

Faithfulness and Generosity

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[0 : 00] You've seen the news, Prince Harry's engaged to the, what's her name? Megan, Megan Markle. Yep, I'm all down with hip happening. But one of the stories you may not have heard about recently, about Prince Harry, happened just last September.

He was in deep conversation at a volleyball game, I think it was, and a toddler next to him started stealing his popcorn. So have a look at the next slide. Next slide, there she is. Deep and constant. I noticed the headline, Popcorn Poacher. That's what she was called. And apparently this went on for some time before Harry realised, and then on the next slide, caught her.

And it was all a bit of fun. But today, we continue our series, as Vijay said, in our Ten Commandments. And the two commandments we're looking at today, both are about taking things that don't belong to you.

But before we get to them, just two quick reminders. First is that we actually, as Christians, not under the Old Testament, law. Jesus has freed us from the Old Testament law.

[1 : 03] So at one level, we don't have to obey the Old Testament law anymore. But we also heard that Jesus didn't come to abolish the law either. That is, it's still meaningful for us, and we can still find meaning from it, as well as application.

And to that end, I gave you some questions, which we'll be following again on your outlines, to help you find meaning from God's law and apply it to yourselves today. That's the first reminder.

The second reminder is that these commandments are like topics. So instead of doing our usual custom of working our way through a passage in the context of the letter, we're going to have to look at several passages to build a picture, search the scriptures, as it were, before we apply it to ourselves.

Now, the first commandment we're looking at today is this one on the next slide. It's the seventh commandment, which is about adultery. Now, I am acutely aware that some people at our church have been hurt by this, and either that or divorce.

And so with that in mind, why don't I pray now that we would have ears to hear God's word, realizing that life is not always easy and sometimes messy.

[2 : 15] So let's pray at this point. Gracious Father, we do thank you for your word, which is given for our good. And Father, we know, though, that people don't always follow it, and we've, as a human race, managed to hurt one another deeply.

Father, we pray for those here this morning who might be sensitive to this issue. Father, we ask that they might find comfort and acceptance in Christ.

And we pray that you would help us all to hear what your word tells us on this sensitive topic. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, if we go back to that slide.

Thanks, Ryan. The command, the seventh command is pretty, seems pretty straightforward, doesn't it? It's literally two words in the original. It's not adultery.

Now, strictly speaking, adultery is having a sexual relationship with another person's spouse or even fiancé. So in the Old Testament, on the next slide from Leviticus 20, if a man commits adultery with another man's wife, you know, a woman who does not belong to him and he to her, both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.

[3 : 33] It's pretty serious, isn't it? Have a look on the next slide. This is not just for a wife, but also for a fiancé. If a man happens to meet in town a young woman, betrothed or engaged to be married, and he sleeps with her, you shall take the two of them to the gate of the town and stone them to death.

The young woman, because she was in the town and did not scream for help, and the man, because he violated another man's wife, you must purge the evil from among you.

Now, the reference to not screaming here really means she gave consent. She was a willing partner in the affair. If she did scream, then there are different Old Testament laws which would both protect her and provide for her.

But notice, it's not just those who are married, it's also those who are engaged. In other words, it's having an affair with someone who does not belong to you and you do not belong to them. But rather, they are in a relationship with someone else.

That's why when David commits adultery with Bathsheba in the Old Testament, Samuel, the prophet, accuses David not of adultery, but of taking someone else's wife.

[4 : 45] And the reason God takes this taking of another person so seriously is because it's an act, a gross act of unfaithfulness.

And God calls that evil. Even in our world today, some newspapers and magazines will still call unfaithfulness, marriage unfaithfulness, a scandal.

So on the next slide, earlier this year in July, some AFL executives resigned over an affair they were having with co-workers and the Australian newspaper called it a scandal. So even for a lot of people in society, this kind of behaviour is scandalous.

Although I heard other reporters say they didn't understand what the big deal was. So clearly our society is moving. But for God, the scandal is not so much the sexual act, as bad as that is.

I mean, after all, God created sex to be a good thing within marriage. The real scandal, though, is the attitude of unfaithfulness that leads to the act. And that's why when Israel is unfaithful to God, he calls that adultery.

[5 : 52] Let's have a look on the next slide from Jeremiah chapter 3. You might remember Israel was one nation and then it was split in two. The northern kingdom kept the name Israel. The southern kingdom was called Judah, after the biggest tribe Judah.

