

Learner's Exchange: Moral Failure

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Testing 1, 2, 3, 4, 4. No, it's just a record.

I would like just to pray to begin with because the subject is fairly vast and the understanding of me or I suppose any of us is fairly limited. So let's just pray.

Our God and Father, as we venture forth on this subject and as the implications of it come very close to all of us, sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly, we ask that by the scriptures and by your Holy Spirit and by our ability to share honestly with one another, we may find something of the reality of your amazing grace.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, Gary Hart has done us a great favor by giving us a front page headlining example of moral failure.

What do you think about that story? I mean, how do you react to it? That's quite appropriate, too.

[1 : 32] Nothing? Nothing. I'm not sure that as a member of the public eye, I guess you could expect that she's a couple tribunes, but I'm not sure how that action would affect its political ability.

There was an interesting thing on CBC one night this week, I think it was perhaps Thursday night, in which it was carefully explained that the media in Canada don't do that.

They don't interfere with a person's private life. And they went through the story of the agony one reporter had about reporting John Turner patting a lady on the bottom.

You know, that was the Canadian approach they said was very different and didn't deal with that.

What do you think happens to Gary Hart because of what's happened this week?

I mean, where's he at, do you think? And I'm going by that authoritative statement, the province, to know anything about it at all.

[2 : 55] Where would he be at this lovely Sunday morning with the sun shining? I would say he's facing a whole look at what his future is because I'm sure he thought he had a good chance for the presidency and kind of think of trying to have a child like that.

But that's ended now, hasn't it? That he said no more. He's not going to go for that. But the ramifications of what that means to him personally are just probably starting. It's very hard to replace the dream all of a sudden and know where your life is going to head after that.

So that this moral failure has ruined his life? It's certainly ruined the dream. I hope that the student woke up this morning with his wife that being Mother's Day that he's going to start working on his relationship with his family.

I hope that he's going to be in the same way. I hope that he's going to be in the same way. And what do you, yeah, why do you think that, though? I mean, what, do you think that's liable to happen?

Does that sound like what's going to happen? Brian? I think he's looking at how much he needs to tell his wife to satisfy his career.

[4 : 25] And how much he would keep him to do it if he doesn't do it in the same way. So the fact that it's on the front page of every newspaper in the United States doesn't mean that it's been on the front page of his own sort of personal memo to himself.

That you think he's still covering and defensive. I don't want to judge a man. I want to judge a man like that. Okay.

I want to say that I think he is terribly afraid of his wife. He's afraid because of what he's done. He's afraid of what's happening for the relationship. You mean a man like that would be?

And he's wondering how much he thinks he needs to tell his wife to hear the response to the last year. And how much did he even have a lot of people in that advantage of his real self that he actually had a teacher or something because he's so afraid to share?

Anybody else have any feelings about that, Yolanda? It almost seemed like secrecy would become a way of life for him. And that he can continue covering up as he's alive.

[5 : 43] Probably at this point he can't find a little good life that doesn't know any other way to live besides what's covering up. And kind of like the prodigal son idea, not showing the other side, the younger brother's side.

And either we'll continue covering up or have to find a way to live without having secrets. Halbert? A couple of comments.

One is that he said, at least with regard to that one incident, that last one, that he didn't do anything morally wrong. And so it's hard for us to know how much to believe he means what he's saying. But if he, you know, if it's true, that makes a difference, I think. And the second point is, I saw a very good discussion of this in a program called Washington Week on Channel 9, where they have various journalists, high-level journalists discussing these things.

And one thing that came out of there by a man who was intimately acquainted with Gary Hart and his career, having published something very impressive about him before this thing broke.

[6 : 57] And I think to the effect that maybe something in his personal life might interfere with his career.

But the point that I wanted to bring from that discussion was that it came out that he had made this man feel, if not ultimately indicated, he had serious ambivalence about the idea of running to the presidency.

And it was thought, in this discussion where they said he was being really stupid, that maybe he really wanted to have a way of getting out of the race.

You mean this was his way out? Yes. Hmm. Well, that brings another dimension into it.

One thing I wanted to say is that one reaction I had, my initial reaction, is to raise the question about this thing, is my reaction was, morals still matter.

