

God's View on Marriage and Sexual Sin

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With the baptism which opened our service, we certainly had the opportunity to have our minds framed by the Gospel, the Gospel that says Christ Jesus died for sinners like you and like me and rose again from the dead on the third day as a means of paying for sin before God, that sinners who were once separated from God and under his judgment could be forgiven and reconciled to him, not on their own merit but rather through the merit of another, through the saving work of someone else. There is nothing that you can do to save your own soul. There is nothing that you can do to erase the red stain of guilt that is on your garments and somehow make them white through a washing that you would do on your own. No, Scripture says that there is salvation in no one else; that there is no other name under heaven given to us except through the Lord Jesus by which we must be saved.

And one of the things as you read Scripture, as you study it, as you become acquainted with God's word, is you see that God looks at the human heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 says that God does not see as man sees, "for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart," a statement that prepares us for the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 through 7, which shows us that God requires a searching righteousness of the inner man to be found pleasing to him; that what God wants is worship that comes from the heart rather than that which is simply external and ritualistic and mindless in its application. God looks at the human heart and sees sin in the heart that men would never see. As we come to what God says in his word, we realize that he sees through us; that he sees the inner man; that he sees us in ways that our private thoughts that would be so humiliating, so embarrassing, so shameful if other men knew them, and yet as we think about that we quickly realize that there is a greater issue. It's not if men knows them, it's that God already knows what's going on in our heart and God looks at our hearts and says that the sin even in our hearts is not acceptable to him. He requires, in other words, a heartfelt spirituality that is far different than the external religion of man.

Look at Matthew 5:27-32 which will be our text more for the next week or two after this than it is for today, but it's where we're at in the Sermon on the Mount. Last time we saw what God thinks of the sin of anger and says that the one who is angry shares equal guilt with the one who commits murder because anger is the sin that leads to murder. God condemns the root as much as he does the evil fruit that comes. And now we come to the area of sexuality, of marriage, and Christ will teach us what the true import of God's word is in these areas with the words that he gives beginning in verse 27. Jesus said,

27 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. 31 It was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce'; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

As we approach these verses over the years as I have studied this passage, it's become very plain to me that you must have a sense of understanding of the context that informs it, the broader biblical context that is necessary to understand why Christ speaks as he does in this particular passage of Scripture. He's dealing with the area of sexuality and dealing with the area of marriage as he speaks here, and as we remember that he is speaking of internal matters of the heart, that informs the way that we should think about the way that Jesus unfolds God's original plan for marriage. The things that Jesus is speaking here is based on prior revelation that God is given. And what I want to do this morning is to remind you of God's original plan for marriage because that is necessary for us to understand why he speaks so profoundly and so strongly against sexual sin. God's view on marriage helps us understand his view on sexual sin and only as we have the context can we begin to understand something of the fullness and something of the weight that is at hand here.

I'll probably allude to this more later on this morning and I hardly need to tell you, but just to remind you and to kind of get your mind rolling in the same direction as God's word here this morning, is I think we are so immersed in the hyper-sexualized nature of culture today that we've lost most of our sensitivity to it. We don't view it from the same perspective that God does. Just as it would be hard for a fish to have an outside perspective on water, it's hard for us to have an outside perspective on the nature of the sexuality and sensuality that is in our culture. We have reached a comfortable truce with it. It does not outrage us but, beloved, it is an outrage to God and we need to understand why that is. We need today to think God's thoughts after him. We need to see the whole big picture of sexuality, the whole big picture of marriage from God's perspective before we could ever begin to understand the way that Jesus applies God's word in the areas of lust in Matthew 5:27-30, and his teaching on divorce in verses 31 to 32. We start with what God thinks. That's the only thing that matters, right? It does not matter what you and I think about anything. What matters is what God says and what God thinks.

So we need to go all of the way back to the beginning if we are going to have a proper context to understand the serious nature of what Jesus says here. And let's not

underestimate, let's not take for granted, let's not understate the seriousness of what Jesus says. Jesus says that sexual sin is so serious that the one who lusts in his mind is guilty of adultery. He says that he is so protective of divorce that he needs to expand on it in the comments that he makes, so protective of marriage, I should say, that he makes comments on divorce in the middle of this sermon. This matters. This is important. This is crucial and we need to understand why. So what I want to do this morning is to review briefly some material that I've shared in the past on God's plan for marriage and then take a look at what God has to say about the sin of adultery that will inform our perspective as we move forward in this text in the next two or three weeks to come.