And that's where we get the name Jew from. So Jews didn't actually exist before the kingdom was split. But listen to what God says. He says, Have you seen what faithless Israel has done?

She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. I thought that after she had done all this, she would return to me, but she did not.

And her unfaithful sister, Judah, the southern kingdom, saw it. I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.

The next slide. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister, Judah, had no fear. She also went out and committed adultery. Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood.

[6 : 54] Now the reference to stone and wood there is clearly a reference to the idols that were made out of stone and wood. And so what Israel was doing, they were going worshipping other gods and being unfaithful to the Lord, their God.

But God calls this unfaithfulness adultery. Because at the heart of adultery is unfaithfulness. And so the antidote to adultery, the way to avoid it, is to be faithful.

I turn now to our first reading from Malachi chapter 2. It's page 959. Page 959. I chose this as the Bible reading because the commandments were two sentences long.

So I thought, rather than have a whole Bible reading for two sentences, we'll do this one. So page 959, to the right-hand side of the page there, chapter 2, verse 13.

Listen to what they're complaining about. He says, Another thing you do, Israel, you flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favour on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.

[8 : 12] You ask, Why? Well, Malachi says, it is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

You see, faithfulness matters to God, so much so that he refuses to listen to their prayers or accept their offerings because of their unfaithfulness to each other, even in marriage.

Now, why does faithfulness, even in marriage, matter so much to God? Well, four quick reasons.

First, because God has made the married couple one. Verse 15 of Malachi there, in our translations, is not quite got it right.

It's a hard verse to translate, but I think on the next slide, it's a more accurate rendering of the Hebrew. It says, Has not he, that is God, made them, the married couple, one? In flesh and spirit, they are his.

And why one? Because he was seeking godly children or offspring. You see, from the beginning, in Genesis, we're told, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one.

[9 : 22] You see, in marriage, God designed two to become one and so faithfulness to your spouse matters because of who you are. You are actually one in God's sight. That's the first reason faithfulness matters.

And the second reason is because of verse 15 there, that God desires godly offspring or children. I mean, God knows how hard it is to be a parent. And those of us who are here, who are parents, you know how hard it is to be a parent.

And if you're not a parent, but I bet you've babysat some nieces or nephews or done creche for us once or twice and after 20 minutes, it's like, get me out of here, I need a coffee. It's hard work, isn't it?

And so having two parents makes it much easier. What's more, raising kids to follow Jesus in our society is hard work too. I don't know if you realize this, but our state is now known as the most progressive state in Australia.

Do you realize that? By which, it really means we're the most morally regressive state in Australia. And so having two parents who are both believers makes it much easier to raise our kids in the Lord.

[10 : 29] You know, we don't always feel like coming to church. I don't always feel like coming to church. And if you've got two of you who have really committed to it, then you can encourage each other. Oh, come on, we'll get you, we'll get you, go. It's much easier than just having one.

That's why I take my hat off to the single parents amongst us or those parents who have a spouse who is not a believer. And it's why we as a church need to do everything we can to support them for God desires godly children.

This also means, by the way, that those parents who stay at home to raise their kids sometimes feel like they don't have a real job. But in fact, they actually have the most important job in God's eyes, raising their kids to follow Christ.

And because of this, because of what God desires, then faithfulness matters. Of course, being faithful to each other to help raise godly children doesn't guarantee the kids will stick with it. Sadly, I know of many people here at our church whose adult children have walked away from the faith. But if that's you, then don't give up. You never know how God will use the seeds you've planted. So keep praying for them. I pray for God to raise up other people their age to talk to them.

[11 : 41] Because as kids get older, actually, kids never listen to their parents whether they're older or not. So pray for peers. Well, the third reason faithfulness matters is also for our good.

Because the opposite of faithfulness, that is unfaithfulness, which leads to adultery and divorce and so on, well, it brings shame for yourself if you've committed adultery and violence to your spouse. Have a look at verse 16 in your Bibles. The man who hates and divorces his wife, says the Lord, the God of Israel, does violence to the one he should protect, says the Lord Almighty.

So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful. You see, faithfulness to your spouse matters because divorce is like hating and committing an act of violence against them. Now, to be clear, there are some reasons why you might have to divorce.

