

Ten Rules for Life | Seventh Commandment: Do Not Commit Adultery | Exodus 20:14

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(Discussion questions on page 6)

We live in a sensual age. Sex is more accessible, and more acceptable, than ever before in our society. Hook up culture. Dating apps. Pornography. Changed views of homosexuality. Less pressure to settle for one lifelong marriage partner.

And yet, people are lonelier than ever, relationship more fragile, and birthrates are falling. No Western country currently meets the basic replacement level for birthrates. And rates of loneliness and depression are steadily rising.

Here is a great irony: two of the purposes of sex are *intimacy* and *procreation*. And yet, the more sexual freedom westerners have, the less deep connection and new life they produce. It's as though the world's gorging itself on delicious fare, all while starving to death.

What's going on?

Scripture would tell us this is no accident—this is what happens when we misuse one of God's good gifts; it produces bad fruit.

And this is why with the seventh commandment—"You shall not commit adultery"—we are not just dealing with a few rules, we are dealing with God's desire to protect life and society, and to protect us from pain.

And there is so much pain when we address the topic of sexuality—pain, and shame, and secrets, and sin. One hundred percent of us are sexual sinners; and many also have suffered from the sexual sin of others.

Some of us manage sin in this area quietly, maintaining public respectability; some of us judge others while not keeping scripture's standards; others have been completely wrecked by sexual sin. But all of us need God's Word here.

The seventh commandment is not the most important. But it can feel like the most painful to confront. But it also may be the very place to go where the Spirit of God brings healing—the type of healing that comes from repentance, amendment of life, and the power of the Gospel.

What good news does God's Word on sexual morality have for us today? We have three points to cover to hear the testimony of Scripture on this matter: **(1) What God Protects by the Seventh Commandment; (2) What God Prohibits; (3) What God Promises to sexual sinners and those who suffer from this sin's fallout.** What God Protects, Prohibits and Promises.

I. What God Protects

Adultery—what the seventh commandment expressly forbids—is sex with someone other than your spouse. As such, this commandment has to do first and foremost with *marriage*. By this commandment, God protects an institution of his own creation, precious to him.

Marriage is the only institution created before our fall into sin. It is the culminating event of the creation account, as recorded in Genesis 2:

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. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gen 2:21-24).

The sacredness of this institution is threefold:

(1) Marriage is God's creation—as an institution in general, and also in the case of each individual marriage. Jesus emphasizes this when he teaches on the union of husband and wife, saying, "what therefore *God has joined together*, let not man separate" (Matt 19:6).

(2) Marriage is foundational for society: the mandate to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28-30) is meant to be fulfilled by the procreative power of the union of marriage—by children. These children are to be raised and disciplined within the sacred bonds of family which marriage creates.

(3) Marriage portrays God's love for His people:

"Your maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name" (Isa 54.5); "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" (Rev 19:7).¹

Now, why does restricting sex to marriage, protect marriage?

It does so because God designed sex to seal something permanent, not to spice up something temporary. Sex is the superglue, the cement, of the marriage covenant—it is designed to help hold together that which is not to be torn asunder. Using sex casually is like using superglue to hang Christmas cards or cement to build blocks with your kids. It to use something so powerful, designed to be so permanent, casually, recklessly. And people get torn apart.

Adultery, therefore, tears at what God intends to be permanent. It threatens and institution society depends on; it defiles what God has made sacred.

And the costs are high.

These costs sound as warnings in the **Book of Proverbs**, where a father warns his son of the folly of adultery. The adulterer loses respectability, economic opportunity, and at times their life.

If you are here today, and you are thinking about an adulterous relationship, or justifying one. If you are taking steps towards one—flirting at work, communicating too much with someone you should not, neglecting your own wife or husband. Then I want you to hear this father's warning to his son, as God's warning to you:

Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? ²⁸ Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? ²⁹ So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; none who touches

¹ "And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband'" (Hos 2:16).

her will go unpunished...³² He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself.
³³ He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away (Prov 6:23-33).

I don't think this father is being arrogant to speak so frankly. I think he is like a man in a burning building who knows where the fire escape is—he pleads with his son to save his life from a sin that will wreck it—and wreck so much more.

Have we not seen how one fling, one bad decision, has ruined someone's career, someone's family, someone's community, someone's life?

