

Sermon for October 15, 2017 – 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 20:14 (NIV84)

Theme: You Shall Not Commit Adultery. Understand . . .

- 1) God's purpose for marriage
- 2) God's desire for the single.
- 3) God's desire for the married.

"You shall not commit adultery."

A sermon on the sixth commandment. Wow, where do I begin? Sometimes it seems as if our perverse society is inventing new ways to sin against this commandment! And it's not like the data is inconclusive about how ignoring this commandment is leading to a breakdown of our society: America's STD epidemic is at historic levels – with no signs of decreasing; the objectification of women is getting worse and worse; the growing exploitation of children is horrifying; and the difference between lust and love has been so obscured, that our society has almost all but lost the meaning of true love.

Worse yet, these problems are not just facing unbelievers. Due to the constant bombardment of popular music, TV shows, movies, books and the internet, Christians are falling for the world's false narrative regarding sexuality. Internet pornography, living together outside of marriage, sexual experimentation – Christians are falling hard for these sins, not realizing that they are far from harmless. The Scriptures call them soul destroying. Unless they are repented of, they separate us from Christ!

So where do I begin? I guess where God does in Genesis: not in describing all the ways we sin against this commandment, but in understanding the great gift God is protecting by giving it. Let us do this under the theme: **You Shall Not Commit Adultery. Understand . . .** 1) God's purpose for marriage. 2) God's desire for the single. 3) God's desire for the married.

Part One: Understand God's purpose for marriage

You shall not commit adultery. What is adultery? In a narrow sense, it is cheating on your spouse. Scripture, however, defines it more broadly as any thought, word or deed that attempts to corrupt God's gift of the oneness of flesh between a man and a woman in marriage.

In order to understand what this means, consider why God instituted marriage at the beginning of time. It was not good for the man to be alone. No, God intended man to be part of a two-person team – differently gifted, yet working together in harmony, respect and love to raise children who would know and glorify the LORD. This is why God created a helper suitable to Adam. "Suitable" doesn't mean "same," rather it means that the woman would have gifts to fulfill a role that would support her husband, and man would have the gifts and love to provide and care for his wife. And

the way “Eve” (the first woman) was created from “Adam” (the first man) illustrates this truth, as one early Church Father once put it: “Woman was not created from the foot of man that she should be trampled on by him, nor from the head of man that she should rule over him; but from the rib of man, that she may always lie close to his heart, under the caring protection of his arm.”

God created man and woman for each other – blessing them with the incredible gift of becoming one flesh, thereby enacting in a physical way the emotional bond and spiritual commitment they share as husband and wife. God never intended the act of becoming one flesh to be a selfish “getting” of pleasure, but a voluntary selfless giving of oneself for the joy of the other. And as husband and wife selflessly give themselves to each other, they have mutual joy – basking in the love they have for one another.

And when I say that they bask in love, I mean much more than physical attraction. You see true love is not merely something we feel, it’s something we do – even when we don’t “feel” it. True love is a commitment to do everything we can to benefit someone else. Do you know where you can find the best example of this true love? You find it in Christ and the self-sacrificing love he both exhibited towards us on the cross and continues to exhibit to us day after day as he patiently bears with our weaknesses and forgives our sins.

Yes, God intended marriage to be a wonderful picture of the love the LORD has for us in Christ. Is it any wonder, then, that the devil tries his best to destroy marriage? Hating everything that glorifies God, the devil hates marriage - tempting us to ruin it with selfish thoughts and desires: using our corrupted flesh to work against us. Instead of viewing our bodies as gifts that don’t belong to us but to our spouse, the devil gets us to think that our bodies belong to us and us alone, and that we can do whatever we want with them. He gets us to confuse lust with love – all with the intent of destroying God’s gift – bringing society to where it is now: a confused mess of hedonism where few understand what true love actually is.

And boy, is our society ever corrupt! The 1960’s sexual revolution – celebrated by our world and championed by the likes of Hugh Hefner – certainly made its mark, but not a good one! Behind the façade of laughter is a society filled with pain, hurt, regret, loneliness, confusion, sickness and death.

This is one reason God gave this command, and emphatically repeats it again and again on the pages of Scripture. He sees the hurt and knows the devastation our society’s abuse of sexuality is causing – not just physically, but eternally as well. This is why he gave the sixth commandment so that, acknowledging our sins, we might repent of them and be forgiven. And in the peace of his forgiveness, find the reason, hope and strength to honor God’s gift of marriage by avoiding anything and everything that tries to break it.

Part Two: Understand God’s desire for the single

Do not commit adultery. Honor God’s gift of marriage in such a way that you do nothing to tarnish, corrupt or destroy it. Now that we understand his command, and the purpose for which he gave it, you might have the question: “How does God want me to keep this commandment.”

