

You Have Heard It Said Thou Shall Not Commit Adultery

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Date: 13 October 1988

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[0 : 00] 5 and verse 20 something.

No, we're past 21. Last week we did 21. We're at the next passage. Let me just ask you if you would bow your heads and let me lead us as we pray that God will speak to us through this word. Our God, we know this to be your word. This is indeed the apostolic witness to the gospel, the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and that you have spoken to us through him and revealed yourself in him.

So as we read and study and meditate on these words, we ask that we may come in mind and heart into the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and that we may be made very much aware that what he commands, he enables.

And we ask that we may know this in the circumstances of our lives. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. You may or may not know that I'm using you as guinea pigs in a sense, that I'm doing this same Bible study downtown on next Wednesday.

[1 : 53] So I try it out on you today and then I take it downtown next Wednesday. So I need your reactions to it and to see whether it makes sense to you or not.

The passage then is Matthew 5, verse 28. You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery.

But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away.

It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right eye causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. Well, you may find that highly irrelevant or highly relevant.

[3 : 02] That's up to you. But what you have, just to give you the setting, is you have a number of people who are gathered.

And there is a kind of common consciousness which belongs to them as members of a society in which it has been heard to be said, thou shalt not commit adultery.

It's a kind of underlying general awareness that is rumored among the people. This person says it to this person. This generation says it to this generation.

So that in spite of the fact that adultery may be a highly legal pastime in our society, there remains a kind of awareness that somewhere there is a very clear divine prohibition of adultery.

And if you read the Old Testament, you will find that as Jesus talked to these people and said to them, you know, you have heard that it has been said that thou shalt not commit adultery.

[4 : 16] As Jesus spoke to them and said that, he was bringing up an issue which deeply and personally affected them all.

And he was also reminding them of the way the Old Testament dealt with it. And that is that if anybody was caught and if the woman was in a position of giving any indication of having consented to it, they both would be put to death.

I mean, that's the Old Testament way of dealing with it. We're rather more gentle nowadays or like to think of ourselves that way. But it does show that it was considered, and this, of course, comes out if you read a book like *The Hajj* about Muslim society today, that if this is known, then, I mean, a brother, a father will murder his daughter.

A husband will murder his wife and it will be considered legitimate in that society on the grounds that adultery has been committed. So that it's a very serious crime in the Old Testament.

And it would continue to be a very serious crime among the people. So that when you get in John chapter 8, a woman, as they say, taken in the very act of adultery, brought before Jesus, and saying that according to the law, this woman should be here and now, stoned to death.

[6 : 03] Well, you get into a lot of things around that and a lot of issues around it. If you were to look it up in John chapter 8 in your Bible, I would be just interested to see what happens if you look it up.

Can anybody find it? Can anybody find it? What verse is it?

What they point out at the bottom of the page is that the most ancient authorities omit verses 753 to 811, so that in some of the ancient New Testament manuscripts, that story is not included.

And so as the manuscripts develop, the church saw the wisdom of putting that story in and making sure it was there. But you know what happened is when they did that, Jesus said to them, well, that's fine.

Now, the law is the law, and we must observe it. And they were always very democratic about capital punishment in those days.

[7 : 35] They didn't hire a hangman or an executioner. Everybody had a vote, so to speak, and they had to pick up a rock and throw it at the person in order to put them to death.

That's a kind of democratic form of capital punishment. It probably would make us more aware of what's involved in capital punishment if we all had to take part in executing it.

But that's what they were required to do, and that's why Jesus said to them, let him that is without sin cast the first stone. And of course, they all turned away because it wasn't a thing that any of them could face up to in their own lives.

And I think for us as well, it's not something that we find easily, we find it easy to point an accusing finger at anybody because of a profound sense of failure in our own lives at some level or another with regard to our sexuality.

So that's what's happening. Jesus is doing that. And he says that thou shalt not, which is... And that's how the story begins.

[8 : 52] A long time ago, I want to just give you some background on this. A long time ago, in the course of talking about nuclear destruction of the earth, one existential writer, said that the last man left on this planet will spend his last hours looking for his wife and child.

