

## **AFFAIR PROOFING OUR MARRIAGES**

**Exodus 20:4; Mark 10:6-9**

**Relationship Sermon Series**

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If you were to see a sign leading onto a freeway that says, “Do not enter,” would you resent it or appreciate it? If you were trying to find a way to get on a freeway and didn’t know if a ramp was an on-ramp or an off-ramp, you would certainly appreciate the fact that somebody put up a sign warning that “this isn’t it.”

God has given us Ten Commandments. Now we need to remember that whenever God says a negative he always has a positive purpose behind it. It is not to cause us pain. It is not to take away our fun. It is for our protection. God says that when we follow the rules, we win.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment in Exodus 20:14 states, “*You shall not commit adultery.*” Nothing destroys a family faster than adultery. Even the mention of this word may cause some people pain, and memories, and shame.

The purpose of today’s message is not to resurrect anyone’s past. If someone has confessed their sin to God they have been forgiven. The good news is that God has forgiven and has forgotten it, and we also need to forget.

This morning, rather than resurrecting the past, we’re going to focus on the future. God, my friends, is not a kill-joy. God invented sex. But like everything else it is meant to be controlled. God wants us to use it, not abuse it. All of God’s gifts have limitations on them. For example, God has given us the gift of fire. Fire can either warm you or burn you; it’s how you handle it.

God says I’ve given you a drive called sex. Properly controlled and expressed within a loving marriage it is beautiful and fantastic. But outside the commitment of marriage it can be destructive. It can be detrimental to your health emotionally and spiritually.

This morning I will look at how you can affair proof your marriage. Notice, God wants us to use sex as a tool for building a marriage, not destroying it. Hebrews 13:4 says, “*Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled: For God will judge fornicators and adulterers.*”

It is much easier, my friends, to get married than it is to stay married. In today’s world there are permissive values that basically say anything goes. So this morning we’re going to look at five steps on how to affair proof your marriage. The first step is to make a commitment to God’s standards. Regardless of your past; regardless of your failures say today, “I’m going to make a commitment to maintain God’s standards.

This means that we agree with God about what he says about sex. God’s standards are very clear in his Word. The Bible says that adultery is never an option. Under no circumstances is it okay. Joseph in the Old Testament, you may remember, was seduced by Potiphar’s wife. He had every reason in the world to give into that temptation.

I'm young. I'm in a foreign country. She is willing. I've been abused. My mother died when I was young. My father was over-indulgent on me. My brothers hated me and sold me into slavery. I had a terrible family life. I was deprived of love. But no, Joseph did not try to justify why this would be okay. Instead he said, "I will not sin against God." It says he turned and ran.

This first step in protecting our marriage is to publicly affirm God's standard. Affirm to your mate that you will never be unfaithful. And then affirm this to your friends and relatives so they know where you stand. And then have a friend, a small group, someone to hold you accountable.

The second step to affair proof your marriage is to magnify the consequences. Remind yourself of the devastation and destruction this can cause. An affair leaves permanent scars. The sense of loss to everyone is enormous. So many wish they could erase all this and start over again.

Some of you may be in difficult marriages. You're struggling and having a tough time. The cost of maintaining, restoring, repairing and making your marriage work may seem really high. And yet the cost of adultery is always higher. Everybody loses. And the possibility of fixing your marriage is made very difficult in the process.

You say but God wants me to be happy. Yes, and that's why he gave us this rule. Adultery is ultimately selfishness. It's saying that I'm going to put my pleasure ahead of everyone else. Ahead of what God says; ahead of what it will do to my spouse, my family. It's basically saying, "I'm going to do what I want to do for me." And that, my friends, is not love—it is never love.

The third step to affair proof your marriage is to maintain it. A growing and nurturing relationship with your spouse will reduce the pull and attraction of adultery. The goal in marriage is to be best friends. Someone said, "It's real easy to leave your spouse; it's not easy to leave your best friend."