And some of those reasons are given in the New Testament. We heard one of them today in our second reading. But not every reason is covered in the New Testament. In fact, even God divorced Israel from our Jeremiah reading, you might remember.

[12 : 48] He gave her a certificate of divorce. Yet, divorce is always a tragedy and it affects not just the couple, but it affects the children, the wider family, the friends, and if they're part of a church, the church family.

And so it is a tragedy, but there may be reasons for it. And adultery, on the other hand, well, there's never really a reason for that. And the shame of it often sticks with the person who commits it. Have a look on the next slide from Proverbs chapter 6, or chapter 5 rather. A man who commits adultery lacks judgment. Whoever does so destroys himself. Wounds and disgrace are his lot, and shame will never be wiped away.

I remember some years ago, back in 2009, there was a governor in the US, governor of South Carolina called Mark Sanford, who was tipped to be the next American president. He was tipped to be the one who would take out Barack Obama after his first term.

But he had an affair. He committed adultery. And it derailed his career. At a press conference, he said, the bottom line is this, I've been unfaithful to my wife, I've hurt a lot of people, and I'm going to be spending the next few days, weeks, months, and I suspect years working through all the consequences.

[14:10] A political reporter said at the time that one of those consequences was the presidency. He was that much of a shoo-in that the affair derailed the presidency for him. Interestingly, he called himself a person of faith back then.

Listen to what he says about God's law. So we'll need to make sure the volume's up, Casey. I'm here because if you were to look at God's laws, It doesn't quite match us now, but anyway. They're in every instance designed to protect people from themselves.

I think that that is the bottom line of God's law. That it's not a moral, rigid list of do's and don'ts just for the heck of do's and don'ts. It is indeed to protect us from ourselves.

Now, I'm not sure what's going on there, but we'll go to the next slide. We won't keep listening to it. It goes on for some time, but do you see, did you hear the point he was making?

He realised that God's law was actually there for his good after he ignored it. And not just for his good, but the good of his family and others around him.

[15:14] Though sadly, he ended up going on to divorce his wife who had four children for his mistress. But now they too are split up. It doesn't get better, does it?

And it's interesting that the articles I read about Governor Sanford today because now people are encouraging him to take on Donald Trump. Yeah, I won't say any more. But even the articles now that are talking about him still mention his 2009 affair.

It's as though the proverb is right that the shame is never wiped away. Of course, if he truly repents, God will wipe his shame away in his sight and give him forgiveness.

But the point is faithfulness matters, doesn't it? God has made the married couple one, it helps to raise godly kids, it's for our good and the good of others, and fourthly, it reflects God's very character of faithfulness.

Now before we think about how all this applies to us today, let's see what the New Testament does with this command. So point two in your outlines and here we come to our second reading in your Bibles, Matthew chapter 5, so please turn with me.

[16:22] Sorry, it's topical, so you have to do a bit of Bible flicking. Only 10 pages, as Kate said before. So Matthew chapter 5, page 969, Matthew chapter 5 verse 27, listen to what Jesus says.

He says, Notice how Jesus again broadens the command to get to the heart behind it, to get to the attitude behind the law, not just the letter of the law.

For the Pharisees of Jesus' day, adultery was only when you literally had a sexual affair. And the classic Pharisee of our age is probably the next slide, this guy, do you remember what he said? Letter of the law, no, I didn't really have an affair. But of course he was unfaithful. Jesus says adultery really starts with the heart, the eyes, the desire.

It may or may not finish with the act, but it's all adultery. And so whether you are married or not, we can all fall in to this trap of adultery. Now please do not misunderstand Jesus in verse 28.

[17:39] He's not saying that normal attraction is wrong. We've been created to be attracted to the opposite gender. It's what helps people pursue marriage and have children and ensure the human race keeps going on.

And so when I've heard several girls who watch Pride and Prejudice and on the next slide when they see this guy, they all go, oh. In fact, at nine o'clock, the service before this one, there was one girl in the front row, I didn't have to say, oh.

As soon as she saw it, she goes, oh. It was gold. It's not talking about that. Rather, it's talking about the desire to be intimate, to have someone as yours who does not belong to you.

For the guys, it's the second glance or the prolonged look, the flirtatious behaviour. people are watching TV shows or going online to find some sort of sexual satisfaction.

For guys in particular, we need to make sure that we're careful with what we watch on TV or the internet. I need to say the pornography culture is growing even in churches.