That's a kind of grim picture, but it's an interesting picture. And it takes you back to the first man on this planet who was not in the midst of a holocaust but was in the garden with the whole of God's creation around him, with all the beauty of nature, with all that we marvel at in terms of the creation, with all that around us, Adam had a profound sense of incompleteness.

It wasn't all there for him. Something else was required. Now, that's the way the story goes in Genesis. And just as the last man will be looking for his wife and child, the first man was looking for bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

Someone that corresponded to him. Someone with whom he could live in relationship. And so, it's in surprising contrast to our own society.

And I think that one of the profound desires and longings of our own society is that people should be able to be totally self-sufficient.

[10 : 41] That is, they don't need anybody else. That modern man is achieving or seeking to achieve the status that is described as a single, solitary savage.

in that he's out for himself. And that even the distinction between male and female is being minimized so that whatever a man can do, a woman can do, whatever a woman can do, a man can do.

And nobody needs anybody. And our society is strongly committed to proving that that's true. And therefore, the world is made up of basically unvaried individuals.

That the accident of maleness or femaleness has no ultimate significance. The only ultimate reality is the individual alone in our world.

Well, that is modern secular man. seeking to find the freedom that he's looking for. But it is entirely contrary to the revelation of the word of God which says, in effect, man cannot live by himself.

[12 : 08] He has to live in relationship. Well, that was how it all got started.

And in the Garden of Eden, you have the establishment of the peculiar intimacy of marriage when it says, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.

And the two shall become one. And you shall leave your father and mother and cleave to your wife. Very interesting, feminists, if you're any anxious and militant feminists here.

That's a very interesting reference in the Old Testament since it does say that it's the man who has to leave and cleave. It's not the woman.

She understands better, apparently, from the beginning, what's involved. But it's the man who has to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife.

[13:10] Well, so that that union of man and woman is to be established. And that kind of primary reality is the reality that of two people living in relationship to one another.

That that's what's meant to happen. And that that's the kind of primary reality of human existence is this.

Now, I don't think, I mean, this is, this is, in a sense, reflecting the nature of God is, is, is that.

That we are not meant to be isolated individuals. We are meant to live in relationship to God. That relationship to God finds expression in our relationship to one another.

So that when you come to read about loving your neighbor, it's not incompatible with the scriptures to say that that neighbor, most, that you're most concerned with, may be your husband or wife.

[14:20] And that learning to relate to that person is what life is all about. Well, you know that in our society, there's a lot of departures from this norm.

And that is that there are, there are many people who are single because they have been unable to contract a marriage.

Singleness is often imposed on people by war and by disease sometimes. Singleness is often imposed on people by handicaps of physical and mental and social handicaps.

Singleness is imposed by widowhood. And so widows are given a very special place in the scriptures, throughout the scriptures.

There's a peculiar reference in Matthew chapter 12 about eunuchs. Chapter 19, verse 12, if you wanted to look at it.

[15:27] And it talks about eunuchs because in ancient society, eunuchs had a very important place. And, but Jesus makes an amazing distinction between them in, I guess it's in verse 12.

There are eunuchs who have been so from birth. There are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men. And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

He who is able to receive this, let him receive it. So that singleness is not, well it's not in a sense a natural state, it is a state which can be chosen and for which the grace of God is available to allow you to live it out for various reasons.

And so that what the Bible says that while this relationship may be normal that the idea of being a single person and not having this kind of relationship is a very honored situation as well.

And Paul advocates it, advocates it. He said, the problem with marriage with this is the husband seeks to please his wife and the wife seeks to please her husband.

[16:56] but if you can, he says, if you can stand to live singly, then you can make it your business to please the Lord whom you serve.

And you would find an amazing catalog of Christian men and women who have chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God and whose contribution to the community of Christ's people has been enormous because instead of the energies which normally would go into this relationship, they have been given the grace to apply all those energies to the building up of the community of God's people.

And that in effect is what one of the great widows of the New Testament did, Anna in Luke who with a very long, I don't know whether it's almost an 80 year widowhood that's recorded there, that she gave herself day and night to prayer and fasting so that she was a very effective individual.

