

The 7th Command: Sex and Marriage are Sacred

Exodus 20:14

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Our series on the Ten Commandments brings us to the seventh commandment and the subject of human sexuality and God's purpose for it. This is the most difficult of the commands to teach because when God made us sexual beings he gave us a precious and fragile gift. Imagine sexuality like fine china—the finest and most delicate china in the world—a masterpiece; beautiful in design but ever so fragile. It is so easily broken, but it never chips—it only shatters.

Our sexuality is like that. To speak of it we must do so with awe because our maleness or our femaleness is so personal, so interwoven with who we are. This is a precious and wondrous gift from God to us. But the world we live in looks like what happens when a bull rages through the china shop. The sexual fine china is broken everywhere and its shards are all around.

I know that as you read this, you may be a shattered piece of china. Sex in our broken and sinful world has shattered many a heart. If we could see with the eyes of God into our congregation, we would see dear sisters who are victims of sexual violence. Dear brothers who live in the prison of pornography. Young people who have already broken the seventh command who have not yet graduated from high school. Married folks who struggle with guilt from their sexual past. Spouses who live more like roommates than lovers. Dear ones to us who are in the midst of temptation with someone at work or online. Someone suffering quietly with same sex attraction and feeling there is no one to talk to. The collective pain and guilt and sorrow and deeply personal ache associated with the seventh command in a sexualized culture like ours surely trumps all the guilt and pain of the other nine.

Here's the deal. I want you to know that I know because this is very personal to me as well. My own story is a little more known here than most and being a normal red-blooded American male who didn't get married till he was 44 gives me some perspective on the seventh command as well.

If we really understand the seventh command fully, I don't think any of us are eager to throw stones. Yet, we must teach and preach sexual ethics biblically and boldly. If the church doesn't do it, who will? So for the next two weekends, we will construct a biblical worldview of sexuality and let the seventh command be the foundation.

What the Seventh Command Says Explicitly

Let me read the command. This is Exodus 20:14 (ESV). Listen carefully because it's quick. "*You shall not commit adultery.*" That's it. It's even shorter in the Hebrew—just two words—no adultery. It's a little verse with massive implications. So what is it saying?

It's kind of like trying to understand a foul in basketball or a holding penalty in football. To understand when something is done wrong you have to understand when it is done right. Adultery is sex gone tragically wrong. The seventh command throws the flag. So what is sexuality done right, you ask? The Ten Commandments don't give us that, but other passages do. The most plain goes all the way back to the beginning and God's original

blueprint: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

While this doesn't explain God's plan for sex, it does show that sexuality was part of our personhood from the beginning. Male and female he created them. Notice that this is prior to God's declaration over all creation that it was very good. Human sexuality is part of the inherent goodness of creation. If that's all Scripture said, we could view ourselves like the rest of the animal world with sexuality being simply a reproductive necessity. Pure instinct. No real relationship or commitment. This is how sex is portrayed in entertainment these days. It's hard to tell the difference between human sex on NBC and animal sex on the National Geographic Channel. It has about the same level of commitment.

I want you to begin to consider that the real glory of sex is not found in the world's perspective but in God's. Is it possible that Christianity has a higher and happier view of sex than the obsessed world we live in?

¹⁸"Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.' ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' ²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." (Genesis 2:18, 21-25)

Verse 24 is the key. We know this because Jesus quotes it in answering the Pharisees' question regarding the purpose of marriage (Matthew 19:1-12). Here is God's plan for sex. A man and woman first leave the primary relationship of their lives, their parents. They hold fast or as the old KJV says, they "*cleave to one another*." That's the union of marriage. "*And they shall become one flesh*." There is the consummation of it. "*One flesh*" is more than sexual but it certainly includes it as even the "*one flesh*" language pictures.

Marriage is seen in verse 25 where Eve goes from being called a woman to being called a wife. Their sexuality is plainly part of this first marriage as they are naked and feel no shame. The seventh command says that this creation paradigm is not merely a quaint idea but a moral absolute. Adam became one flesh with his wife but he was not to become one flesh with anyone or anything else.

So what is adultery? Adultery is marital sexual infidelity. It is the most devastating form of sexual sin because it breaks the covenantal vow in ways no other sexual sin does. Here is the brilliance of the seventh command: with only two words—no adultery—God establishes both the sacredness of sex and the sacredness of marriage.

If you didn't know anything and all you saw were these elaborate security measures (see pictures on the top of the next page), you still would know that whoever that is, he's important; and whatever is in that building is really valuable. Why? Look at the protections.



So we come to God's top 10 and number seven has Secret Service all around it. Number seven has high walls and fences and security cameras. What should that tell us? Marriage is really valuable and sex is a treasure. God, why is this so important?

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:25, 28-32, emphasis added)

Here is God's blueprint for marriage. It includes the Genesis 2 passage, but expands on it and explains it. This relationship was designed by God to picture something even higher and more holy than marriage—the relationship between Christ and the church.

JESUS AND THE CHURCH

E G A I R R A M

Marriage by design is a parable. The covenant of love and fidelity pictures the purity of Christ's love and sacrifice for the church. God designed and defines marriage. The husband reflects Jesus; the wife reflects the church.

So how does marital sex fit this picture? Let's say you are God. You desire to communicate to your people how intimate, personal, and joyously Jesus delights in us. How would you do it? You may have some ideas but this was God's. He designed us physically where the union of a husband and wife expresses mutual affection and produces mutual pleasure. The oneness of the experience powerfully mirrors the unity of the church with Christ. It is a holy experience that is sacred, precious, and covenantal; or at least it should be.