[18:55] The statistics are horrific and they suggest that in a room of this size, there will be some men who are struggling with it. If that's you, please seek help. Come and talk to me and get help somewhere.

The only way to get rid of this kind of desire and lust is to starve it, actually. If the lust is like an animal inside you, the more you feed it, the stronger it gets.

So don't feed it, starve it. Otherwise, it will grow so strong it could possibly devour you and lead you away from Christ. And for women, it's going from thinking Mr.

Darcy is daydreaming to actually daydreaming about him and seeking if only my husband was like this. And then picturing your life in Pemberley.

I'm trying to work, I don't really get it. Whatever form it takes, if it involves desiring to have or take someone who does not belong to you, then it's an act of unfaithfulness.

[19 : 54] It's adultery as Jesus said. And it's unfaithfulness to God. And faithfulness to God and to each other matters. Look what Jesus says in verse 29. He says, 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. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Now, Jesus is not telling us to literally cut off our limbs, but he is telling us to take sin seriously, isn't he? So that we don't persist in it to the point of turning away from him and stumbling into hell.

Notice here that Jesus talks about anything that causes us to stumble, though he particularly has sexual sin in mind, because that's the context he mentions it in. What's more, he mentions the eye that we look with and the hand that we touch with.

Because sexual sin is one of those sins that is particularly powerful in ruining relationships, including our relationship with God. A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned about a couple in my first year at Bible college, this is some years ago, and it was the wife this time actually, usually it's the husband, but the wife found emotional intimacy with this other guy.

[21 : 19] It just started off by chatting and spending time together and so on, and it grew to flirting and so on and to the point where she walked out on her husband and her two kids and now no longer calls herself a Christian.

Now, theologically, they may never have been a true Christian in the first place because God has promised to keep those he's chosen away from hell, but part of the way he does that is through serious warnings like this one here, to take sin seriously.

And so we are to take sin seriously and to seek faithfulness instead, sincerely. People keep thinking that the grass is greener on the other side, but someone once said to me, the grass is actually greener where you water it.

So we're going to have a pool of green grass today. And that includes our relationship with God. So whether we are married or not, we're to be faithful to God, for sin is serious.

And so we are to water our relationship through reading his word, meeting with his people, depending on his help through prayer. And whether we are married or not, then we are to seek faithfulness between our family and friends who are married.

[22 : 28] Encourage faithfulness in the marriage of others. I know some grandparents from our early morning service who flew to Perth one time because one of their kids was having trouble in marriage and they stayed for several weeks to look after the grandkids so that the couple could get help because faithfulness matters.

Sadly, people often wait too long to ask for help. But do pray for your family and friends who are married. And if you are married, then we are to water the relationship with our spouse and to work on it.

And it does require work. If I had more time, I could give you some suggestions about how to work on it. I'm hoping we can run another marriage course next year. But we had to remain faithful to our spouse for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, and sickness and health till death do us part.

And if we are in trouble, then get help sooner rather than later. Because faithfulness matters and is for our good. Well, on the next slide is Herbert and Zelmyra, who run the Guinness Book of Records for the longest married couple.

They've since passed away, but at the age of 105 and 103 years of age, they'd been faithfully married for 86 years. That's more than sometimes people live for, isn't it?

[23 : 51] I asked Michelle yesterday how she'd feel about being married to me for 86 years. She let out this whimper. I think she was joking.

Faithfulness matters. Well, I don't have time to deal more thoroughly with divorce in verse 31 and 32. I've made some comments on it already. If you want to find out more, then please come and talk to me.

It's probably a conversation best had one-to-one anyway. Let's very briefly look at the second commandment for today. This will be much briefer. So point three in your outlines and on the next slide, Exodus 20. Here God says, do not steal, or literally again, two words, not steal.

Now this, of course, is loving others by not taking what belongs to them, which is much more than just their spouse. It's all sort, it's anything. In fact, in the Old Testament, as you can see there, it talks about stealing animals, or down the bottom it's stealing money or goods that were at someone's house for safekeeping.

And you'll notice from those verses that they're to pay back more than what they stole. They've got to make restitution. So stealing is taking anything that does not belong to you.

[25 : 03] But it also includes not giving what someone is owed. They're defrauding someone. So for example, the next slide from Leviticus chapter 19, it says, do not defraud or rob your neighbour.