For example, I have been asked by young people what is allowed and not allowed when dating. Can I kiss? Can I do more? My answer is that these aren't the questions they should be asking. Ask, rather, how can I honor God and his gift of marriage through my dating.

I know the pressure young people face regarding God's gift of sex. The coarse joking and bragging of friends, the message of modern music, TV shows and titillating images on the internet – the devil uses all these things and more to tempt us to sin. And, as young adults, we are especially vulnerable due to all the physical and emotional changes we are facing in puberty. How can we fight against this pressure?

By heeding the advice of the wisest King that has ever lived: recorded for us in the Bible. He said: *Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.*ⁱ In other words, don't give in to the societal pressure of having to be in a relationship or of having to prove yourself to the guys. Avoid all the things that try to arouse lust in your heart: provocative pictures, internet pornography, smutty novels, or the pressure from friends to push physical boundaries in your relationship.

Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. In other words, be content with your singleness. Don't rush into relationships. Get to know the people you date on a different level than lust. Try to find out if he or she is someone you want to commit to.

And how do you do that? By remembering God's purpose and blessing in marriage. Remember the great gift God has reserved for you in your future spouse. Don't let that future be marred with the memories of past sin and regret, which is exactly what will happen to the Christian who sins sexually. Rather, think of the love God has for you in Christ. Trust that he will provide for you the love of your life. Just be patient and wait. *Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.*

Part Three: Understand God's desire for the married.

And if you are married, what is God's desire for you regarding this commandment? He desires that you love your spouse – not merely with a selfish, worldly love, but with a genuine self-sacrificing love that puts your spouse first in everything.

And men: God especially commands this of you! *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”*ⁱⁱ Understand what this means. God did not make you the head of the household so you could selfishly use your wife as your own personal servant. He gave you this position so that you might live for your wife and family – putting them and their needs ahead of your own.

And women, God asks you to submit to your husbands as to the LORD. Don't nag or boss your husband around. Listen to him. Help him. Love him – just as the Church loves, helps and submits

to Christ. And why will you want to do this? Because of your love for Christ. You will want to do this because you understand that it is God's will to promote love.

And blessed is the home where this takes place: husbands loving their wives with a genuine, self-sacrificing love, and wives willingly submitting to their husband, thereby showing their love. This is what God intended marriage to be, and oh, how wonderful marriage is when it is like this.

The devil, however, does not want us to enjoy such a marriage. He uses our selfish hearts to cause a rift: enticing husbands to ignore their wives, and wives to become embittered against husbands. Pornography, course joking, worldly advice from friends, smutty novels – the world also tempts the married with these things – all with the purpose of destroying God's gift of marriage. And then there is our weak flesh that, no matter if we are married or single, tries to arouse sinful desires in us.

And who of us can say they haven't fallen – if not in action, then at least in thought? Who of the married, have shown true love to their spouses at all times? Who of the single, can say that they haven't fallen for the worlds ideas of love – joking with their friends and possibly even pursuing a relationship outside of marriage?

Yes, we all have sinned – and sometimes grievously - against this commandment! So where does that leave us? I tell you where it leaves me: at the foot of the cross – repenting of my selfish sin of not loving my wife as I ought, repenting of my wandering eye and the wickedness of my heart. And do you know what? Jesus forgives me, just as he forgives you. Jesus died on the cross for every sexual sin and perversion that has ever been committed on this earth. Jesus paid the price so that, whoever looks to him in repentance and faith, might be forgiven.

And in the peace of forgiveness I trust that the Holy Spirit will help me keep this commandment: loving my wife as I ought, keeping my lusts in check and preventing my eye from wandering. And do you know from where my strength comes to do these things? Not from myself, that's for sure. But it comes from Christ as I keep my mind on him - remembering his mercy, promises and presence. The Holy Spirit helps me overcome temptation by moving me to tell him everything I am experiencing when tempted, asking for his help. The Holy Spirit helps me overcome temptation by moving me to occupy my mind with all the things that are good and lovely – not crass and shameful. The Holy Spirit helps me overcome temptation by moving me to avoid the TV shows, internet sites, music, novels and anything else that tries to awaken the lust of my heart. The Holy Spirit helps me overcome temptation by enticing me to constantly meditate on God's Word.

And if I fall? Then I go to the cross, just like I do for any sin: repenting and arising forgiven in Christ - ready to live for him in response to his love for me.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Do not commit adultery. Honor God's gift of marriage – understanding its purpose and living according to God's will for you regarding this great gift. Amen.

ⁱ Song of Solomon 3:5 NIV84

ⁱⁱ Ephesians 5:25 NIV84