[7 : 58] Yeah. Okay. That's what some people would probably be saying, is that they wouldn't trust him when they're talking to me about this.

How did he do this, Fiona? What trust has he broken?

Well, I think he's broken the trust of, well, I'll put it this way, if that was his wife, I would have a few questions. And I think also...

You think his wife didn't know him? I don't know. I mean, we don't know the person, we only know what the media tends to throw out at us. And so we don't know the whole person.

But I think, just looking at the type of... On a very simplified level, is that you have to have a certain trust in people, and you have to have a whole faith in them.

[8 : 55] But if somebody wants to put that trust or faith in jeopardy, then you're going to be in trouble. It's obvious whether it's a good person. Okay. Okay.

The thing that... Well, I want to throw some stuff at you now, just by way of some background material, and then we're going to come back to this and see what it's all about.

And I put together a kind of lectionary of... By the way, those who set up this sent around to us, I guess, who were taking part in it.

And then, you know, intimacy, our latest sexual fantasy by Tim Stafford. And it's a very good article. You know, that the essential bond in marriage, or the essential bond in our society, is an intimate relationship between a man and a woman.

It's not marriage, nor is it monogamous marriage. It's just the achievement of an intimate relationship. And that is a kind of new high-water mark of 20th century morality.

[10 : 18] Morality. If you can achieve an intimate relationship, that is self-justifying. You don't need anything else.

And so that's why he names this, Intimacy, Our Latest Sexual Fantasy.

And it's a good article. There's a number of good things in it. He does point out, however, and I find this just as a kind of statistical cold bath, before you get carried away with the advantages of intimacy, he said.

This, however, will say very little to non-Christians. If they ask what is wrong with the ethic of intimacy, I would simply say, there are too many losers.

Six hundred thousand babies born each year to teenagers, many of whom will spend their lives in poverty. One and a half million abortions.

[11 : 28] Twelve million cases of sexually transmitted diseases. Many incurable. Millions upon millions of divorces.

Millions upon millions of children growing up with one parent. About three times as many divorced women now as in the 70s.

Divorced men remarry with women on the average ten years younger than the wives they divorced. The older women have a much smaller chance to remarry, and on the whole, less intimacy than before.

And that's, I mean, that's a kind of cold bath treatment of the contemporary playboy-induced concept that to achieve in privacy an intimate sexual relationship is what it's all about.

And that the old issues no longer matter. Then I, the next thing that I, that's just one of the things I want to tell you.

[12 : 44] The next thing I want to tell you is about the Bible. And the Bible is almost a handbook on sexual morality.

And all the things you need to know, you have wonderful grounds for examining almost every phase of sexuality and sexual morality in such stories as, and I put them all down.

And in fact, I could put them into a kind of reading list of biblical passages, which might be a help to you. But just to give you something of the extent of it, let me tell you that it starts with Adam and Eve in the garden.

And the woman told me. Then there's the lovely story, as I mentioned, of the Lord providing a wife for Isaac, which was not a, I mean, it was a planned marriage.

They'd never met each other. Joseph's encounter with Potiphar, the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20, Jacob and the problem of his two wives, the love story of Elkanah and Hannah and Elkanah's two wives, David and Bathsheba, and the implications of that.

[14 : 15] The male and female relationship is dealt with extensively in Numbers chapter 5 and Deuteronomy chapter 22, laying down some very hard laws, almost in the same sense, I might say.

There's something of the same atmosphere about it that we now have in our attempt to deal with AIDS. You know, that we must deal with it hard and brutally because it will ultimately infect the whole of society if we don't.

Well, I think they recognize that kind of thinking in the Torah, in Numbers and in Deuteronomy, as well as in other places. You have that strange person who becomes one of the forebears of Jesus, Rahab the harlot in Joshua.

You have the amazing way that Queen Esther uses her very great physical beauty to achieve really the salvation of her people, which is an interesting comment on that.

You have Amnon and Tamar and a story of sexual abuse in 2 Samuel. And then you have Onan and Tamar, which is the problem of masturbation, and some people have taken that to be the biblical prohibition of masturbation, which I don't think it is.

