for our perusal. We are the ones who have created supersonic aircraft, have built our buildings.

You don't see chimpanzees doing flower arranging. You don't see gorillas flying Harrier jump jets, at least not, I haven't seen them at all. And the very fact of our manishness distinguishes us from the rest of the creative order.

In some strange way, our fear of death is an indication of the difference between ourselves and the rest of creation. The leaves on the trees have not been hanging up for the last month, looking at one another and saying, you know, I'm so afraid to fall off this branch here and get sucked up by that big thing. The prospect of this is awesome to me.

The leaves have no such notion at all. They're obviously inanimate, they cannot think and there is no apparent indication in the animal kingdom of there being much difference there. The manishness of man is revealed in our ability to verbalize.

We are the ones who can speak. Also somebody, I saw something on 2020 and they show these two monkeys and when they did this and that to them, the monkey scratched here and then it scratched here. And they had this big thing lasted 35 minutes pointing out that the monkeys were speaking.

Get serious, huh? Okay, and we're not going to deny their ability to communicate, but they're... Shakespeare wasn't a monkey and no monkey wrote Shakespeare plays. There is a distinction that is written in from the creative stamp of God. In the minds of men and women, our minds are able to conceive, they're able to recollect, they are able to project.

And in fact, no honest philosopher is going to deny this. Because from the dawn of history, man has by his art and by his accomplishments distinguished himself from the rest of creation. And we are not to be in any doubt about this.

We are not to be confused about it. The Bible is very clear. It's very ordered in what it teaches.

God created. He is an infinite creator God. He made man.

He distinguished man from the rest of the creative order. Man was made in the image of God unlike the rest. Man was given a never-dying soul.

And no other view of the world gives an adequate explanation of what we see around us. Now, a view of the world is simply the answer to the question, Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going and does it really matter? If you write those questions down on a sheet of paper, and then you write your answers to them, the things that you write as an answer are your worldview. That's how you explain your existence.

That's how you explain the universe. That's how you explain your world. And traditionally, the humanistic perspective of the Western world has been left struck dumb before these issues.

The pantheistic worldview that has come from the East has also had little to say. And at this point in the late 20th century here in our Western world, as men and women have recognized that this kind of mechanistic, scientific rationalism holds no answers, they find themselves now on a quest for spirituality, which will perhaps explain to them their reason for existence. So what we have is this strange amalgamation of Western individualism and Eastern mysticism, which produces some of the most unbelievably crazy nonsense that we have ever seen in the whole history of the nation.

But the Bible is really clear. The Bible is very clear. God, it is an authoritative God.

God spoke and the world came into being. God is an infinite creator. God is personally involved with that which he has created.

And behind this sixth commandment, you shall not murder, lies the authority of the Creator God. Now, the reaction to authority is one of hostility. That's our second point.

The matter of authority, the problem of hostility. The problem of hostility is aptly summarized by Paul in Romans chapter 8, when in the course of a wider argument, he makes it clear that the natural man or the mind of sinful man is hostile to God. Romans chapter 8 verse 6, the mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

So we know a number of things then about men and women as created. Number one, they have sinful minds and they don't like the idea that God is in control. Therefore, they do not submit to God's law, nor

are they able ultimately to do so.

They are controlled by their sinful natures and therefore they cannot please God. So instead of acknowledging God's creative work, man chooses to believe instead that the universe has existed forever in some form and that its present form just happened as a result of chance events way back in time. So John Byard, the grandmother of folk music, says we are the orphans in an age of no tomorrows.

We have no yesterday. We've got no tomorrow. We are lost in time.

What is she doing? She's expressing her view of the world. The evolutionary concept of our existence starts with an impersonal beginning plus time plus chance. That's the explanation.

There was always something around. There was an impersonal force. Then we have the passage of time and we have a number of chance occurrences.

And then, hey, welcome to the world. Hey, good morning. Glad you arrived, baby.

Welcome to a meaningless, absurd universe. Your arrival is significant in so far only as it makes me feel certain emotions, but you have no reason to be at all, and we might as well tell you that right up front. If we were honest, we would tell them that right up front because the very that it is that worldview which allows us to suck them out of the womb before they arrive because we believe them to have no reason to exist right up front.

Who expresses it best? I think Woody Allen. You know, he's the guy who said, it's not that I'm afraid to die, it's just that I don't want to be there when it happens. He is one of the saddest, most tragic clowns of the late 20th century.

His lifestyle is an expression of his worldview. The way he lives, the things he says, what he does, what he writes, what he acts, is an expression of who and what he is. He's honest in that respect.

In Annie Hall, in a supposedly humorous line, he says, mankind is left with alienation, loneliness, and emptiness, verging on madness. Life, he says, is divided into the horrible and the miserable. See, there are two roads you can go.

You can go the horrible road, or we have the miserable road. But the fact is that we're all living on the verge, the cliff edge of total madness. And you think about it, just turn your newspapers over and read them, read some of the magazines and watch the news reports, and it doesn't seem so far-fetched an idea, does it? It actually seems like we are living on the verge of total madness.

So much of what goes on around us, we say this is unbelievable. This is insanity. Why? Because the law of God, the maker's instructions that are here for all of time, have been taken, closed, shelved, stuck in a museum, and we, the modern men and women, will carry on fine by ourselves.

Thank you very much. We will live with an impersonal beginning, plus time, plus chance, and we'll make sense of it ourselves. The problem of the rejection of God's authority is the problem of man's hostility.

Paul Gauguin, is it? Is that how you pronounce his name? I'm not good at the pronunciation of these names. I think that's him, the painter. Before he tried to commit suicide after his final painting, he scrawled on his painting, When's come we? What are we? Whither do we go? He says, what's the point of all this stuff? Where did I come from? Why do I exist? And where am I going? The answer of modern man to

where did I come from is nowhere.

Why do you exist? No reason. Where are you going? No place. P.S. Have a nice life.

Why do we labor this? Why am I taking time to say this? Because listen, loved ones, this morning, unless we understand that this is the essential difference between ourselves and our non-believing friends, unless we understand the perspective of our neighbors and our colleagues who study with us in university and walk the halls with us and take business trips with us and who play ball with us, unless we understand where the discrepancy lies in our thinking and we are able to dialogue concerning that truth, all we'll ever be left with is sloganeering and a kind of knee-jerk reactionism. And frankly, conservative evangelicalism has got sloganeering down to a fine art. We know the slogans we're supposed to shout, because somebody on the radio told us what we're supposed to shout.