And so, though this is maybe the normal pattern, the Bible does not ignore single people or single life or widowhood or any of those conditions.

In fact, as you will see when we go along, it gives special honor to them. Well, I wanted you to see that, that that's what happened.

[18:30] Now, when you get this state which in which you have two people like this in a married relationship, when you have that, well, what the New Testament picks up on and the teaching of the New Testament picks up on, it says that the fundamental function of marriage is that it's not an end in itself.

Now, in our society, it tends to be regarded as an end in itself. You know, that the highest human enjoyment is to be found in the sexual relationship between a man and a woman.

and that that is still, from a New Testament point of view, only a reflection of a higher relationship, which is the relationship between us and God.

And that's why whenever there's a marriage in the building next door, though I doubt that, I mean, you, being somewhat cynical, I'm not sure that many people ever hear this, they are all told that marriage is only a sign and it signifies or signs the relationship between Christ and his church so that you work out in this very human relationship the relationship of Christ to his church.

Christ as the bridegroom loving the bride and by his love, making her a beautiful and acceptable person by love one for another so that as Christ loves the church, so a man is to love his wife and a wife is to love her husband in order that they see what happens.

[20 : 27] So, it's a terribly important relationship and it's therefore terribly significant that in large part in our society we can't make it work and so we have to make all sorts of allowances because it doesn't work and why doesn't it work?

Well, one of the reasons you see that our society, our secular society around us says it doesn't work is because they argue that a person is meant to be alone, that a person is meant to be a single, solitary, savage, living for himself, so that I occasionally run into married couples who, I mean one in particular, who came and told me that when they got married, and they were on the point of divorce at this point, they were married by a church down east somewhere who didn't say, till death us do part, but they said, while love lasts, and they come to tell me that love no longer lasted, and so they no longer had to deal with this relationship, that it came in the way of their personal fulfillment, and of course one of the phenomena of our age is that now that women are getting to executive positions in big companies in our society, and taking senior positions, is that very often it's still true for them that marriage stands in the way of their career, and therefore our secular society justifies a person breaking this bond, but the Christian community says, no, out of this bond you discover the nature of the relationship between Christ and his church, and so it's that's the thing that happened, so that's what is behind this story, now, I want to give you a couple of pictures, I'm not even at the text yet, am I, but I'm getting there, what happens here is this, this is a laboratory, you see, and in this laboratory there is a great vat like that, and in this vat there is a great medicine that is being concocted, disease, and around this medicine and it's being concocted, it has to be brewed and ingredients added and all sorts of things have added, and it has to be in a highly controlled atmosphere, so if this medicine, if a good batch of medicine is to be made available to the people in need of the healing which only this medicine can give, then one of the rules is that in a controlled environment of this laboratory, one of the rules which is pinned up on the wall with respect to the development of this batch of medicine is thou shalt not commit adultery, in other words, you mustn't adulterate this process, because if you do, the healing property of this medicine will be lost, and instead of it going out and healing people, it might very well go out and damage people.

Now I think that, I mean I don't know what you think about this, but I think that that in a sense is the same thing that happens in a family, that you have a kind of controlled atmosphere laboratory in which children are born and children are raised and people live and people work and that that family is able to be a source of healing and therapy as long as it isn't adulterated by something breaking in to the controlled atmosphere of family life and meaning that that medicine, which would be the people of that family, would be damaged so that their contribution to the world into which they have to go and live, will be spoiled.

So that when Jesus says, thou shalt not commit adultery, that's essentially what is meant, that there is a kind of family structure which can be either a medicine for the healing of mankind kind, or a source of poison.

[25 : 38] And so when adultery takes place, the healing qualities are lost and something poisonous is set afoot. And that begins to damage people.

And it does quite a lot of harm. And that's why I think that Jesus says, you know, thou shalt not commit adultery. That's why that's, I could say so much more.

But that to me is a picture that I'd like you to think about in connection with it. So what happens then when you go back to the passage is that what takes place is that you have a relationship like this between two people.

