

Teaching the Sixth Commandment

Attributed to Siegbert W. Becker

In an age when we are in danger of being overwhelmed by a deluge of pornography, when the wickedness, the immorality and the perversion of our cities calls for a rain of fire and brimstone from the sky, when the only kind of uplift that the world has learned to expect from America comes from brassieres, there can be no question that the sixth commandment is a subject worthy of discussion among Christian educators. It is also a topic that most of us would just as soon avoid in mixed company and in free and public discussion. In fact, I have the uncomfortable feeling that I have been tricked into the position in which I find myself this morning. I originally agreed to read a paper to this conference on the first commandment, an area in which I would have found myself much more comfortable and competent. But having accepted a place on the program, I could find no quick excuse when Mr. Kehl informed me that the conference would discuss the matter of sex education in the school in the afternoon and that therefore the committee would like to have me read an essay on the sixth commandment instead.

At the same time, as I analyze my own feelings, it seems to me that I ought to be ashamed to admit that I find the subject of sex more awesome frightening than a discussion of God and his person and attributes.

I. Developing a Healthy Attitude Toward Sex

That brings me to the first point that I should like to impress upon you this morning. I believe that before teachers begin to teach the sixth commandment, they should first of all be sure to make an attempt at least to develop in their own hearts and minds a healthy attitude toward sex. A healthy attitude toward sex will avoid, on the one hand, the prudish mid-Victorian avoidance of the subject, which was in the main the result of the conviction that sex was sinful and evil *per se*, and on the other hand, the modern obsession with sex as the source of man's greatest pleasure and satisfaction. Neither view is in harmony with the Biblical picture of sex.

As Christians we will recognize that sex is a creation of God, and this elementary truth which even a cursory examination of Scripture will confirm, will be one of the foundation stones on which we build a healthy view of sex. When men say that the Bible teaches that sex is evil, when they tell us that the early Christians invented the doctrine that the Lord Jesus was born of a virgin in order to free his birth from the taint of sex, when they teach that the eating of the forbidden fruit in the garden is a euphemism for the sexual relation between Adam and Eve, when they spout this and similar nonsense, they only betray their own ignorance and prejudices. The Bible teaches without equivocation that sex is a creation of God. He made them male and female, it says. Maleness and femaleness, sexuality, comes out of the mind of God, and we would do well to remember that at the close of the creation chapter we are told that God saw everything that he had made and that it was all very good. When God ordained that a man should leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife that the two of them should be one flesh, he clearly ordained that husband and wife should live in sexual union with each other. The notion that sex in and by itself is evil is an idea which is not derived from Scripture. In fact, it is diametrically opposed to the teaching of the Bible. As Christian teachers we all know this, but we ought to ask ourselves whether it is really one of the fundamental presuppositions in our own personal attitude toward sex.

We could also learn something that would help us develop a healthy attitude toward sex if we would closely examine the manner in which the Bible handles the subject. The Scriptures treat sexual matters with the utmost frankness, and the person who understands the Bible will have a rather broad education in the normal and abnormal use of sex by the time he comes to the book of Revelation. This frank and open treatment of sex one finds not only in the Song of Solomon, which some of us who are older would be embarrassed to read in public, but also in some of the basic Bible stories that we would not consider dropping out of the grade school curriculum. We could begin at the very beginning and remember that miniskirts and bikinis have a lot in common with fig leaves, and I have often felt like slaughtering a few animals to provide coats of skins for some of the students at Wisconsin Lutheran High School and even a few in the college.

I imagine that something will be said later in this conference about the best way of teaching these stories to elementary school children, and I do not intend to go into that area at this time, but all of us could list a large number of Bible stories that would force us to speak of sexual matters if we explained them so that children could understand what they are all about. Yet we are so hesitant to speak of these things in a frank and natural way that some of our college students do not even know what circumcision is, for example. It is pretty obvious that it will be very difficult to avoid the subject of sex in a Christian school if we teach that circumcision was the sign of the covenant which God made with Abraham and that Jesus was circumcised when he was eight days old, that Jesus was born of the seed of David and of Abraham, that his mother was a virgin who went to Bethlehem "great with child," and that her husband knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son. A little thought will convince us that it is impossible to talk about the most fundamental doctrines of the Bible without becoming involved in sexual matters, if we believe that the Bible was written to be understood by its readers. That does not mean that everything has to be explained in detail at every age level, because there are some things that would not be understood by the young no matter how clear your language is.