So first of all this morning if you're taking notes, you can just write down as the first point: what is God's plan for marriage? God's plan for marriage, because the way to understand this, the way to think about this, is that we don't think about sexual sin in isolation. It's not simply what happens in private or what happens in the secrecy of one's own mind apart from any context that makes lust and sexual sin so wicked. And it is wicked, beloved. What is it that makes it so wicked? What is it about private thoughts in your mind that would be so wicked that Jesus says if that is happening to you, cut your hand off, pluck your eye out, take desperate measures to deal with it? The remedy that Jesus gives is so stark and so striking as to awaken us to the reality of the depth of the guilt that it incurs. Why is that? No one, no one without an open Bible in front of them that lives in our society would ever think that it matters. No one would think. This is accepted. This is praised as good what God calls evil. Well, we can only begin to understand that if we look first at God's plan for marriage to make sense of Jesus' teaching on lust and divorce.

Well, marriage as we've said in the past, is that God-ordained institution in which a man and a woman covenant with one another to live as husband and wife in an exclusive, monogamous relationship for the remainder of their earthly lives. God made marriage. The Supreme Court sinned egregiously when they tried to redefine it and to make it something that could be shared between people of the same sex. It's not their institution to define. It's God's institution and he has already said what it is. It's an institution in which a man and a woman according to the biology with which they were born with; it's amazing the way you have to specify things in our modern culture now. A man and a woman in the biology that they were born with, they covenant with one another. They make promises to each other in the presence of witnesses and vows before God that they will live together in an exclusive loving relationship where they are devoted to one another exclusively for the remainder of their earthly lives. That's marriage as God defined it. That's marriage as God made it.

What lies ahead is going to be a very quick review. For those of you who perhaps have not heard this or want to refresh your memory, we have many CDs titled "A Refresher On Marriage." Pick one up because this is going to be a very quick review of what is treated in more detail on that CD but we need the context. You know, beloved, when it comes to just the basic principles of how to think, of how we approach anything, we need to start with big principles. What are the surpassing principles, what are the abiding principles that guide the matter that's at hand? You start with those principles before you

reason down to the specifics. Before you talk about the specifics of lust and divorce, you have to step back and look at the greater principles of marriage that God has established in order to have any hope of understanding them properly.

Well, what does God say about marriage? First of all, marriage is a permanent union. God's plan for marriage is that it would, first of all, be a permanent union. Turn over to Genesis 2, if you would. Genesis 2, before the fall of man into sin God established this one man/one woman relationship, pronounced it good and considered it holy. You remember that he had created Adam, placed him in the garden but Adam was alone and in verse 18, God looked at that and said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." God parades numerous animals before Adam but at the end of verse 20, Scripture says, "but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him." There is nothing in a beast of the field or a bird in the sky that would provide an appropriate kind of companionship to a man who was alone and so God in his grace and his goodness, again before the fall of man, created woman for him.

In verse 21 it says, "the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then [God] took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man 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.'" And here in verse 24 we see the permanence that is intended in marriage. Verse 24, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." God fixed the order of marriage and God fixed the order of gender for the good of man; that the loneliness would be shattered; that there would be companionship for the man provided by the woman that would break this loneliness which God said was not good. So much so that Adam speaking prophetically could look into the future and say, "It's for this kind of relationship between a man and a woman that a man will leave behind his prior family ties and join together with this woman and they will become one flesh." A flesh which Jesus said in Matthew 19, is not to be separated. So that as a man and a woman come together in marriage, there is a permanent bond, a permanent union that is intended by God in the bonds of matrimony. Marriage is meant to be a permanent union.

