

Exodus 20:14 4-22-18

Adultery

We begin with a warning that today our sermon is for mature audiences. Our subject is adultery and I just don't know how to talk about that without getting into the so-called adult themes. **14** *You shall not commit adultery.* Just as last time we saw that what lay behind the prohibition against murder is the principle of the sanctity of life, so today we see that behind the command against adultery is the principle called the sanctity of marriage. Marriage is what is being protected by the seventh commandment. What do you hear at every Christian wedding you go to? All that stuff about marriage being instituted by God. It all began in the garden when God brought Eve to Adam and said the two shall become one flesh. Marriage is not a human invention. It's origin is heaven. And since it is God who has come up with the marriage idea it is God as well, who intends to protect it by His law. The stability and durability of the marriage bond is an absolute essential for two reasons: one social and one spiritual.

The social reason is that the family unit, beginning with husband and wife, is the basic social institution. Out of this relationship comes children and thereby the perpetuation of the race. But it's not just the biological production of children which counts. The good of society requires intact marriages not only to produce consumers but to produce citizens. Three weeks ago I read those statistics about the tremendous increase in illegitimacy and single parent homes. And that phenomena, more than anything else stands, behind the identical increase in criminal behavior. One of the most intriguing books I've ever read is George Gilder's "Men and Marriage." It is a sociology book that ends this way: *Here emerge the most indispensable acts of social formation: the psychology of giving, saving, and sacrifice, in behalf of an unknown future, embodied in a specific child – a balky bundle of possibilities, which will yield its social reward even further into time than the most foresighted business plan. In this venture, few mothers and no societies can succeed without enlisting the fathers. Marriage is the key to the connection of fathers to this central process in the creation of life and the production of wealth* (p. 198,199). Fact is that when marriages blow up families blow up, and when families blow up the children suffer, and when children suffer society suffers. And either a society treats the marriage bond as sacred, necessary and inviolable or it will pay an enormous price. History teaches the practical, social wisdom of this command --*You shall not commit adultery.*

The spiritual reason for the sanctity of marriage is found in Ephesians 5. It is here that the relationship of a husband to a wife is compared to the relationship of Christ to His church. **31-32** *A man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.* The coming together of a man and woman sexually is an incarnation or tangible representation of their union relationally and their union relationally is a visible picture of the spiritual relationship between Christ Jesus and His people. As a husband, I am representing God in the living sacrament of marriage. And if I violate my promises to my wife, if I am unfaithful to her, then I have done something more serious than hurting her, and more serious than hurting my kids, I have despised and denigrated the purity and faithfulness of Christ. Marriage is sacred and holy because of what it represents, therefore, what God has joined together let no man rend asunder. Rather than think of this commandment as simply a restriction on a certain behavior, remember that the seventh commandment is given to protect a most holy and valuable gift of God, we call marriage.

Now I want us to look at the various ways that one can break the seventh commandment to the end that we, as lovers of Christ, might walk in blessed obedience. I will offer you three ways this commandment is broken and thus the marriage union is broken. The first way is to engage in sexual intimacy with or seek sexual gratification from anyone who is not your husband or wife. That is easy to understand. Not easy to do. Our sexual desires are robust and they are fallen so that we are powerfully attracted to forbidden fruit. The challenge is to channel all my sexual interests and energies, in a disciplined way, toward that one person whom God has given to me. And, if that one person is not available, I must exercise self-control by suppressing my sexual drive. And hey, it can be done. It's a struggle to be sure but don't buy this soul-destroying rubbish which says a call to sexual abstinence apart from marriage is unreasonable. Billions of people have done it, before marriage, in marriage when necessary, between marriages too. And they haven't exploded! And they haven't been depressed over it. Now I grant you this, it's tough to be a fallen human. We have desires that militate against our well-being! God's law, my friend, is not a shackle to keep you miserable. His word about sexual purity is not meant to keep us from something good, it is meant to keep us from destroying ourselves and it is meant to corral us toward something very special. My sexual drive, when it is funneled into the way of God's law, leads me right into a lifelong monogamous relationship which is good for me and my wife and my kids and the whole human race. God knows what He is doing. And to cooperate with Him see that your sexuality drives you to your spouse and to no one else.

