

BE FAITHFUL IN MARRIAGE**EXODUS 20:14**

When you're driving and you see one of those signs – DO NOT ENTER, do you appreciate it or resent it? Do you say to yourself, "Why shouldn't I be able to go that way? What does the Ohio Department of Transportation know about anything? Why should they be able to restrict my freedom?" Or, would you think instead, "OK, thanks for the warning. If I went that way, I might end up in a construction site or run into another car. I appreciate the heads up." We're in the midst of a ten week study of the Ten Commandments - God's Big Ten. We recognize that although they were given some 3,500 years ago to a small, obscure group of people at the time – the Israelites – these ten statements have continuing validity for everyone, everywhere, every day.

We've been reading all ten each week. Let's do that again. Now, it's true that eight out of the ten are expressed negatively. Some people think that makes God seem negative. Nothing could be further from the truth. God's Big Ten are like a DO NOT ENTER sign. If you obey them, your journey through life will be far more successful and far less painful. If you ignore them, you will at some point crash or run off the road of life itself. They're laws that actually liberate us to enjoy life, not shifting suggestions we're free to ignore. But this basic misunderstanding about God's Big Ten is no more clearly demonstrated than when we come to number seven. "You must not commit adultery." (EX. 20:14 NLT) Many people have already decided God is anti-sex. God is a cosmic kill joy. God doesn't want people to enjoy sex. Those are all head scratching assumptions since God created sex. Could it be this commandment – just like all the rest – is really a helpful warning God's given us because He loves us?

Just about everything God's given us has limitations. God's given us water. In fact, you can't live without water. But too much water, and your home gets flooded or you drown. Fire is a good thing. It warms your body and cooks your food. But it can also destroy your house and burn your body painfully. God created sex for human beings. When it's experienced in its proper context – marriage – it's beautiful, wonderful, and nourishing. But if it's taken out of that context, it becomes one of the most destructive forces in human experience. The positive value behind this commandment is faithfulness in marriage. That's really what God is after in the lives of His people. He knows that while faithfulness doesn't guarantee a happy marriage, unfaithfulness absolutely guarantees a miserable relationship. DO NOT ENTER. Let's identify, first of all, then ...

THE CAUSES OF ADULTERY

One cause of adultery is the ungodly values of the culture or society we live in. We live in a culture that increasingly suggests sexual gratification ought to be one of the greatest pursuits in all of life and however you express yourself sexually should be tolerated by all. Just about everything and anything is acceptable. There's absolutely nothing new or modern about that attitude. When God first gave this commandment 3,500 years ago, the Israelites were surrounded by people from other cultures who practiced a wide variety of sexual behavior including ritual prostitution. What's that? You worshiped your god by having sex with a temple prostitute. It was a world of

unrestrained sexual expression and very few standards. Hard to believe, but our culture today was probably more conservative - more moral - than when God first gave this commandment. Nevertheless, we live in an atmosphere where non-biblical sexual expression is encouraged. People are encouraged to become sexually active long before marriage while the rest of us are prompted to pursue the ideal sexual relationship wherever and with whomever we can. Those values impact and permeate Christian and non-Christian alike. When God says DO NOT ENTER, we ask, "Why not? Who are You, God, to tell me what to do? Why should I live my life by Your rules?"

A second cause of adultery is unsatisfying marriages. Reliable statistics on the frequency of adultery vary greatly, but most researchers have come to these general conclusions: Over a third of married men will cheat on their wives. Nearly a quarter of all married women will cheat on their husbands. More than 50% of all marriages will be impacted by one of the spouses being unfaithful. If accurate, that's got to include some people who claim to follow Jesus, yes? Less than perfect marriages are as old as marriage itself, but it seems the understanding of what makes a great marriage is becoming less and less. There's less willingness to work hard at building a good marriage. If it doesn't happen automatically and effortlessly, go find someone else and the quicker the better. Why go home to noisy kids, a griping wife, and a house that looks like Hiroshima after the atomic bomb, when a man can pursue a civilized relationship with another woman over appetizers and an adult beverage? Why go home to a husband who barely grunts hello and is glued to the TV, when there are several men who appreciate both her personality and physical attributes?

Unsatisfying marriages are the result of a lot of painful "uns." Unmet needs. Unresolved conflicts. Unfulfilled expectations. Very few people go out and commit adultery simply because of lust or sexual urges. People are seeking more satisfying relationships – even just basic friendship - because basics needs aren't being met, conflicts aren't getting resolved, and expectations aren't being fulfilled. Sadly, adultery never solves dissatisfaction. It only injects the most horrible pain into an already painful train wreck.

