

A God who Speaks: The Seventh Commandment

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Date: 13 August 2006

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[0 : 00] Let us pray.

Our Father, you said in your word, I will be your God and you will be my people. And Father, if we have this, we have everything.

We pray that you would give us ears to hear your word as you, our God, speak to us, your people, this morning.

And may your word do its perfect work and change us to be more like your son, Jesus. We ask it for his sake. Amen. Please be seated.

If you're visiting with us, we warmly welcome you. This morning, we've been doing a series this summer on the Ten Commandments. And this morning, we come to the seventh commandment.

[1 : 07] You shall not commit adultery. What do you think? Is there a reason why God should command that marriage is to be between one man and one woman?

Until death do they part? Why should it have to be this way? The God who created this world with all of its astonishing diversity, flowers and trees, teeming life in the seas, birds of the air, bugs and creeping things, more incredible than anything science fiction could ever come up with, not to mention galaxies, stars, planets, without number.

No two snowflakes. Exactly the same, we're told. Well, why, given this enormous creativity and diversity, should God insist that there is only one acceptable form of marriage, only one acceptable relationship for sexual expression, that sex is for the lifelong heterosexual marriage of one man and one woman, and that any other form of sexual expression is wrong, or even sinful?

Why should a man not have two, or three, or four wives? Or for that matter, why should a woman not have more than one husband? Why shouldn't two people who love and care for each other have sexual relations, even if they aren't married, or not yet married?

Or why shouldn't, as our society is pressing upon us, loving homosexual couples be permitted to marry, or to have sexual relations, even if they choose not to marry?

[3 : 04] And why is it so wrong in a marriage for one of the partners, being a mature adult, to have a harmless fling on the side, perhaps away on a long business trip, perhaps because the marriage relationship has grown cold, or dreary, or limiting?

Isn't all this just an arbitrary rule that limits human freedom and creativity? Well, first, we need to make sure that that actually is what God really does say.

After all, our Canadian Parliament has decided that they have the authority to define and redefine marriage as they see fit. According to this view, marriage is just a social institution that humans have developed, something not unlike democracy, and which we're free to tinker with as social realities change.

But how does the Bible describe marriage? I invite you to turn with me to the very beginning of your Bibles, to page 2 in the Pew Bible, or to Genesis chapter 2.

It's probably page 2 in whatever Bible you've got, I would guess. Just a word of a caveat. Today, we're going to look up more scriptures than we normally do.

[4 : 30] Our hope is to draw together a big theme across all of scripture. So I hope I don't weary you. Let me know if you do, if I do. But I'll try not to dwell long on each passage, but we'll try to pull out a few key points as we build this biblical picture.

All right, so Genesis chapter 2. Let's look at verse 18 on page 2. Genesis 2, 18. And the Lord God said, It's not good that man should be alone.

I'll make him a helper, comparable to him. And then jump over to verse 21. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept. And he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place.

Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man he made into a woman. And he brought her to the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

[5 : 41] So here we have the story of the original marriage. And we can observe several things. First, that marriage is ordained and created by God, not by people.

Second, that God provided marriage in response to a genuine need. It's not good that man should be alone. Third, we see that marriage is elevated above all other personal loyalties in a person's life under God.

The married man, in this case, leaves his father and mother. Marriage severs what would otherwise be the most important human relationship of all.

A husband must put his wife above all others, and so too the wife, her husband. And fourth, the husband and wife are joined together to become one flesh.

Joined together. One flesh. This speaks of many things, primarily of the sexual union with the husband and the wife, but also of the entire shared human experience in marriage.

[6 : 48] They're joined together as one, physically, emotionally, socially, in every way. This way of speaking conveys to us the intimacy, the mutual care, the tenderness, the love that God intends for marriage.

marriage. And so, in summary, this primeval marriage, it shows us that marriage is the exclusive, lifelong bonding of one man and one woman in a life that's fully shared.

God joins them together so that they belong fully and only to one another. But to understand why this has to be, why, it still doesn't explain why, we need to observe a recurring theme in the Bible from the beginning to the end.

And it's namely this, that marriage represents the covenant relationship of God with his people.

God is the husband of his people. The Lord is the husband of his people. The marriage relationship and the marriage covenant then points beyond itself to the intimate relationship with God for which every human soul longs and yearns in the barrenness of this fallen world.

