

Date : 25 February 2024
Topic : Family, Marriage, Divorce (Part II)
Key verse : *...if you think you are standing firm (overconfident), be careful that you do not fall... 1 Corinthians 10:12*

Introduction

I had spoken last week on being vulnerable – that our lives are in danger of defilement (=sexual immorality) and about strengthening our marriages, to avoid divorce.

- How do you rate your vulnerability to sexual immorality?
Many listening to the message on sexual defilement may conclude...
*I don't go to those kind of movies...I do not work with beautiful women in my workplace... I am not vulnerable (=individuals who are at greater risk of failure).
... I don't have these pulls toward sexual sin... I got married as a virgin... I never fornicate (Greek *porneia* = pornography) ...I am not vulnerable...*
(The word *fornicate* is the catch word for all types of sexual sins, like illicit sexual intercourse, unmarried as well as married; incest, prostitution, lesbianism, homosexuality, bestiality, paedophilia and adultery. *1 Corinthians 6:9-10*).

1. What is the impending danger of a lax attitude? *...I am not vulnerable*

- a) We forget that our society is lowering our resistance by over exposing us to sexual misdeeds. How?
- By laughing at these acts on TV shows, treating them as trivial. Not only is sexual sin tolerated in any form, it is advocated, promoted and marketed.
(For example, a prostitute is a comedic genius, cleverly plying her trade with an amusing tone and very humorous. So we laugh about that and our senses become totally dulled to prostitution even though we may be negative about it initially).
Without realising it, our resistance to immoral sexual behaviours is being broken down through entertainment and rising levels of crassness we see everywhere.
 - Influence of colleagues. Those who serve in the military may think they are not vulnerable because they are all males in the workplace and therefore no sexual temptation can arise. But colleagues' daily chit chatting of their sexual experiences may shift and erode your values of purity over a period of time.
I know of a group of male technicians at a work place. One of them went to Vietnam on holiday and ended up marrying a Vietnamese single mother. Through his influence and introduction, 6 other technicians married Vietnamese women, though none of them had set out to find Vietnamese brides initially.
 - Pressure from older colleagues
A group of soldiers en route to the Middle East had to transit in Bangkok. Every senior colleague had "booked" an "escort" for the night; everyone, except one who refused. Out of fear that he would report about them to folks back home, they all intimidated that if he insisted on his abstinence, they would forcefully tie him up and forced a girl on him.

b) We forget our society also warns us of danger ahead.

- Carelessness is being inattentive, negligent, unmindful.

Why does society warn us against unguarded and undisciplined behaviour?

- Why workplaces have signs? (Beware! Hazardous material)
- Why do playgrounds post prohibitions? (Height – Do not jump)

- The odds against us are obvious. Why?

Because a scammer and a 'sucker' is born every minute.

(example : Last Monday, 19-2-24 the Straits Times' headlines stated *Scams soar to record 46,500 cases in 2023*. That 73% scammed were aged below 50. This is despite warnings issued by the authorities. This is a 46% jump over a 12-month period.

Obviously, the victims did not think they were vulnerable. 45% of the victims of job scams were aged 30 - 40. These people, with experience and supposedly tech-literate, obviously did not consider themselves vulnerable to being scammed).

c) We forget God's Word warns...lest he fall (nkjv)

Those who consider themselves not vulnerable to temptations are overestimating their abilities. Paul wrote...*if you think you are standing firm (overconfident), be careful that you do not fall... 1 Corinthians 10:12 (niv)*

- Do not just depend on your will power, but on God's grace to protect you.

...*I will never get drunk*

...*I will never break the law*

...*I will never look at pornography*

While we strongly oppose these vices, we need the humility that our primary ability to conquer evil comes through Christ.

example, Simon Peter said...*I will never betray You* (Jesus), and what happened?

- The Tempter lurks around waiting to trip us. Every one of us has a weak spot however self-confident we may be. Satan exploits our weak link to throw us off guard, making us susceptible to temptation.

Most Christians underestimate the influence of spiritual forces at work to undermine a Christian's testimony. Though these powers are unseen, we must know their influence and not be ignorant of the schemes / traps of the evil one.

- How are we trapped?

The secret for the perfect trap? Beautifully baited but camouflaged. We take the bait when we live complacently and are unaware of the enemy's intent. God loves us enough to warn us of sin's consequences. When we ignore His warnings and get careless with them, we jeopardize ourselves.

- How does Satan trap you?

- Are your thoughts negative, discontent, selfish?

- What about your vision for life?

Live for self or to glorify the Lord?

- Your affections?

What occupies your aspirations, desires?

- Your associations?

Hindering your walk with Jesus?

Taking you to shady places?

- Antidote to vulnerability?

Jesus said...*pray...lead us not to temptation but deliver us from the evil one...*

Prayer actually helps circumvent temptations.