A third cause of adultery might be an undeveloped or inaccurate sense of self-worth. This is most evident in young people, but you can observe it at any age. Some girls have concluded the only way to attract or keep a boy interested in her is by giving him her body. She believes she has nothing else of value or worth to offer. It's limited to her physical body. Some boys have concluded manliness is somehow defined by unrestrained sexuality. They assume they have some kind of unwritten right to be sexual with whomever whenever and however they desire. Again, they assume their self-worth is somehow attached to their genitals. I've found the recent #MeToo phenomenon both wrenching and fascinating to observe. I congratulate the all too many women in our culture who have said, "Enough already!" I can only wonder how many women would have been spared unspeakable pain if as a culture we had obeyed God's DO NOT ENTER signs. "STOP. You're not allowed to do that to a woman." But we know better than God, don't we?

THE CURSE OF ADULTERY

Why is adultery such a bad thing? Why has God erected this big DO NOT ENTER sign in front of it? First, adultery defies God. While we're focusing on adultery today, God's Word makes it only too clear that any and all sex outside of marriage is unacceptable to God. The Bible says, "Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body." (1 Cor. 6:18 NLT) Isn't all sin equally bad? All sin separates us from God, that's true. But some sin has far greater consequences than others. No sin will do you more spiritual, psychological, and physical damage than immorality. God made sex for marriage and marriage alone. Why? Does He want to deny you something wonderful? No, He wants to preserve something wonderful. The big concern in recent years is how to have safe sex. It's kind of ironic, because sex was never meant to be dangerous! When you do sex God's way, it's always safe. Sex was given for human enjoyment in marriage by a gracious God.

When you commit adultery, you defy God. That's a serious thing. The Bible says, "Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery." (Heb. 13:4 NLT) Do you remember the Old Testament story of Joseph – the teenager sold into slavery by his brothers? His first owner, a man named Potiphar, had a wife who wanted Joseph to share her bed. Joseph's answer to Potiphar's wife ought to be the answer every follower of Jesus gives whenever we face sexual temptation. "How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God." (Gen. 39:9 NLT) Joseph realized adultery was like shaking his fist in God's face – not just offending Potiphar. A sexually pure life isn't optional for a follower of Jesus. The Bible says, "Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10 NLT) No, I don't think this was intended to be a complete list, but don't ignore this list either or minimize it! Behind every act of adultery is someone who says, "I will not let God tell me what to do!" It's defiance – out and out rebellion – against God.

Second, adultery defiles marriage. God said a man and a woman become one flesh in marriage. Sex is one expression of that oneness – that unity. Marriage is a unique, sacred contract between a man and a woman recognized by God. Sex is reserved for that context. Within that exclusive relationship of commitment, sex works best. It can and should be a wonderful, renewing, refreshing, and enriching experience. One reason adultery is so deadly to marriage is because it consummates a union that was never a union. It's a lie; it defiles God's gracious plan and purpose for marriage itself.

Third, adultery destroys families. In my experience as a pastor, there are very few marriages and families that can recover once adultery has been exposed. Even where God's grace creates forgiveness, horrible emotional scars and pain remain. Adultery destroys the family because it defiles marriage which is the foundation of a healthy, strong family. Fathers or mothers who commit adultery teach their children that honor, faithfulness, and commitment are far less important than a passing pleasure. They

teach their own children that the parent's pleasure or happiness is of more value than the kids themselves. Faithful couples forge strong families and strong families are one of God's greatest blessings. Adultery threatens to destroy all of that.

Fourth, adultery denies the best kind of love. You might already know the New Testament was originally written down in the Greek language. There were at least three different words for love. Eros is sexual, romantic love. Philia is family or friendship love. Agape is God's kind of love which we, as human beings, can show to others if and when the Holy Spirit lives in us and controls our lives. This kind of love reveals itself in and through faithfulness and commitment. It fully accepts you the way you are while wanting you to become the best version of yourself possible. It sticks by you and with you regardless. It always seeks the true well-being of the one who is loved. It's the highest, the deepest, the broadest, and the best kind of love out there. We all want and need agape love. Adultery is incompatible with the best kind of love. It's a denial of it.

