

The Law of God, Part 8: The Sacred Union

Exodus 20:1 ESV (Pg. 35) And God spoke all these words, saying, **2** “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **3** You shall have no other gods before me. **4** “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **5** You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. **7** You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. **8** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, **10** but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. **11** For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. **12** Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you **13** You shall not murder. **14** You shall not commit adultery.”

- I. Last week we said that the sixth Commandment, “You shall not murder”, was the beginning of the 5 Commandments that specifically govern our interactions with other people. It makes sense that it should be first, since God is the giver and taker of life, describing himself as the “God of the Living”. We are also forbidden to murder because all humanity is created in the image of God. This makes murder extremely abhorrent, both to God and ourselves, and, according to Jesus, God’s prohibition of it extends to hateful heart-level thoughts, words and actions as well.
 - A. The seventh commandment, “**You shall not commit adultery**” tightens the focus. Though it applies to all of humanity, it emphasizes those with whom we are in the closest covenant. The way we obey or ignore this commandment has major ramifications, either stabilizing or destabilizing the societies we all share.
 1. For example, right now in America, sexual expression, a gift given by God to be enjoyed in the safe confines of a one-man, one woman marriage covenant, is now viewed by many as central to our identity in every way.
 2. Many of these sexual identities we embrace place a value on sex and sexual activity that is way too high, that is devoid of any real context, and in many instances, perverse and self-destructive to those who practice them.
 - B. Rather, we were designed by God to find our identity in the fact that we were created by him, for his glory, and even more as the redeemed of Christ. We were never meant to be identified by our various sexual preferences and orientations, but by the fact that we were fashioned male or female in the image of God.
 1. But God’s answer to all of this was to command his people, “You shall not commit adultery”. This may seem odd at first glance. Adultery, as strictly defined, only denotes one type of specific sexual sin: The violation of the sexual covenant of marriage with someone who is not your spouse.
 2. Does this imply that we are free to engage in all other sexual activities as long as they don’t violate that spousal covenant? What would that mean for

activities such as viewing pornography, homosexual behavior, etc.? And in the light of the Supreme Court's landmark 2015 Obergefell decision, who gets to define who can be our spouse is in the first place?

3. This morning I will contend, and hopefully prove, that the 7th Commandment includes all the things the Bible defines as sexually immoral. More than that, I want to emphasize the gospel-centered "why" behind the commandment. My desire is that you see that God's way is far better than your own or anyone else's, and that it alone leads to life for those who hear and obey it.
- II. To understand the all-encompassing nature of the meaning of "adultery", the best place for us to look is at Jesus' own words in the Sermon on the Mount: **Matthew 5:27 ESV** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' **28 But I say to you** that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. **29** If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. **30** And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.
- A. Just like he did with the commandment about murder, Jesus uses his authority as giver and holy interpreter of the law to expand the application of this Commandment. One can't claim righteousness on the basis that they have never slipped between the sheets with another's spouse. Jesus says a lingering gaze, and the thoughts you entertain are enough to condemn you. Again, the issue is not just the adulterous **act**, but the wicked **heart** at the base of it.
 1. Don't miss that the context for Jesus' imagery of our eyes and hands causing us to sin is lust and adultery of the heart. It is graphic, but it doesn't take a Bible scholar to see what he is referring to, and what he is prohibiting.
 2. His answer is shocking: tear out the eye, and cut off the hand; whatever is required to keep your soul out of the danger of being cast into hell. This corresponds to what Solomon taught his Son in the Proverbs...
 - B. **Proverbs 6:23 ESV** For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, **24** to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. **25 Do not desire her beauty in your heart**, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; **26** for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life. **27** Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes **not be burned**? **28** Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet **not be scorched**? **29** So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; **none who touches her will go unpunished**. **30** People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry, **31** but if he is caught, **he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house**. **32** He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it **destroys himself**. **33** He will get **wounds** and **dishonor**, and **his disgrace will not be wiped away**.
 1. Notice that Solomon starts where Jesus does when he says, "Do not desire her beauty **in your heart**". Desire not only often leads to the act, but Jesus actually **equates** the desire and the act, making one as heinous as the other.

2. Solomon also points out the terrible consequences of sexual sin, using words like “burned”, “scorched”, and “punished”. The offender will “pay sevenfold”, even “give all the goods of this house”. He “destroys himself”, suffering “wounds”, “dishonor”, and disgrace that will never be wiped away.
- C. All of this serves as a warning to those who would defend viewing pornography, or engaging in a lustful fantasy life as a “victimless crime”. The same penalties that apply to adultery with your body, also apply to adultery of the mind.
- III. But the Bible also teaches that all sexual sin is adultery because the marriage bed of one man and one woman is the only place where our god-given sexuality has been blessed and sanctioned by God to be expressed. **Genesis 2:24 ESV** Therefore **a man** (single male) shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife (singular female), and they shall become one flesh.
- A. If there are any doubts about what is meant in Genesis, Jesus clarifies the language when he quotes this verse to his opponents in Matthew 19: **Matthew 19:4 ESV** He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, **5** and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? **6** So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”
1. He says that marriage is rooted in the fact that God created all of humanity male and female, so that when they come together, they might be physically, emotionally, and intellectually complementary to one another.
 2. This eliminates the possibility of God’s blessing resting on homosexual unions, or on any other aberration of his monogamous, heterosexual design.
- B. But Jesus also clarifies further, instead of saying “**they** shall become one flesh” he (and Paul later) state it as “**the two** shall become one flesh”; also stating, “they are no longer two but one flesh”. God’s desire for us is to spend our days in covenant sexual relationship with one other person of the opposite sex.
1. I can imagine that some of you might be protesting, saying “What about Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon? These are all Bible heroes who had multiple wives! Did God change his mind about what was right?”
 2. I would point out two things, and let you study them out on your own time:
 - a) First, nowhere in scripture does God encourage a man to take multiple wives. Jesus said his monogamous intention was “from the beginning”. Ancient polygamy was an expression of fallenness, not holiness, proving that the people that God chose were oftentimes flawed like you and me.
 - b) Second, there is not one central polygamous character in all of scripture who didn’t suffer in one form or another (husbands and wives) for their departure from God’s perfect plan for their sexual happiness.
- C. And that really is the point. God’s design for our sex lives is for our flourishing. A quick Google search of recent polls conducted¹ will quickly confirm for you that the most satisfying sex lives belong to those who are married, and even more so if that couple is spiritual or religious. Sounds like Hollywood just may be wrong!
1. God is not a “cosmic kill joy”. He doesn’t want to restrict your pleasure in anyway, even sexually. If you grew up with the mindset that God was a