2. Hidden fault lines which make us vulnerable

a) Past sexual abuses render us vulnerable to pre and extra marital sex.

- John L Sanford attributes these past defilements to molestation, exposure to lustful activities such as pornography.

Interplay of forces of the spirits of lust manipulate our emotions and sexual drives to undermine our resistance. What we do not know can destroy us.

Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of hell. Proverbs 9:17, 18 (nkjv)

The imagery of *...stolen waters...and bread eaten in secret...* is meant to evoke the idea of something forbidden or taken through illicit means.

The context is a contrast between what Folly offers and Wisdom's invitation.

What Folly offers is inferior to Wisdom's promise of wine and meat. Somehow our human nature, by default, prefers what God has placed off limits to what He has approved. Our carnal self believes that illicit sex is more satisfying than sex between a husband and wife, which God sanctioned.

b) Personal factors such as overconfidence and complacency lead wholesome Christians to fall into sexual sins.

(Christians, who claim they are committed to obey God's commands on purity, may even congratulate themselves that they cannot be tempted, have actually believed a lie against themselves).

...Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 1 Corinthians 10:12

What is the context of this text?

... let us not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day, 23,000 fell. 1 Corinthians 10:8

c) Relationship fault lines in a marriage

- Unresolved conflicts can trigger an emotional earthquake in marriage.
Examples of hidden fault lines which lie submerged in marriages:
 - wife's disappointment with husband's low earning power through the years
 - conflicts that simmer under the surface - words left unspoken, disagreements not discussed.
 - anger over words spoken by husband's family, but felt undefended by husband.
 - habits that irritate and disappoint
 - harsh criticisms in front of in-laws and children
- Inappropriate sharing with someone of the opposite sex.
 - Inappropriate sharing concerns things of the heart; like, your feelings, frustrations and fears which are intimate issues in a husband and wife relationship, to be shared only with your spouse. (If one spouse is domineering or indifferent, the other may not want to bring this up which will further compound the problem of drifting apart from each other).
 - In John L Sanford's counselling experiences, there were many cases of Christian brotherly- sisterly sharing which develop into romantic attractions because this sister or brother cares. When a man enjoys the attention of the caring sister in Christ, sin crouches at the door because feelings between the sharing friends will run beyond control.
(Unless the couple takes this issue to the Lord in prayer and seek a counsellor's help, the marriage will be teetering at the edge of disaster).

3. How to strengthen marriage relationships?

My application

a) Roles

Know your role as husband or wife? Is there a difference between the two?

- No matter how superior the wife is intellectually, she must realise that her husband is the one to provide leadership in the marriage and home, and to protect her physically and emotionally.
 - A husband cannot abscond from this role. He has to learn.
 - Role confusion will stress the marriage, especially if his wife mindlessly carry out major decisions making without consulting and obtaining his agreement.

b) Respect

God's Word instructs us that a wise woman builds her home and by wisdom fills it with wonderful things but a foolish woman destroys it (by not respecting husband but belittling him) *Proverbs 14:1*. Disrespect is one big hammer untutored wives use to wreck their marriages. There can be no successful marriage without respect and there can be no successful family without a successful marriage.

c) Faithfulness

Trust is a non-negotiable ingredient for a sustainable marriage. Trust cannot be bought. Once betrayed, it is virtually impossible to build again. A spouse must be completely trustworthy. A ideal wife is simply one in whom her husband trusts.

Proverbs 31

- Trust has to do with faithfulness to the marriage vow that must never be broken – not even once. (Everyone makes mistakes but unfaithfulness in marriage is the one mistake that will bring death to a marriage relationship).
- Do not make excuses for going astray. The human psychic just cannot accept unfaithfulness without altering the marriage relationship. Every couple must know the cost of the consequences that will surely follow. Betrayal in secret can never be kept secret for long.

d) Intimacy

Build your relationship to a deeper level. Last week, I mentioned the forgotten element of extending tenderness to your spouse. Make this a habit. Ask God to help you to be genuine. It looks fake if it does not come from the heart. If you habitually criticise your spouse, any tenderness will look fake.

e) Do better with each passing day

- Set learning goals.
Try to make your wife laugh, acquire the skill of cracking jokes and story-telling.
- Be learning new knowledge
(Stay sharp in your thinking. All of us tend to grow lazy. Meditating on the word of God and memorizing scripture will sharpen it. Otherwise, early dementia may result).
- Speak a word in season. Read, listen, take note of how others do it.
(Learn from speakers who make their congregations laugh. Ask yourself what is it that is funny? Pay attention not just for your enjoyment but how you can make use of it).
- Avoid crabby behaviour. Everyone has challenges. Coming home and sitting at the dinner table with an unhappy face will affect others negatively. Therefore, compose yourself, so that you bring something to the dinner table. At least, bring an interesting anecdote of the day.