Now, having said that, I just need to make a little side note here. I realize that as I speak to many of you, many of you have been through the difficult waters of divorce and I understand that and I acknowledge that as I speak here today. I realize for many of you that are in that situation, that divorce was not something that you wanted to begin with, that this was inflicted upon you from without rather than something that you sought on your own. There will be plenty of things to say about that in days to come, for today our purpose is not so much to minister to those particular and important pastoral needs in this particular message, this message is simply designed to show what the plan of God for marriage was and you'll be able to know from your own sad experience what happens when a violation of that pattern takes place. God has grace, God has mercy, and for some of you, you were not at fault when your divorce took place and God views that from his eternal grace and mercy upon you. Here today we simply want to talk about marriage as

God intended it. In the future, we'll look at how man has defaced it and how we respond to that going forward but we need to see the pattern first before we can understand the consequences of violating it. God's plan for marriage was that it would be a permanent union, that two would become one flesh not to be separated

Now, secondly, God's plan for marriage is that it would be an exclusive union. An exclusive union. Permanent monogamy is the standard for marriage until death do us part. Monogamy being that there would be no sharing of the sexual relationship outside the bonds of marriage, but when a man and a woman come together in marriage, that is the only appropriate outlet for sexual expression. Within the marriage it is blessed, within the marriage it is good, but not outside it. God builds walls around the marriage relationship as we're starting to see, that his intention in it was exclusivity and his intention in it was permanence.

Look at Matthew 19 where Jesus expands on the passage that we just read in Genesis 2. Permanent monogamy is the standard, until death, and Jesus makes that plain in what he says. As our so-called friends, I speak ironically as I say that, the Pharisees come to Jesus looking to trip him up as they often did, the Pharisees came to Jesus in Matthew 19:3 and said, "Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?'" They say, "What about divorce?" Jesus did in Matthew 19 what we're trying to do here today, is to take them back to the beginning to set a context for answering their question. The question is not the particulars of any individual divorce, that's never the main question, beloved, the question is always: what did God originally intend from the beginning? "Start from what the foundation was and then we can begin to address your questions," he says to the Pharisees.

So in verse 4, "He answered and said," and the Pharisees had this loose view of divorce. "Is it lawful for any reason whatsoever?" And Jesus answered and said to them in verse 4, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So," here's the implication, here's what you draw from that, here's what you conclude from that, "they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." The point being here, beloved, speaking in the most general simplest terms, almost too simplistically perhaps, but what Jesus is impressing upon us here is that man, human kind, the human race, men and women everywhere throughout all of the ages, are to respect the institution of marriage. They are to respect the order of gender that God established and that is not to be tampered with. That is not to be diminished. That is not to be violated because marriage is a God-created ordinance and what God created was good. What God created, furthermore, was holy. It was separate. It was sanctified. It was not to be defiled and so for the Pharisees to come in this episode in Matthew 19 and loosely talk about breaking the violation of marriage for any reason whatsoever was already a colossal destruction of what God intended for marriage. It's not to be spoken of in such terms. "Don't trifle with marriage saying a divorce is acceptable for any reason whatsoever," Christ says. "God made them one flesh and what God has done, let no man separate." There is to be an order of respect for this institution.

As you read on in Scripture, you see not only is marriage to be a permanent and an exclusive union, it is also to be an intimate union. An intimate union. Scripture says a man becomes one flesh with his wife and if you look at 1 Corinthians 7 for a moment with me, 1 Corinthians 7, reminding you again that this is just a hasty overview and that the CDs out in the lobby will treat these matters in the greater depth that they deserve. 1 Corinthians 7, all of this building up and culminating in a greater point yet to come in today's message. 1 Corinthians 7. Remember that one of the purposes that God spoke of in Genesis 2 was: it's not good for a man to be alone. God provided for a deep intimacy to take place to drive out the solitary nature of man's existence and to replace it with an intimate companionship that would satisfy the deepest longings of his heart. Included in that is the physical expression of that intimacy in sexuality and in 1 Corinthians 7 beginning in verse 3, the Apostle Paul speaks of what marriage is to be like in the matter of sexual intimacy and what you find is this in verses 3 through 5 of 1 Corinthians 7, "The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." There is a mutuality in Paul's instruction here which, in essence as we'll see in verse 5, is saying that God commands intimacy to take place within the marriage; that this is commanded; that this is a part of the marriage relationship as God has established it, that there would not only be an emotional intimacy to it but there would be a physical intimacy to it as well and when a man and a woman come together in marriage, they have surrendered the rights over their body to one another so that the man has a right to his wife's body and the wife has a right to her man's body. This is the clear teaching of Scripture. This is not optional. This is not some psychobabble counsel. This is the command of God that this is what marriage is.

