



DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY

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There is an old joke about The Seventh Commandment, “Do Not Commit Adultery.” Moses comes down from Mount Sinai, and announces: “I have good news and bad news. The good news is that I got Him down to ten. The bad news is that adultery stays.”

The joke is telling. The prohibition on a married person having sexual relations with anyone except his or her spouse may be, for many people, the most consistently difficult of the Ten Commandments to observe. The reasons shouldn't be hard to guess.

One is the enormous power of the sex drive. It can be very hard to keep in check for the entirety of one's marriage – especially when an attractive outsider makes him or herself sexually or romantically available. Another reason is the human desire to love and be loved. For normal people, there is no more powerful emotion than love. If one falls in love with someone while married, it takes great effort not to commit adultery with that person. And if we add in the unfortunate circumstance of a loveless marriage, adultery becomes even more difficult to resist. That's why the joke with which I began is funny – because it reflects truth.

Why is adultery prohibited in the Ten Commandments? Because, like the other nine, it is indispensable to forming and maintaining higher civilization. Adultery threatens the very building block of the civilization that the Ten Commandments seeks to create. That building block is the family – a married father and mother and their children. Anything that threatens the family unit is prohibited in the Bible. Adultery is one example. Not honoring one's father and mother is another. And the prohibition on injecting any sexuality into the family unit – incest – is a third example.

Why is the family so important? Because without it, social stability is impossible. Because without it, the passing on of society's values from generation to generation is impossible. Because commitment to a wife and children makes men more responsible and mature. Because, more than anything else, family meets most women's deepest emotional and material needs. And nothing comes close to the family in giving children a secure and stable childhood.

And why does adultery threaten the family? The most obvious reason is that sex with someone other than one's spouse can all too easily lead to either or both spouses leaving the marriage. Adultery should not automatically lead to divorce; but it often does. There is another reason adultery can destroy a family. It can lead to pregnancy and then to the birth of a child. That child will in almost all cases start out life with no family – meaning no father and mother married to each other – to call his or her own.

And if adultery doesn't destroy a family, it almost always does terrible harm to a marriage. Aside from the sense of betrayal and loss of trust that it causes, it means that the adulterous partner lives a fraudulent life. When a husband or wife is having sex with someone other than their spouse, their thoughts are constantly about that other person and about how to deceive their spouse. The life of deception that an adulterous affair necessarily entails inevitably damages a marriage even if the betrayed spouse is unaware of the affair.

Finally, the Commandment prohibiting adultery doesn't come with an asterisk saying that adultery is OK if both spouses agree to it. Spouses who have extramarital sex with the permission of their husband or wife may not hurt their spouse's feelings, but they are still harming the institution of marriage. And protecting the family, not protecting spouses from emotional pain, is the reason for the commandment.

Many marriages, sadly, are troubled. And it is not for any of us to stand in judgment of others' behavior in this realm. No one knows what goes on in anyone else's marriage. And if we did, we might often well understand why one or the other sought love outside the marriage. But no higher civilization can be made or can endure that condones adultery. That is why it is prohibited in the Ten Commandments.

I'm Dennis Prager.