

BEING FAITHFUL IN MARRIGE

Exodus 20:14

Good morning! How was your week? We're continuing our series on the Ten Commandments, "Living a Fulfilled Life". And we're talking here about obeying these commandments to live a fulfilling life. Not to be saved but because we are saved. No amount of good works can save us, Amen? But because we are saved already by the finished work of Jesus on the cross then we can live the abundant life he promised in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." This abundant life doesn't come with an abundance of health and wealth, thought that'll be nice and God could give us those things, but it comes with an abundance of peace and joy in our lives despite our circumstances.

And so, we come to the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery". I've entitled this message, "Being Faithful in Marriage".

Friends, you know what will give you peace and joy in your marriage? Being faithful to your mate. Just think of the devastating effects of adultery. It will affect not only you, but people around you. Your family, your children. You will hurt the very people who are close to you. You will also hurt the other person's family especially if that other person has a family of his or her own, too. Then you also hurt your reputation, your standing in the community, or whatever organization you're involved in. You could lose your job.

This message then is for all married couples, right? Wrong. Because as you'll see later, it could apply to anyone, married or not, old and young alike. Except for little children. This will be hard for them to comprehend.

Like a story I read about a Sunday school class of first graders who were learning the Ten Commandments, and they got to, "You shall not commit adultery."

Of course, the teacher was worried he would have to explain what adultery meant. He was going to skip it but then a little girl raised her hand and asked, "What does 'commit' mean?"

This commandment is similar to the sixth commandment which I talked about last week. It's similar in the sense that Jesus took it a level higher. We learned from Jesus that "You shall not murder" refers not only to physical murder but to mental or emotional murder. Because hating someone is like killing someone. Anger is like murder if it is not properly handled. BTW, in the same Sunday school that I mentioned earlier, the teacher was giving a lesson on the commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." The teacher asked, "Now does anyone know a commandment for brothers and sisters?" A sharp little girl raised her hand and said, "You shall not kill."

Anyway, so Jesus took the seventh commandment to a higher level as well. He says, "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart". (Matthew 5:17) Adultery is a serious matter, a grave sin. God hates it just like he hates murder. In the Old Testament, in fact, the punishment for adultery is death. If you remember, when Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant with the baby Jesus, he thought that Mary was unfaithful to him but rather than subject her to humiliation and death, he kept silent about it and planned to just divorce her because he loved her.

Jesus made it clear that adultery is not just a physical act. It goes deeper than that. Adultery springs from the heart. At its very root is lust. Let me repeat that, at its very root is lust. Jesus' whole point is that it is quite possible to commit adultery in the heart without ever physically touching anyone.

In other words, you may outwardly remain faithful to your spouse while inwardly lusting after someone else.

That inward lusting—though it remains hidden for years—is “adultery in the heart” and is a way of breaking the Seventh Commandment—quietly, silently, repeatedly.

So what are we talking about here? Lust is the irresponsible pursuit of sexual enjoyment. Like all other sins, lust begins on the inside and eventually works its way out. It’s a problem of the heart ... a very powerful problem ... a very real problem.

We must protect our heart if we want to have a lasting marriage.

Prov. 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

This morning, I’d like to give you pointers on how to battle this sin of lust so that you can remain faithful to your spouse. These are 4 practical things you can commit to in order to protect your heart and your marriage.

1. I must avoid lust-producing situations.

In the world we live in today, it’s just so hard to do this. It’s everywhere. It has invaded our homes. Even our personal space. It’s right there on the gadgets we use every day. It’s so easy to see it and hear it, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It takes a lot of will, a lot of discipline, and a lot of prayer to avoid lust-producing situations.

That means there are some TV shows or YouTube videos I must not watch. There are some radio stations or podcasts I must not listen to. In my entertainment, I must not go to places where the only purpose is to excite me sexually. There are some books I simply should not read. It matters not if everyone else is reading those books. If that book produces lust in my life, I must not read it.

The psalmist says in Psalm 101:3 (NLT), “I will refuse to look at anything vile and vulgar.”

If you have any apps on your phone that show suggestive ads, remove that app. When a TV commercial features scantily-clad women who can make you lust, change the channel.

You may want to do what Job did. He said, **“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.” (Job 31:1).** It means the moment you see sexually explicit images, look away and remember that covenant you have with your eyes.

Now, aside from that, in my daily life, I must be conscious of my own conversations. I must be aware of where I am and what I am doing and to whom I am speaking. To be more specific, there are some relationships that will do me no good. There are some smiles I simply must not return. There are times when I must choose to appear unfriendly—not because I dislike a person but because I know I am beginning to cross the line.

For our young people, this means there are some parties you should not attend, some dates you should not accept, some music you should choose not to listen to, some movies that you should not watch.

2. I must avoid provoking lust in other people.

This is a very sensitive area. Sometimes we Christians act as if freedom in Christ means we no longer need to worry about how other people think or feel.

Let me be blunt about this: There are some sisters who don't help the brothers by the way they dress. Some Christian women seem to delight in dressing as seductively as possible—and then acting surprised when someone has a problem with it.