[8 : 17] Well, there are many, many places in the Bible where this idea is presented and the implications of it are drawn out for us. And I might wear you even doing the little bit I'm hoping to do, so we won't look at them all, but one of the clearest of all is in the prophet Ezekiel.

I invite you to turn with me to that. It's on page 726. This will be our longest text. But Ezekiel's very graphic, so it shouldn't wear you out.

Ezekiel 16, page 726. I'll just read the first part of that. Again, the word of the Lord came to me saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations.

And say, thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem, your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan. Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. As for your nativity, on the day that you were born, your navel cord was not cut.

Nor were you washed in water to cleanse you. You were not rubbed with salt nor swathed in swaddling cloths. No, I pitied you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you.

[9 : 31] But you were thrown out into the open field where you yourself were loathed on the day you were born. And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, live.

Yes, I said to you in your blood, live. I made you thrive like a plant in the field and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare.

When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed, your time was the time of love. So I spread my wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you and you became mine, says the Lord God.

Then I washed you in water. Yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin. I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk.

I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck and I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.

[10 : 43] Thus you were adorned with gold and silver and your clothing was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry, a fine flour, honey and oil.

You were exceedingly beautiful and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty for it was perfect through my splendor which I had bestowed on you, says the Lord God.

So here Ezekiel reviews the history of the nation of Israel. Their origin was like a newborn baby girl, unwanted by her parents, exposed, left to die.

And the Lord finds the baby in this condition and he mercifully saves her. Years later, the girl has grown to become a beautiful young woman and the Lord comes to her again and clothes her and marries her, marries her.

He becomes her husband, bound to her by covenant and he lavishes upon her many wonderful gifts with the result that she is much admired by others.

[11 : 54] And so all that exalted Israel as a special nation, all that made her dignified and wonderful in the sight of all the other nations was a free gift from the Lord who loved his people with a unique covenant generosity.

She owed him absolutely everything. But how did Israel respond to all of this demonstration of kindness and love?

Let's read a bit further. Verse 15. But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it.

You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen nor be.

You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from my gold and my silver which I had given you and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them. You took your embroidered garments and covered them and you set my oil and my incense before them.

[13 : 04] Also my food which I gave you, the pastry of fine flour, oil and honey which I fed you, you set it before them as sweet incense and so it was, says the Lord God.

Moreover, you took your sons and your daughters whom you bore to me and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter that you have slain my children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire and in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not remember the days of your youth when you were naked and bare struggling in your blood.

The language here is explicit. It's graphic. It's perhaps even offensive to our ears and I didn't read the worst of it. But if so, it's no less offensive than the wickedness of the unfaithfulness of God's people to him.

Each of the gifts that God had given to his people, her fine garments, her beautiful jewelry, her choice food, she had turned around and used in the worship of other gods. And so she had betrayed her true husband, the Lord.

Even his own children were taken and sacrificed in the rites of idol worship. And all of this came about because his people forgot their humble beginnings and they were utterly ungrateful to God for his grace and his mercy and his kindness, his generosity, his love freely shown to them.

[14 : 42] Well, again, we don't have time to look at it now, but the chapter continues with warnings of judgment upon the nation for its unfaithfulness. But the warnings end in a note of hope.

And let's jump over to that. If you turn over the page to verse 59 of the same chapter. For thus says the Lord God, I will deal with you as you have done who have despised the oath by breaking the covenant.

Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your older and younger sisters, for I will give them to you for daughters, but not because of my covenant with you.

And I will establish my covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame when I provide you an atonement for all you have done, says the Lord God.

There is a promise here that the marriage between the Lord and his people will someday be restored and enjoyed again forever.

[16 : 08] Well, on that note, we'll fast forward to the New Testament, to the coming of Jesus Christ, because it's in him, it is in Jesus that we finally meet the bridegroom of the covenant people.

In Jesus, the Lord finally comes as the divine husband. You may know the words of John the Baptist when he said, you yourselves bear me witness that I said, I'm not the Christ, but I've been sent before him.

He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices at the bridegroom's voice. And Jesus also described himself in these terms.