[15 : 56] You have a father speaking to his son about the evil woman in Proverbs 6.20.

He gives the how you deal with the evil woman. And then you have a wonderful picture of seduction in Proverbs 7, where, I mean, it's as old as the hills, this story, and yet you can read it in every newspaper week after week, that it still goes on as though Proverbs 7 had never been written to tell you how it works.

You have the preacher's experimental approach to pleasure in Ecclesiastes 2. You have what I am calling the hymn to delayed gratification in the book, in the Songs of Solomon, which I think that's basically what it's saying.

You have the beautiful and faithless bride of Ezekiel 16. You have Hosea's living parable of marital unfaithfulness, focusing in Hosea, but perhaps more in Hosea 3.

You have Malachi and the marriage covenant and the wife of your youth and the commitment to be faithful to her.

[17 : 37] And then you have the story of an unwed mother in Matthew 1, the adultery and divorce teaching of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 27-32, the marital conspiracy in Acts 5, 1-11, that's Ananias and Sapphira, the deliberate unbelief and resulting sexual chaos in Romans 1, 24 following, where the whole sort of picture of sexual chaos is portrayed as resulting from a denial of what can be known about God.

You have marital and sexual problems in the church in 1 Corinthians 7. You have the ultimate, I think, story of the human moral dilemma in Romans 7, 13-8, 7, that I can see what's right, but I find

in my members another law, and so I do what is wrong, and that that in effect is the moral dilemma that we can't solve.

Just to come back to Gary Hart, I think one of the fundamental problems in that whole situation is that there is no place of forgiveness to which he can turn, at least apart from God.

And I think that probably is true of moral dilemmas generally. And the paper reports this morning that he is angry and defiant and badly hurt because he obviously has done a lot for his country. But there is no place of forgiveness. And what I think the Bible teaches about moral failure is where the place of forgiveness is and how you come to it.

[19 : 49] And it's not easy to come to, but it's there. You have the Nicolaitans in Revelations 2, which seems to have been an early Christian sect that tried to put together a kind of sexual license with Christian faith and how they introduced these things.

So that's just the beginnings of a kind of list of things that you need to do, that you need to read. I think reading those would be far better for all the public schools in British Columbia than all the information that is put out on the techniques of sexuality.

I mean, the techniques pretty well, I think, can be learned. But what lies behind that and the whole question of moral failure is something that is harder to deal with.

Now, talking about moral failure, this is the problem that is created. And here it is.

[21 : 06] And this is the moral standard. And sometimes this is established by the Boy Scouts, and sometimes it's established by the Masons, and sometimes it's established by the Rotary Club.

And a lot of people think that the fundamental purpose of the church is to establish this. And it isn't. The fundamental purpose of the church is to deal with the issue once this has been smashed. And the difficulty is that you stand here like this before this moral standard and you discover that there is very little relationship between you and this and that inevitably this is going to topple over and crush you.

And it's just a matter of time. It's going to happen. The difficulty, of course, is that it produces various things that you can do.

You can pretend that you live by it. But the fact is, even as Ken pointed out right away, the thing that somebody in moral failure needs to do is go and talk to their wife and see what can happen or husband.

[22 : 37] And see, but the thing is that what we're committed to is going on either not acknowledging the problem or, if we've acknowledged it, not letting on that we've acknowledged it.

And this, of course, is the tremendous significance of the David and Bathsheba story in the Old Testament where David, having been attracted to this beautiful woman and having had intercourse with her and she finding herself pregnant, and David sends her husband out to be killed in battle and then claims her as his own wife.

And without, as far as you can tell from the story, one qualm of conscience. He does the whole thing without any qualm of conscience.

And I think behind that is the kind of thing that lies in this sort of moral intimacy thing. sexuality is such a good gift and the fruits of a sexual relationship are so profoundly satisfying that they, in a sense, develop a life of their own and so are self-justifying.

In other words, if it's this good, it must, if it, if it, I suppose, if it tastes this good, it must be right. And that's, and that I think is, is the real adult problem with sexual immorality.

