

The Seventh Commandment

by John W. Ritenbaugh

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In the previous article, we saw a small wedge of the statistical picture of how greatly the breaking of just one commandment—the sixth—impacts mankind. The conclusion is clear: Mankind must bear the weighty burden of the fruit of the major problems he brings upon himself. This article will reveal nothing statistically similar regarding the breaking of the seventh commandment, as there is absolutely no way that figures can be compiled showing how many times adultery is committed. This sin is done in secret and rarely creates major headlines.

However, the overall statistical picture is far worse because adultery touches only one aspect of this grave social sin. Within the spirit of the seventh commandment are numerous other sexual sins, such as pornography, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, as well as all the creepy, lecherous, psychologically destructive sexual attacks against weak and innocent children. Pedophilia is apparently far more common than we would like to believe.

The numbers of these sins added to adultery must be enormous beyond comprehension. Is there any way to compile figures telling how many divorces occur at least partly as a result of these sexual deviancies? We cannot delve into them deeply because, even with the common act of adultery, we have no way to number accurately how many of them produced the bitter fruit of divorce. We must be content with knowing that we are looking into a seething snake pit of evil deliberately promoted by the twisted mind of Satan.

State of Calamity

Year after year, at least in the United States, sex and marriage are discussed in public print with undiminished, God-ignoring confusion and increased pessimism. Calamity always attracts attention, and in the United States, marriage is in a state of calamity. This calamitous state is so consistent that it is now accepted as normal. Serious cultural observers are now saying that we may be witnessing the end of marriage as it has been practiced in Western cultures, that is, as the foundation of our societies.

The rush to "live together," the continuing march of feminism, and the push to legalize homosexual and lesbian unions are fueling these forecasts. In the late 1960s, the divorce rate was under 40%. By 1975, it had climbed to almost 50%, and in 1978, it was 51%. By 1988, it was back down to 49.5%, and it has held steady between 50 and 51% since then. However, San Mateo County in California had reached a 70% divorce rate by 1988. Nevada's divorce requirements are so liberal that its rate is typically much higher than the national average.

However, today's approximately 50% divorce rate is skewed by the fact that so many couples are simply living together without any legal transaction taking place, so no public records are made of when they move in together or when they split. Yet, so large is the number that 40% of all births in America are outside of wedlock!

It used to be that the average divorcing couple was married for 7 years before splitting, but that number has continued to fall to as low as 4 years.

We live in a time when we are bombarded with information claiming that sexual compatibility is the all-important factor in marriage. But, as general public knowledge of sex has increased, and as mobility and ever-increasing numbers of women comprise the work force, so have opportunities to be promiscuous and experiment with many partners. Moreover, so have the curses of broken homes and an unstable society increased. Sexual incompatibility is not the major cause. It does cause divorce, but it is only one facet of a far deeper and broader national sin that America shares with the Israelitish nations of northwestern Europe, Canada, and Australia. This national sin is shown many times in Scripture.

Israel's National Sin

Notice, as these verses unfold, a serious character flaw as compared to other nations.

Amos 1:3: Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron."

Amos 1:6: Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they took captive the whole captivity to deliver them up to Edom."

Amos 1:9: Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood."

Amos 1:11: Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever."

Amos 1:13: Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead, that they might enlarge their territory."

Amos 2:1: Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime."

Amos 2:4: Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandment. Their lies lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed."

Amos 2:6-7: Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name."

Notice first that the Gentile nations are guilty of the same basic sins—that of gross and vicious cruelties in warfare. In sharp contrast, God charges Judah with commandment-breaking, specifically

lying. Israel's sins largely involve national and personal deceitful faithlessness in social, economic, and cultural circumstances. This is not to say that other nations do not have some of these same characteristics or that Israelites have no vicious streak in them. However, Israelites have the Word of God and most especially God's commandments more generally available to them and thus have less excuse, so God holds them more accountable than any other people (Amos 3:2). To whom much is given much more is required (Luke 12:47-48). Israelites should know better.