Much of the difficulty we have in teaching the sixth commandment would be overcome if we would develop the habit of speaking of these matters as frankly and as naturally as the Bible does. We need to learn to use words like whoredom and harlotry as normally as we use the words theft and murder. These words all stand for something evil, but they are not on that account dirty words, any more than sex and marriage are dirty words. We must learn that the sensitivity that we have developed in these areas is not theological, or religious, or Biblical, but only an outgrowth of the culture of the mid-Victorian and post-Victorian era. The Bible uses four letter words that we do not use in polite society today, and if it were not true that the use of these words in a society like ours is a symptom of a rebellious attitude in the heart, even these words would not be unChristian. They are offensive in our society because of what they tell you about the people who use them, but they are not offensive because of what they tell us about sex or other natural functions of the body. Luther and the Bible do not display that kind of sensitivity, and instead of accusing Luther of using filthy language and the Bible of telling dirty stories, men ought to ask themselves whether they understand what it means to stand under the judgment of God's Word.

Those of you who belong to a later generation than mine may not even understand what I am talking about. We have come a long, long way since pregnant women stayed in the confines of the home for the last four or five months of their pregnancy lest they display their shameful state for all the world to see. What a strange way that was of displaying our faith in the words of

the Bible that tell us that children are an heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

The danger today, and I am now speaking to the generation to which my children belong, is that we will run into the ditch on the other side of the road and become altogether too frank and unreserved in our treatment of these matters. There are at least as many dangers in too much frankness as there are in too much reserve. God did make clothes for Adam and Eve after they fell into sin, and the Bible speaks of the shamefulness of nakedness. I would hate to have anyone understand what I have said as advocating the kind of frankness and unashamedness to which we are rapidly becoming accustomed. Much of the frankness of our time, of which topless waitresses and topless bathing suits are a mild symptom, is nothing but pure unadulterated filth, of which St. Paul would say that it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. It is sad to see that they are not being done in secret anymore, but for all the world to see.

It is sometimes difficult to know exactly where to draw the line and the quest for the golden mean here is probably as futile a search as the quest for the holy grail. But I would here briefly like to deal with an argument which one often hears and which at first glance seems rather persuasive. In a plea for greater frankness and openness, we are told that we should, for example, be offended by the portrayal of fornication and adultery on the stage and screen and in literature as little as we are offended by the portrayal of theft and murder.

While I am convinced that the portrayal of too much violence can be damaging to good discipline, yet I believe that the open demonstration of sexual sins or even innocent sexual behavior is far more dangerous than a gun fight in a western movie. There is no natural drive toward murder and theft, but the sex urge is as natural as hunger and thirst, and in of itself, just as innocent and pure, for in a sinless world it would still be part of a man's normal life. While I can imagine an actor portraying a murder and an audience viewing that murder without in any way being tempted to hatred, I find it difficult to see how healthy people can stand in close embrace on a stage or how a healthy young man can read a passionate passage in a book, especially if the author dwells on the subject at any length, without being aroused to the kind of lust the Savior condemns when He says, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Those who ridicule some of our older teachers who refused to allow an embrace on the stage of a school play and who fail to see the dangers involved in that kind of activity would do well to remember that Elizabeth Taylor Todd Fisher and Richard Burton fell in love (if you want to disgrace a good word by calling it that) on the set of *Cleopatra* and that Vanessa Redgrave met an actor named Nero on the set of *Camelot*. If you want to argue that things are different in a Lutheran young people's play, I can only assure you that the sex glands don't know whether they are in Hollywood or Hartford, whether they are in a barn loft or a church basement.

