

“You Shall Not Commit Adultery” October 24, 2021

Today, we cover the 7th commandment about adultery.

Parents, this sermon will PG13. Or maybe more like pg10 or 11? It's up to you, I don't mind being a conversation starter but I don't want to start a conversation you aren't ready to have yet. So do with that what you will.

Deuteronomy 5:18 You shall not commit adultery.

And then, Jesus famously doubles down on this command in his Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:27-29

27 “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.

So as we've done throughout this series, we aren't just talking about what the specific commandments are and what they mean. We are also talking about why God says them in the first place.

And we've got plenty of talking to do here. The commandment says no adultery, which would be cheating on your spouse or participating with someone who is cheating on their spouse. Then Jesus says, very similar to our discussion last week about murder, that God is actually after our hearts. And he wants us to pluck up the seed that could become a tree that produces the fruit of adultery.

And then just a bit later in the book of Matthew, Jesus reinforces this idea.

Matthew 15:19

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

That term sexual immorality is the greek word “porneia” and it's what you might call a junk drawer term. And it refers to anything sexual that isn't a man and a woman who are married. Any sexual interaction or expression that isn't in the confines of a man and woman in marriage, Jesus says, is restricted.

Can you even imagine something being more ‘nails on the chalkboard’ of our culture's soul than this? Restrictions on sexuality? And not just on what we do, but what we think and want? Yuck. Christians, always trying to ruin the fun.

Obviously, I'm being silly. But there might not be anything in scripture that our society is more convinced that they are right and God is wrong than the biblical sex ethic. So we'd better know why God says what he says.

So let's start broad. Let me tackle a couple of **false assumptions** modern folks have.

-First. There is a general assumption in our culture that restrictions are bad. And that **freedom is the absence of restraint**. We love freedom and we think true freedom comes from throwing off any external constraints and following our hearts. Doing whatever we want to do.

This gives me a perfect opportunity to once again share one of my favorite illustration stories.

Willie the fish.

Freedom is not the absence of restraint. It is the presence of the right restraints. The ones that fit your nature. And if you were designed to live in water then being restricted to water is actually when you will thrive.

-Second false assumption, and it's connected to the first. **Our desires match our design**. Or positively, Following our desires is the best path to knowing what is good for us.

This passes as common sense in our society even though it doesn't hold up to the slightest bit of scrutiny. When I say it now passes as common sense, here is what I mean.

A while ago I was at our childrens museum, Edventure. And posted on the wall
“have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. “ - Steve jobs

That’s right down the hall from the aeronautics exhibit that explains lift and thrust.

This sort of thinking is now so common sense that without thinking twice we put it beside scientific explanation of the physics of flight.

Now...you’ll never catch me hating on Steve Jobs. But what a completely stupid thing to say!

So, the State Fair is here. My wife does not like the State Fair. And in her defense, other than that, she’s a pretty great person. I find the State Fair to be the perfect combination of unnecessarily fried foods and people watching. And I have a desire. A deep desire. A desire I was born with. To eat all of those fried foods. And a few years ago I was at the fair for dinner. And I ate a footlong corn dog and fries. And a strawberry shortcake. Then the next day I went with some friends for lunch. And I got a cheesesteak sandwich and fried mushrooms. With mini donuts. Then our plans changed and I ended up there again that night for dinner. So it was 3 meals in a row at the state fair. I had the donut hamburger, with strawberry lemonade. And an elephant ear for dessert while we watched the hypnotist. How can you not love this place?! Well, the honest truth is, as I ate my elephant ear while watching the hypnotist, my body began to shut down. It’s never happened to me before or since. But my body just quit. I don’t know how to say it other than that. I had to lay down on the chairs in the middle of the show while someone went to get me some water. And right before I passed out I yelled out “I had to follow my heart!” Nah I’m kidding about that last part. Everything else is true. Our desires do not always match our design. And just the slightest bit of critical evaluation makes that obvious.

