

THE SIN OF ADULTERY

September 21, 1958

Scripture: Exodus XX

"Thou shalt not commit adultery." This is the prohibition which God gave to Moses called the Ten Commandments. They were not given as mild suggestions nor as general guides but as direct, imperative commands.

God knew the potential waywardness of His own creation. He knew that all of us are both spirit and flesh. When flesh predominates man reverts to an animal status and becomes estranged to his Creator. Today we look at this sin of adultery: its magnitude, its subtle meaning, and the frightful toll that it takes in health, domestic happiness and personal bankruptcy.

DEFINITION OF ADULTERY

By definition adultery is the dictatorship of the body — a dictatorship wherein basal senses call the plays of existence. Reason and chastity may be only incidental when life is ever at the beck and call of passions. Were there nothing else to gain than the fact that one can prove to himself or herself that life is capable of being lived on a higher plane than the senses, such would be reason enough.

In the case of a married person adultery is the breaking of a mutual trust. Those familiar vows seem far distant to millions who are guilty of having broken this commandment — vows that remind, "and forsaking all others cleave only unto thee . . . and the two shall become one flesh." When life degenerates to a status where in one's vow pledged in the presence of God's called servant means little more than the recitation of a ritual, then the holy wares of life fall into disrepute.

Adultery is murder to the family status. Not the individual but the family is the basic unit of civilization. One cannot stand alone and perpetuate the human race. It is not the twigs, nor branches, nor leaves but the trunk and roots of the tree that give life to the twigs and branches. Just so the family to society. Whatever strictures and disciplines needed to preserve the family

unit we must be prepared to pay them. God wasn't exercising the folly of dictatorship when He said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery"; He was forewarning of a destructive doom if we do commit it.

REASONS FOR ADULTERY

The magnitude of this sin known as the oldest profession is hard to exaggerate. One small facet of its size is seen in the fact that last year over one million children were born out of wedlock in our country alone. Why the ever-increasing dimension? Why the growing laxitude and fearlessness of this commandment? The death of taboos explains much of the forward activity. Once society imposed a restraining set of taboos and "don't" on the human race as safeguards against society's disintegration.

Today in the main, taboos are dead. Who fears the judgments of God as restraining forces from the wrong conduct? Certainly no sizeable majority! For instance, when have you heard a sermon on the sin of adultery? Religion is far too silent on the issue as though so private a domain were not the province of "thus saith the Lord."

The emotional excitation so characteristic of our day accounts for the monotonous emphases on sex. Seeking release from the mounting tensions of our type of living, millions feel little restraint in frequenting the haunts of sexual looseness. Under the typhonic pressures of tension that mounts in proportion to one's paganism the bars are lowered and restraint abandoned.

IGNORANCE

Moreover, a delusion of ignorance comes in for its share of the guilt in this sin. All types of personal obsessions, superstitions, conjuring — account for the helter-skelter thinking on the subject. Some are honestly convinced that theirs is an abnormal endowment of sexual capacities, appetites, etc., hence the biological need for illicit relations. Man's kinship to animals becomes a curious observation when this type of rationalizing continues.

Then there is fear — simply being afraid to love, to let go, to let God — afraid of being married and assuming responsibility. Instead, many prefer the free lance type of existence and subsequent adultery. Many an unholy caress has become an unpalatable substitute for the respectable embrace of a life's partner . . . and that to the unknowing ignorance of the parties involved!

Then I must be honest to admit that much adultery is the result of sorriiness on the part of one or both of the life partners. By sorriiness I mean the lowering of personal respect, a careless decor, an unsanitary demeanor, poor dress, unconcern over one's appearance and all the many things that causes the love partner in marriage to drift away in his attention and affection.

This in no sense justifies the drifting; I am prone to believe that it explains much of it. There is a stewardship to one's body so far as keeping it clean, attractive, healthy and holy as much as there is a stewardship of the mind or one's money. "Know ye not that the body is the temple of the soul?" Temple . . . not a hovel or an unsightly, obese tabernacle . . . a temple.

FUNCTIONAL ADULTERY

There is another kind of adultery that is seldom spoken of . . . functional adultery wherein a person may never touch another, yet, at the same time be guilty of having broken this commandment. Jesus said that if a person looks on another and lusteth after that person that he is guilty of adultery. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he."