- frowning old cop in the sky, scanning the horizon so that he could write a ticket for anyone who would dare enjoy anything, you need a much better understanding of just who this God we serve really is!
2. That is not God at all! A quick survey of the Song of Songs will prove that he delights in the sexual pleasure of his creation! He is obviously the one who created the human body to experience all of the glorious sensations that our sexuality affords, but he is also the God that designed specifications for its safe use, so that not one of his beloved creatures is wounded by it.
- D. In my garage I have a chainsaw, and I have a a lawnmower. Both of them serve a wonderful purpose that helps me enjoy my property, and decreases my work.
1. However, these two very helpful tools are not in anyway interchangeable. One cut limbs well, the other one cuts grass. I know this because, thankfully the manufacturer graciously included a written guide detailing the specifications of each for me when I first bought them, including all I need to know about safe operation and maintenance of each of them.
 2. But if I don't read those instructions, and I think, "They're both sharp! I'll just cut the limbs with the lawnmower, and the grass with the chainsaw!" Guess what? Most likely I'm going to get hurt! Even more than that, the equipment will not function well (if at all!) and will probably eventually break.
- E. Human sexuality is a lot like that. If we think that the pleasure it provides is interchangeable for all contexts, relationships, and desires, not only will it not work as it was designed to, failing to provide the pleasure, security and satisfaction that it was designed to bring, but people are going to get hurt.
1. From disappointment, to abandonment and rejection, and loneliness on one end; to divorce, STD's and even death on the other, it never pays to ignore the manufacturer's safety and maintenance specifications for the full enjoyment of human sexuality.
 2. The good thing is that the Manufacturer has been gracious enough to leave us with a copy of those! **Proverbs 6:23 ESV For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, 24 to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.**
 - a) To ignore God's instructions is to choose darkness over light, and death more than life; it is to prefer destruction over our own preservation.
 - b) On the other hand, to embrace the design of God is to embrace joy, and peace, life and pleasure in its truest, most undiluted form. **Psalms 16:11 ESV You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**
 - c) This is not describing a religious mysterious pleasure, but pleasure in its most broad sense. God wants you to enjoy life to the fullest, and the only way to do that is to completely submit to his truth and Lordship.
- IV. Over this series, I have done my best, not just to explain whatever commandment we were discussing, but to tell you why it matters to believers in Christ, under the New Covenant. I want to continue to do that today. Did you know that for us, "You shall not commit adultery" is so much more than a prohibition? It is a promise.

- A. You have to understand that in the Bible, God always looks at his people as his bride, not just his adherents or followers. This is seen several times, and in several different ways in both the Old and New Testaments.
1. Because of this, whenever his people were unfaithful in the Old Testament, God would equate their unfaithfulness to whoredom and adultery against an innocent, faithful Husband.
 2. This is especially seen in the book of Hosea, where spiritual adultery against a faithful, covenant-keeping God is the central theme. In chapter 2 particularly, God proclaims his love, his provision, and his protection that was lavished upon Israel, only to be thrown back in his face as the people cried out to idols for love, protection and provision! It was spiritual adultery.
- B. God hates adultery because he has been the victim of it. He has seen his beloved bride act like a common street whore in the face of his mercy. But in the New Testament, things change. God still calls his people (the church) his bride, but it rarely mentions spiritual adultery as a problem or even a possibility. Why?
1. It is because that our purity, and our righteousness is not secured by our good behavior, but it is secured by the work of Christ, irrevocably applied by the Holy Spirit. He has made us righteous - the untarnished Bride of Christ!
 2. **Ephesians 5:25 ESV** *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*
- C. Because of the sanctifying work of Jesus, we are as righteous as Jesus himself in God's sight! How righteous is Jesus? We know that he would never leave us, betray us, or be unfaithful to us in any way! He will always defend and protect us, provide for us, comfort and encourage us. You can count on that!
1. Therefore, "You shall not commit adultery" is a promise. It reminds us of what God will never do to you and I, his bride!
 2. Because of this, we can live lives of both physical and spiritual purity, standing in the righteousness that we didn't earn; the righteousness that has been imputed to us, faithful to a Husband-God who is always faithful to us.
- D. Remember, to you as a believer, the Bible says that God will never leave you or forsake you. He is with you always, even to the end of the age. He remains faithful even when we are faithless. God shall supply all of your needs. He has loved you with an everlasting love. What more could any bride ever ask for?

¹ For example, see <https://www.imom.com/poll-shows-sex-within-marriage-is-more-fulfilling/#.XR-FUS2ZM1I>