But then into that relationship comes a third person and perhaps even a fourth person. And there may be involved in that relationship two or three smaller people like that. And so when the line which is appropriate breaks down and you start getting crosses that happen like that and these people become isolated from this health giving relationship, then you begin to create something which is extremely damaging to our society.

Now, that's why. And so Jesus says that what you've got to be aware of in this is in a sense, and this is highly personal and individual, he said that adultery begins with an individual.

[27 : 22] And the way it begins, he says in Matthew chapter 5, is that a man looks at a woman lustfully.

and he's already committed adultery with her in his heart. So that the thing which ends up in the overt activity began in the heart of the individual.

That is, in looking at someone lustfully to provide satisfaction for a deep need in this particular individual's life.

And it's then, you see, out of that, that, you know what I'd like to do right now is, I'd like you to put a lot of emphasis on that word looks.

Because I suppose we are, we have all lived through the pinnacle of pornography in the whole of human history.

[28 : 45] Now, various ancient civilizations were pretty good at it, but I don't think anybody has ever reached the ability to, the, the, the expression of pornography that we've, that we've met with.

And pornography depends basically on looking, you know, with eyes wide in amazement. So that, and I, I may be sentimentalizing things here, but I, I think that's important, that it's, it's there.

And that instead of the dynamic of a kind of total emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual relationship in which, in which two people are together, they draw back and they look.

And that's why, you know, what you see becomes the most important thing. And our sexual relationship, instead of emerging out of a kind of, if I might say it, hands-on relationship between two people, becomes objectified into a looking relationship.

What do you see? and that, and that, so that in, in, in our society, you know, there's a great sexual industry, which is based primarily on looking.

[30 : 22] thing. And, and, and, so, how do I look becomes the most important thing. And, and, and, and, and I think that that, I think that the, if you wanted to, to make a contrast with that, that what happens to the individuals is he starts looking.

and as he starts looking, he stops hearing. That, that, that, because fundamental to a relationship is being able to hear each other, being able to talk to one another.

You know, that, that, that people have been distracted into a, a kind of an objective out there looking, rather than a profound inward speaking and hearing relationship.

And that's why Christ says, as soon as you move away from a hearing relationship to a looking relationship, then you, you've already done the damage.

The damage is there and it's just waiting to happen from that point on. And so he says, and I, I, I'm over time, but I'll end up with, uh, this illustration.

[31 : 52] And, it says, you're better to cut off your right hand or to pluck out your right eye and to go into the kingdom of physically handicapped.

more important than your physical wholeness is your spiritual wholeness, is the viability of your relationship to one another.

That's how important it is. I think Jesus uses that illustration simply because we can't imagine anything being more important than our right eye or our right hand.

You know, you can't, you can't imagine doing that. But Jesus says, even if you can't imagine it, I'll tell you that it would be better for you if you could imagine it, if you could understand that that's the basis, that you'd be better.

And, of course, that's why often physically handicapped people have solved problems that the beautiful people never solve.

[33 : 05] I mean, profound personal human problems. They solve them because this has been done for them.

And the beautiful people can't imagine that these people who are handicapped are ultimately better off.

people are and it's a very heavy lesson, isn't it? But then it's not an easy problem in our society either. And so when Jesus is preaching the Sermon on the Mount, he says, this is the way it is. I don't think he thinks that the legislature of British Columbia are going to come banging at the door to say, how do we put this into law? Because you can't. Human society can't.

But, because even if you could put it in law, you couldn't get people to obey it. And that what you're dependent upon ultimately is, as Jesus says about the eunuch, not everybody can hear this.

[34 : 23] if you can hear it, then it can be a great grace and blessing to you. But you're going to live in a world where a lot of people can't hear it.

And of course, we live in a world where this teaching of Jesus can't be heard by many people. It's just too heavy. But that doesn't mean that we have the right not to teach it, or to relax it, or to accommodate it, or to say, well, it didn't really apply to a society like ours.

It's there, and it's not going to go away. So something has to happen to us. And to that end, we must pray, and we must listen.

Well, that's all for today. If you have any questions, I imagine you have many. Don't ask me. I told you all I know.

Do you Do you