This is what it is to be and based on that Paul says in verse 5, "Stop depriving one another." Apparently men and women in the church were depriving, married men and women in the church were depriving one another of intimacy and Paul says in a classic counseling statement, "Stop it. Don't do that. Stop depriving one another except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. If you want to take a timeout, have some time in prayer, fine," Paul says, "but once you've done that," he says, "come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." The point being that marriage is meant to be intimate. Sexual expression is not only permitted in marriage as something to be tolerated, no, it is commanded as something that God considers to be good and it is a sin against your spouse to withhold intimacy from one another out of anger or whatever it might be. As a pattern of life, that is a sin against God. Marriage is meant to be an intimate union by the plan of God as an expression of the companionship that an exclusive, permanent relationship would provide. It is high. It is lofty. This is what God requires. This is his plan for marriage. But notice that the sexuality comes within the context of the greater institution of marriage. It is part of the institution, it is not the fullness of it.

Finally as we consider God's plan for marriage we can say this: that it is a loving union. It is a loving union in the sense that the spouses are seeking the higher interest of each other

in their lives rather than their own selfish interests. Marriage thus pictures the love that Christ has for those in his church, that Christ has for his own. What did Christ do? Now we'll step really far back into the biggest picture possible and say what was Christ doing when he came to earth and offered his life on the cross as a sacrifice for sinners like you and me? What was he doing there? Well, we can say so many things about that but in a preeminent way Christ was seeking the interests of those who would be his people. He was laying down himself. He was sacrificing himself. He was voluntarily laying down his own life for the good and spiritual benefit and the eternal well-being of everyone who would ever believe in him. And in that sense, it was a great and high act of preeminent eternal love. Not love in the squishy emotional sense that that word is bandied about today in foolish love songs and overly emotional movies that reduce it to a mere sense of sentiment that often has nothing more than selfish ambition at the heart of it. In Christ we see what love truly is. In Christ we see a self-sacrifice, a laying down for the interests of others, for the interests of those who would believe in him. Marriage is designed to picture that kind of love.

Turn to Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5 in that chapter where Paul gives an extended treatment on marriage from verses 22 to 33. He speaks first to wives in verses 22 to 24. Then to husbands in 25 to 33. The proportion probably speaking to where the problems often lie in marriage, not exclusively but he certainly says more to husbands than he does to wives. But notice in verse 25 as he speaks about the marriage relationship, how he shows how it illustrates the relationship between Christ and the church and bases it and premises it in the biblical principle of love.

Verse 25, he says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So [also] husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself." Marriage is meant to be a union of love. God made marriage holy. God made it for the good of man and ultimately that it would picture salvation between the Lord of the church and those who believe in him, the Lord who loved himself and gave himself up for those of us who would believe in him, and we return with our devotion, our loyalty and the giving of our hearts to him in spiritual intimacy. That's what marriage is designed for, not just for the good of man as he walks through his earthly life, but that it would be an illustration of a great eternal reality of the love of Christ for his church. That's what marriage is and so God made it for the good of man and to picture salvation, establishing in marriage principles and pictures that he established before the beginning of time to illustrate realities that would live on after the end of time.

Now, what can we say of all of that? Beloved, I'll just again just keeping it really simple here this morning, God takes marriage seriously even if we do not. God takes marriage, God thinks about marriage in a high and lofty and sanctified way even if our culture does not, even if our culture tramples all over it, even if our judicial system blows cannons at it in an effort to knock it down in disregard for the holy state that God established it in.

Even if our culture does that, God doesn't go along with it. And only if we can see it from the perspective of God's high and lofty perspective can we begin to understand why Jesus speaks as he does on lust in Matthew 5:27 to 30 and on divorce in verses 31 to 32. This informs how we are to understand what Christ speaks of in the Sermon on the Mount.

