



March 1, 2011

Gleanings

Does Sexual Sin Have a Price?



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On a recent broadcast of the *Tonight Show*, Leno and another gentleman took questions from the audience regarding male–female relationships. One young lady asked about the appropriate time in a dating relationship to have sexual intimacy. Leno chauvinistically responded that men want it as soon as possible. He treated this moral issue with triviality, but it is a serious moral matter with significant implications both socially and economically. The latter will be the focus of this article.

In the twenty-first century, biblical values as the standards of conduct are being eliminated in the name of personal freedoms. This is particularly true in North America, but I find it is also a global reality.

The rejection of biblical values is based on an assumption. We humans presume that we can reject biblical values without consequences, specifically economic consequences. This is a big assumption and one that needs to be explored. So let's consider the question, does sexual sin have an economic price?

To help us answer the question, consider the nascent company Ashley Madison—a company that started in 2002 with the tag line “Life is short, have an affair.” The Canadian-based company focuses on facilitating affairs by using the Internet to connect people. Operationally, the company employs more than one hundred workers who care for customers and maintain six Web sites. In 2010, the company's revenue was nearly \$60 million with a profit margin of \$20 million.

There are many people who oppose a business that facilitates adulterous affairs. For example, Fox Sports declined to air an Ashley Madison commercial during the Super Bowl. Ashley Madison's CEO, Noel Biderman, spends considerable time promoting and defending the company. Even Biderman's wife defends the company by claiming that their personal values are not consistent with the company's value proposition, which she says is simply a tool to make money. So here is another major presupposition: a person can have two value systems—one for home and the other for work. A corollary assumption is that it is okay to compromise your personal value system to make money.

Biderman's amoral response to his critics is that Ashley Madison is simply servicing a need. This defense reflects Biderman's apparent belief that biblical values no longer apply and there are no consequences for rejecting biblical values. In defending himself, he would probably note that his company is highly profitable, but this defense ignores the consequences, specifically financial consequences, others may suffer. Let's look at the bigger picture and consider some of the economic impact of adultery on society.

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- *Fees to Ashley Madison.* The entry price into the process of finding an adulterous partner is not economically high, but after you find someone, the fees to Ashley Madison for the privilege of communicating and meeting the person can be very high.
- *Rendezvous.* Once you meet the person, there will be an economic cost to continue the relationship—entertainment, trips, and meeting places. And there may be extra fees associated with attempts to hide your activities.
- *Distraction and lack of focus.* There is an economic impact associated with the distraction of an adulterous affair. Your focus in life and work will be impaired as you plot rendezvous and nefariously seek to hide your activities. If your lack of focus is impaired enough, you might be demoted or lose your job.
- *Trust issues.* Frequently a person in an adulterous affair will try to hide it. But human beings have an internal radar system commonly known as a “gut feeling.” When a person tries to hide something, many times those around the person sense it. They don't necessarily know what it is, but they know something is not right. It becomes difficult to trust a person whom you feel concerned about, which impacts the person's potential for promotions and new employment. Anecdotal, I understand that Ross Perot, founder of EDS, would fire an employee on the spot if he discovered that the employee had committed adultery. Ross's reasoning was based on trust. He said if an employee would betray his or her spouse, the employee would betray him.
- *Disease.* One of the dangers of adultery is contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). These can be debilitating, even deadly. Granted, there is a perception that STDs can be managed, but the known processes are not fully reliable. If a person contracts STDs, this can impact his or her health and ability to work, both of which have economic implications. Plus people infected with STDs infect others as well. And medical treatment for STDs can be expensive.

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- *Divorce.* According to the free Web site divorceguide.com, 75 percent of all divorces are caused by either money problems or adultery. Divorce leads to additional financial issues such as legal fees, counseling, and the cost of a second household.
- *Divine response.* Notwithstanding the impact of the above six issues, the biggest economic risk for adultery is the divine response. Adultery is sin and sin always has a price. Under the Old Covenant, the Israelites were strictly forbidden to engage in sexual intercourse outside of marriage (Leviticus 18). The penalties for disobedience varied from individual uncleanness to death to community economic calamity. There was a direct response from God for sexual immorality. In today's world we are not under the Old Covenant as a means for salvation from sin and acceptance with God. Christ settled this so that now salvation is a free gift based on accepting Christ. But the Old Covenant is still relevant to us in the sense that it provides insight into a divinely ordained moral code. Furthermore, the New Testament provides ample testimony to the truth of the Old Testament sexual moral code (Galatians 5:18ff; Ephesians 3:5ff; Colossians 3:5). If the moral code for governing sexual relationships is the same in both the Old and New Testaments, then the consequences of disobedience might be the same. One of the Old Testament consequences for sexual sin is economic calamity. And God has no limit to His means and methods for producing economic consequences for sexual sin.

People who engage in adultery reject the God of the Bible and choose to gratify the desires of their flesh (Ephesians 2:1–3). This can only lead to judgment.

Apparently Biderman and those who use his service fail to understand that God has made the rules for sexual conduct. When men and women fail to follow God's rules, there is always a price to pay and one aspect of the price will be economic.

Furthermore, it seems Biderman fails to understand that the purpose of business is divine in nature: business exists to fulfill the Creation Mandate. To be licit before God, a business must be a vehicle to do the will of God and not support sin and rebellion against God.

And to address Mrs. Biderman's assumption that people can have two different value systems (a personal value system and a work value system): this is called hypocrisy—pretending to be righteous but in reality being unrighteous. Jesus had no tolerance for hypocrisy and attacked it without mercy (Matthew 23:13ff). We humans are integrated beings. Whatever we believe in one area of life, we believe in all areas. Claiming to be against adultery personally but supporting adultery at work to make money is hypocrisy and, in reality, a lie. The truth is that Mrs. Biderman supports adultery.

In the end, Ashley Madison will be judged. It's just a matter of when. Don't be distracted by the apparent short-term financial success. It is a ruse that is deceiving Biderman, his wife, and many others. The reality is that Biderman is on a "slippery slope" to judgment as described in Psalms 73:16–19. The only way to stop the slide is to repent and turn to Christ. True repentance would be evidenced by shutting down Ashley Madison as a vehicle to facilitate sin and proactively embracing God's code of sexual conduct. This is the way to lasting blessings, including financial blessings, because sexual sin—indeed all sin—has an economic price.

Further reading.

http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/11_08/b4216060281516.htm

<http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/02/14/adultery-incorporated-the-infidelity-industry/>

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