Fifth, adultery despises faithfulness. There's a lot of things that aren't truly necessary to make a marriage happy. For example, the amount of money your household generates has little or no effect on whether your marriage is truly happy. But some things are imperative for every marriage to flourish and thrive. One of those qualities is faithfulness and the deep trust a husband and a wife have in each other that's generated by faithfulness. Mystery, secrets, and intrigue are fun in novels or movies, but marriage needs certainty, confidence, transparency – in a word, faithfulness.

Sixth, adultery degrades people. All sex outside of marriage – regardless how alluring and inviting our culture wants to make it – is simply in the end a use and abuse of two people by one another. The inevitable results are guilt, shame, depression, anxiety, fear, regret, and possible disease. What does God say, "Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body." (1 Cor. 6:19-20 NLT) One way to honor God day in and day out is to run away from sexual sin as quickly as possible and as often as necessary.

William Willimon is a retired Methodist bishop. He wrote about something interesting that happened in a class he taught at seminary. The students were sharing case studies about pastors and discussing them. In one case study, a woman asked her pastor, "What does the Methodist Church believe about premarital sex?" The pastor asked, "What do you think about premarital sex?" The woman said, "I know pastors don't approve of it." "Some pastors. Older pastors," observed her pastor. "But isn't the Bible against people just living together?" the woman asked. Her pastor responded, "The Bible is a culturally conditioned book that must be read with interpretative sophistication. The main thing is to be sure you're open, trusting, loving, and caring."

Willimon asked his students what they thought about this episode. One young man in his class – barefoot, wearing a tank top and blue jeans - was the first to speak. His words were the opposite of what Willimon expected from his appearance. "This is a bunch of garbage. It's lousy counseling and even worse pastoring. I've lived through

three or four of these so-called relationships. I'm here to tell you there's no way for them to be open, trusting, loving, and caring. No way in hell without a promise. I hurt some good people in order to find that out. I wish the church had told me. I might have still learned the hard way. But I wish the church had told me."

Well, this church and this pastor just told you. More importantly, God's been telling human beings for the last 3,500 years. DO NOT ENTER. Not because God wants to deny you anything of value, but instead because He loves you and wants to preserve what's valuable. Not because God wants to rob you of pleasure, but instead because He wants to protect you from pain. Is there a cure for adultery? Indeed there is!

THE CURE FOR ADULTERY

First, make a commitment to God's standards. Choose to believe God – the creator of sex – knows what He's talking about and wants the best for you. Choose to believe God wants to protect you from something that has the potential to damage and destroy you. A few years ago, the Family Research Council found the people most likely to report a high degree of satisfaction with their current sex life were married people who also strongly believe sex outside of marriage is unacceptable and wrong. 72% of them reported sexual satisfaction – a percentage 31% higher than single folk who saw little wrong with sex outside of marriage and even 13% higher than married people who also saw little wrong with sex outside of marriage. The study went on to show that sexually happy people also tend to attend church! Who knew? Two-thirds of the people surveyed who attended church weekly were very satisfied with their sex lives compared to barely half of those who never attended church. So there you go! God is not trying to keep you from having sex. He's trying to preserve and keep sex for you.

Second, maintain your marriage's health and well-being. Determine you'll meet each other's needs, resolve every conflict, and try to fulfill every reasonable expectation for each other. I think we all know men and women are different. Many Christian couples have been helped by the insights of Emerson and Sarah Eggerichs who teach that while both men and women need love and respect, women tilt toward love and men toward respect. Protecting your marriage means both husband and wife getting serious about becoming a full time student of your spouse's legitimate needs and determining you will meet those needs to the best of your ability. Christopher Columbus made one great mistake. (Now for something completely different!) He landed the most profitable sales call in history. He discovered the new world. But he forgot to service the account. Competition will court your customers. In Columbus' case, the competition was Amerigo Vespucci. He started servicing the account. The result? We didn't become the United States of Columbus. We became the United States of America. All because Columbus didn't service the account. That can be a real factor in the decline of a marriage. Yeah, you did an unbelievably great sales job during the courting phase, but then after a while you stop courting your spouse. Then you hear about the "other man" or the "other woman." What happened? You forgot to service the account. Someone asked, "When should you tell your wife you love her?" A wise man answered, "Before someone else does!" Maintain your marriage. Service the account.