Now, that's God's plan for marriage, a permanent, exclusive, intimate, loving union till death do us part. Let me say a word to those of you who are single or those who would hear this later who are single or for those of you who are parents raising young people who want to be married one day. There is a way that you need to think about marriage and this is what you need to think. This is what you need to think about it. Young people, I understand the desire to be married. I wasn't married until I was 26 and there were times where I got quite impatient along the way waiting for that to happen. The wait for Nancy was worth it and the 29 subsequent years have been worth it and far better than anything that I would have ever hoped for. You must realize that in this church, you have a noble pastor's wife, no matter what else you might think about the pastor himself. You have a noble pastor's wife that I have been privileged to be married to for all these 29 years but my point is this: the waiting for that to come to pass was, you know, I understand the frustrations of waiting. You want something and you can't make it happen and you're waiting and you start to think, "I want this. I want this. I want to be married and all of that." But let me say something here that is designed to help you and to hopefully strengthen your soul while you're waiting. The key thing for you if you are unmarried, wanting to be married, the key thing for you is not to get married. That's not the point. That's secondary. That's not your primary goal in your singleness is to get married, and I know that sounds shocking and why would anyone say that when marriage is high and lofty and good, but the first thing for you to do, the primary goal for you in your singleness is to think rightly about marriage. You are to think rightly about marriage and to honor it in the way that God does, to think rightly about the institution, to have your thinking about it right and then only secondarily worry about or seek after the spouse that God would give to you. Those things come and, you know, God sorts those things out over time, but the key thing is for you to think rightly first of all about marriage because that frames everything else. It frames the kind of spouse that you look for. It frames how you are going to conduct yourself after you get into marriage. If marriage is simply about you having the fulfillment of your loneliness taken away, having your loneliness taken away, if that's all it is and that's the way that you're thinking about it, "I really want to be married because it's what I want," brothers and sisters, you're not thinking about it quite right just yet. Maybe perhaps some of the delay is simply so that your thinking about marriage could become more mature, that you are better prepared for marriage based on a biblical understanding of it. You should be thinking about marriage in the sense that we've talked about here. Marriage is created by God. It's a holy institution and that it is meant to be an exclusive, permanent, intimate, loving union. "And that when I enter into marriage, it's got to be with a spouse that I want to give myself, I want to give that to them. I want to hand that over to this spouse whom I love, that they would receive the benefits of what God intended marriage to be."

Notice how I did not frame that. I did not frame it so that you would be receiving the benefits of that marriage but that you would be giving it. Christ gave salvation to his

people and your thinking about marriage should be this high and lofty institution is designed for the glory of God and for the good of man and I want to give that to someone who will reciprocate, we hope, we trust. But before you can pursue marriage, you have to think rightly about it. You have to think about it the way God thinks about it. Anymore than you would try to build a house before you understand how a house is built, before you do any construction, you need to know what to do with a hammer and a nail. That part of my life is still future. That's okay.

But, beloved, all these things that I say, I say with the recognition and the understanding that marriage has touched all of our lives deeply whether for good or for ill. Those that are single, longing for it, I understand the impatience that sometimes you feel. Those of you that are in a good marriage and God gave you a good spouse and you are blessed in it, I understand something of the joy that you feel in that because that's the experience of my life. But I've also been a pastor long enough to know that for a lot of people, disproportionately marriage just brings sorrow and heartache that you cannot get away from. Well, we need to understand in the midst of that that we are seeking to understand what God has established and that even the sorrow of marriage in this life can be that which would prompt us to seek a greater intimacy with Christ even if our spouse does not fulfill their part in the marriage. That's God's plan for marriage and so we speak about these things with sympathy for those who hear, not in a critical spirit, if marriage hasn't worked out for you in accordance with God's design.

Secondly, as we consider God's plan for marriage we should also consider God's protection of marriage. God's protection of marriage. And there is something, again, just very simple, there is just something that is very simple that can help us understand the way God views marriage. You can understand the high and lofty view that God places on marriage by the serious protection that he builds around it, by the penalty that he imposes on those who violate that loving, exclusive, intimate, permanent relationship. What happens, what is God's perspective on those who violate the institution of marriage is our question here as we come to this part of our consideration?

Well, let's start going back to the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20. Go back there with me and we're going to kind of build a case here, we're going to put things together brick by brick and build something that will give us a sense of what God says about it, you know, because things that are valuable to us – look at it this way, think about it this way, beloved – things that are valuable to us, we protect. People put their most precious jewels into safes. Moms hold on closely to their young children who are prone to run out into traffic. They protect them. They hold onto them. And on it goes. The measure of protection that we give to something is a measure of the value that we attach to it, right? Just a simple basic principle of life. Well, as we look at what God says about violations of the marriage relationship and violations of sexuality that he has prescribed, we get a sense of how he views it. It's not a casual trifling matter to him.

