

7th Commandment: Covenant Faithfulness

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[0:00] Exodus chapter 22, reading from verse 16, we are continuing in our series in Exodus working through! This section of case law. So we're going to read from verse 16 through to verse 20.

Let us hear God's words together. If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride price for her and make her his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bride price pervergence. You shall not permit a sorceress to live. Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death. Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord alone shall be devoted to destruction. This is God's word. Please keep that open in front of you. Let us pray for his help with these words together. Father, we do thank you for your eternal word that although the grass withers and the flowers fade, your word, O Lord, stands forever.

We pray that you would speak to us now through it by your spirit. Show us yourself. Show us our sin. Show us the savior you have given us in the Lord Jesus Christ, that we might love him and live for him in all that we do. Amen. Well, I wonder what you expected to hear when you headed out the door on your way to church this morning. Unless you had read ahead from where we left last week, sorcerers and bestiality was probably quite far down the list.

But this is God's word. And as the apostle Paul tells us, all of it is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. That is as true of our passage this morning as it is of Jesus' own words in the Gospels. As part of our ongoing series in the book of Exodus, we have been working our way through this section of case law that appears in chapter 21 to 24 of Exodus. And as we've been doing so, we've been kind of focusing each week on one of the Ten Commandments. And seeing how the case law here in these chapters enriches our understanding of the Decalogue. This morning, we are going to focus on the Seventh Commandment. You shall not commit adultery.

Now, those verses we read might not seem on the surface to say loads about that, but they will help us unpack this commandment a little more. And it is a commandment we really need to pay attention to, isn't it? Joe helpfully showed us last week how you shall not steal is a commandment that we, together with our world, kind of verbally signs up for. But dig a little deeper and we see that all is not quite as it seems. With the Seventh Commandment, though, the issues lie much, much closer to the surface, don't they? I don't think I need to convince any of you this morning that what the Bible says and what the world says when it comes to sex and marriage are very different.

[3:45] We live, don't we, in a world that is untethered sex from marriage. Those two things exist in two completely different spheres. We live in a world that has separated marriage from covenant, that has separated marriage from God, where promises are made lightly and broken easily.

We live in a culture where sexual expression is often treated as the highest form of personal freedom. that the area where the modern dogma of the sovereignty of the self is often most fiercely defended.

We live in a society where relationships are evaluated by personal fulfillment rather than covenant commitment. I don't think I have to convince anyone here this morning that the Bible's view of sex and marriage and our culture view of sex and marriage are very, very different.

Perhaps what I do have to convince you of, or allow the Bible to convince you of, is that what the Bible teaches about sex and marriage is not only right, it is also better. Much, much better.

It is summer, isn't it? Some of the younger boys and girls are in here with us. That is always a great thing, and it is no less a great thing today. Even if the topic might make us twitch a little, because we all, at every stage of life, and perhaps especially for the younger ones in this room, need to hear what the Bible says on this topic. Because whether you are seven or 77, you will be hearing what the world preaches. Most every single day. You will be soaking it up, but whether you know it or not.

[5:39] But one stat I read in preparing for this, I'm not going to include too many in the sermon because it makes it just very, very depressing, and I think we already know a lot of it internally. One stat that I did read in preparing for this, 92% of mainstream TV shows feature pornographic content as a plot device.

92%. Now, I'm betting most of us wouldn't have said that, but that's probably because we've become so numb to it in our context that we barely even notice it when it is shouting at us in the face from the TV screens. Even if we are not watching it directly, it has seeped into the fabric of our society to becoming the point of so normalized that we can become numb to its presence. But everywhere it is present, it is preaching. And we are often listening. The world's sexual ethic is loud in our ears and it's attractive to our eyes, but it is poisonous to our heart.

And so it is very, very important that we turn our ear to God and hear what he says, knowing that it is good just as he is. This morning, we are going to work through the same three questions that we have been thinking about over the last few weeks. What does this commandment preach? What does it point out?