The book of Hosea's dominant theme is Israel's faithlessness: "When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: 'Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and the children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord'" (Hosea 1:2). Hosea is especially creative in his use of metaphors to describe the relationship between Israel and God, but the two dominant ones are suggested in this verse. The primary one is Israel as a faithless wife, and the secondary one is Israel as a rebellious child (rebellious against God's law). Harlotry indicates sexual wantonness. If the person committing harlotry were married, it would suggest extreme faithlessness to his or her vows of marriage. In a spiritual covenant relationship with God, however, it indicates idolatry.

In tandem with the metaphors regarding Israel, the prophet uses two main family-relationship themes. In the first, God is shown as a faithful Husband, and in the second, as a loving and longsuffering Parent. In each case, Israel is faithless in carrying out responsibilities within the relationship, which God calls adultery and harlotry. God's judgment was occasioned by Israel departing from duties agreed to in a contract, the Covenant. Note Hosea 2:2-7:

Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry. For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, "I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink." Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now."

Israel is seen as faithless wife and irresponsible mother—so faithless that she chases after her lovers! A spirit of harlotry, an attitude of faithlessness, was created in the whole nation, causing many detrimental ramifications and results. In other words, the deceit and its resulting infidelity are not confined to the God/Israel covenant marriage but affects personal relationships within families and the community. It even has a negative effect on the keeping of contracts in business and upholding promises of quality workmanship.

The Fruit of Faithlessness

Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed." (Hosea 4:1-2)

Hosea mentions a few of these ramifications. The major truth lost is that regarding God's Word and its importance to family, community life, and Israel's relationship with Him. However, it extends beyond that: Soon, there is no reliable basis for business or its relationships; there are no solid, unwavering moral standards; in general, people are consistently untrustworthy in all aspects of life; and dependability in anything is hard to find.

"No mercy" is the next valuable quality lost. In this context, *mercy* has the connotation of "steadfast love," rather than a singular act of kindness. Thus, as a people we blow hot and cold. When we are hot, we are hot, but we cannot seem to sustain it because our eye begins to rove onto some new interest that excites us. Dissatisfaction is an ever-present reality, and impatience simmers right beneath the surface.

Hosea adds that there is "no . . . knowledge of God." This knowledge contains two elements. The first is the general knowledge about God, that is, of His existence, Word, and way. As important as that is, the second—the acknowledgement of God—is even more vital in terms of affecting relationships. This indicates commitment, a robust loyalty to a way of life in which He is the focus. Jesus says in John 17:3 that eternal life is to know God, and the context seems to demand this idea of acknowledging Him.

The apostle Paul confirms in Romans 10:2 that Israel had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. The Israelites had a general knowledge about God, but they did not seek Him nor know Him. At best, this suggests a very distant relationship.

The Hebrew word *zanah*, translated as "harlotry," is not the word used to indicate a single act of adultery. Instead, it means "sexually wanton," meaning something done repeatedly as a way of life. Ultimately, it is understood spiritually to signify idolatry. Hosea 4:11-12 defines it in this manner: "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart. My people ask counsel from the wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God."

By linking *zanah*, harlotry, with wine and new wine, God is showing that this spiritual harlotry has addictive power. "Enslave the heart" illustrates that this faithless spirit bends the heart to obey its desires, and in the process, it destroys discretion and understanding. Recall that Psalm 119 repeatedly states that meditating on God's Word and obeying His commandments give understanding, indicating a major way in which we come to know God. However, if a person practices faithlessness, loss of understanding results. No constructive wisdom ever results from breaking any of God's commands.

Hosea 7:1-4 adds evidence to this description:

When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered, and the wickedness of Samaria. For they have committed fraud; a thief comes in; a band of robbers takes spoil outside. They do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness; now their own deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face. They make a king glad with their wickedness, and princes with their lies. They are all adulterers, like an oven heated by a baker—he ceases stirring the fire after kneading the dough, until it is leavened.