They told us which box we're supposed to tick. They gave us the pre-programmed material for what conservative evangelicalism believes, and then we'll just tick all that. We'll make those phone calls and call all those people, and we don't know why in the world necessarily we will, but we will because it's what you're supposed to do.

Meanwhile, our friends, they are getting their stuff sent to them to tick their box, make their phone call, embrace their cause, and do their deal. Until we recognize what underpins the convictions we can't dialogue at all concerning it. Now, if you think about it, neither pragmatism nor emotionalism is able to stand against the tide of the present evaluation of human life.

Let me say that to you again, you get that, I know. Pragmatism, on the one hand, which simply says, I don't think we should kill anybody because of the utilitarian idea. You know, don't kill them.

We'll have to put them somewhere. All right? So, there's a utilitarian notion in it. I don't think we should kill people because it's not a nice idea.

Or, emotionalism. No, I don't think so. Neither pragmatism nor emotionalism can stem the tide of the devaluation of human life, because there are a lot of pragmatists around, a lot of emotionalists around, a lot of radicals still left over from the 60s.

And the guys from the 60s, they were really radical about peace and life and love and everything, right? Could they do it? No, they couldn't do it, because they had radicalism without roots. They had a program without principles. So, how is it possible then for this transformation to take place? There needs to be the principles, a firm set of principles expressive of a biblical worldview, providing an adequate reason for the unique value of all human life.

That then provides the substance and the basis for us exalting the sanctity of life and seeking to correct those who would devalue human existence. Until we engage our friends and our neighbors in that kind of dialogue, our agnostic friends and neighbors, then we're not having any discussion with them at all. Do you know that? The whole abortion debate is not a debate.

It's a rabble. It's one group on one side shouting their slogans, and another group on the other side shouting their slogans. And we need to understand that the reason this individual shouts this way, I don't accept it, but I know why they do.

Because they believe that the existence of man began in an impersonal way, plus time, plus chance. They believe that man is simply two, eight, six, eight, oh, three, double, five, one. He is a social security number.

He is a unit. His significance is only in the spectrum of the utility of his life. As long as it is going well, and as long as he's not sick, and as long as he likes it, then he will continue with it.

But if he grows sick, or he doesn't like it, or he needs to curtail it, then he'll pull the plug on it, or someone else will do it for him. We've got to show them that the reason they believe that is because their perspective on the world is wrong. They are logically illogical.

There is a logic within their closed view, but their closed view is wrong. We need at the same time to be able to articulate to our agnostic friends that we are not simply about crusades for certain slogans and ideas, but the reason that we uphold the sixth commandment and the sanctity of human life is because, unlike them, we believe that there was a moment in time, a millisecond, in which a creator God, who has always existed, made creation. And as a result of that, he established in the creation of man morality, a sense of right and wrong, dignity as having been made in his image, personality as distinct from the rest, and intrinsic value because of who he is.

Now, we then need to go on, as they will say, well, how in the world did we get in the predicament in which we find ourselves? Then we will move from Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2 into Genesis chapter 3, and we will show how the fall of man leaves men and women today in a world, not the way that God created it, not the way that the world that God intended, but the world in the way in which man has spoiled it. You see, our neighbors, I drove behind a car yesterday that it said, pro-family, pro-kids, pro-choice. Okay? All right? Don't all start nodding your head like a bunch of knee-jerkers.

Listen a minute. Listen. That was driven by a young couple.

Now, why do they say that? They say that, presumably, if we could engage them in dialogue, because of what their view of the world is. Now, we know that that's biblically wrong, but we need to shut up long enough to allow them to talk out their notions which underpin it, to dismantle for them, graciously and kindly, the silly non sequiturs in their arguments, and to share with them the wonder of a personal creator God who has revealed himself in Jesus. Because the only hope is the redemption of their lives, not the instruction of their mind.

And if we think to win by shouting louder, we're crazy. Now, if this is too philosophical for us this morning, this is a philosophical theology or theological philosophy, I want you to know that I'm looking forward this afternoon to talking to some fourth and fifth grade children here in the church. And the kind of questions that they have asked me, I'm supposed to answer all these questions between 5.30 and 6.30, are questions like, who created God? Who created God? Why was God never born? Did God really die? Does God love Satan? When Jesus died, if Jesus is God, why didn't everything go crazy and out of control? So, for those of you who want to have a Christian experience that can be reduced to seven little slogans to make you happy, five verses that you learned, carry on your way.

But I've got to tell you that the kids at your house are asking more sensible questions than many of us are even thinking about. And they are our tomorrow. They are our children, and they're on the forefront of these issues.

Now, the authority matter, the hostility matter, and the sanctity matter. Let's come to the issue, then, of the sanctity of life. The sanctity of life is underpinned by this view of the world, by the fact that God is creator, that he is personally involved, that man is hostile to that truth, but it doesn't alter the fact of the sanctity of life.

Human life is sacred, says the Bible, first because it is God's gift, and secondly because man bears God's image. You can read of this in Genesis 1 and Genesis 9. Human life is the most precious and sacred thing in all the world, and to end it or to direct its ending is God's prerogative alone. So we honor God by respecting his image in each other, which means consistently preserving and furthering the welfare of one another, especially as it relates to life.

Well, then, how is this commandment broken? Let me suggest four ways in which the commandment is broken. Number one, it is broken by homicide. Consider how little regard there is for human personhood.

When daily in each of our cities, men and women are blown away, drugged out, dragged out, drowned, destroyed, simply as a matter of course. When despite the tourism factor, the word is abroad in Europe, forget Disney World, that's not a smart place to go for your vacation. If you stop for a picnic, it may be the last thing you ever do.

Just in Los Angeles last week, they tell me that they have stopped firing now from the bridges across the freeway. What they're doing is rolling their window down and throwing pipe bombs through the windows of the cars that drive beside them. Can it be that 11 and 12 year old boys in a shopping center in Liverpool see another little child, a three or a four year old, come with his mom to the store, lure him away with sweets, and beat him to a bloody pulp? Yes.