And what does it promise? And as we work through these questions, I hope we will see not only the rightness, but also the beauty and goodness of the seventh commandment. So first of all, what does it preach? What does it preach?

We as a family have just recently got back from a couple of weeks on holiday. And while we were away, we decided to go camping for a night. I spent a lot of nights in a tent in my adult life.

[7:44] But last week was the first time I think I'd ever actually camped on a campsite. It's not something you really have to worry about in Scotland, but you do in England. Which meant it was the first time I had to read through a list of campsite rules.

And it was a long list of things you weren't allowed to do. No noise after a certain time, no smoky fires, no loud music.

It was quite a long list, but the list of prohibitions told me something very positive about the campsite. Right here was a place that wanted to make sure people actually got some sleep.

Or as much sleep as you can get in a tent. The things you couldn't do told me something good about the people giving the rules and actually made me want to camp there.

We've seen a similar thing through these commandments, haven't we? Although they are mostly prohibitions, things you are not to do, these negatively given rules tell us something very positive about the one giving them.

[8:48] You shall not commit adultery. Preaches something very positive about God. Most obviously, he is faithful.

This commandment zooms in on the marriage covenant. We know from the rest of scripture, including the case law we just read, that all sex outside of the marriage covenant between one man and one woman is sinful.

And this commandment absolutely has all of that in view. But at the very center, the point from which all that ripples out is covenantal faithfulness. You shall not break covenant.

Remember, I don't think we can oversimplify this, can we? These commandments are not the way to salvation through works. They are the way of those who have been saved by grace. And these people standing at the foot of Sinai, receiving these commands, have been saved by grace because of God's unswerving faithfulness to his covenant with his people.

That is something we have seen in abundance through the storyline of scripture up until this point. In the early chapters of Genesis, God made a covenant with Abraham. A covenant in which he promised to bless him.

[10:14] To give him a land, to make of him a great nation, so that all people would be blessed through him. The story of Genesis is one of God being faithful to that covenant.

And Exodus picks up on the very same theme. Why did God rescue his people from Egypt? Why did he part the Red Sea and send the ten plagues?

Why did he appear to Moses in the burning bush? We're given the answer back in chapter 2 of Exodus. Exodus 2.23, During those many days, the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help.

Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God, and God heard their groaning. And God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

The Exodus happened because God is a covenant-keeping God. And he is forever faithful to his covenant promises.

[11:30] Within three days of being saved from slavery, the people are grumbling against God because they don't have faith in his provision. But their faithfulness does not get in the way of God's faithfulness.

Their faithlessness does not get in the way of God's faithfulness. The fact that they are even here at the foot of Sinai is proof of that. The fact that the recipients of this book are standing on the edge of the promised land that had been promised to Abraham was proof of that.

The fact that we are sitting here today, 3,000 years later, as people from the nations that God promised to bless through Abraham is proof of that.

Blessed in Jesus, Abraham's offspring. When God makes a covenant, there is nothing, there is nothing on heaven or earth that can cause even a momentary thought within him of anything but faithfulness to it.

He never has any desire to step away that he has to suppress. There is no longing to be free from this faithfulness.

[12:45] There is no thought, even for a second, of turning away. So much so that he remains steadfastly faithful even with a perpetually unfaithful people.

That there are grounds for annulling, not a covenant, a covenant of marriage in the Bible. If there is adultery, abuse, or neglect, if a husband or wife is unfaithful to the marriage covenant in any of those ways, God does permit, doesn't command, but he does permit the faithful spouse to annul that covenant.

being faithful does not force us to be covenanted to someone who is unfaithful, but God's covenant of grace is one in which he says he will remain faithful to his promises even when he knows his people are not going to be faithful to theirs.

Isn't that not the most, that's not the most incredible thing, right? Even, God says to his people, not only in sickness and health, not only for richer, for poorer, but also when you are unfaithful, when you turn away from me, when you commit adultery, even then I will love you and cherish you.