God charges that all categories of sinners are adulterers! He uses the normal word for adultery. He then provides insight into one way the spirit of harlotry entered into Israelite culture: "They do not

consider in their hearts"! Is this not also true today? Despite all the evidence of how destructive sexual sins are, people will not change! Within marriage and society at large, we see syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, chlamydia, AIDS, broken homes, rebellious children, and children being raised by single parents. How many children are not even sure who their parents are? These sins are tearing the nation apart!

The Hebrew word underlying the word "king" in Hosea 7:3 is sometimes used to indicate leaders in business, education, and government, not just the head of the government. God is pointing an accusing finger at those whose own evil ends are to profit from this cesspool of faithlessness—to make money and gain power. This list can include doctors, lawyers, hospitals, pharmaceutical houses, pornographers, booksellers, moviemakers, etc.

A Faithless People

"Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her. Though they say, 'As the Lord lives,' surely they swear falsely." O Lord, are not Your eyes on the truth: you have stricken them, but they have not grieved; You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to return. (Jeremiah 5:1-3)

Prophet after prophet records similar statements. Israel has trouble being faithful to anything: God, mate, country, employer, and contracts. Our national mind seems to be like quicksilver. As a people, Israelites are always trying to get the best for the self, willing to bend in any direction to obtain their pleasure. They really work at it. When we think of Jacob's deceitful ways in his early life, we can almost believe that this characteristic is in the genes, though it is not. It is a characteristic absorbed by yielding to a culture saturated with the spirit of harlotry.

Syndicated columnist Sidney J. Harris once wrote:

Most virtues exist on a sliding scale, all the way from excellence to ineptitude, and most of us are tolerably somewhere in the middle, without too much damage to ourselves or others. But there is one virtue that is all or nothing: and that is reliability. You are either reliable or you are not; and, if not, it doesn't much matter how nearly or how often you are reliable.

If I were an employer of any sort, I would be willing to put up with many kinds of personal or professional deficiencies, but never with this. A person who is not dependable is bound to fail you (and himself as well) at precisely the wrong time.

It reminds me of the debonair Viennese gentleman who, when asked, "Have you been faithful to your wife?" replied, "Frequently." It is plain that a man who is frequently faithful is not faithful at all; he might as well never be.

Reliability is one of the hardest character traits to identify by testing or "screening" or anything except personal acquaintance. Some people are "rocks" by nature or training, while others are *papier-mâché* painted to resemble rocks, who crumble when sudden pressure is applied by circumstances.

If you are married to someone who cannot be depended upon to pull his or her own weight, it hardly matters what other admirable traits your mate may possess, because you can never know when or where you will be let down. It is the same as being married to an alcoholic, who is only "there" part of the time—and usually not when most needed.

Consistency is what is required in the people we associate with: the confident knowledge of what we can rightfully expect of them, barring sudden illness or catastrophe beyond anyone's control. Otherwise, there is no real relationship, but only a shifting accommodation to the winds of caprice and self-indulgence.

It is easy to feel affection for another; what is harder is to translate this feeling into acts, daily acts, that demonstrate steadfastness of purpose in a domestic routine that may not be as dramatic as some heroic rescue, but that keeps the craft afloat no matter which way the wind happens to blow. The deepest and most important virtues are often the dullest ones; they win no medals, and get no glory; but they are the glue that binds society together and makes it work, now and always.

Men seem to be particularly irresponsible and ambivalent regarding sex, but with the unleashing of the feminist movement, women are rapidly catching up. In the July 28, 1978, *Woman's Day* magazine, an article revealed that 50-70% of all American men commit adultery at least once, while the Hite Report result was 66%. Yet, 67% of all husbands say that adultery is *always* wrong! The dichotomy between belief and practice is obvious. Clearly, they are confused: They feel it is wrong, but a large percentage is willing to do it if the opportunity presents itself!

This illustrates what God meant through the prophets. No wonder God calls us a faithless people! We are a self-seeking, opportunistic people who are willing to "bend" on principle, standard, tradition, or belief if we can see advantage for ourselves. Even if we can see that the "advantage" is at best short-term—and may even be very risky—we almost always seem to rise to the "bait."