The meaningless absurdity of life without God leads to the tragic destruction of human existence. Once you break the link between a personal Creator God and his creation, once you dismantle the first 11 chapters of Genesis, you are left with the most unbelievable implications. And that's where we're living our life.

Behind a facade of wisdom, we have become the foolish people of our world. We know that the Jeffrey Dahmer incident was disgusting. Our minds recoil from the very pictures that were contained in some of the descriptions in our newspapers and some of the interviews on our TV, and we stand back from that.

And at the same time, we turn around and watch countless millions flood their way in to cinemas all across the nation to watch the cannibalistic adventures in Silence of the Lambs. It doesn't shock me that that exists. What shocks me is that the average Mr. and Mrs. X in our culture are prepared to expose themselves to such unbelievable degradation of human existence.

That is the real indication of the depth to which our decadent culture is coming. So homicide reveals it. Secondly, suicide reveals the breaking of the sixth commandment.

The act of willfully causing one's own death the suicide in making himself the object of murder still remains the subject of it. Suicide offends against community, in that we don't have the right to deprive others of us. That's not pride to say that, that's just true.

We don't have the right to deprive our families of us or our friends of us. That is not our right. Suicide offends against human dignity.

Because if you think it out, if sin is to do what we please, to decide the purpose of our lives without rendering account to anyone else, then suicide is the ultimate realization of that dream. Because in suicide, more than in any other act, we defiantly say, I am the master of my own destiny. It is the ultimate expression of freedom from one perspective, selfishness on the other, and futility at the end of the line.

The Bible says, Ezekiel 18, 4, God says, all souls are mine. 1 Samuel 2, 6, it is the Lord who kills and the Lord who brings back to life. And yet the locals in Waterford Township, Michigan know of Polson Street.

They call that there the road of death. Because it is there that the man by the name of Kevorkian has enabled some 15 or more people to go into eternity. When you read the list, you discover that of the 15 listed here, five of them were in their 40s, four of them were in their 50s, and only one had reached the age of 80.

Kevorkian, expressive of his worldview and of his major ego says, everyone is a phony, that is everyone except him. Doctors are socially criminal, legislators are barbarians, and church officials are religious fanatics. Hearing of a man who had killed himself with a shotgun blast, Kevorkian responded by saying, it makes me mad that people feel they have to shoot themselves.

Imagine what a blast that made, he says. You don't see the tragedies. What are we doing? Nobody cares.

Therefore, Mr. Stewart, put on this mask and all will be well. Where does that come from? How do people process information? That is a mind that is hostile to God. That is a Romans 8-7 mind.

The mind is hostile to the authority of God. It rejects the authority of God. It rejects the notion that God personally created, that he is interested in his creation.

And every one of us reacts to say, it disgusts and disappoints us to see a man so abjectly suffering that he blows his own life into oblivion. We agree with that. We agree with the problem of a lack of care.

We agree with the issue of emptiness and loneliness and a sense of alienation. But the answer of the Christian is not here, wear the mask. The answer of the Christian is here, meet the Christ.

The one who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities. The one who is the answer to the deepest longings of our lives. The one who endured death in order that we might discover life.

And yet suicide and the destruction of life is on the ascendancy. This is not going to go away. And bar a revival in our country, this will get worse.

The American Hospital Association says 70% of the 6,000 deaths in hospitals every day are a result of some decision such as halting or withholding of treatment. And some doctors say they routinely give their dying patients the means to take their own lives, but only after determining our patient isn't just depressed or in need of new medicine. Dr. John Flexner, a Vanderbilt Medical School professor who teaches death, dying and bereavement courses, he teaches death, dying and bereavement courses, says if a terminal patient wants to die, there is a way he can help.

Quotes I say, I'm giving you this prescription medicine and this sleeping pill. And for God's sake, don't ever take them together and never take too many of them because that would kill you. So the person walks out the door, and as soon as the will of the wist fancy comes across the computer screen of their mind, having been provided by the doctor who teaches death, dying and bereavement courses, they slip one of the pills,

the rest of the medication, and then what happens? They stand before the bar of God's judgment.

See, they don't believe that. They believe that they go to oblivion. It is appointed man to man wants to die and after this comes nothing.

See, now that's their world view. So they are consistent with their world view. I don't like it here, I'm unhappy here, nobody cares for me here, there is no purpose in my existence, there is no fear in my going, therefore, final exit.

Do you understand why I belabored the first point? Because until we understand these things and engage our neighbors and our friends in that kind of dialogue, they will continue to live with their rhetoric, which is foolish and devastating. Now, I need to say this before I move on and draw this to a close. Some of you are sitting out there saying, well, you know, I remember some years ago when I sat with my loved one in the hospital and it became clear to all of us that there was no possibility of there being any restoration in this individual's life.

We were guided by a caring physician who said that as long as we kept that gadgetry up there, all that technical medical wizardry, all that we were doing was prolonging the experience of dying. We were certainly not extending the reality and sanctity of life. The physician said that if we were to withdraw the extraordinary means, then we would allow nature to take its course, and that's what you did, and that's right.

Physicians all down through the years have done that, and that is death with dignity. It's not a euphemism for euthanasia. Thirdly, abortion breaks the sixth commandment.

The raging debate over the beginning of life should not be viewed as a matter of scientific or technical judgment. That's the first thing you need to say. It is a moral issue.

The reason that our godless friends are so concerned to say that a fetus is not a human being in any realistic sense is because they are still unprepared to say that it is wrong to murder children. Believe me, the day will come when they will decide it is okay to murder children. And on that day, the debate will be over about when human life begins.

Because people will be honest enough to say, we don't care. We know it's a child, we don't want a child, and we are in control of things. There is no authority over us.

There is no God who reigns. There is no personal creator. We were born without reason, we prolong our lives by chance, and we die in oblivion.

Sartre. Therefore, to be consistent within the framework of this worldview, there is no reason in the world why we ought not to go and take these intervention methods. The fact is, you and I know today that from any realistic objective perspective, we have to conclude that the fetus in the womb is, from the moment of conception, a human being in the process of arriving.