And yet how do you build a friendship? Time; time; time! You cannot be best friends with someone you don't spend time with; or who you don't see very often; or who you don't talk and tell your heart to. We need to do things to maintain our marriage. Have a date night. Take a weekend together without the kids. Keep increasing the process of becoming best friends. Commit together to attending the Relationship Workshop on Feb. 9—we need every tool and help we can get.

The fourth step to affair proof your marriage is to manage your mind. People don't just fall into immorality. You aren't a moral upright person today and somehow by tomorrow you fall. It doesn't just happen that way. There is a process.

The process starts by accepting sinful/shady thoughts in one's mind. The battle for any temptation always begins in your mind. What you think about you'll eventually feel, and what you feel you'll eventually act out. If you think about good, happy, loving, kind things, that's the way you will act. If you think of lustful, cheating, obscene thoughts, that's the kind of person you'll become.

That is why we need to be careful of pornography, Internet sites, certain movies, and Facebook and social media contacts with former boyfriends/girlfriends. Oh, I know some say what's the big deal? I can handle it. And yet it's impossible to not be affected by what we focus our minds on.

As this process begins in your mind it can lead next to an emotional non-physical involvement. To assume that a relationship is okay because there is no physical contact is a mistake. By emotional

involvement I mean that you start looking to another person than your spouse for the deep emotional needs that we all have for understanding, support and sympathy.

I talked with a Christian woman one time who told me that she was in a very unhappy and unfulfilling marriage. There was a man at work she began to share her problems with. He was so kind, understanding and supportive. "But he's never touched me," she said. "But if he does, I'm a goner." It is very easy, my friends, to get emotionally hooked. It can so easily lead to the next step.

As the process begins in our minds, becomes emotional, it can easily cross the line into physical contact. And as people have shared, the power of this passion is unbelievable. Psychologist Dr. Will Harley in his book, *"His Needs, Her Needs,"* says the hormonal and chemical energy in an affair often deceives a person into thinking this is the greatest love ever—and that is why it is so addictive.

As a woman I was counseling told me one time, "Pastor, you don't even know what real love is. I've never been in love like this." She was so caught up in this she wouldn't listen to any rational thinking. But that "love" as she called it did not last very long. And it destroyed her marriage and children.

As the process begins in our minds, becomes emotional, then physical, it then is built on rationalization. People say, "If only my spouse were meeting my needs I wouldn't be doing this." "This is true love so it is right." "God loves me no matter what I do." Yes, God will love and forgive you no matter what. And yet justifying our behavior this way cheapens God's grace.

The fifth step to affair proof your marriage is to minimize the opportunity. Don't place yourself in situations where you know you are going to be tempted. Recognize the circumstances that make you vulnerable or might weaken your standards. Be alert and aware of them.

One of the greatest threats to your marriage can be business or separate travel. The more you're away from your family the easier it can be. You need to set some standards to minimize the opportunity. Call home every night and talk to your spouse and kids. Stay away from bars or night spots. Don't drink. Avoid compromising situations with business associates and friends.

Another thing you need to do is to choose your friends carefully. It is well documented that most affairs occur between couples who already know each other. You better make sure that your best friends are those who are strongly committed to their marriages. Have close friends who hold you accountable; friends who care enough to confront you if they have hints that something isn't right. We need good Christian friends.

Now finally, a word to those who may have struggled with this reality and have been unfaithful; each person needs to know that there is still hope. Any person can come to Jesus for cleansing. Adultery does not have to kill a marriage. And yet that person needs to stop rationalizing and call it not just an affair...but sin. Confess and receive God's forgiveness.

If someone is guilty of any of these issues, my friends, please remember that Messiah is the church for you. This is a community of forgiven sinners. There are no perfect people in this church. We can confess, receive forgiveness from God, and then we can forgive ourselves. It can lead to a new and changed life. Remember, my friends, with faith and trust in our God there is always hope.