

No 177

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 leprosy 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 & 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. It is a remarkable fact that the greatest prevalence of vice and immorality is correspondent 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 & heroic daring which, shaking off conventional fetters, has uttered for God a clear and unequivocal witness.

There is no vice more wide-spread, 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 hostile invader 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 exalted 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 wields it sheathed in the scabbard of a false and prudish scrupulosity 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 shew that danger which besets both preacher & 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 sec-
ond 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 consci-
ous life: disobedience to parents. Next comes the
prohibition of murder, which is in some respects
the greatest of crimes against our fellow man,
because it involves the deepest depravity on our
part 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 scope.

1. He applied it to the matter of divorce. "It 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 in

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 novelists, 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 Gods
eye all such as are formed merely of convenience - or
for acquisition of property or social elevation, to ob-
lige officious friends or gratify mercenary par-
ents are not marriages at all. & they deserve no bet-
ter a name than polite prostitution, legalized for-
nication. This relation is too high, honorable, holy
to be assumed, ^{save} where there is first a real union. It
is not the public ceremony that makes husband &
wife, one - but that silent exchange of vows between
two loving hearts whose only witness is God. Any
other kind of marriage though conformed 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 petulant or impatient temper in alienating husband & wife may plant the seeds not only of separation but of adulterous love.

ted adultery with her already in his heart. Here is the lawgiver himself expounding the spirit and determining 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 teaches us that true purity of life proceeds only from purity of heart. Quench the lawful desire and you prevent our breaking sin. How wisely does divine discrimination trace the iniquity to its secret source. Davids 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 seed 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 putrefaction ever rose out of them into life again. Paley has therefore written of this form of iniquity that however it may be accounted for

it corrupts and depraves 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 mens progress to the most desperate villanies and in high life to that lamented dissoluteness of principle which manifests itself in a profligacy of public conduct and a contempt of the obligations of religion and moral probity." "These declarations," adds Dr 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 tender spot in the heart for the gentle 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 so of reclamations. "A 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 grips of these sins, that the words of Holy Writ are literally true. For we read of the Harlot, Her house inclineth unto death and her paths 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 wound-
ed: yea many strong men have been slain by
her. Her house is the way to Hell; going down
to the chambers of death. Prov. 2: 18-19 & 7: 25-27.

After death cometh the judgment, and ye know
says St Paul, that no whore monger 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.

Binghamton Sabb P.M. Feb 23 1862. E. Reynolds at Waterford }

Waterford Sabb P.M. Sept 20. 1868. " }