In Exodus 20:14, he sets forth the basic principle and lays down the law, you might say and says, "You shall not commit adultery. Don't do that." Verse 17, "Not only shall you not do it, you shall not covet it. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not

covet your neighbor's wife," and on it goes. So he says, in light, remember Moses is writing this, this comes in Exodus 20, the next book in the Bible after Genesis where marriage was first established in Genesis 2, quickly through the history of the people of Israel, God gives the law that helps us understand how he views and protects marriage and he makes it central to his moral order of the universe. "You shall not commit adultery. Do not do that," God says. "And not only shall you not do it, you shall not even want to," which is where Jesus really picks up his teaching in Matthew 5.

Beloved, here's what you need to see as we are thinking through this because all of this informs what we're going to study in the next week or two in Matthew 5. Why is it that adultery is such a serious grave sin? It is because adultery violates the intimacy and the permanence and the exclusivity of marriage that God established. That's why it is so wicked and sinful. It is bad to violate your vows to your spouse, sure enough, but from God's perspective, every act of adultery, every lustful desire for adultery, is a violation. It strikes a blow at the heart of the very institution that he created to picture salvation in Christ and for the good of man. And adultery violates that. It walks into the inner sanctum and starts throwing garbage and sewage all around in it. It's such a violation of what God intended it to be. Never was there to be this betrayal and this treachery in the relationship. Never was it supposed to be like that. Why? Because it was supposed to be intimate and exclusive and adultery spits in the face of all of that and shakes its fist in the face of God and says, "I'll do it my way, thank you."

It assaults the institution of marriage with rebellion against God, selfishness, a lack of self-control, treachery, and marital treason. That's pretty strong language to use. Is that justified by Scripture? Well, I think so. Do you know what the punishment in the Old Testament was for adultery? Here's where we get to see the value that God attaches to the sanctity of the institution, the value that God attaches to marriage. How can we measure how sacred this is in the eyes of God? How much to be protected? Let's measure it by the penalty that God attaches to those who violate it.

Look over at Leviticus 20. Keep your finger there and also turn to Deuteronomy 22. Keep your fingers in both spots or bookmark it on your iPad. I don't know. But in Leviticus 20:10 God says, "If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." It's a capital crime in the Old Testament economy of God. That's how serious adultery is. He called for the death penalty in it.

Look over at Deuteronomy 22. I tremble as I read these things. I tremble as I read these things knowing the seriousness of what we're looking at and knowing how much it is in opposition to the culture in which we live, the hearts that some of you carry about in your life, and perhaps even unconfessed sin in this area that you've been hiding all along. I tremble at this. We're dealing with weighty matters here today from God's word. God says in Deuteronomy 22:22, "If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel." If a married man lies with a married woman who is not his spouse,

they shall die. God says that evil must be purged from the nation. That's how serious it is. That's how stark it is.

And those passages, beloved, form the basis for a consistent biblical ethic that you find when you go into the New Testament as well. And here's where I would say to you that as we are contemplating these things, the death penalty, the actual taking of the human life in response to the act as found in the Old Testament is only a shadow of the reality of which the New Testament speaks. Oh, we don't execute people for adultery today. That power of execution has been given to the civil government, not to the church. We don't execute adulterers today but don't think that somehow that diminishes the way God views this matter because on a higher level, on an eternal level, God speaks about adultery incurring the worst of eternal judgment.

Look over at 1 Corinthians 6 and also Hebrews 13. You know, when I was a brand-new Christian, I had only been a Christian for two or three or four days. I was talking about this with an unsaved friend, talking about the issue of sexual sin, and I said, "You know, this is what the Bible says about it." And he said, "Ah, don't pay no attention to that. You know, just go out and have a good time," kind of thing. Well, beloved, no. No. No. We cannot casually dismiss what the one true and living God has said about this in his word. We have to take this earnestly and seriously and come to grips with it and if it exposes guilt in our soul and guilt in our culture, well then, so be it. It is you and I and the culture around us that need to change and need to bend. We don't bend God's word to the prevailing practice of sin in the world around us or to a prevailing practice of sin in your own life. You can't get around this.