Even then I will be faithful to you whatever it costs and we know what it costs him, don't we? That is God's covenant of grace to his people and it is one he has remained faithful to throughout history.

[14:27] So much so that he gave his one and only son to atone for the sin of his brides. He has given everything in order to be faithful and forever faithful to a people who did not deserve his faithfulness.

He entered into this covenant knowing it would cost him his own son. He entered into this covenant knowing that is what it would cost him to remain faithful.

You'll sometimes hear the phrase, won't you, she's too good for him, he doesn't deserve her. But the implication being, you know, that they shouldn't be together because there's a difference.

There's a difference either internal or external between the beauty of these two parties. There is no relationship that is more true of than God and his people. We do not deserve him.

And yet in the face of an often adulterous people who break covenant, who break these covenant commands, God never annuls his covenant.

[15:41] He never drifts away from it. He never turns his back on his people. That is the kind of love that cynics would probably define as foolish, but God is not foolish.

He is simply incredibly, mind-blowingly faithful. But we sang it earlier. Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father.

There is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not. As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

This commandment preaches the incredible faithfulness of our God. God is faithful.

Our infidelity. God is faithful. Often we are not. It was John Calvin who famously described the law as a mirror.

[16:46] A mirror, it can't wash your face, can it? But it can show you how dirty it is. And this commandment, like every other, does just that. Now maybe we think we're actually okay here.

If you're single, surely you haven't committed adultery. If you're married but haven't had an affair, maybe you think you're in the clear too. But as we've seen, haven't we, over the last few weeks, that these commands don't do, they do not sit on the surface of the externals.

They don't just deal with the tip of the iceberg, they plumb into the deepest depths of our hearts. Jesus tells us plainly what the seventh commandment forbids.

Matthew 5, 27, you have heard it said, you shall not commit adultery. I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. those are some truly exposing words, aren't they?

[18:04] That rip away any illusion of faithfulness that we might have thought we had. Jesus is unmistakably clear, isn't he?

That it is not just the action that is sinful, the very thought of covenant faithlessness is adultery. And it is covenant faithlessness whether you are married or not. Because sex belongs in the covenant relationship of one man and one woman.

Any desire for it from anyone outside of that context is an adulteration of that covenant because it is separating sex from marriage. It is deriving a wedge between what God has decreed must remain together.

And that is the heart of adultery. We get a hint of that, don't we, in the first couple of verses we read there in Exodus 22. if a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride price for her and make her his wife.

[19:19] The implication of that verse is that everything that is happening there is consensual. In the eyes of our society, that is all good. But lying with a woman is only to happen in a covenant context, and so a covenant is what they must enter into if that is what they have done.

Because there is only one place that sex belongs, both in thought and in deeds. And that is within marriage. It is not only the place of the action of sex, but even the desire of it.

Jesus says it plainly, doesn't he? A lustful glance. And we know the difference, don't we? Between appreciating beauty and looking lustfully.

Even a lustful look. It's not just the action that is sinful. The very desire is to... That again, isn't it, is so very different from what our world would have us believe.

Where the self is sovereign. If you want it, you have a right to have it. So long as it doesn't trample on someone else's sovereignty over themselves.

[20:39] That is the world's sexual ethic, isn't it? The desire is good. The action is often good too. And yet, actually, although it is preached in the world, we know, almost everyone really actually knows that certain sexual desires are wrong in and of themselves.

Just look at verse 19. If someone came to you and said, that is what they desired, what would you think?

How would you feel? would you affirm the desire, but deny them the action? No, because we have a God-given compass in our conscience, don't we, that even if slightly broken, still points us in the right general direction.

Just the desire, but for bestiality, for pedophilia, we know is not okay. but Jesus says plainly, and we need to hear clearly, that the desire for any sexual relationship outside of the marriage covenant is sin.