This is where sin destroys everything that is holy by taking away the Secret Service and the walls of protection. It takes a holy thing and treats it like a common thing. *Sex is just an instinct. A biological need like the animals. Biology not theology.* This is so easily seen around us. One recent example was the recent Winter Olympics where 100,000 condoms were made available for free in the Athlete's Village. It's not hard to imagine why.

Adultery profanes the pure and holy love of Christ. Spiritually, it says that Jesus is a playboy; a covenant breaker—which is absolutely and eternally untrue. His love is pure, sacrificial, forgiving, faithful, patient, kind, and unending. That picture is so valuable to God that he places protections, walls, and Secret Service agents all around it, but not because he is a prude. Remember, he designed sex and our sexual parts in the first place. He did it because he loves the reality that marital intimacy so wonderfully reflects.

So the explicit teaching is no sex outside of the marriage of a man and a woman.

What the Seventh Command Says Implicitly

While specifically addressing marital sexual infidelity, the seventh command implicitly requires heterosexual marriage as the only context for sexual intimacy. To be clear, that means *total abstinence before marriage; total sexual freedom in marriage*. So the seventh command is implicitly about sex before marriage, bisexuality, homosexuality, bestiality, pornography, voyeurism, sexual innuendo, prostitution, polygamy, and even immodesty in dress. It applies to anything that erodes the high view of covenantal marital purity.

We are not the first sexualized culture. In fact, Christianity was birthed in an incredibly sexual society. Read 1 Corinthians where most members of the church, before becoming Christians, had worshipped Aphrodite by having intercourse with the temple prostitutes. Talk about baggage. That was just normal in Corinth. I'm going to end the message with a wonderfully encouraging passage from 1 Corinthians, so take heart friend.

But here is the difficult balance: while we do preach grace and forgiveness, we must also uphold biblical sexual ethics and morality. I grew up in a church setting that talked about sex a lot, especially when a teenage girl in the church got pregnant. The way the whole subject was handled made sex seem dirty and taboo. Sexual sins were treated different from other sins. I have talked to many people from my generation who say the same thing. There was a lot of preaching against sex, but not much preaching *for* anything. This creates all kinds of confusion and weirdness. Sexuality is a huge struggle, and if it's taboo, it feels to people like Christianity doesn't speak to their greatest hurts and needs.

Over the years here at Bethel, we've tried to preach purity and grace and we want to do the same here. But if we make grace a license for sin, we are failing to understand the seriousness with which God takes sexual sin. So how should we look at this? Like Monday's

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship game. Whoever wins, it will be because they have great offense and great defense. There will be more on this next week but I'm going to give you a quick sketch of it now.

Defense: Taking Heed of the Immediate and Eternal Consequences of Sexual Sin

- *"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."* (Hebrews 13:4)
- *"Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body."* (1 Corinthians 6:18 NLT)
- *"He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away. For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge. He will accept no compensation; he will refuse though you multiply gifts."* (Proverbs 6:32-35 ESV)

Sex is so consequential. In marriage, it is a wonderful glue and celebration of covenantal love. Outside of marriage, it is a destroyer. If King David would have considered for a moment all that his adultery with Bathsheba was going to cost him, do you think he would have done it anyway?

This is the irrationality of sexual sin: when we are captured by temptation we are blind to the inevitable consequences. We don't break the Ten Commandments, they break us. When we are in the grip of temptation, the consequences seem insignificant, if only we can have those few moments of pleasure!

All sin is this way, but sexual sin is the most grievous example because the consequences are so severe. We may not think so. That pornography on the computer screen when you are alone may seem inconsequential. Sin seeks any entry point and then spreads like a cancer in our soul. The sexualized heart slowly degrades dignity, self-respect, and the ability to relate in a healthy way to the opposite sex. It provides the torture of the lustful eye and a constant state of guilt.

If we will keep sex and marriage sacred, we have to have a great defense. We must also remind ourselves of the devastating consequences of giving in.

Offense: Celebrate Marriage and Marital Intimacy

My own story of being a bachelor till just a year or so ago meant marrying people, attending marriage receptions, preaching sermons on sex and marriage, all from a distance. Let me pause and just acknowledge that for singles who want to be married, this is a great difficulty. It makes you want to wear black to weddings. I've spoken on this many times and those messages are available through the church.

The Bible celebrates sex within God's design. Did you know that? You might say, "I suppose you are going to tell me there is a book of the Bible on it or something." Yes, there is! There's a whole book of the Bible (*The Song of Solomon*) celebrating in poetic—yet erotic terms—marital, sexual intimacy. How about I read some of it? Oh, look at the time....I need to conclude.

We have to remember that sex is not the devil's idea or Hugh Hefner's. Sex is God's idea. One huge step on the offense is for marriage and sexual union to be celebrated and

enjoyed. What if Christian marriages were known for having the happiest and healthiest physical relationships?

I don't think we should do what some churches do and use gratuitous sex talk to fill the seats. But I do think we shouldn't blush about the subject. Sex is God's territory. Married couples, perhaps the most powerful evangelistic thing you can communicate to your neighbor and family members is that your marriage is loving, serving, and yes, passionate.

This means living the gospel out in our marriages with love and grace so that passion can remain part of it. But sex is so important in our culture. When they see Christian singles who value marriage so highly and hold sex so highly that they strive for purity, it's powerful. When they see Christian marriages of grace and gospel, it's powerful and makes the Daytona Beach spring break sex scene seem cheap and pitiful.

When they see in a church a redemptive community where sexual sins and bondage of the past is forgiven and overcome, it's powerful. When the church opens its arms to people no matter what their sexual past, loves them, and points them to new life in Christ, it's powerful. That was the church at Corinth with all their sexual baggage.

"Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, emphasis added)

Just like breaking all the other commands, sexual sin is sin Jesus died for, which means if we confess it, and turn from it, we can walk in the newness of life God offers through his Son Jesus.

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