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**September 7, 2008**  
[www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org](http://www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org)

**The Golden Thread of Trust**  
**Exodus 20:14**

Did you hear that Paul McCartney has been talking to Ringo Starr and the wife of the late George Harrison about starting a Beatles' memorabilia museum in, of all places, Branson, Missouri? I'd love for them to put the Fab Four's collectibles next to the Bible museum in Branson that contains a rare book, of which there are only eleven extant in the world. This book is known as "The Wicked Bible." Why? Because two royal printers, Robert Barker and Martin Lucas, while attempting to publish a reprint of the King James Bible, happened to make a couple of small proofreading mistakes. In their version of Deuteronomy 5:24, instead of translating the text, "The Lord hath showed us his glory and his greatness," Baker's and Lucas' version of the text read, "The Lord hath showed us his glory and his great arse." Hey, it could happen to anybody! But it was their other error that really got them into trouble. In their version of the Ten Commandments they happened to leave out one little word. In their version of the Seventh Commandment, the Wicked Bible reads, "Thou shalt commit adultery." Once the mistake was discovered, virtually all of the Bibles were recalled and burned. (And Barker and Lucas lost their jobs!) But one way or another, eleven copies of the Wicked Bible survived. One is in the New York City Public Library. Private collectors hold most of them. But the Bible museum in Branson, Missouri holds another.

A friend of mine once made a similar mistake. When he told his church that he felt called to ministry the pastor assigned him to work with the middle schoolers, feeling that if that assignment didn't dissuade him from answering God's call, probably nothing would. My friend was so enthusiastic that he persuaded his middle schoolers to create two huge papier-mache tablets and paint the Ten Commandments upon them. They convinced the pastor to let them present the tablets to the church during Sunday morning worship. On the appointed Sunday, my friend and his middle schoolers stood before the congregation, proudly unveiling the Ten Commandments, only to discover the important lesson that the divine as well as the devil is in the details. Twittering laughter ran through the congregation like an electric current. Yep, you guessed it: on the second tablet of my friend's version of the Ten Commandments were these bold words: "Thou shalt commit adultery." Even now, twenty years later, when he returns to his home church, some wag with a good memory is sure to sidle up to him to ask, "Do you still have a copy of those Ten Commandments? I'd like to borrow them."

I offer these two somewhat humorous stories as a way of posing a serious question: would you really want to live under an ethical code that commands, "Thou shalt commit adultery"? Would any of us really want to live under an injunction that commanded us to live an untrustworthy life? Would any of us really want to live a life in which we could not trust and could not be trusted in perhaps the most important relationship in our lives? Who would consciously regard such an existence as good? To me, one of the most extraordinary blessings in a relationship is to know that you can be completely vulnerable to your lover, and he or she can be completely vulnerable unto you. Over the course of a marriage, two people can spin a golden thread of trust so strong and so flexible

that it can stretch all the way around the world. You can be five thousand miles away and know that you can absolutely trust your lover and know that he or she can absolutely trust you.

To me one of the most wonderful blessings of marriage is to be able to say to one's spouse, 'I open myself to you completely, and you are free to open yourself to be in likewise manner.'

Who would want to undermine such a gift?

For two people to be able to spin mutually a wonderful golden thread of trust over the course of a lifetime is truly one of life's most satisfying pleasures.

So why would we want to undermine it?

I for one would not want to live in a world that commands us, "Thou shalt commit adultery."

It makes perfect sense to me that the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill," is followed by the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

The first forbids the taking of human life; the second prohibits the killing of the human heart.

And though we inextricably associate the sin of adultery with sex, we do well to heed the incisive observation offered us by the Old Testament scholar Edwin Poteat, who noted that the word for adultery in the Hebrew text, -- "naaph" -- originally had no reference to sex.

Originally, the word "naaph," was used in the same way we still use the verb "adulterate": to mix something impure into something pure.

The chemical engineers among us can testify that some compounds become worthless if someone carelessly alloys them with a substance that adulterates their integrity.

An unstable product results.

Originally, Poteat noted, the word for "adultery," was used with reference to the Hebrew people's practice of undermining the integrity of the true worship of God through idolatrous practices.

I'll come back to this point in just a moment but Poteat made another observation about which I've given considerable thought.

He said, "He was something of a genius who discovered that the birth of a baby was related to love play indulged nine months earlier . . ."

First, I would remind the old scholar that it surely wasn't a "he," who first figured out the connection between sex and babies, and "she" would have had no small number of severe hints along the way that helped her realize the link between the two.

But Poteat's observation raises an important point: *our sexuality is not to be seen in isolation from the rest of our being; rather, our sexuality is meant to be seen in the context of our entire being*. The Seventh Commandment is eminently practical.

It is practical, in the first place, because it recognizes the nexus between sexuality and procreation. Sex makes babies. That's not all it does, but that's certainly one of its functions.

The Seventh Commandment reminds us,

"Do not engage in sexuality activity unless you are willing to accept the procreative consequences of that action. Do not engage in sex unless you are willing to embrace the calling of family."