So the question is, what is our design? Specifically when it comes to marriage and sex? Turn to the book of Genesis. Chapter 2:19-25. This account is one which scripture refers back to repeatedly in discussions about marriage and sex, so let’s look at the source material.

Genesis 2:19-25

19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

There is no one for him to connect with and relate to. The animals are there but he can’t connect with them emotionally, relationally, intellectually, spiritually. He is above them. People are made in God’s image, animals are not.

So Adam is there, but he is alone because he is without a counterpart. And he is given the assignment to name the animals.

Antelope, Aardvark. With 2 a’s. Hippopotamus.

He’s bored and lonely.

21 So 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. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made[h] into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then 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. So God creates a woman named Eve and drops her down in the garden with Adam. It’s important to note that at this point clothes haven’t been invented yet.

So Adam is going “orangutang” and he looks over and sees a naked woman and Scripture says he breaks into an ancient Mesopotamian love song. “Flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones.” Which loosely translated means “MINE! That one goes with me!”

And then...

Genesis 2:19-25 [24] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

One = “Echod.” When combined with “flesh” it means fused together at the deepest level.

Think about it like salt. Sodium Chloride. We know that salt is Na and Cl combined. But it’s not Na and Cl merely coexisting together independently operating and doing their own thing. The two have come together in such a way that they have become something unique, new and different. That’s how the Bible describes marriage. Two no longer separate and individual but one and new.

God is doing this on purpose. In fact, in Ephesians, Paul gives us more insight on this very verse that we just read in Genesis. The bible tells us that a marriage relationship is about much more than just a marriage relationship.

Ephesians 5:31-32 [31] “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” He quotes Genesis chapter 2. [32] This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Paul says that the reason marriage exists is because God wanted to create a living breathing advertisement for Jesus’s relationship with his bride, the church. So God invented marriage to be an advertisement for how Jesus loves his people. We’ve done tons of work on this through the years so I don’t at all feel the need to dive in on it. But Paul’s point is that marriage is supposed to be an advertisement for how Jesus loves his people. How Jesus steps into a covenant with us, of grace. Where he will never leave us or forsake us. Where we are joined with him as one. Two separate entities are now joined for eternity. And because our relationship with Jesus is based on grace, we know that we know that we know that he is not going anywhere. That will always be with us. God’s love for us isn’t conditional. He doesn’t love us because we are lovely. His love makes us lovely. God doesn’t love us because we are worthy of his love, His love makes us worthy. He loves us because he has chosen to love us... and Jesus’s love says, “No matter who you are, no matter what you’ve done, I give all of myself for all of you.

And this is what marriage is all about.

So now, Keep reading in Genesis chapter 2.

Genesis 2:19-25

[25] And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Sex was invented as a shame-free event.

So Adam was looking for someone he could be one with. Someone he could join his life with relationally, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually. They are joined together in marriage. And the physical picture of this oneness is sex.

Sex was invented by God to be a way of saying with your body “all of me, everything about who I am, belongs to you forever.” It was to be a way of physically acting that out. God intended that when you enter into a sexual relationship with another person, you are acting out what is already true of your relationship at all other levels. It’s a physical way to restate everything that’s already true about the relationship. It was to be a way of renewing your wedding vows.

Think about it this way. The biblical vision for sex is that it’s a tangible symbol of an intangible reality. During our gatherings, we usually take communion every week. What is communion? It’s a tangible symbol of our intangible relationship with Jesus. In a similar way, sex is a tangible picture for what it means to belong to a covenant relationship with another person. Sex is communion for your marriage. If a covenant says “all of who I am belongs to all of who you are,” sex is tangibly acting that out with your bodies. Every time you have sex with your spouse, you’re renewing and reminding yourself of the covenant you’re in with them.