The fact that for several months that fetus cannot survive outside the womb does not affect its right to the same protection which other human beings merit and which it will itself immediately merit as soon as it slips from the womb. Dr. Jerome Lejeune, the professor of genetics at the University of Rene Descartes in Paris, the guy who discovered the genetic basis for Down syndrome, says, Life has a very, very long history, but each individual has a very neat beginning, and that beginning is the moment of conception. Do

you know that in the last 20 years, there have been over 30 million abortions performed? Thirty million.

Despite the fact that we are apparently wiser, better educated, and free, no previous generation has ever been as guilty of the wholesale rejection of the Sixth Commandment as ours. Finally, the Sixth Commandment is broken by hidden murder. Turn to Matthew chapter 5, and with this we conclude.

Some of us feel such a rising tide of moral indignation about the things that we've been studying that we're about to go out and go crazy. We're already applying this commandment to everyone else except us. Jesus knew that would happen.

That's why in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, verse 21, he said, You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. He says, Well, listen, I've got something to lay on you. Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.

Anyone who says to his brother, *Rakah*, is answerable to the Sanhedrin, but anyone who says, You fool, will be in danger of the fire of hell. See what he's saying there? He's saying the same thing that we're going to discover next Sunday morning about adultery. He's saying, You think because you managed to walk away from it, in terms of any physical involvement, you're clear? He says, Half of you are filthy adulterers in your mind, and you stand in face of judgment.

You think because you have not been guilty of any of these things. And may I say in passing, there will be some who are here this morning, and you have been guilty of this. You have faced the issue of abortion.

And I want to say this to you. God is merciful in relation to that as He is in relationship to everything else. And, especially if your perspective was a worldview that was so warped before you came to faith in Christ, God understands that too.

So, I don't want you to go out under any man-made burden of your own past. Don't allow the devil to rummage around in your own areas of sin that has already been forgiven. If it has not been forgiven, then let's talk and let's pray.

But some of us are so proud of the fact that we never did that, and we never considered suicide, and I never shot anybody, I never banged anyone over the head. Well, so what? Have you ever had a murderous thought? Did you ever drive away from a business meeting and say, I'd like to kill that sucker? Did you? You ever? Say, you know what? I wish you would drop off the side of a cliff. You know what? The guy is a total empty head.

That's what *rakah* means. Empty head, nincompoop, dog brain. Anyone who says to his brother, you are an empty-headed nobody, answers to the Sanhedrin, is guilty of judgment.

And anyone who calls in question the morality and the character of an individual by saying, you fool, namely you moral moron, will be in danger of the fires of hell. So just because I haven't shed someone's blood, I'm not innocent. My heart has known murder.

I've harbored thoughts that are as foul as a murder. Contemptuous anger has ugly bedfellows. Animosity and malice and hostility, and our old favorite gossip, whereby we kill people all the time from great distances.

We spread the news. Out of the same mouth, as James says, comes the blessing of God and the cursing of our neighbors. And every time I gossip, what I'm saying is, this person did something or said something that I'm incapable of.

And so I put them down and I elevate myself and I face the fire of hell. And as hard as it is for us conservative evangelicals to understand and accept this, in the economy of God, nobody will go to a deeper hell as a result of having had an abortion than will the person who called his brother a moral moron or an empty-headed dog-brained idiot that he wished would die. Sin is sin.

And we have our little evangelical cozy ones, none better than gossip, whereby we malign and we criticize and we disfigure and we desecrate and we diminish the relevance and status and stature of our friends and our brothers and our sisters and even our family. Jesus said, hey smart guys, hey Pharisees, when you finish your talk on suicide, abortion and homicide, remember Matthew 5.21. If you want to play that game, he says, by dealing down one another in the realm of gossip and harmful words, then you're as guilty as the fires of hell. Concluding comment, those of us who are trying so hard to be good in studying these Ten Commandments must be just about out of our brains by now.

Right? Those of us who have somehow continued to believe that we are able to conform to God's righteous demands. We've been thinking this. I didn't do well on the first.

Second, not so good. Third, bad. Fourth, horrendous.

Fifth, my mother, I never called her. Sixth, I'm in deep trouble now. Okay? So some of us are sitting here, it's like we're sitting on a gigantic nail about seven inches long and this idea of making ourselves satisfactory to God is an impossible dream.

These commands make us squirm in our seats and what they do to us is they say, I'm not even going to try this anymore. I hate this stuff. I messed up so bad, I'm not even going to try and make myself acceptable and pleasing to God.

And that's the end of the line. But listen. Those of us who have given up on the idea of using these demands as a means of making ourselves acceptable to God, as a means of achieving a right standing before God, we now recognize that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit within our lives to conform us to the will of God so that in obeying these commands, we're not seeking peace with him, but we are finding pleasure in him.

And there's all the difference in the world. Although we fail, although we will never conform to the law perfectly in heart and mind and action, the new life that God has secured for us and given to us in Christ will enable us not only to tell our neighbors about this transformation, but to show our neighbors the transformation. This law is not a ladder up which we climb to forgiveness, but it is a mirror in which we see ourselves in need of a Savior.

Have you ever come to Christ and turned over your life to him as Savior and Lord and King? You may today. Let us pray. May the grace, mercy, and peace that comes from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and remain with each one today and forevermore.

Amen. I invite you to take your Bibles and we'll turn to Exodus and to chapter 20 and to the 14th verse. If you're unfamiliar with your way around the Bible, then you'll find this in a pew Bible, at least I think on page 54 or thereabouts.

And we'd be glad for you to make use of them. That's why they're there. For those of you who may be visiting with us today, we're in a series on the Ten Commandments.

And this morning, as you will note, we've come to the seventh, which reads as follows, You shall not commit adultery. If the statistics are accurate, this is a very vital statement just at this point in history, and no more so than at any other point, but certainly breaks with real significance into an environment in which more than half of our nation's men are reputed to have been or are involved in extramarital affairs. A third of the women in the United States of America are also so described.

At the same time, the Christian population makes big claims for and loud cries about traditional values. And yet it would appear that many of us are equally confused about the very values we choose to shout about. In a very recent study, some two-thirds of the Christians interviewed said that divorce was a, quote, reasonable solution to a problem marriage.

And 45% of the Christians interviewed stated that the children produced by unhappy marriage partners should not serve under any circumstances to keep the family intact. So we have a strange problem. We have moms and dads, on the one hand, extolling the virtues of purity before marriage and fidelity after marriage, and then themselves devastating and disappointing the very children that they are seeking to rear in the framework of these biblical principles.

