

I. Introduction

A. Last week I mentioned that this morning we'd continue our series on the ten commandments with a sermon on adultery, which means it's mostly on sex. This is the commandment that gets most of the press; this is the commandment that generates most of the jokes - one of the classics has Moses saying to the people, "Good news: I got him down to 10. Bad news, adultery is still one of them;" this is the commandment that doesn't need an introduction - after all, the purpose of the introduction to a sermon is to get your attention. When the topic is sex I generally have your attention.

B. Of course, I've already made some of you a bit nervous, uncomfortable. I knew this would happen, so I prepared two sermons. I can speak on sex, or I'm ready to talk about the Monastic Understanding of the Economic Trinitarianism in 17th Century Europe. I thought I'd let you all vote. Anyone for economic trinitarianism? (I didn't think so. As a college pastor I spoke on love, sex and marriage more than I care to remember and I often opened with that offer. Remarkably I've never talked about economic trinitarianism. The truth, I barely remember what it is).

C. So we take up number seven, which is the third of the horizontal commandments. We have been told to honor our parents and also to not murder anyone. We are now coached on honoring marriage. *We are not to commit adultery.*

1. Technically this means that if we are married, we are not to have a sexual relationship with anyone other than our spouse.¹ But even a casual reading of the rest of the Bible shows that other types of sexual sin are off limits. For instance, sex between unmarried couples - often called fornication - is prohibited in Acts 15, Romans 1, Ephesians 5 and I Thess 4. And beyond that, Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5:28 makes it clear that it's not just our actions but also our thoughts that matter - that to look at another person with lust is to commit adultery. Which doesn't mean that temptation is sin, but rather that nursing the temptation or engaging in fantasy about it is a sin.

D. So, there is a broad spectrum of counsel about sex in the Bible. And in light of that, I'd like us to think more broadly about the entire topic of sex. And I want to do that proactively. Rather than arguing from a defensive position, I want to begin with the grand positive behind the 7th commandment. We've been told that:

¹ There is a bit of debate as to what all is being declared out of bounds here. Some think the intent of the commandment is narrowly focused on adultery and others think it prohibits other types of sexual sin. As noted, it actually doesn't much matter. Other forms of sexual sin are commented on in other places.

1. We shouldn't worship false gods because there is a real, personal God worthy of all worship; we shouldn't empty his name because He is so worthy of glorious honor; we shouldn't kill because we have been made in the image of God and our life has value.

2. We now come to a prohibition against adultery, and I want you to hear that God's view of sex and marriage is that they are good and wonderful things worth protecting. God is pro-sex.

3. In fact, God is more pro-sex than Hugh Hefner or whoever you want to point to. That view of sex is shallow and thin. What the pornographers do not get is that their pictures do not show too much of a person but too little. Sex is bigger and more important than they know.

4. God has the most cosmic and glorious view of sex of anyone.

E. I have four main points.

II. One: God created us as sexual beings.

A. In the early chapters of Genesis, we see that He made us in His image as male and female. Different in all the right ways and for all the right reasons

1. Men have a Y chromosome, broader shoulders, narrower hips, a propensity for spacial over verbal skills and male sex organs.

2. Women have 2 X chromosomes, narrower shoulders, wider hips, a propensity for greater verbal skills and the ability to bear children.

B. It is considered a bit scandalous to mention these differences today, but they are good, they are divinely ordained, and I hope that I haven't yet told you anything that you didn't already know.

C. Sex is his plan not ours. He created us, all the parts, and wired us for pleasure. Sex was his idea. Consequently, God has great advice about sex. Advice that is wise, sweet, healing and perhaps a bit surprising. The Bible does not have as much to say about sex as it does money, power, greed or hatred. But what it has to say is important. Which sets up point number two.

III. Two: God created sex to be a blessing and a bond between a husband and a wife.

A. Sex is a God-ordained blessing - an opportunity for the most intimate and profound form of communication possible between two people. One in which we begin to understand the blessing of being naked and unashamed.

B. It may surprise you to hear such positive things about sex. I need to acknowledge that more than a few church leaders have spoken out against sex - typically those who have read too much Plato and too little Paul. It is those who

have bought into the Greek idea that the body is bad and the soul is more elevated. It has a “higher nature” that rises above the “lower nature” of the flesh.²

C. But this is not what the Bible teaches. If it is your view, your view has been shaped by something other than God says.

D. The Puritans knew this, by the way. They were not perfect, but they are so much more interesting and joyful than their reputation. Their goal was purify the church. That lead them to study the Bible. And when you go to the Bible you see that sex in marriage is not only celebrated it’s commanded.

1. They were not shy in talking about this. In fact, they were known to put husbands in the stocks for refusing to have sex with their wives, as they understood to be commanded in I Cor. 7.

