The Commandments. IX
The Sin of Lust

Exodus XX: 14.
 Thou shalt not commit Adultery.
A high degree of culture does not always imply safe standards of judgment. Because vice takes a new name, and loses its grossness it does not necessarily follow that its influence for evil is lessened; is it not rather increased by the disguise that veils its repulsiveness. This sickly sentimentalism helps to cloak it. If from motives of false delicacy we hesitate to attack loathsome leprosies in the body politic with the wholesome remedies of direct exposure and rebuke, mingling compassion for the evil-doer with denunciation of his evil-doing, do we not leave the infection to spread its Pollution and enlarge its fatal sway? Let us not turn away from sad truths, or fear to falter in assailing every stronghold of Satan.
Perhaps these considerations of false delicacy have too much controlled the utterances of the pulpit. Set to guard the purity of society, the messenger of divine mercy and wrath must declare the will and word of God. The range of his testimony against evil must not be contracted by a fastidious taste and if ever he is called upon to speak the truth in love, surely it is when he confronts the worst commonest evils of society. This is a remarkable fact that the greatest prevalence of vice and immorality is corresponding in history with the silence of the pulpit as to social sins, and the eras of religious reformation have invariably followed close upon the bold and heroic daring which, shaking off conventional fetters, has yielded for God a clear and unequivocal witness.
There is no vice more widespread, more infectious and contagious, more subtle in its approach, more multiform in its manifestations, more fatal in its results than what the Bible calls lust. It has caused the severest divine judgments to descend—
one deluge of water and another of fire—It made the grandest republics of ancient history so rotten that they crumbled into dust before the hosts in vader or fell and sunk by their own weight. And is it becoming that we pass by the seventh commandment, or evade the directness or disguise the plainness of the Sermon on the Mount, or even leave unexplained that first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans which a New England divine pronounced unfit for a public reading?
The owl saw spots on the sun which the eagle had never seen, though she could gaze directly at the brightness which blinded the owl. But the owl was looking through smoked glass, and the spots he saw were on the glass.

To some it may seem a mark of advanced civilization that our ears have grown to be so refined, but is it not fastidiousness? Are we any purer in heart for our delicacy of taste and culture? Let us not deceive ourselves. Purity like other exacted virtues is never self-conscious. It is not so quick to discover impurity in what implies no impure intent or design. And hence we have reason to be concerned not so much about a plain utterance, as about the false refinement that is too quick to detect the savour of impropriety.
It is not only justified by propriety but it is demanded by duty that the preacher should deal with sins in plainness of speech. The sword of the Spirit is put into his hands. If he wield it sheathed in the scabbard of a false and prudish sensuality, he dulls its edge and blunts its point in a word makes that a comparatively powerless weapon which in its native and naked majesty is so keen and piercing as to be sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow and lays bare the thoughts and intents of the heart. He must therefore use its bare blade if only for the sake of the effectiveness of his blows in using a divine weapon.
I have spoken thus not by way of apology for introducing into the pulpit a theme which naturally and necessarily comes before us in our studies upon the ten Commandments. Apology itself demands apology for to apologize for doing a duty that can be neither decently avoided or evaded would be itself a crime against this solemn office. Yet it seemed a fit time, just now, to show that danger which besets both preacher and people, namely a tendency peculiar to our times, to pass by in silence or at least disguise with elegant circumlocution, the hideous forms of vice. The boldness of sin demands of the preacher that he also be bold in speaking and of the hearer that he be bold in hearing all the counsel of God.
Let us then with prayerful conscientiousness hear God's command: Thou shalt not commit adultery.

First observe its significant position upon the second table of the law. This whole table treats of the duties growing out of our human relations, and naturally begins with the first sin of our conscious life: disobedience to parents. Next comes the prohibition of murder, which is in some respect the greatest of crimes against our fellow man, because it involves the deepest depravity in our heart and is aimed at life itself. Next in order is adultery. Sometimes it outranks even murder in guilt & criminality, but it follows it because life represents the highest possession and its taking argues generally deliberate malice.
That which this Command directly and obviously forbids is too plain to need one word of comment. Marriage is a union of the most sacred friendship, intimate confidence and solemn obligation known between man and woman. It presupposes one thing which is the first necessity, the indispensable requisite, a true love and provided this exist marriage may and ought to follow provided also that there be not too close a degree of blood relationship between the parties and no prior moral or legal obligation superior in binding force. To guard so solemn a relation God ordains that it be entered into only upon the basis of a mutual covenant, made as strong as mutual vows can make it. The violation of that marriage covenant is adultery to the offending party and whosoever shares the guilt.
Christ has himself left two qualifications of this seventh commandment. First he gave it a new application and second a new people.