The second way we can commit adultery is to entertain thoughts about sexual intimacy with or gratification from anyone who is not your spouse. That well-known word from Jesus is in Matthew 5:27-28 *“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.”* What is forbidden here? First, let’s note what is not forbidden. What is not forbidden is a natural sexual attraction. To notice that someone is nice looking, to feel a jolt of erotic energy at the sight of or picture of a person is not lust. Lust is when you play around mentally and indulge in fantasies and keep on looking and keep on thinking. It’s like Martin Luther said, *you can’t keep a bird from landing on your head, but you can keep it from building a nest there.* When the bird of sexual attraction lands on your head, obedience to Christ means you shoo it away, right away. And you don’t invite it back by the things you read and hear and watch. What is forbidden is that fantasizing, the indulging of the lust. Jesus doesn’t say it is just as bad as the physical act of adultery, but it is a form of adultery. We are to be committed to mental and emotional faithfulness. Not only is my body to belong exclusively to my wife, so must my mind and heart. The reason for this command is simple. We are whole beings. You cannot separate what you think about from what you do and what you say and what you feel. The more you indulge adulterous thoughts the more you are drawn away from your spouse and to the object of your lust. Adultery never begins in a hotel. It begins in a heart. The wise man or woman will nip it in the bud and take his thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ.

Okay, the third way to commit adultery is to divorce your spouse without just cause. Few things are harder on a pastor than dealing with cases of divorce. They are hard because many cases are confusing as to how they fit with biblical teaching. People look to me in hope that I will tell them it’s okay to get a divorce and many times I’m not sure. Sometimes I’m not sure if it’s okay and other times I’m not sure if it’s best. In other cases, it’s hard as a pastor because, although I hurt for a person and sympathize with a person, I cannot sanction a divorce for the simple reason that I don’t believe God does. I speak to many of you who have been thru divorce. I know this is sensitive stuff. I know it is terribly painful and some of you may cry as I speak. I’m no stranger to divorce myself. My mom left my dad when I was a teen. My four siblings have been divorced seven times between them. As well as anyone who hasn’t been thru it himself, I have an appreciation of the pain which pushes people toward divorce. But, I can also understand the word of God. It’s teaching is sometimes hard to apply to certain cases. I don’t pretend to have pat answers to hard questions. Neither do I have time today to treat this subject thoroughly. Consider

reading Jay Adam's fine book, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. That said, however, I am responsible to teach the historic protestant and biblical understanding on this matter. God says in Malachi 3:**16** (NLT) *"I hate divorce!" says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife."* God hates divorce. That is how He feels about it. How then do you feel about it? You want to go into marriage seeing it as an inviolable covenant that will be broken only by death. In fact, you probably said that when you got married didn't you? I urge couples that Beth and I counsel to never even entertain the option of divorce. When you look at divorce as an option and you encounter pain in your marriage what is the natural response? To get out. When you are committed to lifelong marriage, when divorce is not there as an escape route then the only choice you have is to humble yourself and work on the marriage. If divorce is not available then your pain, instead of driving you to a lawyer may drive you to your knees. And God says *whoever humbles himself shall be exalted*.

Still, with that general perspective in mind, we know that Scripture offers two possible grounds for divorce. Life in a fallen world could land you in one of these hard places despite your best intentions. The first possible basis for divorce is mentioned in I Corinthians 7 and involves a marriage in which one spouse is a Christian and the other isn't. Paul teaches that a Christian married to a non-Christian is to stay in the relationship and make the best of it. But I Corinthians 7:**15** (ESV) *But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved.* The point here is that if that non-Christian (in spite of your efforts to be a good spouse) wants out of the relationship, if he or she decides to leave or divorce you are free of your marital obligations. That is one exception to the no-divorce rule. The second is given by Jesus when he is questioned by some Pharisees in Matthew 19:**5b-6** *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined 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 no man separate.* That is the basic rule concerning marriage. **9** (ESV) *Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.* The exception clause there in verse 9 allows one to pursue a divorce in the case of sexual immorality. It does not require or suggest divorce even then. It simply allows it when the marriage covenant is broken by adultery. There is no mention here of irreconcilable differences or incompatibility or falling out of love. In fact, Jesus makes plain that if you divorce for a reason other than this and then remarry you commit adultery in so doing. And it

doesn't matter what the opinion polls or your Christian friend or your pastor says about it. The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our Lord shall stand forever.

