

GOD'S TOP TEN – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TODAY!

#7. YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.

Or “IT’S NOT ALL ABOUT SEX”

Exodus 20:1-21: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20: John 8:1-11

This is week four in our series “God’s Top Ten”. We’re looking at the Ten Commandments and we’re asking the simple question, are they still relevant today? This morning we’re going to look at the seventh commandment “**You Shall Not Commit Adultery**”. Yet despite all the sexual images in our society there is still a reticence to talk about sex in public, and especially in church! That’s surprising since the Bible talks about sex quite a lot! In fact, one entire book in the Old Testament “*The Song of Song*” is a series of love poems that is quite explicit about the physical beauty of a woman’s body, and about desire and passion.

Now before we discuss the seventh commandment we need to understand that there are two issues we need to recognize. First, there is what the Bible teaches about sex. Second, there are all the cultural things that have been added to that biblical teaching. We need to recognize that often those “*cultural*” things are the ones that influence our attitudes the most. Here are two of the most important ones. First, there is the effect of Greek thinking on Western civilization. Essentially, the Greeks taught that the spiritual and the non-physical were good, but that the physical and material were suspect. Over time this led our society to the Puritan-Victorian way of thinking about sex, summed up in that well known phrase, “*If it’s fun it must be sinful*”. Second, eventually this Greek-Puritan-Victorian thinking was challenged by what we now call the “*sexual revolution*” that started in the 1960’s. The phrase that best sums up this new way of thinking is, “*If it feels good, do it*”.

One of the side effects of the “*sexual revolution*” is that we now live in a culture that is inundated with sexual images. Advertisers use sex to sell everything from cars to toothpaste. The internet flourishes on sex, which has led to a rapid increase in pornography. There are websites where married adults can find someone to have an affair with, no strings attached. Movies and TV shows now thrive on sexual innuendo, and increasingly explicit sexual scenes.

Now honesty demands that we recognize there is a generation gap here. The older you are, the more likely it is that you have been influenced by the Greek-Puritan-Victorian thinking about sex. The younger you are, the more you will have been influenced by the thinking of the sexual revolution because you have known nothing different. Which is why, for all of us as Christians, we need to pay attention to what the Bible actually says.

But here is the paradox. The “*sexual revolution*” was supposed to liberate us, and fulfill us, but has it? Or has it led to problems we never anticipated? Yes, we have better sex education in our schools; but more single mums, more sexually transmitted diseases, and more abortions. We were told that more liberal attitudes would benefit everyone, but sexual crimes against women, and particularly against children, are still a major problem in our society while as many as 9 out of 10 still go unreported. We were told that a more liberal attitudes toward sex would get rid of

the back street stores that sold “adult” magazines. But now we have a multi-billion dollar internet based pornography industry. Great efforts have been made to promote “safe sex”, yet according to Stats Canada sexually transmitted diseases have increased, depending on the disease, by 40-60% in the last ten years alone. I love this quote from English author J. John which really gets to the heart of the matter when he says, *“The problem in our sex-saturated society is not that we think too much about sex, but that we think about it so poorly”*.

So we need to understand some key things about what God thinks about sex as we reflect on this seventh commandment, **“You shall not commit adultery”**. **First, we have to get rid of the idea that God is only concerned with the spiritual part of our life, and not with the physical part.** That means we need to remember that God created us as physical, spiritual and sexual beings. We need to remember the *“Incarnation”*, that in Jesus Christ, God took on our human flesh, and lived among us. In fact, First Corinthians 6:13 (NIV) ties the physical and the spiritual together, *“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body”* Or as The Message translation puts it, *“Since the Master honors you with a body, honor him with your body!”*

Second, we need to remember that God made us sexual beings. He made us male and female. He made our sex organs, and our hormones. He gave us passion and desire. In Genesis 1:28, 31 (NIV), after God created humanity, we read, **“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”** The Greek-Puritan-Victorian view of sex, that it was somehow dirty and sinful, even while it was necessary to procreate, is very much at odds with what God says here. We need to affirm that sex is one of God’s good gifts to us.

Third, we have to understand that God made us for relationships. He made us for a relationship with Him, and he made us for a relationship with others. It’s right there at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 2:18 (Msg), *God said, “It’s not good for the Man to be alone; I’ll make him a helper, a companion.”* Unlike other species where sex is only for reproduction, the creation narratives in the Book of Genesis remind us that human beings are primarily created for a relationship, which can be expressed intimately. This is why the seventh commandment says **“You shall not commit adultery”** because adultery is the great relationship breaker. In fact, the Old Testament prophets often accuse Israel and Judah of committing adultery against God by bowing down to idols, and so breaking their covenant with him.