That's why he repeatedly used parables of weddings and marriages with himself as the bridegroom. But this is made most clear of all by Paul in his teaching on marriage in the letter to the Ephesians. And there, he draws a parallel between the marriage of a husband and a wife and the ultimate marriage of Christ and the church.

[17:23] Let's turn over to that. Ephesians 5. It's on page 1015. This parallel shows us that a Christian marriage that is lived out the way God requires it becomes a sort of a living gospel, a visible parable to the world.

Let's pick it up at verse 30. Page 1015, Ephesians 5, verse 30. For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones.

For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Paul declares here that believers in Jesus are members of the body of Christ.

Not members like you're members of the RA club or something, but members like hands and feet and eyes and ears, that kind of member. You could even say that to Jesus Christ, he can look at his people and say, this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, the very basis and foundation of marriage like we saw back in Genesis.

[18:52] that's what leads to that great mystery in verse 32. I speak concerning Christ and the church. Because human marriage points to and represents and reveals and symbolizes the true marriage of Christ and his church.

That's why it's so important for the husband to love his wife and for the wife to respect her husband. because the human marriage makes visible to the world around us the eternal romance between Christ and his body.

It depicts the sacrificial love of Christ and the joyful human response of devotion. The human marriage and the human home reflect in miniature the beauty of the shared love between the bridegroom and the bride.

And that's why human marriage is so precious in God's eyes. And it's also why marriage even though it's the strongest of all the human relationships is not ultimate or final but it points beyond itself.

So what does all this mean for us? Human marriage is in miniature the marriage of Christ and the church. Well it means plenty. first of all to quote a man named Ray Ortlund the biblical story what I've been trying to lay before you here lifts before us a vision of God not as Lord only or King or Creator but as our lover.

[20:35] the gospel is the voice of our husband who has proven his love for us in his death on the cross and calls for our undivided love in return.

The gospel reveals that as we look out into the universe ultimate reality is not a cold dark blank space.

Ultimate reality is romance. there is a God above with love in his eyes for us an infinite joy to offer to us and he has set himself upon winning our hearts for himself alone.

The gospel tells us the story of God's love and it calls us to answer him with a love on our part that cleanses our lives of all spiritual unfaithfulness because this is the most deadly adultery of all.

Turn with me to James chapter 4 verse 4 it's on page 1047 1047 James pulls no punches adulterers and adulteresses do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God here we see the same charge that the Old Testament prophets like Ezekiel were laying at the feet of Israel and it's now laid against the church of Jesus Christ a Christian cannot have it both ways we cannot give our best affections to the world while also enjoying a right relationship with God and notice that it is merely the desire for friendship with the world James says whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God it's not total immersion in the world or identification with it but merely the wish to be on good terms with the world

[22 : 47] James isn't seeking only to guard us from worldly patterns of behavior he's calling us away from even the desire for the world's approval that is spiritual adultery because no one who wishes to be God's friend God's wife can allow himself to be drawn after the world with its ambitions and affections for instance what is our relationship with our current consumer culture pleasure at heart are we gratefully content with what our heavenly husband has given us or are we addicted to the material goods of this world are we seeking pleasure and luxury through the idols of our modern world the things that are thrown at us from every side because if we do we insult the value and joy that we ought to place in our heavenly husband's all-sufficiency and we need to be confronted by this verse the matter of our faithfulness to Jesus

Christ is of eternal importance he uses strong words if you want to be a friend of the world you make yourself an enemy of God it's a warning to the church we must place ourselves under the word of God which is our covenant document and carefully guard ourselves because if we want to avoid the charge that Jesus laid against his contemporaries of being a sinful and adulterous generation we can't afford to be careless or to take these things lightly our sinfulness that still dwells within us is very seductive and so if we truly desire to be faithful to Christ we must allow God's word to deeply search our inner lives our hearts because as the bride of Christ we must remain open and responsive to our heavenly husband and we must quickly turn back to him whenever we become aware of any glimmer of unfaithfulness in us and so covenant faithfulness is a deeply felt enjoyment and preference for the love of God the love of Christ his favor whatever the cost in terms of hostility even from the world and adultery spiritual adultery on the other hand consists in a lingering wish for the world's favor even as we wish to enjoy the benefits of being a Christian this kind of hypocrisy provokes