Those then are the three violations of the seventh commandment: sexual intimacy with or gratification from anyone not your husband or wife, entertaining thoughts of the same, and the pursuit of an unlawful divorce. The corresponding positives would be what? Sexual fidelity in marriage. Mental purity. Covenant faithfulness. From here I want to look at the danger of adultery, the pardon for adultery and the avoidance of adultery. It is obvious as we look around at the lives wrecked and the reputations soiled and the ministries destroyed by adultery that there is a powerful, powerful allurements towards this sin. It has a mighty attraction. We are pulled to it by our own natural desires, by our physical and emotional urges and then we are deluged with sexual stimuli from our society. Coming thru a supermarket checkout line a while back I looked over the tabloids on display and every single one of them featured an article or two or three about sex, how someone does it, how you ought to do it, how they do it on other planets and so on. I thought, what does this say about us? The pressure to sin comes from within and it comes from without and the only way you are going to be motivated enough to avoid it is if you fear it and hate it because you love your Lord and your spouse. So, let's look together at how God speaks of sexual sin. Proverbs 2:**16-19** *Wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with her seductive words, 17 who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. 18 Surely her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. 19 None who go to her return or attain the paths of life.* Do you see the way God speaks of this sin? It doesn't just lead us to a little trouble in this life. It leads to death. Death! God is shouting to us in the language of Scripture to watch out lest we be burned by sexual sin. Proverbs 5:**3-4** *The lips of an adulteress drip honey and smoother than oil is her speech; 4 but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.* What a graphic description of the short term pleasure and long-term heartache that comes with this sin. Look on **5-8** *Her feet go down to death, her steps take hold of Sheol. 6 She does not ponder the path of life; her ways are unstable, she does not know it. 7 Now then, my sons, listen to me and do not depart from the words of my mouth. 8 Keep your way far from her and do not go near the door of her house.* That is chapter 5 of Proverbs, how about chapter 6:**23-29** *The commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life 24 to keep you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. 25 Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her capture you with her eyelids. 26 For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, and an adulteress hunts for the precious life.*

27 Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? 28 Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? 29 So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her will not go unpunished. When you play games with sexual sin you are playing with fire. 6:**32** *The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; he who would destroy himself does it.* You want to destroy yourself? You want to foul up your life? Here is what you get for adultery. And even if you receive divine pardon there is something lost you can never regain. Someone has said that sowing wild oats takes something out of the life of a man that no system of crop rotation can ever restore. Consider the dangers. 6:**33a** *Wounds and disgrace he will find.* Your reputation, which Proverbs says is more precious than gold, will be shot. Your testimony as a Christian and the name of your Lord with it will be held up for mocking. Your family will be shattered. And you will be at serious risk of bodily harm as well. Is it worth all this? Is it worth the spiritual devastation which comes on you and your partner when you give yourself over to your lusts rather than to Christ? Few there are who would sit in this setting and think so. But you begin with lust, or porn, you begin with a touch on the hand or a lingering hug or a Facebook message and you start down a slippery slope toward degradation. You lose your mind. People in love become blinded and foolish and numb to the truth. They do and say things they would never have dreamed of until the anesthesia wears off and they wake up broken, battered people with shattered families, ministries, careers. God forbid. Listen to Proverbs 7 now **1-2** *My son, keep My words and treasure My commandments within you. 2 Keep My commandments and live. 5 That they may keep you from an adulteress, from the foreigner who flatters with her words.* Understand that the lure of adultery is typically not so much sexual but emotional. Most of us are desperate for affirmation, for someone who builds us up rather than tears us down. The adulteress flatters with her words. **6-14** *For at the window of my house. I looked out through my lattice, 7 and I saw among the naive, and discerned among the youths a young man lacking sense, 8 passing through the street near her corner; and he takes the way to her house, 9 in the twilight, in the evening, in the middle of the night and in the darkness. 10 And behold, a woman comes to meet him, dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart. 11 She is boisterous and rebellious, her feet do not remain at home; 12 she is now in the streets, now in the squares, and lurks by every corner. 13 So she seizes him and kisses him and with a brazen face she says to him: 14 "I was due to offer peace offerings; today I have paid my vows."* That is a way of saying that she is just off her monthly cycle and she won't get pregnant. There is no risk. **15-20** *"Therefore I have come out to meet you, to seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you. 16 "I have spread my couch with coverings, with colored linens of Egypt. 17*