As long ago as 1631, the producers of a version, an edition of the King James Version Bible, were fined 300 pounds by Archbishop Laud. The fine was significant. 300 pounds was probably equivalent to a lifetime's earnings.

And the reason for the fine was simple. The folks who had produced this Bible had been responsible for leaving a word out of it. They had missed a word out of the Bible.

Now, when I read that at first, I thought, goodness gracious, that seems to be a fairly hefty kind of fine after all. I mean, think how many words there are in the Bible. I haven't counted them, but there are a lot.

So presumably it must have been an important word you're saying. It was. It was the third word in the 14th verse of Exodus 20.

Thus rendering the commandment, you shall commit adultery. From 1631 on, this edition of the Bible became known as the Wicked Bible. And sadly, and without any humor, we might ironically admit that it would seem that all too many preachers and hearers have been putting the Wicked Bible to bad use.

And we don't need to start rehearsing the last few years of American Christianity and the tawdry, dreadful example that has emerged from the walls of Christendom. We are all tawd with the same brush. As Christians, while we know that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said we were to be salt, thus having an impact upon our culture that would bring taste and would bring distinctiveness to that which was putrefying, that we were to be light in the midst of darkness, sadly, we are not quite as salty as we might be.

Indeed, we are somewhat tasteless and our light would seem to be very dim, at least in the matters of sexual purity and marital fidelity. The problem is that we have half of it correct. Jesus in John 17 prays for his followers and he says, I pray, Father, that you do not take them out of the world but that you leave them in the world and that you keep them from the evil one.

So if we might picture that, the boat is in the water as it's supposed to be. We live where we're supposed to live. We haven't gone up a hill and hid.

We are in the thoroughfares of life. That's right and that's where we should be. But sadly, the boat is taking on water at an alarming rate.

Instead of being able to channel our course without imbibing the mindset and the thought forms of a culture which is alien to God and to God's Word, we are shipping water faster than ever we should. Forty years ago, Lord Justice Denning, writing in the United Kingdom, said we've reached the position where adultery or infidelity or misconduct, as soft-hearted people call it, is considered to be a matter of little moment. It is no longer a bar to advancement to any offices of state, high or low, whereas any other form of stealing would mean the end of a career.

And frankly, we know that to be true. Even in the last ten years, as I've had the privilege of living here, it is exemplified on every occasion that we turn around in the political processes of this country. Strange ambivalence.

It was in the 60s and the early 70s, on the heels of the sexual revolution, that psychiatrists and sociologists began to give a measure of intellectual sophistication to old-fashioned sin. Began to justify the activities of men and women and to render the claims and cries of Scripture, from their perspective, at least, null and void. Morton Hunt, sociologist, writing in 1969, said the disapproved model, namely polygamy, seems better suited to the emotional capacities and requirements of many people, particularly men.

It offers renewed excitement and continual expressions of personal rediscovery. It is an answer to the boredom of lifelong monogamy. We are, he says, by nature, polygamists.

What he should have said was, we are by nature dreadfully sinful. Rather than accommodating ourselves to a lifestyle which is warped, the Scriptures, the Ten Commandments here in particular, call us to line up against the perfect standard of righteousness. Call us to bring ourselves, with the enabling of God's Spirit, into a line which, far from tyrannizing and destroying, releases us in perfect freedom.

It is the ultimate freedom to become a bond-slave to Christ and to his Word. It is the ultimate enjoyment to live in obedience to God's truth. Writing in a similar time, Jill Tweedy, columnist with the Guardian newspaper in Great Britain, wrote an editorial entitled, When Marriage is Just a Cage.

Here I quote her. The pundits blame the rising divorce rate on our godlessness, our selfishness, our lustfulness. Says Tweedy, I blame it on the wrongful expectation of thinking that people can live together as long as they both shall live.

I think, says Tweedy, this expectation goes against our deepest nature, stunting our growth and requiring distorted lives to fulfill. And then she adds, and this was the headline, outside the bonds of Christian marriage, we will, I hope, learn for the first time what love is all about. Now this introduction concerning the confusion of our culture is in order to help us understand that as we take these ancient words from Exodus 20, they do not simply reverberate in the air with insignificance, but they actually come to our lives with great import and impact.

The confusion that is represented in our present culture in relation to all matters of sexual and moral purity is having an impact that is so incredible that it is virtually out of control. It is estimated that 80% of

adolescents in psychiatric wards are the product of this kind of marital chaos. That three out of four teenage suicides emerge from the inability of the adolescent psyche to cope with the fact that his dad or his mom or her mom or dad let them down.

Well, we're very expert at making it appear that we are able with a little support group here and a little counseling there to absorb all of this. It's not the case. We're confronted by broken up people with their broken down lives.

They've got broken up homes and broken husbands and wives. You'd think that it is almost time for people to awaken up and say, You know, I wonder if we were to go back to the maker's instructions, if we wouldn't find something there to address the predicament. Wouldn't it be an amazing thing to hear one of our leaders bold enough to cut through the crud and simply say, Guess what? This week, I was reading my Bible.

And as I read my Bible, I discovered that almighty God, in whose hands is our breath and our destiny, has determined that life is so sacred and marriage so precious and purity so important that we're going to convene a gathering of people who will examine what it might mean for our society, for our schools, for our towns, for our universities to begin to live life in accordance with the principles of God's Word. In your dreams. In your dreams.

Don't wait for it. Don't expect it. Don't even waste your time trying to make it happen, I would say.

Because never in the history of humanity has there been a significant turnaround in a culture as a result of the embracing of external factors and trying to lay them down on people. Every awakening has come as a result of the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the only power to change a life. And only with a changed life will there be a changed mind.

And with a changed mind will there be a changed lifestyle. If you think that I am more than a little pessimistic and I don't want to be because of all people, we want to stay where we began this morning. There is hope.

We want to believe the best and hope the best. We want to try for the best. We want to impact our culture for its good.

But listen, in Defuniac Springs, that well-known place, the sun in Florida, wherever it is, lawyers for a man charged with child abuse asked the trial judge to remove a plaque containing the Ten Commandments from outside the courtroom door. The reason being, said the attorney, was that it prejudiced the jurors as they entered. His client had clearly broken the Seventh Commandment and he didn't want anybody seeing that commandment or any other commandment as he walked in.

