

The Seventh Commandment (1997)

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***Forerunner*, "Personal," September-October 1997**

Anyone who drives on this nation's freeways knows how everyone "gawks" at an accident or what appears to be an accident. A motorist could be doing nothing more exciting than standing beside his automobile, but it creates a bottleneck, sometimes of great length. People just cannot seem to drive by without slowing down to look at what might be the aftermath of a gory accident.

In bookstores we can tell what the top social issues are by observing where people congregate to peruse the latest solutions to certain problems. Magazines have articles every month by a different Dr. So-and-So who gives his keys to resolving the latest "hot" problem.

For the past forty years, marriage, sex, dieting, exercise, the environment, substance abuse, money and politics have topped the list of issues. Though their popularity varies from time to time, the clear leader over the long haul has been marriage. Year after year, Americans publicly discuss marriage with undiminished confusion, pessimism and passion. Calamity always attracts attention, and in the U.S., marriage is in a state of calamity, even though the venerable institution has lately shown some signs of increasing stability.

Even as recently as the late 1960s, our divorce rate was under 40%, but by 1975 the divorce rate had jumped to almost 50% and by 1978 it reached 51%. However, since 1988 it has remained at a shade under 50%. As alarming as those statistics are when considering the stability of the nation, California's San Mateo County recorded a 70% divorce rate! The state of Nevada, home of Las Vegas, normally has nearly three times as many divorces per capita than the national average!

The average divorcing couple used to remain married for seven years before splitting. However, it is now down to between four and five years. What has caused the divorce rate to increase and marriage length to decline?

Israel's Responsibility

The media bombard us with information claiming that sexual compatibility is the all-important factor in marriage. Yet, as knowledge of sex has increased and spread, as has the opportunity to be promiscuous and experiment with many partners before marriage, so has the curse of broken homes, disease and an unstable, cynical and violent society.

Sexual incompatibility is not *the* cause of these curses. It does cause divorce, but it is merely one facet of a far deeper national sin. God speaks of this sin frequently regarding Israel's relationship with Him under the Old Covenant.

Amos makes an interesting comparison of the sins of the Gentiles and Israel. God promises to punish the Gentiles for these reasons:

Because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron . . . Because they took captive the whole captivity to deliver them up to Edom . . . Because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood . . .

Because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever . . . Because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead, that they might enlarge their territory . . . Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime. (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1)

But His reasons for punishing Israel are very different:

Because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments . . . 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. They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god. (Amos 2:4, 6-8)

God judges the other nations guilty of gross and vicious cruelties in warfare. Israel's sins, though, largely involve national and personal deceit, disobedience to God's commandments, and creating social injustice by being faithless toward fellow man to get for the self.

It is not that other nations do not have these characteristics, but Israel has less excuse to be this way because God gave the Israelites His Word. They should know better! Amos 3:2 drives this home: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." God has given no other people the privilege of being faithfully responsible to Him to keep His commands.

The psalmist of Psalm 111:10 writes: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures for ever." Since doing His commandments produces understanding, it follows that if one breaks them, loss of understanding results. This is what has happened in Israel, and we see it in how the sin of faithlessness has undermined the quality of life on many fronts simultaneously.

Hosea's dominant theme is Israel's faithlessness in contrast to God's patience, mercy and faithfulness. The prophet is especially creative in metaphorically describing Israel's spiritual condition and relationship with God. He introduces two dominant ones in the book's second verse: "When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: 'Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.'"

The primary metaphor is Israel as a faithless wife, and the second is Israel as a child of adultery or faithlessness. A child is the fruit or product of a relationship. Hosea implies that Israel, as a child of an adulterous relationship, manifests its characteristics because the next generation tends to continue the traits of the former and perhaps even increase their effects. A primary characteristic of adultery is faithlessness.

In the first metaphor, God is a faithful husband, and in the second, a loving and long-suffering parent. Israel is faithless in carrying out her responsibilities in both cases. God bluntly calls her actions adultery, harlotry or whoredom because she did not fulfill the duties she had promised in a contract, a covenant. In more intimate terms, this contract is a marriage.