God's jealous anger but not all adultery of course is spiritual adultery that would be that would be wrong because although the body is not primary in God's eyes it certainly isn't nothing and so there is of course also included in the purpose of the seventh commandment you shall not commit adultery that we pursue modesty and purity with our bodies in all of our sexual relations and we need to know that God has provided the intimate companionship of marriage as the remedy the sole remedy s-o-l-e sole the only remedy to keep us from plunging into ungodly lust turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 7 page 991 1 Corinthians 7 it's true that some people have received a special grace from

God in this matter of sexuality and sexual relations and they can contentedly remain single some for life some just for a time that's shown in verse 7 page 991 1 Corinthians 7 7 Paul says I wish that all men were even as I myself but each one has his own gift from God one in this matter and another in that some are gifted but not all to remain single but Paul is also very clear here that those who struggle to control themselves sexually ought to get married so he says in verse 2 nevertheless because of sexual immorality let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband they need to get married because those who seek to have sexual relations in any other way find themselves striving against

God marriage is the sole remedy that he has provided to resist temptations to sexual immorality it's much more than that but it's not less than that and so if you this morning find that your power to control lust is failing you then it's reasonable to conclude that the Lord has imposed on you the necessity of getting married that's what he says in verse 9 if they cannot exercise self-control let them marry for it's better to marry than to burn with passion it's very clear finally Jesus himself shows us the true extent of the application of this law you shall not commit adultery in the Sermon on the Mount page 836 page 836 Matthew chapter 5 verse 27 Jesus said you have heard that it was said to those of old you shall not commit adultery but I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart it's just the same as with murder as we saw last week if you were with us that

[29 : 07] Jesus shows that God is not only concerned with the body with the external actions but with the state of a person's heart it's possible entirely possible to commit adultery just by lustfully looking at another person now it's I think especially guys sometimes get hung up on this it's not this kind of looking isn't just seeing someone and finding them attractive but it's looking with lustful intent it's the lustful intent that is critical and in this matter let me suggest by the way that at least as brothers and sisters in Christ we can show love to one another and help one another by dressing modestly and speaking modestly so we don't provoke or seduce each other to lust but finally Jesus also teaches another way that we commit adultery he teaches that remarriage after a divorce that

was not legitimate in the eyes of God is also adultery jump down to 31 on the same page

Jesus said furthermore it's been said whoever divorces his wife let him give her a certificate of divorce but I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery and whoever marries a woman who's divorced commits adultery friends these these are challenging words these are very difficult words in a culture where half or more of our marriages end in divorce but at peril of throwing something out that could be very painful and leaving it we just need to realize that these words if nothing else reflect the great importance that God places on marriage and the covenant of marriage as a lifelong union of a man and a woman and one that's ultimately joined together by him and so to sum up marriage is not just another mutation of human social evolution like democracy it's a divine creation and it's intended to reveal the ultimate romance that guides all of time and all of eternity this is the real reason why premarital sex is wrong because it toys with the biblical mystery and the covenant as you can see God's moral command is concerned with far more than the risk of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease and this is also why extramarital sex or adultery is wrong because it violates the mystery the covenant and this is also even why same-sex marriages are wrong because they misrepresent or distort the mystery the mystery that marriage represents the union of Christ and his church two who are very different and yet one flesh not the same and this is also why every faithful and loving marriage

Christian or not is precious to God because it shines with the light of Christ's love for his people and of their devotion to him in all the darkness of this present evil age and it also points us to this that God wants us he wants ourselves he wants our hearts our loyalty our love for himself alone he wants to find in us believe it or not the same sense of intimate belonging to him that is appropriate to the sexual union on the human level that's what Paul was saying in Ephesians it's a mystery but it's true God wants us to treasure him above all else and we show him our love by our faithfulness to his word by following him obediently wherever he goes by it being our heart's desire that we would rather die than turn aside one step from following him in order to follow the world and we show him our love finally by savoring and clinging to and and meditating on the hope and the eager expectation of eternal union with him in the new

Jerusalem above our only and ultimate true fulfillment i'll close with the words of john in the book of revelation let us rejoice and be glad giving the glory to him for the marriage of the lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready to her it has been granted granted to be clothed with fine linen bright and pure for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb amen h