Perhaps this will suffice to indicate at least in a measure that need to develop a healthy attitude toward sex as a precondition for teaching the sixth commandment effectively. We have seen that such a healthy attitude begins with a realization that sex is a creation of God, and that, following the example of the Bible, we ought to be able to discuss the subject naturally and frankly with our pupils at the level appropriate to their age group.

II. Teaching the Sixth Commandment -- Marriage

When God gave the sixth commandment to Israel and said from Mt. Sinai, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," those words were not spoken in a vacuum. They were spoken to people who knew what the estate of holy matrimony was. They knew that it was the will of God that a man and a woman should cleave to each other, that they should lie down in the same bed, that they should be one flesh, that they should live together in sexual union, that they should love and cherish and comfort each other in that union, that they should forsake all others in this relationship, and that God would bless this union with children.

It is only in the light of the institution of holy matrimony that this commandment can be understood. The sixth commandment would be obeyed if people would only remember that before marriage you belong to none and after marriage you belong to one. Both the Intersynodical Catechism and the Gausewitz Catechism are on solid ground when they begin the discussion of the sixth commandment with a study of marriage. They were undoubtedly influenced in this by Luther's translation of the sixth commandment, which says, "Du sollst nicht ehebrechen," that is, "Thou shalt not break a marriage."

The Intersynodical Catechism says that marriage is entered into by rightful betrothal and the Gausewitz Catechism says that marriage is established by mutual consent. Which is the best way of saying it, I am not sure, since either is subject to misunderstanding. "Rightful betrothal" is a term which is hardly a part of our modern English speech and it is usually confused with what the world today calls an engagement. In many circles an engagement is looked upon as a tentative arrangement that can be revoked at the wish of either party or at least by mutual consent. Where that is honestly understood and implied, the fathers would have said that any betrothal that has any conditions, either expressed or implied, attached to it is not a rightful betrothal, not a valid engagement.

Still, it is true that a proper engagement is equivalent to marriage, and yet we would do our children a disservice by having them memorize such a principle without careful explanation, because it can become the source of unnecessary conscience scruples and provide the devil with an argument that he can use to his advantage. We may not like this modern habit of looking upon the time of engagement as a time of earnest consideration during which a couple comes to a final decision about whether to marry for better or for worse because such an arrangement surely cannot confer the privileges that an honest engagement would make proper, but it should be recognized also that the breaking of such an engagement should by no means be put into the same classification as the breaking of a marriage. On the other hand, the valid principle that a rightful engagement is equivalent to marriage can be misused very easily by young men, who can only be described as unscrupulous skunks, to seduce an innocent girl into pre-marital sexual intercourse and then throwing her overboard as spoiled merchandise.

For that reason it is well to stress already in the upper grades that the state requires a license to wed and demands that the marriage ceremony be performed by a properly authorized agent of the government. Even under common law, a marriage is usually not considered valid unto the couple living together as man and wife has demonstrated over a period of time that they consider this to be a permanent arrangement. The marriage statutes in our law books have been developed because common law does not provide the safeguards that are necessary in a society as corrupt and lacking in the fear of God as that in which we are living today. The Gausewitz Catechism calls attention to some of these things in the footnote to its definition of marriage.

However, when Gausewitz says that marriage is established by mutual consent, this too is sometimes misunderstood and misused. "Mutual consent" is mutual consent in holy wedlock, the mutual decision actually to be and remain man and wife, and not mutual consent in sexual

intercourse as it is sometimes understood. The business deal that a fornicator makes with a prostitute is a case of mutual consent, freely arrived at, but it is not the establishment of a marriage. For that reason I would also hesitate to say that in every case where a couple has had sexual intercourse by mutual consent, that relationship must be made permanent by a marriage.

Among the Jews a man who had humbled a virgin in that way was expected to offer to marry the girl (Dt 22:28-29; Ex 22:16; Ge 34), yet a father had a right to withhold his consent from such a marriage (Ex 22:17).