Sowing and Reaping

Hosea 2 continues this theme:

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. . . . For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has done 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." . . . 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." (verses 2, 5, 7)

Israel is so faithless to her duties, she openly invites adulteries and aggressively chases after her lovers. Her aggressiveness does not merely perpetuate a condition but creates a climate that increases its effects. Paul reveals this principle in Galatians 6:7: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." It is a law of nature that unless something intervenes to interrupt the growing cycle, more is reaped than is sowed.

The Bible uses a saying to describe this latter principle, "Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind" (see Hosea 8:7). It is like saying, "Fan a breeze and produce a hurricane!" Sowing faithlessness is no different: Unless real repentance interrupts it, it will produce more faithlessness until the spirit of harlotry, an attitude that causes many serious ramifications, permeates the entire nation.

Proverbs 22:8 (RSV) adds another factor to how sin builds in intensity: "He who sows injustice [*iniquity*, KJV] will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail." The first phrase repeats the principle of sin producing fruit and spreading its pain. The second phrase depicts the "law of retribution": The iniquity will rebound, bringing calamity to and perhaps destroying the perpetrator!

Hosea 4:1-2 reveals some of the ramifications 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 after bloodshed."

Faithlessness, when it has infected every area of a culture, blurs the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, morality and immorality. Without truth, there is no reliable ethical basis for government, commerce or social relationships. There are no solid standards. Without virtues upon which a majority agree, one can never be quite sure how another will conduct himself, and so everyone becomes untrustworthy.

In this context, mercy connotes steadfast love rather than a singular act of kindness toward somebody in need. It means, then, that people waver in their loyalties. They pursue whatever fad comes along. We might say today that they "blow hot and cold." When they are "hot" they are "hot," but they can never seem to sustain it because, when their eyes are lured by some new, exciting interest, they are off in that direction until yet something else catches their imagination.

The "knowledge of God" includes two elements: First is the knowledge *about* God, of His existence, Word and way. The second is *acknowledging* Him. This denotes commitment, a steady loyalty to Him personally and to His way of life as a pattern of living. The context demands the second element

since God would have no reason to accuse people who were not aware of Him and His way of life. Because He is addressing those who have that basic knowledge, His complaints are directed at faithless, uncommitted people. In America it is becoming almost impossible to find responsible and trustworthy people.

Sin's Addictive Quality

Hosea 4:11-13 adds more to the list of faithlessness' effects:

Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart. My people ask counsel from their 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. They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides commit adultery.

Everyone understands the addictive and destructive power of alcohol in wine and new wine. It can affect a person's mind (heart) insofar as he will lose the right perspective of situations he encounters and, with it, his discretion. Alcohol has the power to enslave the heart. It also has a subtle quality to draw a person into dependence on it while promoting the destruction of his will.

Amazingly, God lists harlotry (faithlessness) alongside wine and new wine, teaching us that it can affect us the same way! This fact is not nearly so well known. Faithlessness is every bit as enslaving and destructive as drug addition, and it has ensnared far more people in its entangling web than have ever been addicted to a drug.

Hosea 7:1-4 introduces a revolting depiction of the extent of Israel's faithlessness:

When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered, and the wickedness of Samaria. For they have committed fraud; the 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.

We cannot fail to see the same conditions prevailing in our nation. For God to bring about repentance and healing, He must first restore a knowledge of His standards. But when He does, the faithlessness becomes very apparent. It sounds much like Paul saying, "When the commandment came, sin revived and I died" (Romans 7:9).

Unfortunately, when God exposed the Israelites' sins, they did not repent as Paul did. Genuine repentance is impossible without a consciousness of sin. Hosea's indictment is that Israel was not conscious of their faithlessness to God: "They [did] not consider in their hearts." This shows how "far gone" they were under sin's addiction. They had become almost completely numb to their spiritual state. Spiritually speaking, they were sleepwalking through life, unaware of the social disaster they had created and in which they were wallowing. Faithlessness was the "norm" and generally accepted.