This goes for our brothers, too, who don't help the sisters by the way they dress. In our visually-oriented society, it's so easy to mislead by the way we wear our clothes or by the way we carry ourselves. Sometimes we send out mixed messages about our intentions.

Paul was acutely aware of this situation, and he sought to address it when he says in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, “I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety.”

Now, I know if we dress this way or that way that it is not our intention to offend the sensibilities of others. And certainly, we shouldn’t even think of what others are thinking. They must just have impure minds! Yet, we must be guided by the words of Paul, “I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.” (1 Cor. 10:23-24)

This certainly touches the way we dress. It also covers our language and our casual physical contact. It includes our facial language—the smile, the glance, the wink, the knowing look.

C. I must choose purity.

You know, there’s a battle brewing and that battle occurs in the mind. As Christians, we face this battle every day. The enemy bombards our minds with everything the world offers in order to tempt us to commit sexual sin. That is why the apostle Paul urges us to fight temptations when he says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” (Romans 12:2) Folks, the battle for sexual purity is won or lost in your mind.

You see, any time you see people really messing up their lives, you can bet their problems didn’t start with their actions, because their actions began with their thoughts. They lingered on dumb thoughts before making dumb decisions. The Bible says this very clearly — and science backs it up: The way you think determines how you feel. Feelings motivate actions. To change your life, you don’t just work on a bad habit, the action. Instead, you work on what caused it — the thoughts that caused the feelings that caused the action. God says your thoughts control your life.

This explains how affairs happen.

First, you begin by accepting sinful thoughts into your mind. “What would it be like to be intimate with that person? Why is it wrong when it feels so right?” You start having doubts, and you start fantasizing in your mind. You begin to think it’s harmless.

But it’s not. Your thoughts produce feelings. And feelings inevitably lead to actions. You then move into emotional, non-physical involvement. That’s when you start flirting. You start making gestures and comments, subtly or not-so-subtly saying, “I’m available.” Next comes the physical involvement. And finally, you rationalize your actions: “Everybody is doing it. It’s no big deal. We’re both adults.” Your sinful actions started when you accepted sinful thoughts into your mind.

The Bible tells us in 2 Timothy 2:22 how to manage our thoughts before they ever head down this path: “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

The Bible tells us to turn away from lustful thoughts and turn instead toward something positive. That two-step process is how you break a temptation before it ever gets started. You’re thinking wrong long before you’re acting wrong. You stop the cycle by turning your back on those sinful thoughts and turning toward goodness, integrity, love, and peace.

You’re not an innocent bystander to sexual sin. You have a choice.

D. I must be transparent about my personal struggles.

This is a very important point which is often neglected. You see, lust is such a tricky matter that you will never win the victory on your own. Let me say that again: You will never win the victory over lust simply by praying by yourself. God never intended you to fight this battle alone!

Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.” And someone said, “Don’t be shy about asking for help. It doesn’t mean you’re weak, it only means you’re wise.”

God gave you brothers and sisters so you could come clean about your struggles. Please note: I’m not recommending that you share your struggles with everyone. That’s foolish and dangerous. By the same token, I don’t think you should struggle alone. And by no means reveal your struggle to the opposite sex unless it’s your spouse. Or you will find yourself in bigger trouble than you expect.

Find a friend or a small group of friends and ask them to hold you accountable. Tell them you want them to ask you hard questions. Tell them not to let you off easily. Ask them to be tough enough so that you can’t get by with sin.

Years ago, when I was single, I’ve done that. In fact, I’ve got an accountability partner, another pastor, who I met weekly, and we asked each other some very hard questions. We would start with “Did you read your Bible daily? Did you have your devotions daily? Did you watch a movie that was Rated-R? Did you visit an x-rated site? And so on and so forth and the last question was, “Did you answer all the questions truthfully?” That last question surely helped to keep us on the straight and narrow.

The worst thing about lust is that it makes you live in the shadows. You hide your sin either because you are ashamed to admit the truth or you’re afraid to be looked down upon. But when you dare to come clean with some trusted friends, suddenly the light streams in and the sun begins to shine again.

E. I must let love, not lust, rule my life.

When I marry two people, and according to the Bible, they should be a man and a woman, I usually end with the words, “It is often said, marry the person you love. But I say, love the person you marry.”

Then, I don't elaborate because the audience get it, right? Besides I've already spoken for 20 minutes, and the bride and groom and everybody else are eagerly waiting for me to pronounce them husband and wife.

So, let me be quick here as well. What I'm trying to point out is that the antidote to the sin of lust is real love. It is love that isn't affected by circumstances but remains steady and unbending in the unpredictable events of a married life. As I've often said, love is not a feeling. It is an action. Feeling comes after the action. If you act romantic, you will begin to feel romantic. Not vice versa. You act your way into a feeling. It's easier to act your way into a feeling than it is to feel your way into an action.

There are 5 things to keep the fire in your marriage burning. So, very quickly.