“I have sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. 18 “Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with caresses. 19 “For my husband is not at home, he has gone on a long journey; 20 he has taken a bag of money with him, at the full moon he will come home.” Again, what is she saying? There is no risk. **21** *With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him.* Notice what she uses to seduce him. Not so much her sexy figure. Not so much her full pouty lips, but her flattering lips. Her words, her flattery draws him in. It happens to women this way too. **22-27** *Suddenly he follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool, 23 until an arrow pierces through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, so he does not know that it will cost him his life. 24 Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the words of my mouth. 25 Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths. 26 For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain. 27 Her house is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death.* Beloved, this passage sends shivers up and down my spine. It makes me want to run away any time some woman looks at me funny, or I look twice at her. This chapter screams out with moral urgency. Sexual sin is the subject of joke after joke in TV shows and bars throughout our land and I wonder if we have to laugh to keep from crying. The way of adultery is surely the way of death.

Some of you committed adultery last night didn't you? For some of you this sermon is too late. For others of you a thousand sermons wouldn't have helped. You made a choice to sin knowing all the facts. What now? Is life over for you? Is there any hope for you? I Corinthians 6:9 says adulterers will not be in heaven. Unless, unless something happens. **11** *Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.* What hope there is in that verse!! You feel dirty, this says you can be clean. You are guilty, it says you can be justified, forgiven by the grace of Christ. Remember Jesus, the friend of sinners, who had ex-harlots among his disciples. Remember Jesus. When He encountered the woman caught in adultery He said, “Your sins are forgiven go and sin no more.” And from that moment on she was no adulterer, she was a Christian. In his famous novel Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote of a woman in a small town who was caught in adultery and was punished with shame by having to wear the scarlet letter A embroidered on her gown. Some of you can feel a scarlet letter growing on your shirt. You are stinging with guilt today because of what you did just this week. Some of you are stinging with guilt because of what you did years ago, sexual immorality, ungodly divorce, abandonment to your lusts. Listen to what God says. Isaiah 1:**18** *“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are as scarlet,*

they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.” Without downplaying anything, without making excuses confess your sins to the Lord and call on Him for whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Now, let’s look ahead. Jesus has grace enough to forgive when you sin, but He also has grace enough to sanctify us, to keep us from sin and make us pure in heart and life. Let’s talk now about the avoidance of adultery. Five positive things to do to keep the commandment. #1 is you flee temptation. II Timothy 2:**22a** *Flee from youthful lusts.* The great example of this is Joseph in Genesis 39 when he was being tempted by Potiphar’s wife he left his cloak in her hand and ran away. Fred Smith says there are some predicaments you don’t try to meditate your way out of, you run! You put distance between yourself and the source of the temptation. And you certainly don’t voluntarily go to places where you will be tempted. Remember ole Doc Campbell on Hee Haw? He has a patient come to him and say, “Doc, I think I broke my arm in two places.” And Doc said, “Then you better stay out of them places.” That’s right. Don’t go where you are likely to sin, don’t take the first step down the pathway of adultery. This last year our Vice President Pence was mocked by many when it was revealed that he would not dine alone with a woman not his wife. That is what we preachers think of as the Billy Graham rule. It is one of the reasons Graham went a century without a scandal. You don’t put yourself in position to sin and you are likely not going to. Which raises the question: where are you spending your time? What kind of girls or guys do you hang out with? What are you allowing to enter your eye-gate via your TV or computer? What are you listening to in the way of music? What are you reading in magazines and books? Does it promote purity or incite your passions? You avoid temptation, flee temptation and you are on your way to in the paths of purity.