There was a major legal snafu which resulted in the trial being taken to another place because nobody had the guts to remove it or to say leave it and so they fudged it and they all left. Subsequently, in the state of Georgia and in the state of Florida, two other cases were brought concerning the Ten Commandments on the wall outside the courts. And in each case, the judges ruled for their removal declaring the display of the Ten Commandments to be unconstitutional.

So we live with this strange schizophrenia Inside the courtroom, the plaintiff stands and looks at the words written behind the judge's head In God We Trust. No one has a clue in their minds what that means. And they certainly ought not to be so foolish as to believe that to trust in God means to obey His Word and

means to honor these Ten Commandments which we want to unscrew from the walls of our courtroom.

You are unscrewing hopefulness and replacing it with hopelessness. We're unscrewing principle and replacing it with that which is merely puerile extensions of men's fleshly interests. Well, what does the Bible say in the midst of this confusion? Well, the good news is that as confused as things are around us, the Bible is really clear.

And what I'd like to do is address with you the clarity with which the Bible speaks concerning the sanctity of marriage and therefore the heinous nature of adultery. Let's be very, very clear that every time the Bible speaks about marriage, it makes it obvious that it is a high view of marriage and all that is part and parcel of marriage God has ordained and loves and is committed to including all the physical enjoyment that that union contains. The Bible makes it equally clear that marriage is not a sacrament as some of us have been brought up believing nor is it a redemption ordinance unique to Christians but marriage is a creation ordinance.

As Jesus spoke, he said that it was from the beginning that God ordained that a man should leave his father and mother and the two should become one flesh. So that from the very beginning of the creation of man and the construction of the civil order, God intended that marriage should be what was involved in the lives of men and women. This is something that we need to think out.

We won't take time to think it out now but God's design for the continuance of the human race was marriage and there are good marriages that aren't Christian. Do you believe that? Because God established marriage as a creation ordinance and there are bad Christian marriages because in Christian marriages you have sinners saved by grace who still sin. We need to think biblically about these things and many of us have determined that because something happened before we were Christians that somehow or another God wasn't interested in it before we were Christians.

Do you think God wasn't interested in marriage before you became a Christian? Do you think that he didn't care about your marriage because you weren't a Christian? Of course he cared! He established it from the beginning of creation that marriage would have significance. That is not to say that Christian marriages do not have unique potential and unique power because of the presence of Christ. But as Christians we need to be concerned about all marriage.

Marriage is even of our non-Christian neighbors and friends. Its status is not in question and its standard is also clear. In Ephesians chapter 5 you may like to turn to it to remind yourself it's there.

We have Paul announcing the nature of marriage calling upon husbands and wives to live together in a certain way and the picture that he uses of the love between a man and a woman is the love between Jesus and his church. And he wants husbands to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church. Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

Because we never hated our bodies but we feed for them, we care for them in what way? Just as Christ does the church. And so says Paul, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. He says this is a profound mystery this thing but I'm talking about Christ and the church.

Now will you notice in passing there especially young people as you look down on this in Ephesians chapter 5 and the process here in verse 31 what happens, how does marriage take place? Well first of all

you leave your mum and dad, okay? You should ask them about it and certainly if you're going to ask for a girl's hand in marriage you should go and ask her dad because he may have a lot to say and with a lot of justification which if you thought about yourself for a moment or two you would understand why. But you go and you leave your father and your mother and then you get united to your wife that's why we have marriage ceremonies and the two then become one flesh. I don't miss this, you understand? What our culture says is you go out and you find a girl or a guy and you become one flesh with them.

That just is par for the course. And then it may well be that you like them enough to go and ask their dad if you could marry them and then perhaps if they say it's okay and even if they don't you'll go ahead and legitimize your illicit sexual relationship. This is the word of God.

This is the maker's instruction book. This is the pathway to purity, to joy, to fulfillment, to God's best and everything else less than or other than is a dead end street, is a tragedy, is a disaster waiting to reach out and grab you. And some of you already know that to your own personal pain.

Listen to the word of God. Do not despise the instruction of God's word. Pay attention, pay heed to the standard and status and sanctity of the marriage bond.

It is to be held in honor. It is not to be entered upon lightly nor carelessly as the marriage service says but thoughtfully with reverence for God and with due consideration of the purposes for which it was established by God. In marriage, two people are not entering into a contract.

In marriage, two people are entering into a divine covenant. It is a great mystery. They become one.

It is one plus one equals one. They become interwoven with one another emotionally and psychologically and physiologically and in every dimension. And it is this great union of all of that that makes marriage what it is.

And that you see in passing, loved ones, is the monstrosity of removing one element of marriage from the context in which it is set, namely the sexual element of marriage. When you remove sex from the context of marriage, it becomes a monstrous thing. It becomes a disappointing thing.

It becomes a devastating thing. It becomes less than what God has intended. When a man says that he wants a woman, he is not telling the truth.

He wants something that a woman makes possible. And no one keeps the packet when they've smoked the cigarettes and the discarded lives around our nation and the heartache and the pain and the shame and the disappointment that are represented in a congregation such as ours that bears testimony to the vacillation of many of us in relationship to absolute biblical truth is unbelievable. And we are not alone.

So before we all get on our high horse to go and hit the main street to tell our non-Christian friends about quote, traditional values, let us examine our own hearts in relationship to these same values. And the answer is not in our homes. It's not in our huddles.

Because as I say to you, in our homes and in our huddles we are equal to some of the most significant abuse of the very principle that is here contained. Do you hear me? Do you hear God's Word? The sacred union in marriage is not to be intruded upon by anybody. It is not to be arbitrarily broken by anyone.

I don't care what Cosmopolitan says. I don't care about People Magazine. Trash the lot of them, I say.

Start reading your Bible. If some of you young women read your Bibles as much as you read that hogwash, you'd be a lot more fit for getting married than you are right now. And if some of you men paid attention to the principles of the book of Proverbs rather than filling your head with junk, you would be a lot more attractive to some of those young women as they try to make their way through life.

As for God, His way is perfect. Perfect. It's not my prerogative to wake up in the morning and decide that I'd like a new suit.