Fourth, we have to understand that to say that God is pro-sex is not the same as saying that he is in favor of all sexual activity. Now I want to restrict our conversation about this only to this commandment not to commit adultery, because it becomes clear that God intended sex to be within the marriage relationship. Twice, in Genesis 2:24 (NIV) and in Mark 10:6-8, passages often quoted in the wedding service, we read these words of Scripture, ⁶ **“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female’⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,⁸ and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.**

Adultery properly understood, refers then to all sexual relations that is outside of the marriage covenant. Of course, the word “adultery” is being used less and less in our society, probably because it sounds so judgemental in our culture. We would rather use the word “*affair*”, perhaps because it suggests mystery and excitement, and it allows us to declassify adultery as a sin, at least in our minds. But listen to the ancient wisdom of Book of Proverbs (5:15-21 TLB), ***“Drink from your own well, my son—be faithful to your wife...Let her charms and tender embrace satisfy you. Let her love alone fill you with delight... For God is closely watching you, and he weighs carefully everything you do”*** The state may have no place in the bedroom, but this Scripture says God does!

So why does God include ***“You shall not commit adultery”*** in the Ten Commandments? Let me suggest three reasons. **First, marriage is sacred.** It was instituted by God for the good of human society. It was not instituted by us. Faithfulness to our marriage vows is an essential ingredient to our spiritual and to our personal wellbeing, the wellbeing of our families, and the stability of our society.

Second, adultery destroys the “oneness” of marriage; the emotional and spiritual union of marriage. I like The Message translation of First Corinthians 6:17-18 (Msg), ***“There’s more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, “The two become one.” Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever—the kind of sex that can never “become one.”*** I’ve talked to enough people over the years whose spouse has cheated on them, and I’ve heard almost the same thing. It’s not the physical side of the affair that hurt them the most. It was the betrayal of their trust, the deception, and the lies that surrounded it. It breached the “oneness” of their marriage.

Third, adultery is a direct offence against God. Let’s not water that down. Because God made us sexual creatures, every time we misuse our bodies through inappropriate sexual behaviour, it tears away at our souls, and it drives God away. First Corinthians 6:18-19 (Msg) is very clear about that, ***“There is a sense in which sexual sins are different from all others. In sexual sin we violate the sacredness of our own bodies, these bodies that were made for God-given and God-modeled love, for “becoming one” with another. Or didn’t you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don’t you see that you can’t live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.”*** And Hebrews 13:4 (Msg), ***“Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and illicit sex.”*** Now I totally get that that is a hard word for us in our “sexually liberated” society, but it doesn’t make it less true.

So how do we obey this commandment? Three practical steps. **First, watch your mind.** Jesus understood that moral failure always begins in our minds. You begin to imagine what it would be like to be with a certain person. You start to fantasize about them. You go through a mental

process of justifying your actions. Jesus said, Matthew 5:27-28, ***“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*** In other words, Jesus says, cut off all lustful thoughts that lead to adultery before they take root.

Second, avoid putting yourself in vulnerable or compromising situations. Set strict boundaries around your behaviour. Keep your guard up. And remember that more harm has been done to the cause of Jesus Christ in our day and generation by the moral failures of Christians in the sexual arena than by almost anything else.

Third, if you are married, invest in your marriage. Never take your spouse for granted. Did you know that research shows that people are most vulnerable to an affair when they feel that their physical and emotional needs are not being met? So have a regular date night, invest time in family activities, and commit yourself to meeting your spouse’s emotional, spiritual, and physical needs.

Now the question inevitably arises. Can adultery be forgiven by God? So let’s go to Jesus in John Chapter 8:1-8. A woman caught in the act of adultery is brought before him. Her accusers wanted to stone her to death. Jesus basically says *“OK. Why don’t you do that? But before you do, **“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her’** It’s interesting what happened. It says they all walked away, **“the older ones first”**. Those with the most life experience knew that they were not sinless. So when everyone left Jesus looked at the woman – it could just have easily been a man - and said, **“Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”** Jesus gave her a fresh start, but it had a condition. She had to turn away from her sin. That’s what repentance means, turning around and going in a different direction.*

Now I’ve said this before but it bears repeating. The Ten Commandments are not meant to be laws to restrict us, but divine guidance to liberate us, so that we can live in harmony with God and with others. So is this seventh commandment - **“Do not commit adultery”** -, still relevant in the 21st century? I’m convinced it is. How about you?

Prayer

Holy God,
 Scripture reminds us that your Word
 is a lamp to guide our feet and to light our path. (Psalm 119:105).
 It proclaims Jesus to be your living word,
 and **“the bread of life.**

As we come now to the Lord’s Table
 we come to express our desire to be faithful to you
 and we remember Jesus promise that
 whoever comes to him will never be hungry again and
 whoever believes in him will never be thirsty. Amen.