Longtime Affair - Commentary

Hello. This is an interesting letter. It's talking about two people who are married, a woman who is married to a man and a man who is married to another woman. These two people are having an affair with each other. An affair is a relationship outside of a marriage. So, if you have a girlfriend who's not your wife, that relationship is called an affair.

So they're having an affair that's been happening for a while, so it's not a short thing, it's a long-term thing. They love each other very deeply. Unconditional love they describe it. Our roots are intertwined, so their deep feelings are intertwined together. But, they're in their 50s so they're older and they don't want to leave their families. Maybe they have adult children and they don't want to destroy their families.

This makes it an interesting situation. I use this in my class here in San Francisco. There was a very interesting discussion about this article. I think there were a lot of different opinions, which surprised me a little. Some people thought it's terrible, they must end the affair and they're doing a very bad thing. I would say that would be the normal American reaction, or opinion. However, most of the students didn't have that opinion. Most of my students are Asian, Japanese, Korean and Thai. Most of them actually had different ideas.

I would say about half said they should continue doing what they're doing, but continue to be secret. So they said continue the affair because they love each other very much, but they also love their families and don't want to hurt them. So these students said to continue doing what they're doing, but keep it a secret so you don't hurt your families. They thought this isn't so terrible because these people love each other very much and it's not horrible and they're not bad people. That was another opinion.

A final opinion was that they should divorce their spouses and then marry each other to stop the affair. They obviously love each other so much, maybe they don't have the same feeling for their wife or husband, so they should divorce and marry each other.

Those opinions continue or get divorced were the most popular in my class. It was a little surprising to me, but it showed me something. This idea is cultural, the idea of having affairs and the idea of what is good and bad in marriage, has differences in different cultures, not that anybody thinks or encourages affairs because nobody was saying affairs are good and every husband or wife should have one. Nobody said that.

However, there were different attitudes about whether it was terrible a little bit, terrible horrible bad or is it not so bad and that was very different. Each individual had different opinions about that and I can see different cultural ideas about that too.

A little later, I was in the bookstore at Union Square downtown, here in San Francisco and I saw a book about this subject… *The Cultural Opinions of Having Affairs in Marriage*. I didn't

want to buy the book so I didn't read the whole thing, but I did read some. It had the basic idea that it's true, that every country has different rules or opinions about affairs, whether they're really, really bad, a little bad or if they're okay as long as they're secret. There are many different opinions. It talked about how in Japan there are different opinions, in that it's not horrible but that it can be common amongst some men.

Then, in other places, they have the idea that if a man pays for sex with a prostitute then it's not cheating, it's not an affair, because there's no emotional involvement and some cultures don't think that's too bad. Other cultures believe it to be normal for couples to have affairs with someone else, but they should be secretive about it and not let everyone know.

Then the book talked about how America actually is quite different from much of the world, because in America the opinions are very strong that affairs are horrible, terrible almost evil and this is stronger than in most places around the world. Many people have this idea, but in America this idea is very strong, stronger than in other countries.

So it was interesting to me, because when I chose this letter for my class I thought everyone would agree, oh this is bad they should end it immediately, they're bad people, because I'm thinking like an American and that's what most Americans would say. In fact, it's not what most of my students said. I think maybe only one student said something remotely similar to that and all the others were less judgmental and strong about it.

It was interesting and shows again how culture can influence our ideas about this quite a bit, about many things, very basic things such as relationships are affected by culture and often it's in a subtle way that's not obvious sometimes, but those differences are a little more deep. Those differences are there and learning to communicate effectively is important so we can understand those differences.

I don't think in these kinds of cases or situations that there's a right or wrong answer. God didn't write something down and we all must follow it, I think every culture has reasons for their beliefs and there are good and bad points to those cultural beliefs. I'm very much like this idea of not holding onto opinions too strongly, because we never really know. We can't ever really be sure about things, so it's always good to remember even if we have a strong opinion, that it's just an opinion and maybe it's good for us but maybe other people in other situations in other cultures or places with other circumstances, maybe it's not good for them.

