

The Seventh Word

Deuteronomy 5:18

It's a strange world that we live in these days, a world that knows so very little about the honor and beauty of purity. It is a world that knows so very little about what makes us different from the animals we might keep as pets or raise as livestock on a farm. It is a world that is in love with the profane, with the ugly, with the vulgar, and that takes what God created and defined to be good and makes it filthy. I'm talking about the marital relationship, the physical consummation of marriage, the relationship that God created with honor, as he so triumphantly declared,

Gen. 2:24 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

The writer of Hebrews adds definition to that glory of the marital relationship with the simple words,

Heb. 13:4 "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

Marriage is honorable. The marriage bed is undefiled, it is pure. The physical, sexual relationship of marriage is holy, set apart as sacred. And in that relationship, we even have something of the return to the innocent of the garden of Eden, for when a husband and wife are one flesh, they are both naked, as were Adam and Eve, "and are not ashamed."

We live in such a strange world that we even suppress the evident and obvious physical reality of the existence of a man and a woman. It doesn't take anything beyond the first introductory explanation of biology and anatomy to realize the intricacy of God's creation. God created mankind male and female. And we

are created in his image, to related to him as moral creatures, responsible for our actions, responsible to live together as human beings giving honor to this marital relationship of a man and a woman above all other human relationships.

Prov 30:18 There are three things which are too wonderful for me, Yes, four which I do not understand: 19 The way of an eagle in the air, The way of a serpent on a rock, The way of a ship in the midst of the sea, And the way of a man with a maiden."

Too wonderful for me! Such a gentle, sweet, and honorable description. The way of a man with his wife. It's not something to be referred to with vulgar and profane words. It is something to consider with all it's beauty and honor.

Marriage. A man and a woman become one. Even one flesh. And it is such a good thing. A beautiful thing. An honorable and holy thing.

Do you know what the worst thing about sexual sin is? It ruins that glorious perspective on marriage. Sexual sin cheapens the glorious beauty of "the way of a man with a virgin." It makes shameful what God has declared to be held in high esteem. And as we begin this morning, I want to establish that context, God's law preserving that which is good.

So this sermon is not just about a list of sexual sins that are prominent in Scripture. And neither is it about the merely external form of those sins so increasingly prevalent in our culture. But let me start with one of those lists which gives us an understanding of this seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery."

1 Cor. 6:9 "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? 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.”

So the focus of the commandment is adultery, violating the sanctity of the one-flesh relationship between a husband and a wife. The commandment includes fornication, typically a reference to sexual activity by those who are not yet married. It includes homosexuality, which is described this way,

Rom. 1:26 “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

All of those sins pervert what God has declared to be so very good. All of those sins make unclean what God has made to be pure and holy. That is, of course, what all sin does, but never is it more obvious than with sexual sin.

Having said all of that really as an introduction, let me start with Jesus’ own exposition and application of this commandment in Matthew 5. What Jesus does when he addresses the self-righteous Pharisees is to emphasize,

I. THE PERSONAL INTENSITY OF SIN.

You see, the Pharisees thought they were innocent with regard to this commandment. And perhaps, you would see yourself similarly. You are married, and haven’t been physically unfaithful to your wife. You are not yet married, and haven’t become sexually active. So with this commandment, you are not guilty.

But listen to Jesus apply the commandment.

Mat. 5:27 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

The point is obvious, isn’t it?

A. Sin is a matter of the heart.

That’s something we all need to learn. Something we all need to be reminded of. Too often, these days, we think of sin only as what happens outwardly. And we like to think that our hearts are innocent. So when people sin, they say things like, “That’s not really who I am.” Or, we consider our outward sins to be “mistakes” or “errors of judgment.” And we like to cherish the thought that our own hearts are pure.

But Scripture doesn’t give us that freedom. You have to be willing to examine your heart, and be willing to identify the sins of the heart. You have to be willing to admit that when you sin outwardly, when you sin in word or action, that sin comes from your heart.

Mat. 15:17 “Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? 18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

So adultery comes from the heart. Sexual immorality comes from the heart. “Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

So men, and young men, when you are tempted by pornography, the problem is not the internet. That might be the means by which you are tempted, but the sin is a matter of your own heart. When you struggle with impure thoughts, when your eyes wander, the problem is not that an attractive woman isn't dressing modestly enough. The problem is with your own eyes! The problem with your eyes is that they are attached to your heart.

So what do you do? Confess the sin of your heart!

B. Sin must be confessed as a matter of the heart.

David is a good example. The sin was adultery. Then, to protect the object of his affections, he had Bathsheba's husband killed. He was guilty of murder and adultery. Add in lying for good measure. Certainly coveting.

But look at how he confessed his sin.

Ps. 51:1 "Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me....9 Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Create in me a clean heart. That's repentance. Lord, make me clean. In my heart. That's the deepest level of the battle against sexual sin. Lord, wash my heart, for it is out of my own heart that my sin has come.

I would expect that is a hard thing to admit for most people. We like to cherish the thought of our own goodness, and the reality is, sin still abounds in our hearts. And David knew what

the Lord wanted of him.

Ps. 51:16 "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise."

So what is the solution for sexual sin? First and foremost, a broken and contrite heart. Real, genuine, heart level repentance. Not just the admission of an error or a lapse in judgment. Not just a weakness of the flesh or an inability to resist the ever-present temptations of our day. But gut-wrenching brokenness.

With that, please hear the fullness of the gospel, for the promise of forgiveness is granted to those who repent! God will not despise the broken hearted confession. Instead, as was read earlier in the service, as the assurance of forgiveness, this is what we know about God,

Ps. 103:8 "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

So you who find yourself guilty of sexual sin, whether it is a private matter of your heart alone, or has become evident in your outward behavior, confess your sin as David did his, as a matter of your heart.

