



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

LOVE OF NEIGHBOR – COMMANDMENTS 6 & 9

Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked: “The ancestor of every action is a thought.” What you put into your mind comes out in behavior. Because attitudes shape action this newsletter presents COMMANDMENTS 6 & 9 as two sides of a single coin. The coin is human sexuality – a fundamental part of personality that affects communication with others, shapes feelings, and expresses human love. Human sexuality shared within a committed, loving relationship is “an image of the power and tenderness of God” (CCC #2335).

Commandment six focuses on action (“*You shall not commit adultery*”) and commandment nine focuses on thoughts/desires (“*You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife*”).

These companion-commandments express the belief that authentic love implies respecting self, reverencing others, and honoring the commitments that two people have made with each other. Both commandments rest on the foundation that persons were created in the image and likeness of God. Consequently, each person is a precious, irrepeatable gift to be treated with the respect, reverence, and loving care that God gives to us. We are gifts to be opened; not objects to be used. It is within this context of love and human dignity that we need to evaluate the sexual climate of our culture. Actions and thoughts that promote human dignity, positive self-esteem, responsibility and loving communion are ways of expressing love for God and for another person who is made in God’s image. This is the intention that commandments 6 & 9 address. Love, not lust, promotes well-being. Sebastian Temple wrote a poem that clarifies the differences succinctly:

Love is a silence. Lust is a roar.
Love is satisfied. Lust wants more.
Love is a giving. Lust only takes.
Love is a mending of hearts lust breaks.

True love puts the welfare of another person before self-satisfaction. Love is patient, attentive, and gentle. Lust, in opposition, thinks, “me, me, me,” manipulates, and grabs at whatever is self-serving.

ATTITUDES SHAPE ACTIONS

Even though these companion-commandments appear to be limited to adults, parent experience validates the maxim: “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”

The capacity to grow life-giving attitudes about human sexuality and loving relationships begins in childhood. Children need parents to teach them how to transfer the abstract word “love” into practical, observable examples. In other words: What does love look like? What practices ought to be avoided because they cause harm to the dignity of human persons? Teach children the following attitudes and practices as formulas for cultivating a Christian sexuality and love of neighbor.

1. Adultery means being unfaithful to a married partner. In readiness for adult relationships, practice now fidelity in friendships, keep promises and fulfill commitments.
2. Trust is the foundation of relationships. Infidelity betrays a person.
3. Demonstrate reverence for human sexuality via words, looks, and actions.
4. Love does what is best for another person even at the cost of personal sacrifice and delayed gratification.
5. Avoid *occasions of sin*, that is, persons, places, or things that tempt you to be untrue to the values of respect for human dignity, fidelity, and committed love.
6. Practice chastity – the virtue by which we use our human sexuality in a responsive and faithful way. Chastity applies to all people—married, engaged, or single. It’s expression varies according to the state in life. Be modest in dress and body-language and demonstrate a reverent attitude for the gift of sex.
7. Promiscuity and sexual-license in behavior, entertainment, or conversation as well as prostitution, pornography and sexual exploitation are destructive to committed love and dishonor the sanctity of human sexuality.

ACCENT on ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a time to develop *many* relationships based on kindness, respect, and shared interests. Engage teens in dialogue about appropriate sexual behavior and include these thoughts:

- Practice **SAVED-sex**. Sexual self-control eliminates the possibility of unwanted pregnancy; venereal disease; ruined reputations; “freezing” emotional development; and making a choice between adoption or teen-parenting. (Abortion is not a choice of love.)
- A couple is not ready for a sexual relationship before they are able to sacrifice their lives for the sake of each other and a child; and to provide a home, steady income, health care, education, and the intention of lifetime fidelity.

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