2. And their sermons could be so sexually explicit than back in the 1950s, when Edmond Morgan, a Yale history professor tried to print some of their sermons on sex, the Yale Review wouldn’t do it. The sermons were deemed too racy.³

E. The Bible tells us that God designed sex to be shared between a husband and a wife - who are married to each other – as a: 1) a source of wonder and delight; 2) as the way to create new life; and 3) as a way to glue two people together. These ideas are developed in a number of ways:

1. They are hinted at in Genesis 2:24, where we read: “For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.”⁴

² No less a figure than Augustine took the view that sexual pleasure was bad and should be restricted to those instances when you wanted children. Some warned that the Holy Spirit left the bedroom whenever a couple engaged in intercourse. Yves of Chartres counseled the devout to abstain from sex on: 1) Thursdays in remembrance of Christ’s ascension; 2) On Fridays in remembrance of Christ’s crucifixion; 3) On Saturdays in honor of the Virgin Mary; 4) On Sundays in commemoration of Christ’s resurrection; 5) And on Monday’s out of respect for departed souls. . Which left only Tuesday and Wednesday.

³ Thanks to Tim Keller for this insight. It comes from his sermon on Proverbs 5.

⁴ But I’m digressing, what I want you to see is how profound the bond between and husband and wife should be. The OT was written in the context of extended families. The practice was not that a couple got married and then went off and lived on their own. Nor was it that a couple got married and went off and to live with her parents. But that when a couple got married the bride left her family -- which is what we see with Isaac and Rebecca – to go live with her new husband and his family. But that is not what is said here. It says: When a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. In other words, even though geographically all we might be talking about is that they pitch a new tent in the same camp, the husband’s allegiance now comes to rest primarily with his bride, not with his parents or brothers or sisters. And the same is holds for her. Marriage becomes the primary bond in our life.

2. We see this idea reinforced in the Song of Solomon – which is a commentary on Gen. 2:24. It’s an erotic, romantic love poem that celebrates loves’ intensity.⁵

3. We see this in I Cor. 7:4f, where Paul writes that the wife’s body doesn’t belong to her alone, but also to her husband. And the husband’s body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent for a time – so that you can devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you.

F. I could go on.⁶ There are other passages to list. The point is, God is not a prude. He is more pro-sex than we are. He is certainly not surprised by sexual desire. He made us the way He did. It doesn’t take much imagination to realize that if procreation were the only issue, he could have orchestrated that in 1,000 different ways.⁷

G. So: 1) God created us as sexual beings; 2) he did this to bless us and to help us bond and, point three

IV. Three: The Bible points to sex as a foreshadowing of the glories of our union with Christ.

A. I have to be careful here. Some of you may be scandalized. If you are angry, send your emails to your campus pastor! Look, throughout the Bible the church is portrayed as the bride and Jesus as the groom and there are hints that the union of a husband and wife point to the union between Christ and the church.

1. We get a bit of that in Ephesians 5, where Paul instructs husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. And as he is going on, he says: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” (Which sounds like sex). And then he says, “this is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

2. We have several allusions in Revelation which have similar overtones – all linked to the wedding of Christ to the church. We also have the entire book of Hosea. And then there is Romans 7:1-6, where Paul makes a weird analogy, comparing spiritual infidelity with adultery in marriage, weaving sex into the imagery.

⁵ It has spiritual overtones as well. But those do not diminish the celebration of physical love.

⁶ We could check out Moses’ advice in Deut. 24:5. Where he says that if a man just married he is not to go off to war but stay home and make his wife happy.

⁷ We could simply divide like an amoeba.

- B. I was reading about this this week, and found myself a bit embarrassed. First because I had taken all of these file folders that are labeled “sex” to Starbucks. There is nothing salacious about what’s in the folders – it’s articles and copies of commentaries, but at one point it occurred to me that if anyone saw my folders, well. The second reason I was a bit embarrassed was for failing to see what so many writers had noted throughout the ages – specifically, the idea that being naked and unashamed in marriage pointed to the Gospel – in which, if we have confessed our sins, we are fully know (fully exposed) and without shame.
- C. The suggestion is that the joy and ecstasy of marital intimacy – and I have to stress that sex this is not something possible outside of the life-long commitment of marriage - is a foretaste of union with Christ.
- D. Let me say it again, no one has as high as view of sex as God and no worldview has as high of view of sex as Christianity.⁸
- V. Which brings us to point four: because sex is so important, God demands that it be protected.
- A. Because it is so much more than a physical act, because it is the union of two lives - because He designed it to be a glue between two people who have made a life-long commitment to each other; because he designed it as a way to refresh a relationship; because he designed it to lead to new life – which really, really benefits from the chance to happen in a family, in the context a loving relationship between two people who are committed to each; because sex has spiritual implications and overtones - it must be protected. There is no such thing as casual sex, nor is there such a thing as a casual commitment to Christ.
- B. And so we have a number of passages in the Bible in which God lovingly and wisely tells us, we need to safeguard sex – we need to limit it to the union between a man and a woman who have made a life-long commitment to the well-being of the other, over themselves.
- C. This is what we get in the 7th commandment. No adultery.
- D. This advice unfolds through the accounts of all the people who didn’t take it: Abraham and Hagar, David and Bathsheba; Amnon and Tamar
- E. This is what we read in Proverbs 5 – where a father offers his son advice based on the seventh commandment: **Drink water from your own cistern running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours**

⁸ You cannot be more vulnerable as you are when you lie naked next to someone. When there is no pretext or mask. When you are both physically and emotionally undressed. This can be a wonderful thing. To be so fully known and accepted. No person can know you as well as your spouse. And when they are the one who loves you most, well, that is a wonderfully affirming thing.

alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love. Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man’s wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman?