Seen in this light, it starts to make sense why the bible teaches that all sex is reserved for a covenant relationship between and husband and a wife. That’s the bible’s teaching on sex in one sentence: *all sex belongs inside a covenant*. Sex is a way of saying that all of me belongs to all of you, so in light of that, Scripture says that sex only makes sense in that context. To do otherwise would be acting out something

with your body that isn't true of your life and every other part of your being. It'd be inconsistent to do otherwise.

This is why we diverge from our culture in a dramatic fashion. We just think sex is more important than they do. There's no other way to put it. We reject the idea human beings are simply animals with time and chance on our side. We reject the idea that sex is just a drive, like hunger or thirst. So where our culture would say that sex is no big deal, as Christians we say that sex is a very big deal.

And to be honest with you, "sex is no big deal" crowd trips me out. Because they sure don't act like it's no big deal. You're chasing it with every fiber of your being. Talk about it all the time. Think about it all the time. Seem to be basically willing to do whatever it takes to get it. In fact, you often identify yourself based on it. These aren't the actions of someone who thinks something is no big deal. It seems as though you believe it's a very big deal. And then if you just think about it, sex is an action that has the potential to create human life. It is inarguably essential for the survival of our species. What rational argument is there that it's no big deal. We go extinct without it! It's on a very short list of requirements for human survival.

Sex with your spouse is meant to be a covenant renewal ceremony. You must not do with your body what you are not doing with your life. And this is why Jesus comes after, not just our actions when it comes to sex, but our thoughts and desires...our hearts.

As we read in Matthew chapter 5

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.

the word for lust in greek is "**epithymeo**". It is translated in other places as "coveting"... which is the wanting of something that is not yours or that you cannot have. A selfish, often insatiable desire. Greed - the selfish or insatiable desire for money and wealth, in this sense, is the lust of money.

And this is important to understand because it clarifies some things. Jesus is not simply talking about attraction or appreciation of beauty. To look at a woman or a man and find them beautiful or attractive is not a sin. Beauty is a good thing, a part of God's good design. That's normal and healthy.

This is about the selfish longing for something that isn't yours. It's about commodifying a person or relationship.

We don't live in a place that tells us that sex is precious and to be honored and handled with great care because it's a covenant renewal ceremony. To state the obvious, We don't live in a place that cautions and warns of the dangers of lust. In fact, we live in a place that warns of the dangers of a church that says lust is sin. This is a new development. We've changed definitions of words on this and now when a church won't condone any sexual behavior you prefer, that church is slandered as being toxic, abusive, and traumatic. And I say that mostly for the sake of our members so that you guys know what's happening out there. All it takes to be called what used to be awful words is for you to hold to a biblical sex ethic. In fact, we live in a society that has commodified lust. Lust is now a commodity. 'Sex sells.'

There's a reason the commercials are all wildly attractive people.

Imagine that shampoo commercial but it's just a totally regular looking guy with a dad bod and he's like "hey. I use this shampoo and honestly, I look a lot like you. Certainly, you and I look more alike than that model who's normally in this commercial. So try this shampoo. Suave for men."

And I would argue that unrestrained lust, total lack of sexual inhibition, have not been good for us as a society. And there are all sorts of ways I could talk about this, and I have in the past. But let's keep on the subject of adultery.

It's hard to get precise data on adultery because most people try to keep it a secret.

But according to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy...

-15% of women and 25% of men have committed adultery. And they say if you include emotional and sexual intimacy without actual intercourse it moves to 35 and 45%.

-In 2015, the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy reported that in 41% of marriages, one or both spouses admit to either physical or emotional infidelity. Admit to it.

-In fact, they said that 17% admit to infidelity with a brother-in-law or sister-in-law.

-Interestingly, 74% of the men say they would have an affair if they knew they would never get caught; 68% of the women say they would have an affair if they knew they would never get caught.

So...we aren't doing great out there. We are flippant about covenant keeping, at best. And I think are sometimes blind to the damage it's doing to us. Let me just give you one example.

There is a book called **The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce**.