[24 : 17] It's such a profoundly satisfying experience, at least on a temporary basis. You have the story of the lust of one of David's sons for one of David's daughters that's listed in this thing here.

And, and it, it tells the story of how he very much lusted after his half-sister and, managed to get her to come and minister to him while he was sick in bed or pretended to be.

and when he got her into a bedroom, he, he, in effect, raped her. And then it says that in the morning after that, he hated her.

That, you know, it's a terribly involving reality of love and hate and of, uh, lust and, and hate. And it's, it's a very confused area in our lives and that's why I think it, it, it becomes a problem.

And you've got to be able to somehow identify the problem. Otherwise, what you do in the face of a moral standard like this is pretend that you are what you ain't.

[25 : 33] You know, and I, I'm, I'm still mad at the Boy Scouts for telling me to, to be good. I haven't got over it. Uh, not that I disagree with the necessity of being good, but that fundamentally they didn't tell me the problem I would run into trying to be good.

And, uh, so that, uh, they, uh, you know, there came a crisis for me and, and I think a crisis for all of us because once, once you become, uh, sexually mature, you're, you're faced with a very big problem.

and the big problem is whether you can face this moral standard, which I think Romans 7 says you can't, or whether you're going to pretend to have faced it and to live by it and we will all pretend one thing and be another.

So that, in a sense, what happens is that you pretend to be this, you know, that this is your standard, but the reality is this. You know, that this is where you live.

This is what you pretend and this is where you live and if those two things get out of touch with one another, you're in very serious trouble. You know, that if you, if you, if this pretense excludes this reality in your life, you're in, you're in deep trouble and, uh, this is where, this is where I think you need to, uh, face something.

[27 : 12] You, you need to be in touch with something else. Well, what happens when you acknowledge this, though, is that it's, uh, it's a kind of, I mean, it produces a sense of hopelessness and despair.

And rather than give in to that, we very often decide, well, we'll, we'll, uh, face it out. We won't, uh, we won't acknowledge the reality of it.

We will pretend otherwise. And, uh, and the difficulty is that our sexuality particularly is so strong and has such a, it's almost like nurturing another life within your life, which is, has its own goals and its own ambitions and its own desires and which won't shut up and, uh, do what you want it to do. It keeps pushing you in another direction and, uh, and you don't know how to deal with it or how to face it or how to come to terms with it. And so, you tend to disown it and, uh, you become very indignant, as I guess Gary Hart has become very indignant, when somebody says, hey, what about this?

when somebody puts the finger on it. Now, I think Brian is right that Gary Hart is just another person. There's nothing particularly significant about what he's done.

[28 : 42] It's just who he is at this particular stage. But what he's done is, is a common experience of man. It's, uh, I mean, that temptation is common to man.

And, uh, for us to assume that we would behave better under the same circumstance, I don't think there's any justification for it. So, you have these two things going on here.

So, that what you do, ultimately, is you come to a place which, which I think you may find difficult for me to say, but I think you come to a place of condemnation.

That is, that, that you are condemned by the reality of your own life. You know, and at this point, you can commit suicide, you can become acutely depressed, uh, you can become frustrated to the point where you can no longer cope adequately with life, and you, you, you do sense that terrible condemnation that the only way you can live with this reality in your life is to lie about it, or to hide it, or to maintain the secret.

How much, I mean, that's when Brian says that, how can I maintain the secret? You know, how can, how can a man once, I mean, if we were all given the privilege of having our most intimate private life covered on the front page of the paper once during the course of it, uh, it would destroy most of us.

[30 : 20] So, uh, what do you do but you come to face this, this ultimate condemnation. And I think that that's, that's what moral failure leads to.

C.S. Lewis in one of his books says, when he began as a Christian to do a serious moral examination of himself, this refined, Oxford professor in the baggy gray flannels and the tweed coat and the brilliant, brilliant mind said of himself, when I looked at myself, I found a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, and a harem of fondly held hatreds.

Well, he and I he suddenly became aware of who he was. And, and the reality of that was, was in a sense his condemnation.

Well, interestingly enough, you see, what I think happens is that, uh, that condemnation either destroys you if you acknowledge it and if you allow it or else it leads you to the one who was condemned on our behalf.

