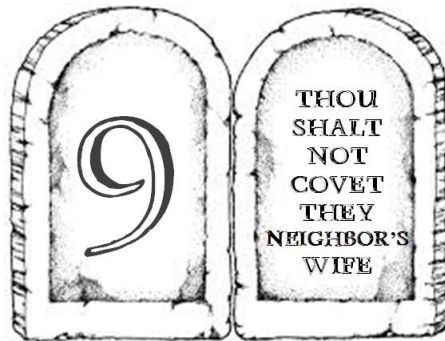


TEN COMMANDMENT ARTICLE SERIES

BY FR. BRIAN



I have often been told that because a priest is not married, he really cannot speak to issues around marriage. But I would truly disagree with that proposition. I know I have not directly experienced the ins and outs of marital relations, but at the same time, I was truly blessed to have a great example of a good and holy marriage—that of my parents. My parents did not have a “perfect” marriage. They had their disagreements and issues through the years, but, ultimately, they always put the other first in their lives. I have only to look at my Dad: though I have no doubt that he loved us kids unconditionally and would have laid down his life for us, I do not think he necessarily wanted a large family. My Mom did, and so not only did they have five children, but they also brought foster children into our home. And we were the neighborhood house where the kids just hung out. My Mom loved having all of these people in her life. She needed to share God’s love with as many people as she could. My Dad understood this need and so he supported it. And Mom did the same with my Dad and supported the things most important to him.

They helped me understand what the heart of marriage is truly about by how they lived it. It is ultimately about being Christ to your spouse. It is about helping the other to grow into the person God created him/her to

be. It is ultimately about being the presence of God’s love in your spouse’s life, and through that love, leading them to heaven. And this is only possible when you put the needs of the other before your own. It is that call to truly unconditional love, which seeks only the good of the other, no matter how difficult. It is helping them to bear the cross of Christ as they help you do the same.

The Sixth and Ninth Commandments truly are related. They say: “You shall not commit adultery.” (Deut. 5:18), and “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.” (Deut. 5:21) Often when we think of these, we simply think about *not* doing something wrong. Rather, they are trying to uphold the sanctity of marriage and all that this great sacrament is intended to give us.

A good marriage is grounded in friendship, mutual respect, honesty, trust, self-giving, and total and unwavering fidelity, leading to true intimacy. This foundation for marriage mirrors the Church’s relationship with Christ. And, when one of the spouses or even both lose sight of this bedrock, the marriage can begin to falter. How often I have heard from couples that one or the other stopped loving their spouse. A good marriage is not sustained *only* by the love that the couple feels for each other. It takes a daily commitment to work at the relationship and to help it grow. Without that commitment, love can wither and die. Most times, in a relationship, adultery is *not* the root problem but rather its physical expression. The breakdown in the marriage began long before the adultery.

The root of adultery is ultimately selfishness. One spouse comes to the decision—however one may lie to oneself—that this dysfunctional act is okay. They may be able to rationalize that the relationship is dead or that they are no longer in love. The marriage is somehow not meeting their emotional or physical needs. Whether the adultery occurs as a one-time event or is an ongoing relationship, its very nature is an attack on the bond that God created through the consent of the spouses.

In many circumstances the problems in the relationship of the husband and wife occur over time, but the heart of almost all their problems is a failure to communicate. Once communication begins to fail, couples begin to drift. This lack of communication can be exasperated by something as simple as the computer. In the lives of many people, the internet has created a fantasy world where they believe their every want can and should be met. People meet in chat rooms, reconnect over Facebook, discover each other in multiplayer interactive gaming, and so on. They begin to have conversations with others that are only appropriate with their spouse.

This can also happen in other places, such as the workplace or through organizations to which one might belong. But ultimately, they forge bonds that are not healthy because they degrade the marriage bond that he/she consented to uphold and live out. These very conversations are adulterous in themselves. As Christ said: to look at another person with lust in your heart is to commit adultery; therefore, adultery is not just about the physical act.

When we look to Christ and his relationship with the Church, we must recognize that Christ did not choose to die for his own self-satisfaction. He died for the Church because it was necessary in order to bring salvation into the world. He died that the Church might live. Adultery, in many ways, is seen in the Bible as one of the most deplorable of sins. It is an attack on the very foundation of society which is the family. It is a rejection of God's steadfast faithfulness in the life of his people. Faithfulness is an attribute of God, and we are called to be his image in the world.

Faithfulness in marriage is ultimately how we come to be Christ to the other. This faithfulness is about friendship, mutual respect, honesty, trust, self-giving, total, and unwavering fidelity, leading to true intimacy. When these qualities are being adhered to, then the marriage is being lived as Christ intends. If the couple continues to seek what is best for the other, then they are being Christ to the other. Adultery can only happen when the desire to live out our marital consent stops being a daily commitment, and we simply allow the marriage to falter.