Third, manage your mind. Jesus said adultery begins in your brain not your genitals. “You have heard the commandment that says, “You must not commit adultery.” But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Mt. 5:27-28 NLT) I know very well what that means for men. There are movies we can’t watch, magazines and books we can’t read, and websites we dare not click on. Even random channel surfing can be dangerous! But whether you’re male or female, the pattern to avoid is very clear. Step one toward adultery is accepting and dwelling on sinful thoughts. Step two is emotional, but still non-physical involvement with another person. You’re trying to get your emotional needs met by someone other than your spouse. It’s the devil’s trap. Step three is physical involvement. Step four is rationalization. You call it an affair rather than adultery. You call it a meaningful relationship rather than unfaithfulness. You call beautiful what God calls ugly.

Four, minimize the opportunity to sin. The best offense is a good defense. Take preventative measures. If you think you could never commit adultery, you’re in the greatest danger of all. Given the right set of circumstances, every one of us will break all ten of God’s Big Ten. There are some people and some situations you need to run away from fast. Don’t kid yourself into thinking you’re mature enough, spiritual enough, or sophisticated enough to handle the pressure. What does the Bible say again? “Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.” (1 Cor. 6:18 NLT) Too many times people linger on the doorstep of sexual temptation. It’s like the two cartoon characters, Frank and Ernest, who had just attended church. Frank said to Ernest, “I’m willing to flee temptation, if I can leave a forwarding address.” Some very simple advice: don’t listen to a member of the opposite sex tell you about his or her marriage problems; don’t fish for compliments; if you’re married, don’t flirt (if you are married, flirt with your spouse often); avoid a prolonged stare and a lingering touch. Hear again God’s very clear expectation in this area of life: “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality... because these are improper for God’s holy people.” (Eph. 5:3 NIV)

Let me mention a final cure for adultery. Make your way to the cross if you sin. Meaning what? May I say something directly and lovingly to anyone here today who has committed adultery or who is involved in an immoral relationship this morning. You likely carry around a very heavy burden of guilt and condemnation. The same is true for sexually active single people, gay people, as well as anyone using pornography. Jesus can forgive any and every sin including sexual sin. Even adultery. That’s one reason He died on the cross and rose again. But to receive His forgiveness, you need to make your way to the cross. How do you do that? First, confess your sin and ask for God’s forgiveness. Don’t rationalize, excuse, or minimize it. One day you will stand before the God of the Universe and give an account of your life. Whatever justification you pour over your sin today will sound hopelessly pathetic and useless then. Second, end any immoral relationship immediately. Make it surgical. Cut that person out of your life. No, you can’t go back to being friends. No, you can’t have any contact whatsoever. Don’t respond to any text, email, or phone call. If you have to change jobs, do it. If you have to move to a new neighborhood, do it. If you have to change churches, do it.

Third, if you've done the first two, don't let the devil condemn you for what God has forgiven you. If you're a repentant adulterer, this church is for you! If you want to forsake a life of sexual sin, KRBC is for you! We're just a bunch of forgiven sinners saved by grace, too. There are no perfect people at KRBC and we've got no room for self-righteousness. You will need help to get your act together, live into the forgiveness God has given you, and break the power of temptation in your life. We all do! This is the place to be because we're all working on it together. On the one hand, we're not going to pretend we've achieved some awesome level of holiness. On the other hand, we want to hold each other accountable to God's standards. We believe God wants the best for us and we're going to help each other discover God's very best.

Years ago now, I gave a message like this one at another church. A woman called me the following week. She had not been at Sunday's service, but she wanted to discuss my message. She came to see me. She was having an adulterous relationship with a man in the church I served. God used what I said that day – very much like what I said today – to convince him to end their relationship. She very much wanted to continue the relationship. I said to her, "My friend, God can never honor or bless this relationship. It already has within it the seeds of its own destruction." To this day, I still don't know who she was involved with. I'm just glad he moved toward repentance.

One of my favorite preachers was Ben Haden, long time pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He passed away five years ago. On one occasion, he was invited to give a message at the dedication of a new church building for another congregation. Guess what Bible passage he choose for that great occasion? "Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10 NLT) What? The pastor of the church being dedicated thought to himself, "Ben, what on earth are you doing? You're supposed to be helping us celebrate the opening of a new building!" But then Haden read the next verse and his reason became crystal clear, "Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11 NLT)

What kind of people gather here each and every Sunday? Forgiven sinners saved by grace. If our church stays the same size or grows to a 1,000 attenders one day, what kind of people will be here then? Forgiven sinners saved by grace. What kind of people will stand before the throne of God in Heaven one day? Only forgiven sinners saved by grace. God's grace. Receive it. You need it desperately and so do I. And then, be sure to offer it to other sinners who make their way to the cross of Jesus.