1. Attention

Philippians 2:3-4 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

The very first sign you knew you were falling in love is when you noticed that somebody was paying attention to you, and you began to pay attention to that somebody. The first step in being in love is to start paying attention again. Do you remember how much attention you paid your mate before you were married? You wrote notes. You made phone calls. You spent hours talking together. You sent cards. You bought flowers. You brought gifts. Over and over. All of these things were saying, "You have my total undivided attention."

2. Affirmation

The quickest way for you to put spark back into your marriage is for you to start affirming and appreciating and admiring again the strength of your spouse instead of focusing on their weaknesses.

I Thessalonians 5:11 “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up.” Everybody wants to be admired, appreciated, looked up to. We fall in love with people who admire us. That's how you fell in love: somebody paid you attention and affirmed you and you fell in love with that person.

Somebody said, "Treat your husband like a king and he will treat you like a queen." Simple but profound. We tend to become what others expect of us.

3. Affection

You know how affectionate you were during your courting days. In fact, you can always tell who the unmarried couples are. They can't keep their hands off each other. You see a couple walking hand in hand do you assume they're married or dating? I think it's sad that after the marriage, after the wedding, the touching and tenderness stops in so many marriages. All marriages need large amounts of hugging and kissing and caressing and sitting close together in the car, holding hands, patting each other, snuggling. Non-sexual affection is what I'm talking about here where you just enjoy each other's company.

Colossians 3:19 (AMPC) “Husbands, love your wives [be affectionate and sympathetic with them].” It is a commandment. Husbands, you must be affectionate to your wife. If you're not, you're sinning.

4. Adventure

Most marriages are dull. Eccl. 9:9 "Enjoy life with your wife." I Timothy 6:17 "God...richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." A study said that the number one cause of affairs is boredom. Are you fun to live with? Or are you a bump on a log? When was the last time you did something just for the fun of it? Something unusual to break the monotony? Something crazy just for the fun of it with your husband or wife?

Perhaps, you need to date your mate again. You can date anytime. It doesn't have to be at night. It doesn't have to be expensive. But do something together.

One rule: no kids. You've got to do it alone. Something that's mutually fun and enjoyable.

5. Accordance

The Bible says at Pentecost, "they were all with one accord." (Acts 2:1 KJV) Meaning, the disciples' hearts and their spirits were knit together. I John 1:7 " But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."

These two verses are principles we can apply in a marriage relationship. The husband and wife must be in one accord and must be in fellowship with one another while they walk in the light of Christ. When I'm committed to Christ and my wife is committed to Christ, and we're both trying to live for the Lord, it naturally draws us together in a bonding that nothing else can take the place of. Spiritual harmony, spiritual oneness, brings about emotional oneness which brings about physical oneness. It joins you together. Spiritual unity enhances romance. I remember the story of a guy who ended up proposing to his girlfriend while they were praying together. Prayer joins you together. And then there is the natural desire to show physical affection, physical oneness when you are spiritually one.

Folks, lust or love? Which will it be? It's your choice. Like right now, I have Coke and Water. What is your choice?

Coke offers carbonated purified water, cane sugar, caramel coloring, food acids, flavor, and caffeine. Water offers me two hydrogen atoms to every oxygen atom. Coke offers me flavor, a caffeine rush, and a promise to quench my thirst. Water offers to quench my thirst but not in a taste-filled, get-pumped manner.

Coke packages it's product with colorful labels and contoured bottles, recognizable throughout the world. Water is packaged in a simple bottle.

Coke comes with a price. You can find water for free during Servant Evangelism. Coke is not recommended to be consumed to sustain life. Water can sustain life. Coke is not recommended to wash your body.

Water cleans a dirty body. There are times when the happiness that Coke promises is not available. Water lives up to its promise. You could not expect growth from a garden watered with Coke but you can with water. There will never be a day that Coke rains freely down on you but water will, and always does. You can get Vanilla Coke, Cherry Coke, and diet Coke. With water you get just plain ordinary pure water. And of course, just when you have settled for Coke, along comes Dr. Pepper.

Lust offers you a taste for what the world has to offer. Lust tells you that your spirit can be satisfied while you embrace the thrill it offers. Lust makes itself attractive and hard to resist. But lust comes with a price. It is short lived before a stronger desire pushes you into a deeper need. Lust leaves us filthy. It stops our spiritual growth. Until we reach a day that a particular lust no longer satisfies, and we chase after a different lust.

Following Jesus is not as taste filled as what the world offers. There are times when I am restricted in doing what others are doing by the call on my life. But following Jesus quenches the thirst in my soul for peace and rest. Christianity is not packaged in a glittery box. It is simple in its composition. Being a follower of Jesus cost nothing because He has already paid the price. He is the sustainer of life who cleanses us and is always present through the Holy Spirit. He is a river of living water that causes us to grow spiritually. He has promised to be the same yesterday, today, and forever.

But let me give you a warning. When you add just a little powdered flavoring to your bottle of water, it is no longer pure. Light and darkness cannot exist together. Neither can the Kingdom of God and any measure of lust. That is the message that God wants us to hear today.

Is it the world or Jesus?