

If you want to be married, if you want to live in the relationship called marriage...and there is no dishonor in choosing not to be married. Contrary to our culture, there is nothing shameful or second-class about being single! In fact, those of you who are single can find a real friend in the apostle Paul. He was proud of being single, and held singleness to be a lifestyle superior to marriage. Following the epistle lesson today, in the next several verses, Paul writes, "to the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do." There! Not everyone needs to marry. In fact, there are too many married who should have not married in the first place! But, if you want to live in the relationship of marriage and if you want to be successful, if you want to find fulfillment and meaning in marriage, if you want to find love in marriage, then heed this commandment.

Likewise, if you want to bring children into this world, and are not planning to put them up for adoption (there are some married couples who should have put their children up for adoption!); if you are planning to rear children and provide the kind of home, the kind of environment, in which they can develop into the kind of people you want them to be--independent, creative, thriving successes--then, heed this commandment. "You shall not commit adultery" is talking about the foundation of marriage and family; namely, faithfulness.

Rueben Job has written,

"One of the tragedies of our society is the notion that happiness, meaning, and fulfillment can be found in infidelity and even through promiscuity. To watch just one evening of television or to browse through a newsstand is to be impressed by our society's fascination with faithlessness. We denounce our crime rate and the general collapse of morality while we laugh at entertainers who make light of fidelity, faithfulness, and integrity. Our culture teaches us to love for momentary pleasure, to ignore the rights of others, and to seek the gratification of all our desires. Thus, we make of marriage and the lifetime commitment of one woman and one man to each other, not an exquisite treasure, but a heap of broken rubble."

The world's way doesn't work. We glorify it in TV soap operas, but it doesn't work. The world's way doesn't work because relationships are built on faithfulness and loyalty. Jesus said the two shall become one flesh. The marriage commitment begins with the physical bodies. The sex act unites two lives. Within the marriage covenant, sex becomes a unifying, beautiful experience. Marriage is a sharing, a giving to each other, of dreams, hopes, goals, and, most emphatically, bodies. In our epistle lesson, Paul phrased it dramatically, I Corinthians 7:4, "A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is." Past history has liked that verse. It meant that the wife must remain faithful while the husband could have mistresses, or play around as he pleased. But, Paul did not stop there as if the wife is owned by her husband. Paul continued, "In the same way, a husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is." Marriage is a sharing of lives, and that sharing includes the bodies. Faithfulness is the foundation, the basis, the security on which to build a relationship. Destroy that faithfulness, and you have nothing.

One statement my Dad made this week which surprised me was that he wishes he could have been a better provider. I asked, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, we were poor as church mice." I told him we kids didn't know we were poor. We were never conscious that we lacked anything, and then I added, "We had what counted." He replied, "I'm glad to hear you say that." We take a lot for granted in our lives, but from time to time we get insights into the treasures we have received. We're critical of our parents in our younger years, aren't we; but as we grow older, have

children of our own, hear the stories of what our parents had to face, of which, as children, we had no knowledge; we gain a sense of appreciation of parents. As I reflect on my upbringing, one of the gifts, one of the treasures my parents gave me, which I took for granted, is the gift of faithfulness. Never did I suffer the anxiety of so many children where the love, security and faithfulness of their family are broken by adultery, estrangement and divorce. My parents love each other. I never doubted that. Our home life was stable. What a gift! Someone has said, "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." My dad gave that gift to his children.

The question for married persons is: Is unfaithfulness worth the shattered covenant? Is infidelity worth the trauma created in your children? Is adultery worth the estrangement? If there is pain in your marriage, get counseling. If sexual gratification is lacking, get sex counseling. Rarely is it proven that changing a relationship, changing a partner, makes any improvement. What do you expect from marriage? A panacea? A miracle? You're working with two imperfect human beings; what do you expect? Are you realistic? Is adultery a valid solution?

Now, I can't end the sermon by only presenting the ideal situation. What happens when adultery occurs? I tell couples coming to the church to be married, "We don't believe in divorce. United Methodists do not believe in divorce. We believe your marriage lasts until death parts you." We do not believe in divorce, but it does happen. We are not living in an ideal world. Relationships are destroyed. People do hurt one another deeply. But, God gives second chances. That is our gospel. Jesus forgave the woman being punished for adultery. He said, "I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more." Pick up the pieces, and rebuild your life.

God is faithful. God's love is faithful. God has called you to live in covenant, has called us to live a lifestyle that is an alternative to the world's lifestyle. When we look at marriage and the family, we see the Christian lifestyle in direct opposition to the world. "You shall not commit adultery; you shall be faithful." The major difference between God's lifestyle as expressed in the commandment and the lifestyle of our culture expressed in TV soap operas is that our lifestyle works!

STRAIGHT TALK

EIGHTH IN SERIES, TEN COMMANDMENTS REVISITED
THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

DOUGLAS NORRIS

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

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