So friends, God is protecting two things when he restricts sex to marriage: He is protecting marriage; and He is protecting us. He is safeguarding marriage, family, society, and souls.

[T] Now moving to our second point, let's notice how this protection is expanded in Scripture not only to prohibit adultery—but all forms of sexual sin.

II. What God Prohibits: *adultery, fornication, lust*

The seventh commandment centers on adultery, but, by implication, prohibits more than this. It prohibits all forms of sex outside of marriage between one man and one woman. This becomes evident by more specific laws about sexual morality across scripture.

I want to highlight **two statements** from Jesus that help us see how wide God's arms of protection extend here:

Porneia

In teaching his disciples about really defiles a person, Jesus says,

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, **sexual immorality**, theft, murder, **adultery**,²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. (Mark 7:21-22).

Notice that Jesus uses another term alongside "adultery," translated, "sexual immorality." It is the word, *porneia*, from which we get the modern word pornography. This was a catch-all term for all types of sexual sin in the Jewish culture of Jesus' day: "prostitution, fornication, unchastity, sex with members of the same sex."

In condemning *porneia* and *adultery*, Jesus is forbidding every kind of deviation from the created order. It is as C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*: "There is no getting away from it; the Christian rule is, "Either marriage with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence."²

And yet there is more. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus adds another dimension by looking into our hearts:

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 **lustful intent** has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt 5:27-28).

"Lustful intent" does not mean noticing that someone is attractive. It means looking at them in a way that leads to sexual arousal—making them an object for your pleasure.

² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 95.

If we apply this fuller teaching, than sexual sin includes all forms of sex outside of marriage, cohabitation, pornography, the reading certain literature, even the use of sexual language, the messages you send, shows you watch, private habits no one sees.

I grew up in the 1990s, attended college in the early 2000s, and in pastoral work still interact with some many young people. I can tell you that the biblical message on sexual morality is not what people are receiving in school, on campus, in culture.

Because the message of scripture seems so out of step, because it is so hard to keep, it's tempting to simply ignore it. Some people throw up their arms and don't even try to meet the Bible's call for purity. Others determine it must be repressive or cruel. Other just suffer quietly with hidden or unconfessed sin.

But the church—God's Bride—is to be different: Paul writes to the Ephesians,

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. (Eph 5:3).

So what do we do?

[T] Here is where we need to turn to Jesus as the dispenser of truth *and* grace. Rather than relaxing God's standards or being crushed by them—Jesus shows us how to be redeemed *through them*.

Think of God's law like a doctor's diagnoses. If we ignore it—we get worse. If we hear it without any hope of a cure—we despair. But if we receive the diagnoses from a physician who also promises to heal us—then we hear it with hope. The diagnoses, plus the doctor's care, equals a path to healing.

This is what Jesus brings to those suffering from sexual sin and its fallout—he brings hope!

Which brings us to our third point:

III. What God Promises to those suffering from sexual sin and its fallout

There are three promises of God that I want us to hear to end this sermon.

First, the promise of forgiveness

Jesus did not come merely to be a moral example for us, or a good teacher. He came to *die* for us, in order to bear the penalty for our sins. And therefore, Jesus alone can extend to sexual sinners' *forgiveness*. Jesus says,

Truly, I say to you, **all sins** will be forgiven the children of man (Mark 3:27).

"All sins," Jesus says, even the dark and horrific ones. Some people think that adultery is an unforgivable sin. It is not. The only unforgivable sin is the sin that we refuse to confess and forsake. We commit unforgivable sin when we refuse to turn from our sin, cleave to it so long and so deeply that we can no longer confess it and turn from it. What Jesus calls "**the blasphemy against the holy spirit**" (Mark 3:28)—the resistance against the Spirit's work of convicting. And this, to the point where the Spirit withdraws and our conscience hardens over, and we are unable to repent.³

This forgiveness, however, does not automatically erase the fallout from sin. Sexual sin is especially impactful, and the healing process in a family is something that the guilty party cannot control. They must humbly commit to following God and accept how His will continues to unfold.

³ On this point, see John Piper, *What Jesus Demands of the World*, 320.

Second, the promise of reformation

Reformation means re-forming—bringing the person back into the original intent God had for them. Alongside forgiveness, God promises those of us in Christ *reform*—our lives made new—individually and collectively. This is not all realized in this life; but progress can be had.