The place of forgiveness. forgiveness. And not the forgiveness of somebody who hasn't been let in on the secret of your moral failure, but somebody who knows all about it.

[32 : 18] That there isn't any part of it that is unknown. And so, you suddenly find that you are forced because of the recognition of your own just condemnation by reason of your moral failure in

the light of a standard which you have given assent to in all sorts of ways.

And, uh, you are justly condemned and in that condemnation you look to the person of Jesus Christ. Now, I have a story for you. And this story comes from a book called Noon Till Three. And the story is of a professor at a university with two children and a wife and a typical home on Point Grey. Only this didn't happen here.

It's a, it's a, it's just a novel written by a professor in the States. And he falls in love with one of his graduate students.

And they develop a secret relationship. relationship. And in that secret relationship they become sexually involved with one another.

[33 : 31] And that relationship goes on for a while and he tires of it. And along comes another graduate student who's different in character and in personality from the first.

His wife is totally deceived. She knows nothing about this. He gives up one graduate student and takes on a relationship with another and maintains the kind of liaison with the first but he's, he's not spending time with her so she knows that something's wrong.

And she doesn't know what to do about it and he just ignores her and tries to keep her happy and to do what he can to cover up his infidelity to her as well as his infidelity to his wife in the first place. and that goes on for a while and then along comes another graduate student and he falls in love with her. Totally and completely and utterly in love with her.

He really thinks she is the one. Everything about her is beautiful and his relationship and his ability to communicate with her and his ability to be open with her and her understanding of him.

[34 : 55] The whole thing is just a totally good relationship. And the book tells in some detail the story of how this tangled web is developed.

and then the highlight of the book the sort of crisis in the book says that he wants to have sexual intercourse with this third student but he is so much in love with her that he doesn't want to deceive her.

And if he is not going to deceive her he has to tell her about his wife the first graduate student and the second graduate student and see what she does with it.

And the question of the book is what does she do with it? He tells her every detail.

What does she do? Well time's short. The purpose of the book is and I'm really I'm murdering this book by telling you this but it's still well worth reading.

[36 : 32] what he does what the purpose of the book is to say that that third student is Jesus Christ.

And though you have offended him and violated him and done everything to make it as though there is no possible way that he could accept you he accepts you unconditionally.

Once there is the recognition the honesty of the honesty of all that you've done. Once you have come to the place of telling the truth to him then he can shower his love on you.

He can accept you. Now it sounds like a highly immoral story but it's written to show as he says the amazing grace of God that God is able to forgive us and that if we can be honest with him in that way then he is able to deal with us.

And I don't know how you can face that. I mean you can take another famous American politician like Chuck Colson who was caught in gross immorality who was sent away to prison but in the course of that he found a place of deep forgiveness and there's no doubt that his life is now far more effective than it could ever have been even in one of the top spots in the country simply because he found what Gary Hart has not yet found and what perhaps you and I weighed down by a sense of moral failure have not found and that is a place of forgiveness.

[39 : 03] Now what happens here and I think this is really I find difficult and I may just leave you confused by telling you this but I'll tell you anyway so that you can help perhaps deal with my confusion.

Christ does not say turn back to that moral standard. Now that's your responsibility. He does say live in relationship to me and the result of that living in relationship to you to him is that something that you can start where you are and something greater than the law happens because well for reasons that would get us into an exposition of the theology of Romans but that's what happens.

Can I get you to ask me some questions in the few minutes that we have left that I can clarify any of this? I'll take a statement, Harry, and that is the moral standard is not the gospel of the church.

I know, but it's taken to be very often. Yeah, it's not our gospel, but in fact our gospel, which is the death of Jesus and the message of reconciliation and forgiveness really has no sense apart from the moral standard because there's nothing to be forgiven for if in fact there wasn't a standard. And I think the church faces a dilemma in that the church either goes so far to the moral standard that all it does is say don't.

[40 : 52] it doesn't really matter. Yeah, and it's living in this tension. But so often that what's regarded as the chief function of the church is to raise an enormous moral standard which can't leave anybody anything but confused and defeated because it's so hopeless of attainment and the rewards of it aren't there anyway.