1. He applied it to the matter of divorce. I that hath been said Whosoever shall put away his wife let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you that whosoever shall put away his wife saving for the cause of fornication causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

The ground of all this lies in the nature of the marriage relation itself. In God's eyes it is essentially a union for life, and therefore only to be dissolved when one of the parties is false and so more than dead to the other. In such case continuance m
the outward tie when the inward bond is really broken is worse than separation. But nothing can be plainer than this testimony of Christ, that the tie of marriage is to be annulled only for one cause. The English novelist Bulwer & Dickens, may write romances to justify breaking an uncongenial union on the ground of incompatibility of mind & temper. The Rationalists of Germany may philosophize to frame some system of Communism which is superior to the family. The advocates of Free Love may argue that the bond between husband and wife is dependent upon the caprice of an uncertain passion. The spirit medium may declare upon the authority of a celestial messenger that certain souls are married and not mated and others mated but not married.
Judging marriage by the higher law, which demands a spiritual union, some so-called marriages are themselves adulterous. It is probable that in God's eye all such as are formed merely of convenience or for acquisition of property or social elevation, to oblige officious friends or gratify mercenary parents are not marriages at all; they deserve no better a name than polite prostitution, legalized fornication. This relation is too high, honorable, holy to be assumed where there is just a real union. It is not the public ceremony that makes husband and wife, one—but that silent exchange of vows between two loving hearts whose only witness is God. Any other kind of marriage, though conforming to human laws violates the divine
Here let me add, that an inharmonious married life approaches the guilt of adultery for it violates the vow which each takes to study not only the purity but the peace of the other. Separation may be a worse sin, but such marriage is daily infidelity; and among the causes which make adultery so common, none is more prominent than those discordant connections which leave the soul open to temptation which make one crave from others the love he does not find where it was sought and expected, and make the chalice of unlawful union the sweeter because the home cup is so bitter. So that the indulgence even of a fretulant or impatient temper in alienating husband’s wife may plant the seeds not only of separation but of adulterous love.
ted adultery with her already in his heart. Here is
the law giver himself expounding the spirit and de-
termining the scope of his command. All tempers of
mind or feeling; all habits of life, which lead to the
violation of his law, virtually transgress it, even
though it be only manifest in the lustful look. Our
Saviour lays the axe at the root of the tree; He teach-
es us that true purity of life proceeds only from hu-
rrity of heart.рест the lawful desire and you
prevent our breaking sin. Now cooly does divine
discrimination trace the iniquity to its secret source
David's adultery, dissimulation and deceit, malice,
and murder all were directly traceable to a look of
lust and David is but a type of sinners generally.
No sin brings as its natural penalty a more terrible harvest of woes. The fruit of these seeds is worse than the crop of armed men that rose from the dragon teeth sown by Cadmus, in the old myth.

We can trace to sensuality the foulest forms of physical disease, mental insanity or imbecility and moral rottenness and death. Our dictionary has but one terrible term to express the state to which it brings mankind: viz. Bestiality. It breaks down the very structure of the family and tears away the pillars of Society. History will tell you that it has eaten out the vitality of whole nations and that no people that ever reached the depths of sensual intemperance ever rose out of them into life again. Paley has therefore written of this form of debility that however it may be accounted for...
it corrupts and degrades the mind and moral character more than any single species of vice whatsoever. That ready perception of guilt, that prompt and decisive resolution against it, which constitutes a virtuous character, is seldom found in persons addicted to these indulgences. They prepare an easy admission for every sin that seeks to enter are in low life usually the first stage in men's progress to the most desperate villanies and in high life to that lamented dissoluteness of principle which manifests itself in a profusion of public conduct and a contempt of the obligations of religion and moral probity. "These declarations," adds Mr. Dwight, "have long since been amply verified in living examples, and who has not.
You need not go any farther back in history than the pathway traversed by your own experience to be able to say from personal observation that the infallible consequences of trifling in any way with that law of chastity which God has written not only on tables of stone but in the fleshly tables of the human heart are the most fearful. That both through organic laws and by direct divine judgments the vice of sensuality makes havoc of peace, purity, prosperity—~all that is dearest to the individual, personally, domestically and socially, both as to body and soul. Nothing accomplishes such rapid and such utter ruin. Almost any other vice leaves some tenderness in the heart for the generative touch of love to reach with restoring power, but this eats out the very sensibilities of the soul.
It may almost be said of this sin that it hath no forgiveness. Not that it is unpardonable. But it belongs to the class of which we may say that they imply a moral state generally hopeless of repentance and of reclamation. "I man may forgive the wrongs done him but never the wrongs done by him to others." It is very remarkable how very rarely you reclaim a sensualist. A nation sunk in this vice never finds forgiveness—an individual once addicted to it seldom even seeks it. The vice seems to destroy the very appetite for purity. And so few are they who are ever rescued from the deadly grip of these sins, that the words of Holy Writ are literally true. For we read of the Harlot, her house inclined unto death and her path unto the dead. None that go unto her return.
again, neither take they hold of the paths of life let
not thy heart decline to her ways: go not astray in
her paths, for she hath cast down many woun
ded: yea many strong men have been slain by
her. Her house is the way to Hell, going down

After death cometh the judgment, and ye know
says St. Paul, that no whoremonger nor unclean
person hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of
Christ and of God. Eph. 5:5. The voice of Him who
sat upon the throne St. John heard proclaim that
such should have their part in the lake which
burneth with fire and brimstone which is the
Second death.