

The Ten Commandments - 6

This is a series of talks in which I am examining the significance and meaning of each Commandment and am trying to show how and in what way each applies in our own lives. Behind all that has been said is the firm conviction that the Commandments are meant for all people for all time. They are the laws of a loving God who knows that, as we live according to them, we shall enjoy the happiness which He intended should be present in human living.

I have referred to and dismissed the various efforts over the years to rewrite and update them, because this is in no way necessary. The Commandments are as relevant today as they were yesterday and as they will be tomorrow. It is just as necessary today as it was in times gone past that God should say to us, "You shall not commit murder" or "You shall not commit adultery". Certainly times change but human nature basically remains the same. Every generation needs to be told of the necessity of rejecting the evils spoken of in the Commandments, if in any way spiritual and heavenly qualities are to be present with them. Speaking of heaven and of heavenly life, we read in Revelation Chapter 22, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city."

And this is what the Commandments are all about. By nature we incline to the various evils which have to be overcome and rejected. To the extent that we successfully do this, good is able to take its place. To the extent we reject feelings of anger and impatience with others, feelings of mercy and understanding are given a chance to develop in their place. As we reject covetousness, contentment has a chance to take its place. And as with the Commandment with which we are dealing here, if we reject adultery in all its various forms, the love of marriage and the true love of one's married partner is able to take a firmer hold and grow within us.

The point made is an important one and well worth thinking about. I picture the human mind as a somewhat small and crowded room. Crowded at the outset of our adult lives with impurity and insincerity, with covetousness and discontentment. And I know that only as I expel these things do I make room for their opposite qualities to take their place. I know that sincerity is a quality which can only develop within me as I shun insincerity. So too mercy and tolerance can only become part of my nature as I

reject feelings of anger and impatience. The love of what is chaste and pure can only develop and grow to the extent that I shun what is impure and adulterous. And so it is with us all.

Strictly speaking, adultery refers to a sexual relationship involving a married person. My Oxford Dictionary defines it as the "voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person with one of the opposite sex, other than his or her partner." But adultery also has its wider connotations not necessarily involving married people or strictly defining one particular relationship. In reality anything is adulterous which harms even the ideals and expectations a person has in regard to marriage or mars their future enjoyment of a marriage relationship. Thus it was given Swedenborg to write of this sixth Commandment that it means "not only committing adultery but also wanting to do and doing things that are obscene, and also having wanton thoughts and expressing them." (*True Christianity* 313) The fact of the matter is that all of these things do harm to a marriage and threaten our enjoyment of what is the most sacred of all human relationships. And such things are adulterous.

Looked at in the light of wider implications, it is clear that the Commandment does not only apply to adults and married couples. It is applicable to us all, even to children and to young people whose hopes can be shattered and whose ideals can so easily be polluted by the misrepresentation of marriage, by the snide jokes and suggestive literature which abounds in our community and is openly available on every bookstall.

To young people and adults, irrespective of whether one is married or not, the Commandment is there, "**You shall not commit adultery**". You shall not, in other words, do anything that would degrade the marriage relationship. You shall allow nothing to enter your mind which distorts what marriage is all about and do nothing, the burden of which you will have to carry in your marriage or at some future time if you do marry.

People complain at the seriousness of it all and argue that the harm is over stated. There are the vociferous advocates of premarital sex and no censorship. But these have no comprehension of the scars upon the mind which such experiences give rise to. The experiences are impressed upon our memories only to return, unwanted, to haunt what should otherwise be a pure and uplifting experience. They become woven into the fabric of our nature and become an irradicable part of us.

However the question arises as to how we can be protected against such things which would erode our ideals? How can parents best safeguard the interests and wellbeing of their children that their minds remain unsullied and their behaviour be kept wholesome? From where do we draw our strength to resist the allurements of the lewd novel and the appeal of the blue movie. For the fact is, these things do have an appeal to the unregenerate side of our nature and almost invariably stir us in some unclean way.

The answer lies in keeping always in front of us the ideals of marriage love. By reaffirming our belief in marriage as something divinely set apart. By remembering that in the marriage relationship, if we are prepared to work hard at it, there is possible the deepest happiness that we can ever know, both on earth and in heaven.

Part of our trouble lies in the fact that the marriage relationship is itself being questioned. People don't realise that it is an ever deepening relationship, involving essentially the marriage of two minds and that such a marriage when it comes into being survives death and goes on being perfected to all eternity. Instead marriage is looked upon only as an agreeable legal contract signifying commitment to one another, useful particularly in the case of children, but breakable at will.

And what a tragedy this is. For this is no defence against adultery. This kind of attitude won't protect a person against temptations when they come upon them. This isn't the kind of reasoning which gives one the strength to reject out of hand things that are unclean and impure.

One of Swedenborg's books "*Conjugal Love*" (alternative title is "*Love in Marriage*") has been described as a virtual exposition of the sixth Commandment concerning adultery. (Ohdner). It is truly one of the most amazing books which have ever been written for it was given to Swedenborg to describe and explain the nature of true marriage love. Though true love and the ideal marriage are rare, yet they are possible.

True marriage love is something which flows in from the Lord and is received by partners in a marriage to the degree that they look to Him and strive to live their lives according to the teaching He has given us. Marriage is essentially the marriage of two minds; two distinct minds which nevertheless complement each other and interact

with one another. As we have already indicated, a true marriage relationship grows and deepens over the years and the partners themselves become ever more closer. And this is not dream talk. This is the reality of the situation which has virtually been completely lost sight of. And it is these kinds of ideals and this kind of teaching which best protects us and our young people from the things which would otherwise intrude upon and spoil their future happiness.

I would mention one final point which arises here regarding adultery. Just as we can adulterate on the natural plane of life so too we can adulterate on the spiritual plane by defiling the truths of the Divine Word with our own false reasonings and thinking. A person adulterates at the spiritual level, even if it is only within himself, in his or her own mind, if they falsify a certain teaching the Lord has given us, and argues that it doesn't apply to them. They 'adulterate' the truth to make it seem different from what it actually says.

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