Back to Sex Sins

A *McCall's* magazine article, "What Men Want From Women," reports:

[Men] say they value the same things women do: loyalty, commitment, caring. At the same time, many insist they "need" the novelty and excitement of pursuing other women. Is there any way to make sense of these mixed messages and find new understanding between the sexes? (August 1981, p. 26)

As we saw, God says this "need" is being driven by a culture enveloped and enslaved in unfaithfulness and steeped in a spirit of harlotry. God thunders in His Word, "You shall not commit adultery" and "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." Notice this vivid illustration of its destructiveness:

After this Absalom the son of David had a lovely sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. Amnon was so distressed over his sister Tamar that he became sick; for she was a virgin. And it was improper for Amnon to do anything to her. . . . However, he would not heed her voice; and being stronger than she, he forced

her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Arise, be gone!" (II Samuel 13:1-2, 14-15)

The strong desire to be unfaithful to one's clearly stated and understood responsibilities is a drive we have to deal with and overcome. We must learn that there is a living principle that God activated and still enforces in His creation. When this drive controls a person, retribution will automatically follow. Thus, the person is considered faithless. Any time a thing—in this case, sex—becomes an end in itself, it creates an idol, which will provoke a response from God. In addition, as this illustration shows, it also ceases to give the satisfying pleasure God intends. Like a drug, the individual constantly needs more to achieve the satisfaction he desires.

Solomon shows clearly in Ecclesiastes 1:8 that human nature cannot be satisfied. It says, "All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." This is not the way God made us; it is the way we have become as a result of Satan broadcasting his spirit and us following its promptings. We have become perverted in our tastes, and our tastes have to be converted in order to enjoy the benefits God intends.

The *Woman's Day* article mentioned above listed the reasons, from most to least frequently mentioned, that men gave for remaining faithful:

1. *The fear of being caught.* They avoid adultery, not because it is sin, but simply to avoid the pain of possibly losing respect socially or financially. People fear scandal more than they fear sin because they want to be well thought of.
2. *The inability to deal with guilt and deception.* It is not the adultery and all the evil it produces that is the burden, but having to bear something personally that can no longer be hidden.
3. *The lack of opportunity.* Frequently, an occasion never arises because the man's wife or an authority figure is always looming in the background, but he is open to it!
4. *The belief that husbands should be faithful.* This is not necessarily belief in God, but usually a societal more that a man believes he should conform to in order to fit in.
5. *The personal desire to be faithful.* This is a notch stronger and purer than the previous reason.

However, there was not one mention of God in these five reasons, perhaps because it is not fashionable to talk of God. Yet, it could also be because God is not in all their thoughts and what He thinks is rarely considered.

Lessons From David

Regardless of how successful a person might consider himself in getting away with his adventure into sin, he could learn a few things from David. First, however, we must note Numbers 32:23: "But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out." Interestingly, the context of this verse is a warning to those who may not be faithful to their words of promise. Regarding David, II Samuel 12:9-14 reveals:

"Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.'" So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die."

Overall, this story is a quick study into cause and effect. First, it teaches that, regardless of one's status, adultery cannot be committed without damaging relationships anymore than murder can be committed without damaging relationships. It does not matter whether the perpetrator is a prince or pauper. The only variable is the speed with which the effect takes place. We should never forget the warning given in Genesis 2:17: "In the day you eat of [the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil] you shall surely die." The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) no matter which commandment is broken.

Second, besides death, sin produces two effects that may also manifest slowly:

1. A damaged relationship with God. Isaiah 59:1-2 shows that sin creates division between God and us because of the breach of trust. Sin is a breaking of the terms of the covenant agreed on by both God and us. After committing a sin like adultery, can the individual be trusted any longer? This effect is not easily seen, but God's Word nonetheless reveals it does occur. As this episode shows, with repentance and God's merciful forgiveness, the division can be healed.