Not necessarily as sinful, there are degrees, but it is sin nonetheless. That is true of men who desire sex with their men, or women who lust for other women.

[22:16] It is true for a single woman who looks lustfully to another man, it is true of a married man who glances longingly at someone other than their spouse. Anything that goes outside the bound of the marriage covenant, and this commandment picks up the mirror and shows us our sin.

And it is a sin that runs deep in our culture and in ourselves. you might have heard it said that sex sells.

I'm not sure that's quite the full picture. How long would the queue at the cinema be if Hollywood released a film with the tagline husband and wife enjoy intimate life?

love? The lines wouldn't be long, would they? That's not the material that fills porn sites.

Because sex in that context is good, it is right, it should not be intruded upon or viewed by others, but husband and wife enjoying the gift of sex is good in God's eyes.

[23:31] sin. It's not so much that sex sells, it's that sin sells. We know faithfulness is good and yet we convince ourselves that infidelity will be gratifying in a way that faithfulness is not.

And there might be a momentary thrill, but there is always a much longer lasting regret. But in our sin we just think we need more. And so sinful sex really sells.

Because sexual desire is strong and we think it is what will bring us satisfaction. And we live in a world that says that is the case. That says it is right for every desire to be fulfilled. But Jesus says otherwise doesn't he? The desire in itself is not natural, it is not good, it is sinful. So there is not one of us that can sit here this morning and say, I have not committed adultery. There are adulterous actions that are more grievous than others, aren't there? And the action is worse than the desire. And the consequences of that, as many of us will know all too well, can be utterly devastating.

[25 : 01] But none of us, not one of us can look in the mirror and say, I am innocent. Now maybe some of these topics have or are casting a shadow over your life, whether adultery or porn, whether the action or desire, whether it's a victim or a perpetrator.

we don't have anywhere near the time or space this morning to speak into each of those situations, but please do come and speak. If I speak to myself or to Joe or to Ben, to one of the elders, to Anne or Judy, please do come and speak to us.

But what we need to see in this commandment is our own sin that exists in each and every one of our hearts. Whether in action or thought, all four fall short of the glory of God.

And that points out our, I think, even bigger problem. We are unfaithful to one another. Even more so, we are unfaithful to God.

Interestingly, sex appears here in very close connection with obviously idolatrous behavior. That the worship of false gods, that is what the sorcerers are guilty of in verse 18. That the bestiality of verse 19 is likely connected to some kind of bowel worship and why the punishment is so severe.

[26 : 27] Verse 20 is very explicit, isn't it? We have an adultery problem. Not only with regards to sex and marriage, but also with God.

The prophets later in the Old Testament speak of God's people as an adulterous bride, offering themselves to other gods. Even James in the New Testament calls out to those in the church who have turned to the world, adulterous people.

Our problem runs deep, very, very deep, and the mirror does not cleanse us, does it? It just shows us how dirty we are. The mirror cannot cleanse us.

We cannot cleanse ourselves. ourselves. But God can. A third and final point this morning.

What does this commandment promise? promise? It promises a marriage made in heaven.

Because of God's unshakable, faithful commitment to his covenant, even the deepest, darkest depths of our unfaithfulness cannot separate us from his love in Christ.

[27 : 42] Nor from his commitment to unite himself to his church through his son in the marriage that all other marriages point to. Just listen again to Paul's words that Anne read for us earlier from Ephesians chapter 5.

Paul writes, Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

But Paul says later on in those verses that this relationship is the blueprint on which marriage is built. A relationship where Christ gives himself up for his bride even when she was unclean.

In order to make her completely clean. I trust that if you're listening this morning with a humble heart, that is the most wonderful assurance.

Perhaps you have felt sin uncomfortably exposed. Here is the most comforting hope. You do not clean yourself to come to Christ.

[29 : 06] Christ has come in order to clean you. That he might present you as part of his bride to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

That she might be holy and without blemish. Pure. Perfect. That is what Christ gave himself up for.