Faithlessness—A National Trait

When this faithlessness combines with marriage and promiscuous sex, very few people will change, despite all the evidence of how destructive this sin is! Syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, chlamydia, AIDS, broken homes, increased illegitimacy, rebellious children, teens bearing children, and latch-key kids—who see their parents only at bedtime because both parents work to provide them "with the better things in life"—are just some of the effects.

Faithlessness is tearing the country apart! Hosea 7:5-7 shows that the nation's leaders are glad these things are occurring because it gives them an excuse for their actions! Besides, they are prospering as a result! Politicians, doctors, lawyers, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, pornographers, booksellers, movie makers and others are prospering from this faithless, adulterous society.

Jeremiah weighs in with a devastating picture of Judah just before it fell to the Babylonians:

How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by those that are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were like well-fed lusty stallions; every one neighed after his neighbor's wife. (Jeremiah 5:7-8)

Prophet after prophet makes similar statements. Israel has trouble being faithful to anything: God, mate, country, employer and contracts! Our national mind runs like quicksilver from here to there—always running to get the best for the self, willing to bend in any direction to gain advantage and have our pleasure. We work very hard at this. At times, it almost seems to be in our genes!

Nationally syndicated columnists Sydney J. Harris writes on the subject of reliability:

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 gentlemen 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.

Faithlessness and Sex

Men seem to be particularly irresponsible and ambivalent about sex. A July 28, 1978, *Woman's Day* article reports that somewhere between 50% and 70% of American husbands committed adultery at least once! *The Ladies' Home Journal*, October 30, 1981, sets the figure at 54%, and the *Hite Report* claims it is 66%.

Whatever the exact figure, it is extremely high, especially since another survey reveals that 67% of all husbands say adultery is *always* wrong. What a double standard! Though they feel it is wrong, a large percentage of men are willing to commit it if the opportunity presents itself. This illustrates what God means about our faithlessness.

We are a self-seeking, opportunistic people who are willing to "bend" on principle, standard, tradition or belief if it means advantage for ourselves. Even if we can see the "advantage" is at best short-term—and may even be very risky—we usually seem to rise to the "bait." An August 1981 *McCall's* article, "What Men Want From Women," states:

They 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?

Yes, it is called sin. The seventh commandment is "You shall not commit adultery," and the tenth includes "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife."

Such drives are a part of our humanity that we must deal with and overcome. If we do not, they will lead us into many woes. Notice how the story of Amnon, a young man who could not control himself to remain faithful, illustrates the cause and effects of this sin:

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. . . .

[Tamar protested his advances.] 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)

Anytime a thing, like sex, becomes an end in itself, it ceases to give the satisfying pleasure God intends when used within the context of love. Instead, because of sin's addictive traits, a person futilely searches for the satisfying fulfillment of his expectations. With it he reaps the guilt associated with a knowledge of sin.

Solomon shows in Ecclesiastes 1:8 that human nature cannot be satisfied. This is not the way God made us but how we have become through sin. "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). We have become perverted in our desires, and our desires must be converted to enjoy the benefits God intends.

The above *Woman's Day* article lists reasons men give for remaining faithful, from most to least frequently mentioned:

1. *The fear of being caught.* Men avoid adultery, not because it is sin, but to avoid the pain of possibly losing everything, socially and/or financially. People fear scandal more than sin because they want others to think well of them.
2. *The inability to deal with guilt and deception.* The burden is not the adultery and the evil it produces, but having to bear something personally that they can no longer hide.
3. *The lack of opportunity.* Men are open to adultery, but the occasion never arises because their wives are always looming in the background.
4. *The belief that husbands should be faithful.* This is more conformity to social pressure rather than belief in God.
5. *The personal desire to be faithful.* Not one of the five mentions God. This may be because it is not fashionable to talk of God, yet it could also be that God is not in their thoughts and they never consider what He thinks.

David's Adultery and Its Effects

King David's excursion into adultery reveals that, regardless of one's state in life, one cannot commit it without damaging relationships anymore than murder. II Samuel 12:9-14 describes the cause-and-effect process:

"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." Then 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."