2. Evil results in our life in this world. Even with God's forgiveness, this second effect remains and must be borne by the sinner—and tragically, by those sinned against. For example, the evil effects of David's sin brought death—either directly or indirectly—to five people. It directly caused the deaths of Uriah and the newborn son of David and Bathsheba. In addition, it greatly intensified the ultimately deadly competition between Absalom, Amnon, and Adonijah, all of whom died violently. With the dishonorable example of their father before their eyes, it could only teach disrespect, even for those closest to them.

Thus, the throne fell to Solomon. He never had to live through the kind of family life that David's older children did. When he committed similar sins, he could never say that he saw his father do the same things.

This act indirectly helped produce yet more family devastation. II Samuel 16:21-22 records:

And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong." So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

This led to David's actions in II Samuel 20:3:

Now David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten women, his concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in seclusion and supported them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up to the day of their death, living in widowhood.

While this was as much a political act as anything, it clearly conveys Absalom's disrespect for his father, a disrespect that was at least partly rooted in his father's notorious sexual life. Were these women's lives affected for the better by Absalom's extremely insolent adultery? Now defiled, but still young women, they lived the remainder of their lives as widows.

Fornication Is Also Faithlessness

Paul writes in I Corinthians 7:4: "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." The spirit of God's law reveals that all unchaste sexual conduct before marriage, commonly called fornication, is infidelity, unfaithfulness committed against the future mate. Our bodies are not our own. Could God have someone marked out as a mate for those who are single? The fornicator is denying him or her a pure gift. A vital, spiritual reality underlies this principle, for sexual purity is a type of our spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ, our promised Bridegroom.

Where does the Bible show that all this culture's sexual experimentation leads? Hosea 10:13-14 makes it plain:

You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your mighty men. Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be plundered as Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle—a mother dashed in pieces upon her children.

A very troubling, fearful time lies ahead of us. Sin may be entered into happily, but because people trust in liars who deny the penalties for sin, the consequences will be horrible. "The New Scarlet Letter," which appeared in *Time* magazine, August 2, 1982, describes another penalty:

After chastity slouched off into exile in the '60s, the sexual revolution encountered little resistance. Indeed, in the age of the Pill, Penthouse Pets and porn-movie cassettes, the revolution looked so sturdily permanent that sex seemed to subside into a simple consumer item. Now, suddenly . . . herpes, an ancient viral infection that can be transmitted during sex, recurs fitfully and cannot be cured . . . has emerged from relative obscurity and exploded into a full-fledged epidemic. "The truth about life in the United States in the 1980s," says Dr. Kevin Murphy of Dallas, one of the nation's leading herpes researchers, "is that if you are going to have sex, you are going to have to take the risk of getting herpes." . . . An estimated 20 million Americans now have genital herpes.

The figure has now climbed to 45 million—roughly one of every five Americans now has a disease that cannot be cured, one that is increasing at the rate of 500,000 new cases each year in the U.S.

Recall the "mighty men" from Hosea 10:13. They include the sex gurus of this age such as Larry Flint, Alex Comfort, and Hugh Hefner, the latter with his insidious "Playboy Philosophy," who set the tone for contemporary moral standards. It also includes the entertainment figures who make homosexuality, adultery, fornication, and other perversions appear so "attractive" on the silver screen.

The Charlotte Observer published this statistic on June 28, 2008: "Maybe it's a sad side-effect of AIDS fight success, but the number of young gay men diagnosed with HIV infection is rising almost 12% a year, a new report says." AIDS, like herpes and chlamydia, remains incurable. Medications may slow the death rate, but death still hangs over the heads of those infected.

Romans 3:4 reads, "Let God be true but every man a liar [false or faithless]." The "mighty men" can say all they want, but God's Word remains faithful. Just because God's law does not exact an immediate penalty for violation, the hucksters of hedonism think and proclaim that there is no penalty. Despite their claims, there has been a wild explosion of incurable sexually transmitted diseases over the past forty years. How much easier it is to learn truth by obeying God's law rather than through painful experience!

God gives unequivocal counsel in Leviticus 20:10, 22:

The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death. . . . You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out.

This is the Bible's way of saying nature will rise up against those who break God's seventh commandment and become their enemy. We are witnesses to this happening in our lifetimes.