Defrauding someone, not giving them what they're owed, or cheating them out of something, is the same as robbing them. It's equated, you see. I remember one time my brother took his car to a mechanic to get fixed, only for the problem to return.

He then went to a different mechanic, and the second one told him that the first one reconditioned parts that were not new, and so they just fell apart, and not that well reconditioned, obviously.

That's fraud, that's defrauding someone, that's robbing them of the money they've given. That's stealing. Now again, before we apply this to ourselves, we need to think and see what the New Testament says about it.

As we search the scriptures, we come across the next slide, Ephesians chapter 4. And here Paul begins by reminding us that if we are Christian, we've put off the old way of life, and we've put in God's way of life.

[26 : 08] So he says, you were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, and to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, and notice, created to be like God.

So be faithful like God is faithful, and so on, in true righteousness and holiness. And then he lists all these things about how we to put off the old self and put on the new one, and one of them is on the second paragraph there, he says, anyone who has been stealing, put it off, you must steal no longer, but instead work, doing something useful with their hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

You see, we're not to steal, but work for what we need. And that means not stealing from the government by doing dodgy things to avoid paying the tax that we owe. It means not stealing from artists by downloading illegal music.

It means not stealing from our employers in terms of company time or resources. I heard a story of a lady who was a cleaner and she became a Christian and someone asked her, what's changed now that you've become a Christian?

And the lady said, I now sweep under the rugs. See, she was going to do the whole job that she was paid to do rather than take shortcuts or steal from her client.

[27 : 31] Now for most of us, I'm guessing that stealing isn't a huge issue, but did you notice the second paragraph there that Paul also, like Jesus, broadens it. He says, don't steal but work, but do you notice the reason?

That you may have something to share with those in need, perhaps those who cannot work for themselves. In other words, we're not only to not steal, but we're also to work to give.

We'd have the opposite attitude to stealing. Instead of greed that takes, we'd have generosity that gives. But we often work hard to keep our money, don't we, so we can have a comfortable life.

But Paul says work not just so you don't have to steal, but so that you can give to those in need. Whether it be people in need amongst us, or people in need overseas, by way of a sponsor child, or something like that.

Or perhaps people in need of the greatest thing, which is forgiveness in Christ. So giving to gospel ministry. We're not to be greedy, but generous, which again is to be like God, who generously gave his son to us.

[28 : 45] And can I say I'm so encouraged by the way people here at HCD do give. I'm running out of time, but I can think of examples where people have given to care for those in need, or give to

gospel ministry.

In fact, the last few financial updates I've been able to stand up and say we're above budget, unheard of in churches. So thank you for reflecting our heavenly father's generosity in Christ. Well, while poaching popcorn as a toddler is not really a big deal, even poaching it from a prince, other forms of poaching are, aren't they?

whether it's adultery with someone who does not belong to us, with our minds, our eyes, or our hands, or whether it's stealing or withholding something that does not belong to us.

It's all serious, isn't it? As Paul wrote on our last slide, he says, next one, he says, do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor, notice, adulterers, nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves, those who steal, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, those who defraud people, will inherit the kingdom of God.

[30 : 00] It's serious, isn't it? But the great news of the gospel is that by trusting in Christ, we can be forgiven. Because Paul says in the second paragraph there, and that is what some of you were, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God.

You see, by trusting Christ, we can have our slates washed clean. And so the first question again for us this morning is have you turned to Christ? Do you trust in him? Because if you don't, then you won't be washed clean and you won't enter the kingdom of heaven.

For us who have, then we can continue to receive forgiveness every time we repent and ask for it. And what's more with God's help, we have to keep putting on that new self which is to be like God so that in our relationships we might reflect God's own faithfulness and generosity to us in Christ. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you for this timely reminder, though it's hard to hear, that faithfulness matters and so does generosity.

Father, help us to be people who are faithful in our own relationships, to our own place in life where you have put us. Help us to not commit adultery with our eyes or our minds, certainly not with our hands.

[31 : 31] Help us to be people who pursue faithfulness with you and one another. Help us also to be people who are generous, who work to give to those in need. Father, we pray particularly for those amongst us this morning who have been hurt by people who have not been faithful.

Father, please uphold them, remind them of your love and acceptance in Christ. Help them to keep looking to Christ to find their true identity and fulfilment in life.

Father, we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.