

Indecent Proposal
The Seventh Commandment
Exodus 20:1-17

In 1631 the British Corporation of Barker and Lucas produced a handsomely bound edition of scripture with hundreds of pages of impeccable print. At the inclusion of the Seventh of the Ten Commandment, they inadvertently omitted the word "not" from the seventh commandment, so that it read "Thou shalt commit adultery." The printers were so heavily fined for their carelessness that the mistake put them out of business. This famous edition has forever been tagged The Wicked Bible, or The Adulterous Bible.

Adultery is a terrible thing to be famous for, whether it be a President or the Royal Family or Frank Gifford or Gospel singer Sandi Patti. Families and spouses hardly laugh at the reality of adultery which hurts so many because of a few fleeting moments of pleasure.

We know from scripture that David's affair with Bathsheba was not the high point of his life and leadership. And we should take no comfort in the fact that adultery is so commonplace in our society.

It is my hope and prayer that this message this morning will be both challenging and convicting while at the same time comforting and conciliatory. Because unless you're like Rip Van Winkle who slept through a revolution, you're aware that there is moral confusion in our nation about sexual behavior and standards. It's a different world than before, but not necessarily a better world.

Dr. William Barclay said this in his landmark book on the Ten Commandments: "The moral problems which face our own generation are far from new. The fact that they are not new does not make them any less serious. It reminds us that Christianity is not facing anything which it was not called upon to face before. Our problems are neither new nor unique but have been part of the human dilemma produced by human sin the church has always had to face."

Adultery and the moral confusion that swirls around it has mass-produced broken families, illegitimate children, AIDS, STD's at almost epidemic levels, and the list goes on. Adultery often seems to be handsomely bound in an attractive package, but it's a tempting package with a deadly virus to all human relationships.

Human sexuality is a gift from God, and God is not against human sexuality. After all, God created sexuality and intends it to be for procreation and pleasure. Perhaps the greatest contribution that our Judeo-Christian thought has given to the world is a proper understanding of the body.

Many cultures have taught that the body was evil. That the body had no real purpose. They believed that the soul was imprisoned in the body, therefore they could do to the body anything and everything. It made no difference since the body was worthless.

In the New Testament we are taught that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16) and that we are to present our bodies as part of our spiritual worship (Romans 12:1-2). The fact that our creator God created us with a sexual dimension means there is a spiritual dimension to sex.

And if you cancel out this spiritual dimension, you lower sex to a level devoid of beauty, integrity and importance. Animal instincts are great for animals but lousy for human beings.

I choose the title of this sermon from the title of a movie starring Robert Redford, Woody Harrelson, and Demi Moore. In the movie Redford offers Harrelson a million dollars to spend the night with his wife. The couple talk about it and agree to the proposal. They rationalize that it's only one night, she can keep to herself if she like, and even if she is tempted by Redford's character, it's only sex and only one night.

But here's the thing: are we to live by principles or by price? You see, there's no difference between low-priced sin or high-priced sin. The result is the same. You cannot be a little sinful any more than you can be a little pregnant.

There's an old saying that goes like this "Never take down a fence until you know why the fence was put up in the first place." A fence is needed many times to provide a proper boundary. There are good reasons not to light a match at the gas pump. There are better reasons not to commit adultery. God gives us boundaries to protect us--not to destroy us.

God designed human sexuality to be expressed in a trusting, committed relationship called marriage. Outside of marriage it's simply two people using each other. It might be sex, it might be fun, it might feel good, but it's not love. And it's a misuse of our human sexuality that cancels the purpose and essence for which God intended it.

People who travel across our country are awed by the power and beauty of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Both powerful bodies of water and the economic lifeblood of many states.

But both rivers have banks to control the water so it doesn't spill over and cause damage and destruction. Dams and levees have been built to control the raw power of the rivers. In 2019 the Midwestern part of the United States experienced enormous destruction when the banks could not contain the water and the dams broke.

The same thing happens when we don't harness our God-given sexuality and allow it to be controlled by principles other than those established by God. The word "adulteration" means the mixing of a base substance with a pure substance.

It really goes to the heart of the First and Second Commandments in which we are to worship God and God alone. We cannot mix a little devotion with idolatry and expect the Real Thing. The same principle works in the spiritual realm that applies to the physical realm.

We need to restrain and redeem our heart and speech if our behavior is to be proper and pure. C. S. Lewis wrote years ago that if our culture and moral climate continued in the direction it was going, that "true Christian character and conduct would shine out like a great light in the midst of a dark and perverse generation."

So, our final lesson today is Good News for those who have not fully lived out this teaching, who have found love in all the wrong places. **No man or woman needs to stay the way they are.** Jesus offers his hand and extends to us, not an Indecent Proposal, but a gracious invitation to come to him and allow his amazing grace to make us a new creation in Christ.

Jesus taught that human behavior isn't changed by throwing rocks at a person but by allowing the person to experience the transforming power of the one who is the Rock of Ages. And I John 1:9 teaches us that "{When} we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

So, when temptation knocks at the door of your heart and the one knocking invites you to do something that you know is morally wrong, let Jesus answer the door. That's the key to the seventh commandment and all of life. That's the fence that will hold strong in every generation. Amen.