

LUST AND ADULTERY

Matthew 5:27-30

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 lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

As we begin, two important points need to be made.

First, attraction toward the opposite sex and sex itself are not sinful. Both are designed by God and are necessary to ensure the perpetuation of the human race and that man will fulfill the mandate given by God in Genesis 1:28 to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Therefore, Jesus is not forbidding these things but is addressing their abuses which break the bounds of God's design and purposes.

Secondly, Jesus' words apply to all forms of immorality. Jesus' contemporaries narrowed the commandment about adultery (Exo. 20:14) down to one specific act - having sexual intercourse with someone who is married. By limiting the application, purity was more attainable. In the same way, "to argue that the reference is only to a man lusting after a woman, and not visa versa, or only to a married man and not an unmarried, since the offender is said to commit 'adultery' not 'fornication,' is to be guilty of the very casuistry which Jesus was condemning in the Pharisees" (Morris, 87-88).

WHAT IS MARRIAGE?**1. Marriage is God's design for humanity.**

In Genesis 1:27-28 it says that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.'" Later God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18). In both passages it is God, not man, who decrees that man's singleness is not good, and it is God Himself who sets out to complete one of the central designs of creation, namely, the union of a woman and man in marriage.

Before the creation of Eve, God brought the animals before Adam so that he might realize that there is no creature that qualifies as his partner (Gen. 2:19-20). Eve had to be made uniquely from man "so that she will be of his essence as a human created in God's image as Genesis 1:27 said" (Piper). So we read in verses 21-22 that "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. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman. God made her."

In other words, God's original plan was for people to exist in pairs, not as individuals (Gen. 1:27). God specifically made woman because He recognized that man needed a partner (Gen. 2:18; cf. Gen. 2:20). This partnership is also implied in His mandate to multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28) – a command that would be impossible for Adam to fulfill alone.

We can also see that marriage is part of God's design from the fact that *God* is the one who instigated the union. In Genesis 2:24 *God* says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." From the very beginning it is *God* who unites man and woman so inseparably that the Scriptures can say "the two became one flesh" and "what *God* has joined no man may separate" (Mk. 10:9).

2. Marriage is a covenant (Mal. 2:14; Prov. 2:17).

A covenant is a binding and solemn agreement between two parties. God's covenants with His people can be defined as "a sovereign act of God whereby God unconditionally obligates Himself to bring to pass definite promises, blessings, and conditions for the covenanted people" (Fruchtenbaum, 570). The covenant of marriage is both a binding oath made between a man and a woman and between them and God.

Note: To understand the importance of keeping a covenant, consider promises made through deception. One would think that if a covenant was made on a false pretense it would be invalidated, but even under those conditions covenants were honored. In Genesis 27 Isaac was deceived by Jacob into giving him the birthright that really belonged to Esau - but the blessing remained with Jacob anyway, even after the deception was uncovered; in Genesis 29:22 Jacob is deceived by Laban and marries Leah instead of the promised Rachel, but the covenant of that marriage isn't annulled; in Joshua 9 the inhabitants of Gibeon make a treaty with Israel through deception, but the treaty then cannot be broken. There are other examples as well, but what is important to see is that a covenant is a binding agreement that is punishable by death if it is broken.

3. Marriage is mystery – it is a union that is to mirror God's covenant relationship with His people.

In the OT, marriage is a symbol of the covenant between God and His people (Isa. 54:4-6; Ezek. 16:7-8). In Hosea, Israel's love for foreign gods is likened to an adulterous wife who cannot satisfy her sexual appetite for other lovers. However, in 2:19-20 God says, "'I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD.'" In these verses the covenantal bond of marriage depicts God's covenantal faithfulness to His people. The word "betroth" speaks of the grace of God. It means "to woo a virgin." Though Israel is an adulteress and a harlot, God sees her as an unsullied virgin. He views her as though she has never sinned. (cf. II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 21). What a glorious relationship we have to the living Savior who has eternally bound Himself to us in love.

In the NT Jesus replaces the Father as the Bridegroom. In Matthew 22:1-14 He is the Son for whom the Father prepares a wedding feast. Jesus alludes to the wedding or wedding feast as the relationship between God's people and Himself (Matthew 9:15; 25:1ff; John 3:29). As the virgins were prepared to accompany the bridal pair with lamps to the marriage house, so the disciples were to be prepared for the return of the Lord (Matt. 25:1ff; Lk. 12:35-37). John the Baptist also acknowledged Jesus as the Bridegroom (Mk. 2:18-20). The church is called the bride (Eph. 5:22, 31-32; Ro. 7:4; II Cor. 11:2) whose marriage supper is presented in Revelation 19:7-8. Paul saw his ministry of bringing people to salvation in terms of gathering the bride to present to Christ. He says in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "for I am jealous for

you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.”