They did a 25-year study where they tracked the long-term outcomes of 131 children of divorce. It's considered groundbreaking and foundational for the understanding of divorce's effects on kids.

Let me read an excerpt from one participant.

"As I began to speak with others about the emotional impact of their parents' divorce on their romantic lives today, similar themes came forth, again and again, described in similar language: I have built up walls, rarely letting anyone in. I have trouble living in the moment and often find myself wondering how things will end, even as they start. I feel like the rug could be pulled out from underneath me at any time. I constantly set up tests, forcing people to prove their love to me. I have a hard time trusting. I am so scared of being abandoned."

Absolutely haunting.

Another child of divorced parents due to adultery put it in crushing terms..." if mommy and daddy can stop loving each other, then that means at some point they could stop loving me."

We are just so committed to ourselves. When individualism goes to its extreme, that's our culture right now. But we haven't noticed it yet and keep telling people that their problems are that they aren't putting themselves first enough.

We are a society desperately in need of covenants. Where I know that I know that I know that you aren't going anywhere. I don't have to think about it or consider it or worry about it. My gosh, I cannot imagine the damage to my soul if it was always in the back of my mind that Courtney might decide to leave me one day. If that was always hanging over me. If every argument might be the last straw. If our kids had to worry that every argument might be the one that tears apart our family. I can't even imagine what that would be like, to just be hanging in the air over my family.

We were made for covenant faithfulness with God and with others. And the further we get from it, the more trouble we find ourselves in. More anxious, more depressed, more unsettled, more unsure, less trusting, more fearful...because nothing is secure. No relationships are permanent and reliable and steady. There's no solid ground because everything can be taken in an instant...even your closest most important relationships.

It's supposed to be that our closest relationships are the most secure. We know that we know that we know that God is never gonna turn on me because he has saved me by grace. It's his covenant-keeping grace that sustains our relationship and that's how I know he will always be there and will never leave me.

And our marriage is supposed to be a covenant also kept by grace. Two become one flesh. Inseparable. So I can let my guard down because I know that I know that I know that this person will never betray me and never cheat on me and never leave me. And children grow up in an environment where they know that they know that they know that their parents are inseparable. and that security and solid footing support them as they grow.

We have an entire society experiencing the breakdowns and consequences of a lack of covenants and we don't even fully realize it.

So what do we do? How do we walk in the wisdom of the 7th commandment? How do we actually begin to believe God when he says that sex is precious and belongs exclusively in a covenant in a culture that couldn't be more opposite of that? What do we do with our sexual sin? How do we actually change in our hearts, so that lust is uprooted? Those are some loaded questions and they shouldn't be answered flippantly or in a shallow manner. That sort of change requires some serious horsepower. And if you're thought is "ok if those are the rules, those are the restrictions, and they fit my nature, then I just need to try harder to obey them." I'm afraid you grow very frustrated over time.

John 8

1 but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. **2** Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. **3** The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst **4** they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. **5** Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" **6** This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. **7** And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." **8** And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. **9** But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. **10** Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" **11** She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

Notice the order of his statements at the end. It's critical. Most of us would reverse the order. Neither do I condemn you. Now, go and sin no more. What comes first, forgiveness or life change?

The power to change is found in the assurance of God's acceptance. It is the covenant-keeping grace of God that actually motivates us to change in a way that rules and laws never could.

Another classic...**Mema story**

Grace and acceptance have the power to change us in a way that rules never could. A change from our hearts that leads to a change in our actions.

So I know who I'm talking to here. And I know the sexual sin represented in the room. And I know the power our culture has over many of us on this issue. So it is critical that you know where the power to change comes from. It comes from Jesus, catching you in the act, and saying "I don't condemn you. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. In me, you are accepted. In me, you are now righteous. In me, you are now forgiven. In me, you are now clean. In me, you are now the beloved of God. Now, go live like it. Now, go and sin no more.

So let's go to the communion tables together and receive the change enabling grace and acceptance of Christ.