A proper attitude toward marriage will require a correct understanding also of the purpose of marriage. The procreation of children, while one of the purposes of marriage, is not the only purpose. We are told that God created a wife for Adam that he might not be alone but have someone who would be a fit companion for him and who would help him with his daily work. St. Paul says also that a man should have a wife so that fornication might be avoided. The powerful sex drive, which is often beyond man's power to master and control, is to find its proper outlet in marriage, and we might paraphrase a popular song so that it says in proper English what it wants to say anyway and doesn't, "Sex and marriage go together like a horse and carriage."

The elementary school is perhaps not the place to spell out these things in detail, but the teacher who is conscious of them will be in a better position to teach the basic doctrines concerning marriage.

This is also not the time or the place for a discussion of birth control. But because the subject is openly discussed in our newspapers and on television, it may well happen that the teacher may find himself in a position in which he will have to deal with the subject, even though it is one that does not belong in the elementary school classroom. It behooves us to be careful in formulating our answers to questions on the subject. Birth control is not specifically or directly mentioned in the Bible, but I would like to call attention to two things in this connection. The words, "Be fruitful and multiply," are not called a command in the Bible. It says, "God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" This is really a creative word of God, on a par with the words, "Let there be light," and as such it is responsible for our birth. Just as God blessed the plant world and the animal world and conferred on them the ability to reproduce after their kind, so he also blessed man and provided for the propagation of the race by this creative word of blessing. Men still reproduce today because God spoke these words at the beginning of mankind's history. There are some aspects of the sixth commandment which are best taught indirectly on the elementary level and on the basis of the Bible stories that give us occasion to speak of these things. If we present this matter to seventh and eighth graders as a command it may later prove a hindrance to them in coming to a God-pleasing attitude on birth control.

On the other hand, the words, "Be fruitful and multiply," even though they are not a command, clearly delineate God's purpose in instituting marriage and creating sex, and we can lay the groundwork for a proper understanding of this whole subject in later life by pointing this out already in the elementary school.

Teaching the Sixth Commandment -- Divorce

The subject of marriage has as its corollary the question of divorce. But again, this is not the time or place for a full discussion of divorce and the problems it creates in church and state. But from earliest childhood our people should be made to realize that a marriage can never be

broken without sin, for either a sin is involved as the valid ground for the divorce or the divorce itself is a violation of God's will. Already the words of institution say that a man should cleave unto his wife. We might say that he is to stick with her through thick and thin, for better or for worse, and for good. That it is the will of God that marriage should be a lifelong union that can be dissolved only by death is clearly taught by the words of Jesus, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

It will also not be a waste of time to discuss, at least in the upper grades, the whole question of valid grounds for a divorce. Even though children of that age may not understand all the implications of the terms, they ought to know that the only justification for obtaining a divorce on Biblical grounds is found in fornication or malicious desertion, and teachers ought to be aware that malicious desertion can take place even when a couple continues to live together in the same house. A discussion of all the problems involved in divorce belongs in a seminary class in pastoral theology rather than in the classroom of an elementary school. But we can in the parish school certainly develop an attitude that abhors divorce, as it ought to be abhorred by God's people. It is important that we should do so in these days when the institution of holy matrimony is so openly despised and misused, sometimes even in Christian congregations.

What is more important, however, is that young people learn that while sex is a good gift of God, it can easily be misused in the service of the devil. They must learn that the only valid outlet for an unsublimated sex drive, is the married estate, and somehow they must be made to understand that the sex urge is a sleeping tiger who can cripple people for life if he is not properly caged. Pastors, teachers, and parents, who know how an improper use of sex can bring lifelong regret and remorse, should recognize the responsibility which they have toward the young who do not know the dangers that lurk for them in the jungle of sex.

This is particularly important in our day when our whole country seems to have gone sex crazy. Moral decay, especially in the sexual realm, has always been a prelude to the ruin and destruction of a nation. The Canaanites whom God ordered the children of Israel to destroy utterly, were a people who had made a religion out of sex. Baal and Ashtoreth were honored with the and most immoral fertility rites. America, with its so-called sex-goddesses, is well on the way to the same kind of immorality. The decades that preceded the decay of Roman power were a time of debauchery and sexual excesses, when divorce and immorality had become an accepted way of life. When Paul describes the wickedness of the heathen world of his time, which called down upon itself the wrath of God, he singled out both male and female homosexuality as particularly characteristic of a decadent society.