In Ephesians 5: 31 Paul quotes Genesis 2:24: “for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Then he interprets it in verse 32: “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.” In this verse the words “be joined to his wife” and “the two shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) point to marriage as a sacred covenant that mirrors God’s covenant faithfulness to us.

Marriage exists for God’s glory.

The institution of marriage is patterned after Christ’s covenant relationship to the church. Therefore the highest meaning of marriage is that through marriage the believer puts the covenant relationship of Christ and his church on display. It is for this reason that the husband must love his wife AS Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25-27) and that the wife is to submit to her husband (Eph. 5:22-24); their actions portray God’s covenant relationship with us.

THE SIN OF MARITAL UNFAITHFULNESS in Malachi 2

In Malachi 2:10-16 the word “faithless” (בְּיָדָהּ [bagad] also translated as “deal treacherously” or “breaking faith”) is used four times. The faithlessness spoken of is the failure to keep one’s covenant promises.

2:10: "Why are we *faithless* to one another?"— in reference to general untrustworthiness in our societal relationships.

2:11: "Judah has been *faithless* . . . and has married the daughter of a foreign god"—in reference to marrying of unbelievers.

2:14: "You have been *faithless* to the wife of your youth"

2:16 "For the man who hates and divorces, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be *faithless*."

—in reference to divorce.

Community life is supposed to be ordered by the faithful fulfillment of promises and contracts and oaths and covenants and commitments. But this order has given way to the disorder that comes when people give in to the power of self-centered emotional impulses.

In other words, there are two ways for people to try to live in a community.

“One way is what you might call covenantal order—it's what the OT means by shalom. All relationships are made peaceful and pure by the fulfillment of covenants and promises and oaths and contracts and commitments. Children to parents, and parents to children. Husbands to wives and wives to husbands. Employer to employee and employee to employer. Citizen to state and state to citizen. The peace and prosperity and joy—the shalom—of the community is held together by the deep strong spirit of covenant-keeping that pervades the community. The very fabric of the community is the trustworthiness of its people. Do they keep their commitments?

The other way for people to try to live together in community is the opposite of covenantal order; it's what you might call the disorder of self-indulgence. In this community the spirit of commitment-making and commitment-keeping has been replaced by a spirit of emotional and physical impulse. The moral fabric of faithfulness to covenants and promises and contracts is unraveled and what's left are the individual strands of private gratification." (Piper)

In its historical context Malachi 2:10 is addressing the bad example of the priests who had divorced their Hebrew wives and taken foreigners for their wives instead. Here the prophet lays down the reasons for covenantal faithfulness and the areas in which it does not exist.

1. Malachi 2:10— Unfaithfulness in relationships

We are to be faithful to each other because:

A. We have one Father: "Have we not all one father?" (v. 10).

"Father" could either be a reference to God or to Abraham, the father of the nation.

The fatherhood of God is found many places in Scripture. Isaiah says "But now, O LORD, You are our Father" (Isa. 64:8). The Jews said to Jesus, "we have one Father: God" (Jn. 8:41).

However, as Calvin says, "it is better, as I think, to apply the word to Abraham (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:7-9; Jn. 8:56), and the passage requires this; for it follows at the end of the verse, that the covenant which the Lord had made with their fathers had been violated . . . They did not preserve that purity to which they had been called, for they indiscriminately married heathen wives. As then they mingled without distinction with unbelievers and the despisers of God, the Prophet complains that they were unmindful of that dignity to which they had been elevated, when God deigned [i.e. condescended] to adopt them as his holy people" (Commentary).

When we betray trust, we betray the family of God and dishonor Him by forgetting the dignity to which we have been elevated as His holy people who are related to Abraham by faith (Ro. 4:21).

B. We have one Creator. "Has not one God created us?" (v. 10).

God is the Creator of all life, be He also repeatedly refers to Himself as the Creator of Israel. Isaiah says, "thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you." Then a few verses down it says, "Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made" and then in verse 21, "The people whom I formed for Myself Will declare My praise" (43:1, 7, 21).