And this reform can be emphasized from two angles.

First, what it implies for us getting to work with the Holy Spirit to see amendment of life. We must make a start at change—a real effort for purity. Sometimes people feel so defeated by sexual sin they give up fighting. Or they think the biblical standards are so high they are impossible.

But when you make a start at something, the important thing is not whether or not you'll perfect it; but whether or not you try. Sometimes I wonder if people don't try to fight sexual sin because they don't actually want to give it up—they fear life without it. You must pray for willingness and ask God to help you. You'll likely need to involve a friend or community—this sin is hard to fight alone. And as Lewis insightfully notes, in battles such as these,

Very often what God first helps us towards is not the virtue itself but just this power of always trying again. For how important chastity ... may be, this process trains us in habits of the soul which are more important still. It cures our illusions about ourselves and teaches us to depend on God.⁴

Second, this reformation calls to mind that God can bring beauty from ashes. God is able to take a horrible, sinful decision, and somehow bring something good out of it. This does not downplay the sin or pain; it highlights the power of God. A classic biblical example is David's sin with Bathsheba. It was about as bad as it gets. Yet, God would then bring from the relationship of David and Bathsheba, a king of Israel, Solomon, who was God's choice to build the Temple.

Perhaps adultery then a divorce wrecked your home growing up. You wonder if you are permanently damaged because of this. Friend, Jesus Christ can not only bring healing to you—He can do it in such a way that it leverages your particular pain to make something eternally significant, something powerful, something beautiful.

Perhaps a long battle with pornography has left you beaten and discouraged. God can use this to teach you reliance on him; he can use it to connect you with trusted Christians friends to help; he can use it to create true humility in you; and he can use it as a way to keep you close to the Cross of Christ—even if healing and victory come ever so slowly.

And friends God does not throw out the category of wisdom and responsibility when He helps us: He rarely lifts a defect out of us like magic. Rather, he wants us to grow up as we battle it, with his help.

If you are serious about change: change your environment. Limit your access to sexual content. Invite accountability. Ask for help. Why not set up a meeting with one of your pastors to talk about your struggle—then be willing to join a recovery or 12 step group. God's way of healing you will involve means—be open to whatever those means may be.

Third, the promise of fulfillment

The reason sexuality is such a painful and powerful topic, is because it lies so close to our desires for connection and happiness. We are wired by God for intimacy and joy—and the sexual relationship of

⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 101

marriage is one of the most profound experiences of this on earth. To live without it, or to experience pain within it, is so very hard.

Jesus blesses the institution of earthly marriage by his presence at the wedding at Cana. But Jesus does not set earthly marriage out as the key to ultimate fulfillment—this type of fulfillment and happiness, Jesus teaches, involves union with him.

So his word to the woman at the well in John 4, who had had five husbands, was not go out and do better at picking a man. It was come to him and find **“living water”** (John 4:10).

Scripture does conclude with a wedding—but it is the future union of Jesus with the church, the bridegroom and the bride. I want to allow Saint John, who had this vision of the end, draw us into this bigger picture of the future as we close:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters...for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready (Rev 19:6–7).

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev 21:1–5).

The seventh commandment does not just prohibit adultery—it reminds us that in the end, God has never, nor will ever, abandon His Bride. The seventh commandment reminds us that our forgiveness and fulfillment rests in God’s faithfulness to us—God’s love for His Bride.

In a world full of broken love, that is a hope we can build on live on.

Let’s pray.

Small Group Questions

1. The seventh commandment—“You shall not commit adultery”—is designed to protect marriage, because God holds marriage sacred. Where do you most clearly see the “goodness” of God’s design for marriage and sexuality—and where do you struggle to believe that it is actually for our good?
2. Jesus expands the commandment to include not just actions but desires (Matt 5:27–28). In what ways are you most tempted to minimize or justify sexual sin in your own life or in our culture? What would honest repentance and amendment of life look like in those areas?
3. Sexual sin is hard to fight alone. What makes it difficult to bring struggles in this area into the light with trusted Christians? Do you know of anyone who has had great victory in this area? What was key for them?
4. Which of the three promises that the sermon closes with—forgiveness, reformation, or fulfillment—do you most need to hear right now, and why? How does the hope of God’s future for you reshape how you view your past and present struggles?

This is a preaching draft.

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