1. Proverbs 5 celebrates sex – in marriage. It encourages husbands and wives to be intoxicated with each other’s bodies. That is a good thing. But it also makes it very clear that we need to limit our passions to our spouse. Just as we can bring a fire into our home if we keep it in the fireplace, we can fan flames of passion in our life – but they must be limited to marriage. We need to keep our passions in check. That is what Proverbs 5 is saying. When he talks about not letting streams of water in the public square,” he is not talking about not sharing his wife with others – which was how I read this the first time – but about controlling his own passions.

F. Finally, this is where we also get Christ’s statement on the Sermon on the Mount. Which is the place where the 7th commandment is updated for the NT

1. “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. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”

2. These are horrifying words. They deserve a lot more time than I can give them. Let me quickly note that Jesus makes it clear that we need to police our thoughts because our largest sex organ is our mind.

VI. There is much more that could be / should be said on the topic of sex. I have toyed with doing a series on sex. I ruled it out while we had kids at home because I couldn’t imagine subjecting them to their dad talking about sex during an entire series. But there is much to be said. So far I have argued that: God created us as sexual beings, he did so to bless us and to create a bond to help hold people together. I have said that there is a sense that this bond is a foreshadowing of the blessings of heaven and our bond with Christ, and that we need to reserve sex for marriage. So far I have argued that God has the highest and most glorious view of sex possible. Let me also note:

A. Sex can not only undo people (individuals), but also societies. That is happening in a number of ways which we can see, and some which we probably cannot.

1. I wrote about this in *FutureView*, so I will not say much here other than to note, societies tend to move from a traditional sexual ethic to a liberal one, and then collapse.⁹

2. And that many of the things that are unfolding are ironic. 1) It's ironic that sex could be so fundamentally misunderstood by people who desperately want to understand little else; 2) it's ironic that those who try to make it more than it can be fail to see that they actually end up making it less than it is; 3) it is ironic that as we become more and more sexualized, we not only have fewer children but also, people are having less sex than before.

⁹ We are not the first culture to be misled. We shouldn't make the mistake of claiming that things have never been this bad. Sociologists and historians report that societies pretty consistently move from a conservative sexual ethic towards a more lax one. And there have been a number of societies – the Babylonians in the OT and the Corinthians in the New Testament are just two examples – which just prior to imploding, were extremely amoral. Things have been worse in other places at other times. But probably not substantially worse, and we'd be foolish to not recognize both God's perspective on this and just how strong the undertow is.

B. Let me note that if you are single, the call is chastity – which sounds like crazy talk in this day and age, but is advice from someone who knows you, loves you and designed sex. And by the way, it is possible.

1. Some say it is not. That we cannot repress our desires. Look, I am not going to go Freudian on you – other than to say, he got it wrong. Freud argued that our sexual desires came from deep within and morality was something religious people sprinkled on top. But to deny our desires was to act against our best interest. Wrong. God has written his Laws deep on our heart, which is why sleeping around produces guilt until it hardens our heart.

C. Sex only really works in marriage. You cannot be fully united with someone if you are not willing to be fully united with them – not just physically for a moment, but socially and emotionally and financially. And it’s not just that you lessen it, you hurt yourself. Sex unites people – it serves as a glue. There is no such thing as casual sex. There is nothing casual about it. It is designed to be the least casual thing you do. The only way you can sleep around is to harden your heart.

1. Which leads into my scotch-tape illustration of sex.

D. I would be remiss if I didn’t note that sex is clearly one of the character assassins most frequently used by the enemy. It not only that sex often leads people to do remarkably foolish and sometimes bizarre things that can ruin their lives or the lives of others. But also that our society is grievously misled on matters of sex. It has been our cultural undoing.

E. My plea today is to say that we need to obey God’s 7th commandment – and pursue sexual purity – because: that is the only way life really works; and because that is the way we become whole; and because that is the pathway to lasting joy; and because that is what safeguards our soul

VII. I want to leave you with a short list of steps we need to take to be who God created us to be sexually.

A. I want you to encourage you to take an assessment of where you are at. To take an objective assessment of what you are feeding your soul: what you look at; what you read, and what you think about. Is it a healthy mental diet? Do you want your future to reflect the values you are taking in? They will. The question is, is that a good thing? Or would you be embarrassed if people knew where you let your thoughts dwell.

B. Second, I want you to decide to take the necessary steps to deal with any trouble spots this drill raises. And this means deciding that you will take drastic action if that is what is needed. In general we are to resist the devil. But when it comes to sexual temptation we are to flee: 1) when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him he ran. Literally; and 2) in I Cor. 6 Paul says the same thing “Flee.”

C. Finally, I want to give you a chance to prayerfully confess your short comings related to sexual sin so that you can move on.