The prophet is asking, "Did not God select us from the rest of the world, when he promised to our father Abraham to be a God to him and to his seed? Since then God's favor has flowed to us from that fountain, what sottishness it is to break that sacred bond by which God has joined us to himself in the person of Abraham?" For when the Jews did not consider that they derived

their origin from the holy patriarch, the consequence was, that the covenant of God with them became void and of no effect. This then is the reason why he says, that one God was to them all a Father. And as other nations might have claimed the same privilege, he adds, Has not one God created us? He shows that the Jews had descended in no common or ordinary way from their holy father Abraham, but that God was the maker of his race, that he created them.” (Calvin)

Like Israel, we have the same spiritual origin from the same God. However, if I am unfaithful to you, I act as though my God has no relationship to yours. However, since we have the same God we live under the same privileges and should be faithful to each other.

The prophet then concludes: because we have the same Father and Creator, "Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?"

By marrying wives of foreign gods, the people had shown that they were indifferent to the solemnity of the covenant they had made to each other, and their unfaithfulness showed that they had no concern for the covenantal relationship that God had to them.

2. Malachi 2:11–12—Unfaithfulness though marriage to Unbelievers

In verses 11–12 Malachi moves from relationships in general to the specific issue of marrying unbelievers: “Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem.”

What abomination has Israel committed?

“For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.”

“They had then polluted holiness, even when they had been separated from the world; for they had disregarded so great an honor, by which they might have been pre-eminent, had they continued in their integrity . . . We then see the purpose of this passage, which is to show, -- that the Jews were ungrateful to God, because they mingled with heathen nations, and knowingly and willfully cast aside that glory by which God had adorned them by choosing them, as Moses says, to be to him a royal priesthood. (Exodus 19:6) . . . He therefore condemns them for this ingratitude, because they had not only departed from the covenant which the Lord had made with their fathers, but had also neglected and despised that gratuitous love, which ought to have softened even their iron hearts.” (Calvin, Commentary)

“So the point of the verse is that when we claim to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and then willfully choose to unite ourselves with an unbeliever in the most intimate personal union on earth, we profane the holiness of God. We act as though our emotional drive for human intimacy is more important than affirming the preciousness of God's holiness and nearness. God calls this choice an abomination and he says in verse 12 that those who walk into it with their eyes open are asking for God to turn his back on them. "May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob, for the man who does this, any to witness or answer, or to bring an offering to the Lord of hosts!" (Piper)

3. Malachi 2:13–16—Unfaithfulness through divorce

In verse 13 God had refused to accept the offerings of the people. In verse 14 the people ask, "Why?" and the answer is given: "Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."

"He intimates in these words, that when a marriage takes place between a man and a woman, God presides and requires a mutual pledge from both. Hence Solomon, in Proverbs 2:17, calls marriage the covenant of God, for it is superior to all human contracts. So also Malachi declares, that God is as it were the stipulator, who by his authority joins the man to the woman, and sanctions the alliance: God then has testified between you and your wife . . . " (Calvin, Commentary). It is as if God were saying, "You have not only violated all human laws, but also the compact which I Myself have consecrated which ought to be deemed more sacred than all other compacts. How dare you come to the altar and expect Me to accept your worship and offerings?" (Paraphrased from Calvin)

SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

What makes lust such an evil in God's sight?

The Bible continually reminds us that God is more concerned with our hearts than our outward religious actions (I Sam. 15:22; Ps.51:16, 17; Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 7:8-11). Sins of the mind and heart are of the same essence as the outward behavior. Lust and adultery come from the same root, and both are abusing our attraction to the opposite sex by applying it in a manner that is outside of God's design and purposes. All sin is an abandonment of seeking pleasure in God to pursuing other "lovers." It is knowingly and willfully casting aside the glory that God has adorned us with by choosing the treasures of the world over Christ (Ro. 4:16).

If one is married, lust is also breaking one's marital covenant and disregarding the authority of God who is the stipulator of it. It is a failure to glorify God by failing to display Christ's covenant relationship to the church in our marriages.

For reasons such as these, Jesus tells those who wish to be His disciples that they need to deal with lust radically (Matt. 5:29-30). It should not be allowed to take even a small hold in one's life. It should be hated, crushed, dug out (cf. Col. 3:5-7).

Our generation takes sin lightly. But according to Jesus sin leads to hell (Matt 5:30), which is the ultimate reason it should be taken seriously (Ro. 9:12-14; 13:11-14; Eph. 4:17-24; II Tim. 2:22; I Pet. 4:1-6).

Note: For related information see my notes on marriage and on Ephesians 5:3-6.