Ps. 51:3 "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Praise the Lord that he “does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”

Then what? When the sin doesn’t automatically go away, when the temptations return, perhaps very quickly, then what? What is your duty with regard to this seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery”?

The Scripture is so wise, for God is so wise. The Scripture balances what we always seem to have trouble putting together, namely, what is God’s part in all of this and what is our part? Surely, as I have just proclaimed, God’s part is to forgive. To forgive as an act of grace, freely, fully, unconditionally. It is a gift, not anything you earn.

But then, as the recipient of that gift, what do you do with respect to the temptations to sin that continue to plague your heart? What do you do with the temptations of that old man who still resides in your heart? What is your part, in what we might now identify as sanctification. In other words, the on-going experiences of the Christian life.

What is your duty? In a word, self-control.

II. THE DUTY OF SELF-CONTROL.

Let me emphasize it again, at the risk of being unnecessarily repetitive. Self-control is not a good work you perform in order to achieve God’s favor. Nor is self-control is a good work you accomplish by the commitment of your own strength and ability. It is not something you can do on your own. But it is your duty. In fact, if I may say it so boldly,

A. Self-control is the will of God for you life.

I am always glad when the will of God is spelled out for me in

the Bible. It makes my life easier as a Christian. It makes my life easier as a preacher, too, because I can confidently proclaim to you the will of God for your life!

1 Thes. 4:3 “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.”

Your sanctification. Sometimes translated your holiness. They mean the same thing. And Paul defines that holiness by giving a specific example, “that you abstain from sexual immorality.” Abstinence.

And then a further detailed description, focused upon self-control: “that each one of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.” And the contrast is with unbelievers, “Gentiles who do not know God.” Self-control is the will of God for your life. God’s will is that you exercise control over your own body. That, of course, has reference to the fact that we are created in God’s image. We are not brute beasts. We are not mere animals in heat. We are responsible for the actions of our bodies. And God’s will is plain. Scripture gives us plenty of exhortations and applications.

Listen to one important cross reference:

1 Cor. 6:13 “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members

of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” 17 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

It is the will of God. And it is the calling of God.

B. Self-control is the calling of God for your life.

Still in, 1 Thes. 4:7 “For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”

This is a very important concept. If God called you to Christ, if he has called you to be a Christian, then he has called you to the purity of your body. He has called you to holiness. And it is helpful to understand that as a calling.

Similarly,

1 Peter 1:14 “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

People of God, please understand this aspect of your calling as a Christian. It is not optional. It is not something just for a certain class of Christians. It is your calling. And if you are not living in accord with that calling, then I will continue to urge you to

repent. I implore you to confess your sin, to turn away from it. Flee from sexual immorality. And in that context,

C. Self-control requires that you put sin to death.

Let me go back to,

Mat. 5:29 “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

Self-control doesn’t just happen. It is not automatic, and it certainly isn’t magical or mystical. If you are going to have self-control, it must mean you have to work at it. In fact, if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away!

Now what does that mean? Well, if the temptation to impurity comes from internet pornography, then cutting your eyes out means cutting off the internet. Or putting on a filter that someone else oversees, so that you are accountable. If you are struggling with that sin privately, then please feel free to talk to me about it, that you might gain the benefit of pastoral accountability. If the temptation comes from watching certain movies, then stop watching. If it comes from reading certain magazines, then throw them away. If the temptation comes from a particular relationship with someone else, then break off the relationship. If your temptation comes because you are looking at an attractive woman, then stop looking. “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.”

In the words of Job,

Job 31:1 “I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?”

With this warning, Eph. 5: 3 “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

People of God, do whatever it takes to put this sin to death. Wherever, whenever you sense the temptation, wage war against it that you might learn to resist. Flee from the very cause of temptation. When you have occasion to sin in this way, turn around the other direction and run away. And above all else, don't feed this temptation by feeding your mind and fueling your heart with thoughts that are impure.

And if you have fallen into sin, repent. Confess your sin, and seek the Lord's forgiveness. Then, go and sin no more. Let me end all of this with a final positive encouragement, namely,

III. THE GLORIOUS BEAUTY OF PURITY.

Let me leave you with an emphasis upon the positive alternative to sexual immorality. In other words, the goal. If and when you struggle with sins of the seventh commandment, let this picture of godly beauty be the goal you learn to seek after. And so this is what you have to learn. This is what you have to be convinced of.

A. The purity of your appearance defines your beauty.

In other words, purity is beautiful.

1 Peter 3:3 “Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.”

Those verses are written specifically to godly women, but I want to apply them in a much more broad context here, applying the principle broadly to both men and women. What is beautiful, what is precious in God's sight, is not what you look like. What is beautiful to God is the beauty of what is inside, “the hidden person of the heart.”

You and I must learn to judge beauty in the same way. That is a crucial step in learning to exercise self-control. Learn, and re-learn, what God says about beauty. Beloved, an appearance that demonstrates purity is such beauty.

The second encouragement specifically addresses the marital relationship. The physical, sexual intimacy which God designs for a husband and a wife to enjoy together, in private. Again,

Heb. 13:4 “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

Marriage is holy and honorable. And the marriage bed itself is pure. Undefiled. That's what you have to know and understand. The intimacy of a husband and wife is designed by God to be a very good thing. Pure and undefiled. And it is that honor upon which you must focus your heart.

B. The purity of the marital relationship defines your honor.

So if you are married, protect and preserve the honor and sanctity of that marriage relationship. At all costs. Let nothing and no one intrude. And if you are not married, protect and preserve the honor and sanctity of marriage as well by your abstinence. And by the purity of your thoughts and desires.

Beloved, that is the will of God, your holiness.