Secondly, let’s stand together against pornography. Pornography is as anti-family as anything can be. It feeds on your mental adultery and that of others. So, avoid it yourself and fight it for others. Appeal to companies and networks to quit sponsoring trash that is hostile to marriages and do it politely and humbly. I heard a great story of a man who bought gas at a store and noticed when he entered to pay a large rack of porno magazines for sale, so he simply said to the clerk, “You folks have the cheapest gas in town and I’d like to come here but I can’t because of the pornography you sell.” The clerk says, “Oh that stuff turns you off huh?” The man said, “Oh no, the problem is exactly the opposite. I find those magazines very alluring. That’s why I can’t come back; I love my wife and my Lord too much.”

Our third application is to love your spouse if God has granted you one. If you don't have one, one way to avoid sexual sin is to ask God for one and be open to such a gift. I Corinthians 7:**2** *Because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. **9b** (NLT) It is better to marry than to burn with lust.* So, seek a godly spouse and once you have one then love the one you got. And here I am thinking especially of marital love, erotic love. I Corinthians 7:**3-5** (NLT) *The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs. 4 The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control.* You get the point. As long as you are in love with your husband or wife you are less likely to stray. Proverbs 5:**15-20a** (NLT) *Drink water from your own well— share your love only with your wife. 16 Why spill the water of your springs in the streets, having sex with just anyone? 17 You should reserve it for yourselves. Never share it with strangers. 18 Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 She is a loving deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love. 20 Why be captivated, my son, by an immoral woman.* The same wisdom that says to avoid the loose woman like the plague says to enjoy to the full the sexual union of marriage. If you married couples have a poor sex-life you will bring temptation upon yourself. Quit tolerating it and strive to get it right. Wife, if your husband shows little interest in you it may be because he feels put down by you and unappreciated. Husband, if your wife is unresponsive and uninterested in you it may be because she feels you don't care about her, you don't really love her, you aren't giving her your time and your heart and your ears. You both are set up for a fall. And these aren't excuses for anybody, just facts you must reckon with for yourself and your mate. Some of you here are wrongly content with a passionless marriage. Do something to put the spark back in it. A New Life Intimacy Workshop, a Family Life Weekend, maybe some counseling to address the barriers.

Application #4 is to nurture a hatred of sexual sin and a fear of God. We live in a society that advertises sexual pleasure in a constant stream of powerful images that seldom if ever mention the price tag. You have to intentionally focus on the price, the penalty, the wretchedness of this sin. Take your Scripture sheet home and commit it to memory. Psalm 119:**9** *How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. **11** Your word I have treasured in my heart,*

that I may not sin against You. That's what Joseph quoted when in Genesis 39 under the temptation of Potiphar's wife he said, "How can I do this great evil and sin against God?" Learn the dangers of adultery from Proverbs and I Corinthians 6. Remember the directive to flee youthful lusts. Remember what God said in Malachi about divorce. Build in your mind and heart a fortress of truth against the deceit of the enemy.

Application #5 is to decide and pray. You have some decisions to make. Will you keep God's word? Will you count the cost of being a disciple of Jesus? Is it worth it? Is knowing Christ worth giving up your pornography? Staying pure till marriage? Remaining faithful to a difficult spouse? If you really know Him the answer is yes, yes, yes, He is worth any price. So, decide now to be pure till marriage. Say *yes* to marital fidelity and marital perseverance, so when the devil tempts you otherwise you can say, "That was already decided." Maybe it's time you made a vow to the Lord to quit watching certain films or retire your fantasies or give up your girlfriend. Job said 31:1 (NIV) *I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.* That's the idea. How will you do business with God? Say *yes* to Him. Say *no* to sin, then seek His help in prayer. If you are like me you can't do it without Him. Maybe you need to seek the help of one of His servants too, but you certainly seek, in earnest, the power of His Spirit, so you can say with John the apostle that greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.