And what shall we say of our time? Our newsstands and our bookstores are filled with pornography and the covers of the paperback books displayed next to the soap and the toothpaste in our drug stores are an open invitation to lust. Slick magazines like *Playboy* have achieved respectability, with pastors of established congregations serving as chaplains of the Playboy bunny corps and ordained clergymen writing for *Playboy* magazine and even suggesting in its pages that a little fornication might be beneficial for some people. Churches hold special services and sponsor special activities for homosexuals. Our supreme court with its spineless and permissive attitude toward filth and pornography has given encouragement to those who make a profit out of sexual perversion. The governor of one of our largest states, who once stood a good chance to be elected president of our country, sends his wife to Reno to obtain a divorce by perjury so that he might be free to marry another man's wife, and the wife of the governor of our own state gets a divorce so that she may marry another woman's husband. If this is what we have learned to expect from those who ought to be examples of moral leadership in church and state,

what shall we expect from those with a reputation for immorality and loose living? As teachers we must realize that parochial school is one of the last bulwarks against this flood of immorality which threatens to destroy our nation.

I do not believe that it is necessary or even desirable for us to spell out in detail for our children all the ways in which the sixth commandment can be violated. Yet we ought to realize that if they watch television or read the newspapers, words like rape and incest, homosexuality sodomy, lesbianism, premarital sex, the pill and birth control, wife swapping, venereal disease, syphilis, gonorrhea, intercourse and coitus, and all four letter words that are used as synonyms will be familiar to them, and we will do well to keep this in mind as we teach the sixth commandment. We will need to impress upon them that sex outside of marriage, premarital sex or extra-marital sex is contrary to the will of God, and that means everything that has a tendency to stimulate the sex urge into activity outside of marriage.

Our fathers had a habit of lumping all these things together under the heading of "Tanz und Teaterbesuch", the dance and the theater, and for this we often hear them criticized in our day, as though they ignored many other activities which are every bit as seductive as the dance and the theater. I wonder if the people of my generation were really so stupid as to imagine that dancing in a barn loft was sinful while parking in lover's lane was all right because the pastor had not mentioned that particular form of sexual behavior in his sermons. By singling out dancing they did give us a concrete illustration of what was meant by encouraging the sex urge outside of marriage. A few such concrete examples should suffice. If, while teaching the sixth commandment, you think it necessary to list all the various ways in which this commandment can be broken, you will need most of the school year to do it and will in many cases just succeed in stimulating a desire to try out some of these things. But one thing is certain, our young people need more warnings against television and the movies, against immodest dress and careless contact with the opposite sex, against early dating and going steady, than against rape and incest and gross adultery. The really dangerous activities in this area are those which are socially acceptable. There is so much in our society which is accented as perfectly proper, but which can only eventuate in the gross immorality to which we are gradually becoming hardened.

What is more important is that we give them the proper motives for avoiding sexual sins. Adultery and fornication are not wrong because they spread venereal diseases and lead to illegitimate children. They are wrong because they are contrary to the will of God and as such arouse the wrath of God which is a million times worse than a case of syphilis or gonorrhea. The shame and torment that men will find in hell is infinitely worse than the shame that attends motherhood outside of marriage. In teaching all the commandments, we need to instill in the hearts of our children the fear of God that trembles before his wrath. They must be made to realize that when he threatens to punish these sins in time and in eternity, he means every word of what he says.

Yet this is by no means the greatest or best motive for leading a chaste and decent life. The Gausewitz Catechism as well as the Intersynodical Catechism sound a very healthy note when they stress the fact that the body of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Ghost. An admonition against sexual sin is the context of Paul's question, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, and ye are not your own? Ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." If that passage is drilled into the memory of our children and if its meaning is impressed on their hearts, we shall have gone a long way toward building a chaste and decent life. It will do for them what all the education in all the ramifications of sex will never be able to do for them. God grant it. Amen.