And by the way, I'd also like a new love. Because after all, my suit is no longer giving me the feeling that I once had when I put it on. I used to like to put it on.

It made me feel good. But now I don't feel good because it's fat where it should be thin, or it's thin where it should be fat, or it's pleated where it should be unpleated, or it's worn where it should be smooth. And I don't feel good about her either because she's looking kind of worn.

She looks a little fat where she should be thin, a little creased where she should be smooth, a little frayed where she wasn't before. Well, hey, big guy, how do you think she feels about your ugly mess? I think she just woke up thinking, hey, I'm lying next to Charles Atlas. This is unbelievable.

We've got a real problem with our distended egos, don't we? So we get in our cars and we plug in our stereos and we listen to Elton John who doesn't know squat about marriage or sexuality and listen to him sing, you, me and everybody needs a part-time love. That sounds good. At least part-time.

I mean, we don't need to go full-time, but part-time would be fine. So the prevalent attitudes towards marriage and towards togetherness are so far removed from what the Bible says that to read the Bible as we're doing now and to think these issues out as we try to do now is so radical. It's so radical.

I am excited about how radical it is, I've got to tell you. I'm excited about this. I don't think we're going to need plastic noses or funny suits as we go into the end of the 20th century.

I don't think we'll need to do very much as Christians except live in moral purity before you get married and live in marital fidelity afterwards. That will be enough to mark us out as some of the weirdest people that ever walked the streets of the latter part of America in the 20th century. I do believe that with all my heart.

Look at the scenes in front of us. Look at the young woman as she stands on television and all of the confusion of her background and she says, I never intended that I would give my child up for adoption into a homosexual, quotes, family. I mean, this thing is so messed up.

So, what does the Bible say? Well, the Bible says, look what it says, You shall not commit adultery, beginning of the subject, end of the subject, middle of the subject, the whole subject. You're just not going to do this. Now, somebody needs to acknowledge that we don't have the power to fulfill this.

We've said that all the way going along because we look at the Ten Commandments, they're not a ladder of which we climb to heaven. This would be a chronicle of despair. We're already at number seven.

We broke every one of them getting here. Every rung on the ladder is bust. Every time we try to go up again, we fall down.

We're still on the ground floor. Maybe number six is, oh, down. Seven, down.

So now this ladder is still, we can't go anywhere with it. Because it's not a ladder of which we climb to heaven, it is a mirror which shows us ourselves. We see ourselves, and what do we see? We see that we are immoral, that we are lawbreakers.

Okay, if I cannot get to heaven by keeping the law, then how in the world could I ever get there? That is the message we heard last evening. And some of you heard it very clearly. I need to respond to it.

Namely, that one took our pain, took our punishment, took our lawlessness on himself in order that we might be set free. It's the fabulous message to the woman in adultery. Okay, guys, throw the first stone if you're sinless.

Nobody's left. And Jesus says, I'm not going to throw stones at you either. So here's to you, Mrs. Robinson.

Jesus loves you more than you can know. Have you thought of that? But that's it, isn't it? I don't know what he's writing about, but that's right. And Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate* is a sad, sick story multiplied millions of times to our shame.

But the message to the adulterer is that Jesus loves you more than you can know. And the message to me in my immorality is that it will not be as a result of my ability to become moral to try and prop myself up into heaven that I will ever make it, but it will come as a result of my having to bow down and recognize that I am a lawbreaker and that I need a Christ who is a Savior. Then the Spirit of God works in our lives to enable us to live in a way that would please Him.

The Heidelberg Catechism, which we quoted before, makes it really clear. What, asks the question, question 108 in the Heidelberg Catechism, what does the 7th commandment teach us? Answer, that all unchastity is condemned by God and that we should therefore detest it from the heart. Since both our body and soul are a temple of the Holy Spirit, it is His will that we keep both pure and holy.

Therefore, He forbids, listen to this, He forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever may excite another person to them. That's what you call categorical. That's what you call comprehensive.

That's what you call instruction without loopholes. My kids say to me, they say, what's the big deal about music, Dad? Who cares about albums? What does it matter if the music's good? Who cares about the words? Well, I care about the words because if those words excite you to activity which contravenes the law of God, they're history. Why would you fill your mind with that which would turn you away from truth? You see, when we commit adultery, there's a five-fold dimension to it.

In the committing of adultery, number one, we sin against God. Number two, we sin against our bodies. Number three, we sin against our partner.

Number four, we sin against our spouse. And number five, we sin against our partner's spouse. In other words, we create a huge chain reaction of tragedy.

Now, when Jesus addressed this matter with the Pharisees who loved their robes and loved their prayers and loved their externals, he wanted them to understand, and you need to turn to Matthew chapter 5, that although they were technically okay, they were internally really messed up. It's page 684 in a pew Bible. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 27.

You have heard that it was said, do not commit adultery, but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Now, let me just apply that in one obvious way. You read these Dear Abby columns, and the question keeps coming up, which I hate to even mention from the pulpit, so I will try and be as oblique as I can.

But basically, the notion has to do with the place of fantasy within marriage. It is continually addressed in popular psychology and in the framework of popular immorality that actually it's a very helpful thing, and it certainly is a very normal thing, and it's certainly not a harmful thing. It's helpful rather than harmful, it's normal.

Just go ahead and enjoy yourself. Okay? What did Jesus say? I want to tell you that if you look at a woman lustfully, you have already committed adultery with her in your heart. See, voyeurism reduces our spouse to a mechanism for the fulfillment of our lusts.

But it does. Roger McGuff, one of the Liverpool poets in the 1960s, penned a poem called The Act of Love. And the first verse goes like this, The act of love lies somewhere between the belly and the mind.

I lost the love some time ago. Now I have only the act to grind. High on bedroom darkness, we endure the pantomime.

Ships that go bang in the night run aground on the sands of time. And then the morning, it's cornflakes and goodbye. Another nick on the headboard.

Another day wondering why. The act of love lies somewhere between the belly and the mind. I lost the love some time ago.

Now I have only the act to grind. Do you know how many Christian marriages are living like that? Men who have checked out on their wives in every other way except their physical presence. Wives who are enduring a pantomime as a living single.

And they hear a message like this concerning marriage and inside of them there's such a revulsion to it all because they do not know marriage as God intended it. They do not know the joy as God planned for it. They don't know what it means.