These passages mean that one can so focus his imagination and the deep-seated desires on another in the relationship of sex that the same thing is involved from an intentional standpoint as though the act was actually committed. Fear of consequences, loss of face, fear of the law, etc. . . . if these be the only restrainers, then society is loosely knit. There must be an inner compulsion to do right. Without such all the laws in the world cannot assure fidelity and purity.

Much of the emotional drain, the feverish distraction of personality is traceable to functional adultery — an activity by which double standards are encouraged. One for the world of actual reality . . . the other for the domain of one's imagination where vicarious experiences haunt the existence night and day.

SPIRITUAL ADULTERY

But by far the most involved aspect of this commandment is in spiritual adultery where life is prostituted on other gods to the exclusion and grief of the only God. Naturally when such happens man is divorced from the source of all pure love. Under these conditions a word must be said about adultery between two married people though no other person is involved.

When love is allowed to die between two people who are married, when the fire of real affection has gone out and nothing but the ashes and cinders of a legal document remains, then sex in that context is adultery since it is but the one stop on the organ of marital connection apart from the honest warmth of genuine love. Sex without affection is adultery . . . even in the case of those who are married. Little wonder then that the Bible exhorts us to grow in the stewardship of affection.

I must add one other practical word about this commandment. What about forgiveness when one breaks this commandment? When the person you love most stoops to the adulterous relationship with another — what must be your attitude as a Christian? Get a divorce? I think your role is what it always is for a Christian when another falls into sin: forgiveness and reconciliation. But this is not easy . . . as a matter of fact it is one of the hardest things to do. One's pride, his sense of values, his convictions . . . all come into clear focus at such a time and makes it difficult for many to ever have a forgiving attitude.

Yet, without forgiveness we are not of Jesus. Say whatever you will, the church of Jesus Christ is in the forgiving kind of business. "Bear ye one another's burdens" is still a part of the Bible and what burden

needs shouldering any more readily than the burden of guilt?

One of these days we shall all stand before the disarming presence of the Almighty. Then and there all our guilt will be revealed. Jesus made it clear that the sin of unforgiveness will stand out like a sore thumb in the face of God.

General Oglethorpe said to John Wesley one day down in Savannah when confronted by an obstinate, unforgiving attitude, "I do not forgive." Then Wesley said to General Oglethorpe, "Then general if you do not forgive, I hope that you never sin."

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

THE SUNNY SIDE OF LIFE

September 28, 1958

Friends, as I come to this last broadcast in my series of sermons, let me take this opportunity to convey the freight of sentiment in my heart. Over a period of nearly four years it has been my privilege to be the speaker on The Baptist Hour.

During these years I have tried to present one basic truth: the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. Many of you have heard all these sermons. Some of the messages were designed to encourage those who were in the slough of despair; others to rebuke when some were content to live indifferently to spiritual things. Still other sermons probed the mysteries of a good God and an evil world, while others came as teaching guides for the day-by-day chores of routine living.

Another series dealt with what it means to be a Christian with the hope of inspiring many to mature Christian faith. The Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Majestic Psalms, Every-day religion. Faith that Matters—these and other sermons have been aired to multi-millions during this time.

WRITTEN EXPRESSIONS

You may be interested in knowing that no financial funds are ever solicited on this program nor does the Baptist Hour speaker receive one cent of pay. Your response has been more than ample remuneration.

Among the written expressions have come letters from a patient in an iron lung suffering from poliomyelitis; . . . from an owner of a rubber plantation in Malaya converted to Christianity while listening

to the sermon on "What it Means to be Lost."

From a leper colony on a tiny island in the Pacific came a letter from an elderly man who said that he held the Bible on the nubs of his wrists and blew the leaves to turn them but found the Bible so appealing that even leprosy could not rob him of his faith in God's healing powers.

PREVENTED FROM SUICIDE

An American college student says that his plans to commit suicide were foiled as he accidentally heard The Baptist Hour sermon, "When Life Gets You Down."

Far down in Mexico a rancher writes that each Sunday afternoon he rounds up the cowboys and, there amidst the shelter provided for the cattle, thirty-eight cowboys sit in a circle as they intently listen to God's Word as proclaimed over this radio broadcast.

"I surrendered my life to the call of God and to the Christian ministry because as you spoke of giving all the keys to God, I heard His voice then and there," wrote a young Greek student in an eastern university.

BEGAN TITHING

"For the first time in our lives, my wife, my two sons and I know the joy of tithing our modest farm income. We heard the message on shooting straight with God and it convinced us all that we had been dishonest with our money so far as God and His church are concerned . . . from here on out we'll prove that the nine-