

TEACHING GOAL

To study the basis for the integrity of the family unit.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

Q. Which is the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment is, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Q. What is required in the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment requires the preservation of our own and our neighbor's chastity, in heart, speech, and behavior.

S.C. 70-71, L.C. 137-138, W.C. of F. XIX, Savoy 19, Young 95-96

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: I Corinthians 7

Support Passages: Genesis 1:26-28, 2:23-24, 39:1-18; Matthew 5:27-32, 19:3-12; Hebrews 13:4; Ephesians 5:22-33

BIBLE STORY

Acts 18:1-3,26; Romans 16:3; I Corinthians 16:19; The happy marriage of Priscilla and Aquilla.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

Genesis 2:24

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

APPLICATION

The institution of marriage is one of the most important means to accomplish God's redemptive plan for the earth. It is through the Christian family that God brings His children up in discipline and instruction. Believing parents are the ministers of God to this end.

Therefore it is essential that the integrity of the family not be compromised by the sin of adultery.

SUMMARY

That the main issue comprehended by the seventh commandment is the integrity of the family is seen in the obvious destruction of the family by marital infidelity. In our day the majority of all marriages end in divorce and in some areas nearly all of them do. When divorce occurs the children are usually separated from one or both of their parents and any ethical or moral instruction suffers from the poor example set before them. On the other hand many of our young people live together without getting married and this too attacks the integrity of the family unit.

The Lord quotes the seventh commandment to the Pharisees¹ and continues to say that adultery has been committed even when a man "looks upon a woman to lust after her in his heart". His reference to inward lust provides illumination to the seventh commandment which deepens our understanding of its nature. Jesus does not replace the commandment with a new one but His statement concerning lust stands in stark contrast to the Pharisaical position that adultery is confined to the overt physical act. We have already taken note of the fact that the Greek conjunction "de" can be translated as "and", "but", "furthermore", "then", "now", etc., therefore, Jesus makes no contrasting statement relative to the commandment but to the Pharisaical understanding of it. He is telling us that preoccupation with extra marital sex is not only adultery but can lead to a breakdown of the family unit. Sexual desire per se is not wrong and Jesus does not say so. What is wrong is the desire to have sexual relations outside the estate of marriage.²

According to our study text,³ "it is good for a man not to touch a woman." Paul does not mean to imply that sexual union is bad. Quite to the contrary he states, "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn," (vs 9, i.e. burn with passion). He writes in Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." It is the subject of celibacy that Paul undertakes at the beginning of this text where he teaches that it is not wrong to remain unmarried. However, being unmarried one must remain a virgin. Sexual intercourse while unmarried is fornication and as such cannot be the basis for a viable God-pleasing family. For one thing the inheritance cannot legally pass to illegitimate children which may result from such a union. An inheritance can serve to strengthen a family unit unless it cannot be legally passed to the heirs or it is taxed away by the government. Sexual promiscuity can lead to venereal disease which in turn may render a person incapable of raising a family for the Lord. In addition, and more importantly, fornication does not please God who has forbidden it.

¹ Matthew 5:27

² John Murray, Principles of Conduct, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957, p56.

³ I Corinthians 7

If, however, one chooses to be married, certain obligations and proprieties regulate the marriage relationship. Paul writes, "Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband." (vs 3) He is referring, of course, to the conjugal obligation. Neither the husband nor the wife may refuse the marriage bed to the other. If celibacy is chosen, virginity is the obligation. If marriage is chosen sexual union is the obligation. There are circumstances in which sexual union is impossible as is sometimes the case following an accident or a disease. In such a case sexual union may be impossible but the obligation to be faithful to one's spouse remains.

Furthermore, our text takes up the situation in which one of the marriage partners is an unbeliever. This can occur when one of the marriage partners is converted to faith in Christ after the marriage takes place but the other one remains an unbeliever. If the unbeliever consents to continue the union the marital obligations remain in force. If, however, the unbelieving partner wishes to dissolve the union, "let him leave; the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases..." The obligations of marriage may in this case be dissolved and the family unit remains consisting of the remaining spouse and the children who are term by Paul as "holy". We shall have more to say about divorce in the third lesson on the seventh commandment.

The point of all this is the integrity of the family unit. We are enjoined, therefore, by the commandment to abstain from fornication or adultery which will certain debilitate or destroy the family.