Perhaps now you can see why adultery is so grievous in a Christian context. It is always sin. Not only because of the damage it does to individuals, families, whole societies.

You can go and see the statistics on that if you want to. But because marriage is given as a portrait of Christ in this church and Christ died to make his bride pure.

To desecrate it. It is like knocking bricks off the Sagrada Familia or rubbing out a corner of the Mona Lisa. You are not only marring someone else's view of something that should be beautiful.

[30 : 18] You are also undoing the work of the artist. Jesus is making something beautiful in his church. He is making you beautiful as part of it.

And he has given us the small gift of covenant faithfulness to display something of the splendor of his heavenly masterpiece. To be unfaithful to the covenant of marriage, to pursue sex in any way in thoughts or action out with its bounds is not only to break God's law.

It is to go against the purpose for which Christ died. That is why the sin is so grievous.

It is wrong and deserving of God's judgment in any context but adultery amongst Christians whether public or private, in singleness or marriage, in action or thought. It is not only the breaking of God's law, it is the pushing back against the purpose for which Christ died for us.

But Christ's amazing promise proven through history is that nothing will ultimately stop him from presenting the church to himself at the end of history as the most beautiful bride.

[31 : 39] If your hope is in Jesus this morning, then you have the perfect marriage to look forward to. The most glorious wedding day is coming.

Just listen to these words from Revelation 19. Apostle John writes, Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude like the roar of many waters and the like, I like the sound of mighty peals of thunder crying out hallelujah.

For the Lord our God, the almighty reigns, let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.

It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure. For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, write this, blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

[32 : 48] Whatever might lie in your past, and whatever you might be wrestling with in the present, here is the hope, the promise that the seventh commandment points us to.

If you flee from your sin and run to Jesus, you are blessed. Whatever dirt lies behind you, you have been made clean.

You are invited to this wedding. Your name is on the guest list. Your place at the table has been set and it's not hidden away in a dark corner somewhere. It is right next to the groom himself as his beautiful bride.

And you will be there. And you will be without blemish. Each day until then is one we are given to get ourselves ready for that day.

His bride has made herself ready. That is what we are doing. It is not easy.

[34 : 10] It is a battle. The command of covenant faithfulness does not get easier. You won't get to a day when you have been a Christian for 50 years and all of a sudden the temptation will stop bothering you.

Every day is a battle to flee from sin, to run to Jesus. But it is a fight we can win. Not because we can clean ourselves, but because Christ has cleansed us and is sanctifying us so long as we keep on turning to him.

Because God is faithful. Even when we are not. We have this wonderful promise to hold on to, to look forward to, and to strive towards each and every day.

Let's pray together that we will be clothed in the righteous deeds of the saints and be blessed in Christ who has given himself for our sin. Let us pray together.

Father, we do thank you again for your faithfulness.

[35 : 31] Lord, that there is no shadow of turning within thee. Lord, that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever. And that when you make a promise, you keep your promise.

That your word is sure because it is your word. That your commands are good because they are your commands. That all that you do is just and faithful.

But Lord, we know that is not true of ourselves. Lord, when we look into our own hearts, when we hold it up to the mirror of your law, we see that we are an adulterous people.

those whose sin runs so very, very deep. Lord, we pray that you would convict us of that sin.

Not so that we would dwell in it, but so that we might run to Jesus, in whom we have the promise, the glorious promise, of a day when we will not only be cleansed, but presented in all beauty and splendor to him.

[36 : 45] Lord, we know our sin runs deep, but we thank you that your mercy runs deeper still. And so we pray, Lord, for all of us here this morning, that if we have felt our sin exposed, Lord, we would take it to you.

That we would repent and turn to the Lord Jesus, and know that there is forgiveness and cleansing in him. And that by your spirit, you would renew us day by day to become more and more like him in all purity, without spot or blemish.

That we might be presented and present ourselves to Christ on that last day as a beautiful bride. that we might bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.