That's something you should always remember. I try to remember that. I have strong opinions about things, certainly about education and teaching, as well as other things and sometimes they're too strong so I have to remind myself that it's just an opinion. It's not right or 100% correct, because God in Heaven didn't give you this opinion it's just your opinion. It's good for me and my experiences but in the end finally, it's only an opinion and it's not good for everybody.

All right, another issue about this letter, this long time affair situation is the issue of a double standard, which is something we've also talked about in my class. It's something that I feel very strongly about. What's a double standard? It is a rule that is different for different people.

For example, a rule that's different for women than it is for men. We see this double standard everywhere in the world about having affairs. I'm sure you know and you will agree that in most countries, if a man has an affair it's less serious than if a woman has one. So a man is married and he has sex with another woman, maybe he pays a prostitute or he has a

girlfriend. In different countries we might think different things about this and might think this is bad, but in most countries and I want to say almost all, most people will still have a little bit of attitude and think that's normal for men. It's not so terrible, he's a man.

However, if we change the situation and have a woman, a wife, she's married and she has an affair, maybe she pays a man to have sex or she has a boyfriend. In most cultures we judge the woman much worse, she's terrible, she's a prostitute, a slut or she's horrible. It's much worse and more negative for the woman than for the man, and that's a double standard. I think it's wrong. I think it's 100% wrong that, the woman, if she does something she's terrible, horrible and everybody criticizes her saying she's a bad person. But if a man does the same thing then it's okay, it's not so bad, that's normal or it's a little bad but not terrible. That is a clear double standard that we see in nearly every country I know of.

In my class discussion, everybody agreed that in their own country this was a double standard. In Thailand if a man has an affair it's less serious than if a woman does, same in Japan and even the same in America. I don't know about Europe, but my guess is it's probably the same. That's not good, because it shows that to be honest women are still not equal. You're getting closer, especially in some countries, like the U.S. where women are getting closer to being equal as in many countries.

However, there's still a lot of work too do. There are so many double standards about women, where the woman is treated more badly or she's judged more harshly, more severely and in a more negative way than a man for the same situation. Of course, we see this in working that women are getting more jobs, better jobs, in the U.S. but still if you look at the top of the company, the president, CEO and top officers, it's still mostly men in those positions. If you look at the American government like senators, congress and the President, still men.

So there is still this double standard in politics, culture and business everywhere. There's still a lot of work to do, work that woman have to do but I think men have to also realize this, understand it and help change it, because its something that affects them as well.

If you have a daughter or a girlfriend, do you really want her to be treated badly? Do you want her to have a double standard to live by? I don't and I hope you don't either.

It's a big issue and I think we see the double standard issue most strongly about sex and sexual relationships, because that's where women really get treated badly, judged differently and much more negative. A man has sex with many women and he's cool, but if a woman has sex with many men and she's a slut. The woman is treated negatively and badly and the man is almost admired and complemented. It's wrong.

It's the same regarding affairs as we've discussed. If a man has an affair and it's not so bad, but if a woman has an affair it's terrible. So this is a double standard that in the area of sex, we see this a lot with even enjoying sex, where men are taught to enjoy sex. If a man really likes sex a lot it's great and he's passionate, that's seen as wonderful. However, if a woman really enjoys sex, she's very passionate and direct about it, than she gets criticized, so we often see women who are afraid to enjoy sex or to say they enjoy sex for fear of being criticized.

This is another double standard that we see with women, especially in this area of sexual relationships.

So those are the two big issues I wanted to talk about, one being the double standard that we see with men and women in most societies and the cultural differences from country to country and region to region about this idea of having affairs and how bad it is. It depends on where you're from, your age and many other things.

Hope you enjoyed the topic. We'll talk to you for the next lesson.