Sin produces two overall effects: First, because of the breach of trust, it creates division between us and God (Isaiah 59:1-2). Second, it produces evil results in the world. Upon true repentance, God's merciful forgiveness cancels out the first. However, the second remains, and the sinner must bear it and—tragically—so must those caught within its web. As a result of David's sin, five people, including four of David's sons, died directly or indirectly: Uriah, the illegitimate baby, Absalom, Amnon, and Adonijah!

But the punishment did not end there. II Samuel 16:20-22 relates another step in the unfolding of this sin's effect:

Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give counsel as to what we should do." 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.

II Samuel 20:3 adds a final note on this event:

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.

God prophesied it, and Absalom and Ahithophel used it politically to discredit David and elevate Absalom. It illustrates Absalom's disrespect for his father, which was at least partly rooted in his father's notorious sex life. Did the adultery make the concubine's lives better? "Can a man take fire to his bosom and . . . not be burned?" (Proverbs 6:27). No, he cannot. Not only is he burned, but those close to him also suffer because this sin's penalty reaches out to destroy what should be very dear and cherished relationships.

Fornication

I Corinthians 6:19-20 and 7:4 reveal that all unchaste conduct before marriage ("fornication") is also infidelity and is doubly so if one is a Christian.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. . . . 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.

Upon acceptance of the blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin, we become His since He bought and paid for us by His death. As His possession or servant (literally "slave"), He expressly forbids us to engage in any such activity. In addition, the spirit of God's law helps us to understand

fornication as unfaithfulness against one's future mate. Virginity should be held in reserve for the one we eventually marry, so he or she will not receive a mate defiled by intimacy with somebody else.

And, just as with adultery, though God forgives a fornicator of his sin, the effects of fornication will take their toll. God's law produces a penalty automatically. Sometimes it manifests itself in disease. Other times may see a child born out of wedlock or a "shotgun" marriage of two incompatible people. A few minutes of forbidden pleasure is not worth the price!

Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles, who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. (I Thessalonians 4:3-7)

On the Verge of Destruction

What we have sown—and are even now beginning to reap—with our faithlessness is illustrated in Hosea 10:12-15:

Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you. 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. Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great wickedness. In a morning the king of Israel shall be cut off utterly.

By listening to the sensually appealing but iniquitous advice of "authoritative" individuals, our people have fallen prey to the lustful desires of human nature. Humanistic psychologists and psychiatrists urge people in the measured tones of academia that sin is passé and that we should not concern ourselves with remaining faithful or virgin. Ministers back away from the Bible's authority by seeming to respect it no more than a mere writing of men. Sex gurus such as Alex Comfort, author of *The Joy of Sex*, once said of sex, "There is nothing to be afraid of and never was." For decades Hugh Hefner has propounded his insidious "Playboy Philosophy" in his magazine, setting the tone for contemporary moral standards. We cannot forget the political figures whose sexual escapades, once only whispered about, are now openly discussed. Yet many are re-elected, indicating the public's approval or unconcern.

People are persuaded, even though the statistics indicate an ever-increasing rise in sexually transmitted diseases and a steady divorce rate. Because God's law may not exact an immediate penalty (Ecclesiastes 8:11), the hucksters of hedonism cry, "There is no penalty!" But because God is faithful, the penalty always falls. The penalties are mounting, bringing great sorrow and becoming visible for all who care to see. How much easier it is to learn wisdom through obeying God rather than through the harsh experiences of human nature!

Leviticus 20:22 concludes a section devoted to a variety of sexual sins and states a major result or penalty of breaking the seventh commandment: "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 that when a society unrestrainedly breaks God's laws, nature will rise up as an enemy and make it impossible to live in the land. The inhabitants will be uprooted and thrust out—but not before many die in famine, war and natural disasters. The natural process of sin will bring that nation to its knees and humble it before the world.

Israel's problems with faithlessness, of which sexual faithlessness is a major form, is on the verge of destroying us. Take heed, brethren! A major social calamity is under way and building to a crescendo. If we become caught up in it, it will lead us right into the Tribulation. This should truly motivate us to keep the seventh commandment.