Now what I am saying should seem to be a basic truth,

but it is a basic truth our society seems to have forgotten.

The number of babies born into one-parent households in our country is shamefully astronomical.

I remember years ago Bill Moyers doing a documentary on a man who had fathered five children by five different women. Moyers asked him, "How does it feel to have had all those -- 'Women?' -- the man interrupted him. "No," said Moyers patiently, "children. How does it feel to have fathered all those children with whom you have no relationship?"

Here was a man who had divorced sexual pleasure

from its procreative possibilities and its procreative possibilities from its parental responsibilities.

The Seventh Commandment refuses to see sexuality in isolation.

The Seventh Commandment says to us ‘See your sexuality, your procreative possibilities, your parental responsibilities in context – they all are supposed to fit together in a righteous and harmonious world.’

The Seventh Commandment speaks directly to lovers.

The Seventh Commandment says to lovers, ‘Your sexuality is an expression of the totality of your marriage relationship. If the totality of your marriage is healthy, your sexuality will be healthy also.’

But if you allow your marriage relationship to become adulterated, if you allow the impure to alloy the pure, your sexuality will become affected, as will be the whole of your marriage.

Sexuality is not only an expression of biology; it is also an expression of theology.

Sexuality is an expression of love, and our marriages are meant to be characterized by love, and love roots in God, whose very character is love.

*The hard truth is, adultery the act is often not the cause of a marriage break-up.*

*Adultery the act is often the effect of a marriage break-up.*

Before adultery happens in a hotel room, it happens within somebody’s head.

Somebody has said unto his or her lover, “You are no longer special to me, and I am no longer special to you, so I am going to act in a destructive way.”

Now if these spouses actually paused before they acted and talked to each other, they might save their marriage. But usually they act first, then talk later, amidst the wreckage of a broken relationship.

Adultery the act roots in an adulterated heart.

Adultery the event begins in corrupted thought before it is evinced in corrupted acts.

Thus the Seventh Commandment says to us, “Cherish your lover. Embrace him! Embrace her!

Nurture each other with all of your being. Make each other feel special every day!”

If you will do these things, the temptation of adultery will never be a real temptation for you!

The Seventh Commandment is a call to lovers inviting us to cultivate a pure heart of love for each other, for if we truly make an effort to treasure each other, then our sexuality will be pure and uncorrupted as well.

The Seventh Commandment speaks directly to our relationship with God,

because before adultery breaks a vow unto one’s lover, it first breaks a vow unto God.

Before corruption adulterates our relationship with our lover,

corruption creeps into our relationship with the divine.

Before we break promises to another, we find ourselves being unfaithful to the God to whom we have made great promises.

Thus, we cannot be surprised to find ourselves straying from purity of action when we find ourselves straying from the purity of our faith.

The Seventh Commandment cuts to the nitty-gritty: if you cultivate a strong relationship with God, you are going to be less likely to vitiate the integrity of your vows unto other people.

Does that mean that if you have a healthy relationship with God that your marriage will always be perfect?

Absolutely not. I have known plenty of good and faithful people whose marriages simply didn’t work.

Adultery did not break up their marriage.

Their marriage relationship simply did not work.

Life and love are very complex, and there is no faith formula that is fool-proof in making them work.

But it is also true that often an impurity in our relationship with God results in impurity of action in our relationship with people. That is just a fundamental fact of existence.

I say to people all the time what I said last night to a couple gathered at this marriage altar:

*love is a heroic and difficult adventure.*

The promises you make to each other at a marriage altar are heroic, courageous promises.

I remember something Will Willimon, long-time dean of the chapel at Duke University once said. Dr. Willimon performed many a wedding for Duke students at the chapel, and he said he looked upon many a beautiful, intelligent couple. He would say to them, “Do you know why I speak to you of sickness as well as health, of failure as well as success, of poverty as well as riches? Because the whole of your marriage is not going to be like a beautiful day in June. It is going to be filled with plenty of sadness and pain.” The Spirit of the living God must nurture us if we are truly going to allow our love for our lover to grow. The Spirit of the living God must inform us and shape us and strengthen us if we are really determined to grow in our relationship every day. Fidelity is an accomplishment! Constancy of love is an achievement! A lasting love is an attainment of Olympic proportions. It is something that we must work on throughout the whole of our lives. It does not just happen. It is an achievement that is made possible only as God nurtures our ability to love.

If we break the golden thread of trust can it ever be reattached? Sure. With God, all things are possible. But I remember something G. K. Chesterton once said: if someone walks to the edge of a cliff and keeps walking, he will not break the law of gravity, he will prove it. Likewise, if we defy the Seventh Commandment, we do not really break it – we will only prove it. God is saying to us, “Your love, your sexuality, your relationships with each other and with the divine, are all related in a single context of holiness. And if you will spin a golden thread of trust throughout your lives with your lover, and if you will always treasure and guard that gift, you will reap one of the greatest blessings and delights you will ever know.”

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Eighth in a Series