You know, it doesn't even if you get up this high, you still haven't done it. And even if you notice that most people are living at this level and you're living at this level still in terms of the moral standard, you fail completely.

and that you have to hide from that reality. So what you're saying is that we have to find our own one? No, no.

I'm not. I'm saying that what the moral standard does for you is to bring you to a place of condemnation.

You are condemned by it. What? You got to that front. Okay. And you when you've got through that and pulled that out, then do you not come back with your own?

[42 : 24] Well, when in, you mean, this is, I mean, this is, this is what Nathan had to do for David, you know, to tell him the story which brought him to the place of repentance and conviction and conviction, a place of condemnation, really.

And having got there, he could then go on in knowing the reality of the grace of God. But until he got there, he couldn't know this reality.

And so we are faced with a moral standard which we can't maintain, and having that standard, we are brought to a place of condemnation, which in our society most people want to avoid.

That's why I feel upset about Gary Hart that he is defiant and angry, you know, because there is another alternative for him, which may not relate to the presidency, but it does very much relate to who he is as a person.

And that this condemnation brings him to recognizing what it is that God has done for us in Christ, and how utterly dependent we are on it.

[43 : 45] Arlene. I don't know if this goes back to what you're talking about about being confused, and I think that's a hard thing as a Christian, after you face a condemnation and you have felt the forgiveness, that's very freeing.

But then there's a sense of wanting to live a life that's pleasing to God. And as a Christian, when we strive for that, we often put ourselves back under this moral standard.

And I find the hardest thing as a Christian is to live in that freedom that Christ gave us without letting that freedom degenerate into ignoring the standard and saying, well, I can just do anything.

Well, that's right. I mean, I remember being shocked. But this is just, when I was in Kingston working in the penitentiary, meeting young men who told me that they liked going to certain churches to pick up girls because the girls at that church couldn't sin.

they could do whatever they liked, but it wasn't sin because they were sanctified. And that, you know, that they had found in their relationship to Christ that they didn't sin.

[45 : 13] I mean, it's so very deceptive that this church was trying to preach something which didn't make any sense at all. and the guys in the prison could see through it very quickly.

They understood how to work that system. But in this, what you are is that you are released from the condemnation of the moral standard. You're forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ.

Christ. And the great fallacy of the gospel, the potential breakdown of the gospel is, the question that Paul raises in Romans, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

You know, because that's what looks to be the logical conclusion. And Paul's answer is, how can we? We're dead. We have been condemned and we have died with Christ on the cross and therefore we can't go back to sinning.

Alan. Is prerequisite forgiveness, if prerequisite forgiveness is my repentance, what am I turning away from, what am I turning to to receive that forgiveness?

[46 : 38] And how do I convince myself that my repentance is a thing that I'll ever master? Is that, am I making any sense? how can I repent when I know that I'm going to tell?

How do I convince myself that I'm worthy of this and I'm ready of this knowing that I'm going to work? that I'm going to do? Well, you see, I think this obviously leads to a lot of things, but basically what I think that question needs to be answered by saying that our repentance is a continuing repentance and our God is a continually forgiving God and that we have to maintain the relationship and that when it says that how many times do I sin against my brother and forgive him, you know, the breakdown comes not at the point that God says, I will forgive you no more.

You've gone too far this time. I am incapable of dealing with you and many people feel that they have gone beyond that place where God can deal with them any longer.

They have sinned and sinned and sinned and sinned and sinned. And I'm sure that the truth of the New Testament is that God can keep forgiving a lot longer than you can keep sinning.

And that that's the thing that you need to recognize as the fundamental reality of God's relationship to you. And that you hold on to that relationship relationship.

[48 : 24] And a lot of people I think lose out at exactly that point. You know, that they think that they can sin better than God can forgive and have. And that is blasphemy.

Basically. But it's hard for us to recognize because we're self-centered creatures and self-deceived creatures so often.

we've got to quit. We've got to quit. happening tonight■■■ but we've got to get sure the thing to do we won't think that will PieçãoTF gruppoo and apparently went to the people asking what like?

We've got to see it on the screen.