And it cuts like a knife into their heart. This is painful stuff. You see, that's why Jesus was so radical in His statements.

He said, listen, it would be better for you if you've got an eye that's causing you to sin to gouge it out and throw it away. Because it would be better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away.

It's better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. In Mark chapter 9 and in verse 45 He says, and if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.

What is this? This is ruthless. This is chilling. This is not cozy.

This is demanding. It's decisive. This is what the Puritans called the mortification of the flesh.

It's something exceptionally practical, loved ones. It's not a funny feeling in your tummy. It's not a wooziness.

It's not something that comes as a result of singing Christian choruses time and time and time again. It's not as a result of repeating things like a kind of mantra. You can do all of that.

You can be full of gifts that can be coming out of your ears and you can be living in total sin. How in the world do you think that a man like Swaggart was able to continue to parade himself across the stage of his church and across the stages of the world and engage in such activity? Do you think he had spiritual gifts? Do you think he was able to manifest all kinds of things without question? But he wasn't mortifying his flesh. He wasn't doing what Colossians 3 says.

He wasn't looking at his hands and asking the question, am I doing anything with ease that I shouldn't be doing? If I have kids here this morning, I have to talk to a group of young people, I say, put your hands up in front of your face and look at your hands and answer this question. You don't have to answer out loud. Just answer this question in your heart.

Is there anything that I'm doing with my hands in private that if it was flashed up on this screen right now, I'd be so ashamed? How about your feet? Is there anywhere that your feet are going? How about your eyes? What about the videos? What about the magazines? What about the literature? What about that stuff? See, this is intensely practical. It's an act of the will. It's not about a feeling that you get in the pit of your stomach.

It's about doing things because the Bible said this, I must, with the Spirit's help, do that. Take the test. Now, let me conclude by saying three things.

Number one, don't fall into the trap which woolly thinking leads to, which concludes that there is no difference between mental and actual adultery. This I hear all the time. The equation goes like this.

Well, I've thought it, so I guess I've done it, so I suppose I should just go ahead and do it. Jesus said, you do it here, you've done it. So people say, well, I thought it, I must have done it, so I guess we just complete the process.

That is from the pit. That is the devilish equation. He wants to drag you down to the very abyss of moral uselessness.

There is a substantive difference between thinking about and committing adultery. There is no difference, says Jesus, in terms of the punishment that he will mete out. Therefore, we cannot play fast and loose with things in our minds.

However, there is a difference between what I think about and what I actually do. We don't have time to go through it all, but let me tell you this. Number one, adultery, the act of adultery breaks the marriage covenant.

Adulterous thoughts do not. Adultery provides ground for divorce. Adulterous thoughts do not.

Adultery violates and defiles each other's bodies. Its mental counterpart does not. Adultery is the vehicle for sexually transmitted disease, whereas the mind does not transmit sexual disease.

The second last thing I'd like to say is this. I want to issue a word of warning to all of us who, in both speaking and hearing this, are tempted to believe that this is an unbelievable message for Mr. So-and-so who lives down the street or the guy who just left our church. It goes like this.

We're just good friends, said Jack. Who did he say that to? He said it to himself when he was driving in the car. He was driving in the car and he was thinking about this girl who works with him.

Her name is Thelma. As he drove in the car and he thought about Thelma, he said to himself, we're just good friends. I respect her for her mind.

I like her as a business associate. There's nothing wrong with that. No.

But eight months later, Jack and Thelma were waking up together in the morning and Jack was no longer waking up in the morning with his wife. Why? Because Jack and Thelma were terrible moral reprobates? No. They were just like you and me.

They were sitting in church. Eight months ago, they were in church. Eight months ago, they had nothing in their minds about being involved in cheating on their spouse.

Eight months ago, they were listening to messages like this, taking notes and saying amen, but something went wrong. Impossible, you say. It couldn't be.

Listen. Be careful. That's what Jack and Thelma thought.

What happened was simply this. That because they believed they were invincible, because they believed they were above it or beyond it, they didn't put up any hedges around them to protect against the possibility of them falling into sin. It all started innocently enough, but then slowly, imperceptibly, gradually, they began to depend upon one another emotionally.

They began to confide in one another with little secrets and private plans and shared ambitions. They began to justify their lunches together and extended lunches together. They exchanged physical touches, which they said were brotherly and sisterly.

They liked each other. They became special to each other. They became enamored with each other.

And they gave themselves to one another. Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls. Have you planted hedges, men, about this? Do you have hedges? Do you still go out for lunches with your secretary? I think you're nuts.

When you say, I have to, I get fired. Get fired. Better to go into hell fired, go into heaven fired than go into hell unfired, huh? Oh, she came in.

She was upset. I just went around the desk and I gave her a hug. I didn't mean to be hugging her four minutes after I started hugging her.

Well, you can be sure you won't if you don't ever hug her, first of all. Don't linger. Plant hedges.

Build walls. Let me give you three walls. I'm just going to say them.

I can't expand them. Wall number one, practicing the presence of God. Reminding yourself all the time that Jesus is with you wherever you are.

Secondly, memorize the word of God. Fill your mind with Scripture. Psalm 119, 9, and 11.

Thirdly, stick with the people of God. In large groups in worship, in small groups in accountability. Finally, let me give you a word of encouragement.

We started with John chapter 8. We're going to finish with John chapter 8. Glad we're about to sing a song from John 8. It's a wonderful song. It's a song about a woman taken in adultery. And some of us are here this morning, and for us this message is so painful.

Some of us actually are probably here and we have decided that our past is actually unforgivable. We believe ourselves to have sinned ourselves outside the love of God. We've broken the seventh commandment so badly, maybe so continually, and we believe that we're done.

Well, I want to tell you, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, that it's not so. If you do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, if you do truly and earnestly cast yourself upon God's mercy and upon his grace, you may be forgiven, you may be pardoned, you may be cleansed, you may be set free. But hear the word which Jesus spoke to the woman as she went.

What did he say to her? Go and leave your life of sin. Unless you know that you are prepared to walk out of here this morning and never pick up the phone to him or her again, then don't bank for six seconds on the forgiveness of Christ being ministered to you. For our forsaking is the evidence of our being forgiven.

This is the word of God.

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