

DON'T JUMP THE FENCE!

Recently the news reported three pastors of, what would be termed, “megachurches” have resigned due to moral failure. You sometimes hear me from the pulpit talking about the feat of some man of God with a follow-up, “...and he was one of my students.” I never mention one of my students who had been defeated due to moral collapse. One reason I don’t do this is because I do not believe it wise to publicize a person’s sordid misconduct for four reasons: **1. The Bible forbids us to go into details of wicked activity.** *“For it is a shame even to speak of those things (works of darkness) which are done of them in secret”* (Ephesians 5:12). We need to rebuke the deeds (Ephesians 5:11), but sometimes the fine details of how sin was committed becomes inordinate and inappropriate entertainment that can actually tempt others. **2. Discipline is a matter for each local church.** Oftentimes other churches and their pastors do not know the full story. Much harm has come when other churches get into a rebuking mode of other churches. *“He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears”* (Proverbs 26:17). Our duty is to pray for and be available if counsel is sought. **3. As a rule, I do not go public with a brother or sister’s downfall because of the hurt it inflicts on the innocent members of their family.** *“... If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man...”* (James 3:2). The Lord Jesus said, *“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea”* (Matthew 18:6). **4. I am not quick to go public with a brother or sister’s downfall, because I want to provide a path back for the prodigal.** Jesus tells us when the prodigal son *“came to himself,”* he cried, *“I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee”* (Luke 15:18). He knew the father would receive him! Sadly, many a fallen brother has felt the need to attend another church or even another denomination because they were so embarrassed that others in the congregation know the details of misdeeds of which they are now ashamed. I am happy to say, I pastor people who have made a one hundred eighty degree turnaround. I shall go to the grave with personal confessions they gave to me many years ago. God says, *“I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins”* (Isaiah 43:25). If God says He chooses not to remember forsaken sin, who am I to bring these things back up? *“He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends”* (Proverbs 17:9).

When a brother or sister sins against the Lord, I try to major on addressing the wrongness of the sin, not the sinner. My heart is grieved at the number of formerly dedicated people that are caving in to the myriad temptations around them. In the remaining part of this article, I want to address why people are giving

in to the temptation to jump the proverbial moral fence because “the grass seems greener on the other side.”

1. Quit looking on the other side of the fence.

We read this sad words in II Samuel 11:2, 3a, *“And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba...”* David was looking across the fence to his neighbor’s yard and succumbed to lusting after his neighbor’s wife. The king knew the law said, *“...Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife...”* (Exodus 20:17a), but he presumptuously sinned. How could this have been avoided? 1. David, the king should have been at war, not staying alone at home. 2. When he couldn’t sleep, he of all people knew he should have been talking to the Shepherd, not checking out his neighbor’s sheep. However, let me get to the root: 3. **DON’T LOOK!** Don’t go looking. On the other hand, if you are not looking, and see something at an inadvertent glance that is not right, turn away, don’t take a second or lingering look. Later David wrote: *“I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes...”* (Psalm 101:3a).

2. The grass is greener because it is over the septic tank.

A person reared in the country might appreciate this statement more than a city-slicker. Those who have a septic system, rather than city sewage know the more unpleasant side of country living. You see, after a few years, the sewage has a tendency to seep. Now this is great for the grass, it greens it right up. If, like myself, you have ever played tackle football over a septic tank, it may be green and soft but it stinks to high heaven! To make the application, an immoral dalliance may seem an experiment that might be pleasant, but I warn you, it stinks to high heaven and does nothing but harm to all involved and many who were not involved! Sin is wicked and evil and should always be seen that way, *“...that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.”* (Romans 7:13).

3. Water your own grass.

Be right with God. Stay right with God. Love the person God has placed in your life! Let me give you three statements in periodicals made in the past few years of a certain pastor and the church he pastored: "One of the 10 healthiest churches in America"; "one of the fastest-growing churches in the US during the 21st Century"; "one of the top 20 Christian leaders in the US to watch." Today he is out of the ministry because of sin. It is a dangerous thing to believe your own press reports! Paul said, *“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”* (I Corinthians

15:10). *“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”* (Proverbs 16:18). Be accountable to someone who loves you, especially your spouse. Check yourself. Stay as close to Jesus as you can. I have never known anyone who is intimate with Jesus that fell into immorality. I love the prayer of Robert Murray McCheyne, “Lord, make me as holy as it is possible for one man to be.”

There was a song written in the sixties, some of the words which go as follows: “If you're down and confused...cause you're baby is so far away...And if you can't be with the one you love, Honey, love the one you're with.” Such is the wicked mentality of the world. This is not to be the mindset of the Christian. We are to love only the one with whom we are in covenant. Water your own grass! It is an amazing thing when we water our own grass. Why, it greens right up! When a Christian works on his or her own yard, it doesn't cause people to become envious of them, it encourages them to work on their own yard as well. Many a person has said, “I want to be a Christian because I want the kind of marriage that this Christian I know has.”

In conclusion, the Bible says, *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5). Believe me, if you have Jesus and a godly spouse, you have everything you could possibly have to make you happy! Don't jump the fence! You should ask yourself, “Why did God put that fence there to begin with?” The answer is, He loves you and wants the best for your life. Love Him in return by being faithful. Be faithful to Him; be faithful to your spouse. *“...Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Revelation 2:10b).

-Pastor Pope-