The Apostle Paul writing in 1 Corinthians 6:9 said, "do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators," those with sex outside the bounds of marriage, "nor idolaters, nor adulterers," those who are married and sin outside the marriage. "Don't be deceived," he says, "don't go wrong on this most basic premise: fornicators, adulterers, the effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, swindlers, will not inherit the kingdom of God."

There are eternal consequences to these issues of sexual sin and in Hebrews 13:4, turn there with me. Remember, we're laying a context for messages yet to come in what we are seeing here today. Hebrews 13:4, the Bible says, "Marriage..." I'll give you a moment to find it. Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for," because, "fornicators and adulterers God will judge." And beloved, God doesn't lie. His word does not mislead. It does not teach us things that are not true. When it says that adulterers are worthy of death, that's what it means. That's how great the guilt of that sin is. When it says that God will judge eternally those who practice fornication and adultery and homosexuality, it means it, and we have no right, we have no business, we have no prerogative, we have no desire to diminish or lower the standard that God has revealed in his word about these things.

You know, you could ask the question, "Why is sexual sin judged with such severity? Why does God take such a severe hand against it?" Well, you can think of 10 reasons. It violates marriage. It disobeys God. It betrays your spouse. It betrays your children. It breaks the wedding vow of faithfulness. It steals the wife of another. It betrays fellow Christians. It makes it easier for others to sin, "He did it. I'll do it too." It violates a godly testimony to the lost. And beloved, it creates, adultery creates a reproach that will follow you to the grave. I had a friend in California, a man of some stature, who was found in adultery. And isn't it true in your own experience when something like that becomes known, there is just a reproach that attaches to it? You can't think of the person apart from the sin that they committed. There is a red stain that comes on the one like that.

And so what do we say about this? How do we think about marriage? How do we think about God's plan for marriage? How do we begin to honor it in the way that God does? We start it here: God protects marriage by building a fence of judgment around it to those who would assault it and violate it, either in their lives or in their teaching.

So, beloved, here's what I want to say: sexual sin is not a casual matter. I understand that everything on TV and movies and magazines and anyone else that you would talk to outside of the church of Jesus Christ would reduce it to something that is a casual matter of indifference. I realize that in my lifetime it used to be a shame and a reproach for a man and a woman to live together without being married and now that is a common factor of the way that people exist. I get that but, beloved, what we must do is we must think biblically. We must think about this from God's perspective and realize that from God's perspective who has the only perspective that matters, from God's perspective this is not a matter of casual indifference. God looks at that, God looks at sexual sin and understands and declares it to be a shaken fist in the face of the Creator. And beloved, that kind of rebellion does not go unnoticed or unjudged in the plan of God. Sexual sin is intrinsically evil in the eyes of God. There is no way to diminish that. That's why he judges it so severely.

So what does all of this say about the world in which we live, a culture that is soaked in sensuality, pornography, and casual forms of sex and perversion that would declare unashamedly, boldly and brazenly, that a biblical ethic is not only unreasonable but that the biblical ethic itself is wicked? What would we say about that? What would we say about ourselves, more importantly, in our casual approach to these things? Beloved, again I say it in love. I am here as a pastor, not as a prosecutor to you. I'm speaking here hopefully on behalf of God. It's his word, right? And seeking your good in what I say. In light of everything that goes on around us that we see all around us, what does our lack of outrage against it say about the way that we have been assimilated into the culture without even realizing it? That that which outrages God and calls forth his severe judgment is something that we just kind of move about in without a sense of outrage about it? What does that say about us, about how our senses have been dulled against it? Well, beloved, God intends for us to honor this institution of marriage and that context helps you understand what Jesus has to say about lust and divorce which we're going to study in the coming weeks.

For now, let me just step back completely and say something much different. For now, let's step back and just remember the cross of Christ because to one degree or another, we all realize that this convicts and condemns us all, don't we? That even if we're not guilty of the physical act, our minds and hearts have desired things that were forbidden. Fingers have gone on computer keyboards where they should not have gone. Eyes have drunk in what they should not have seen. And we realize that God's standard is something that we all fall short of and are convicted by. What can we say to that? What can we say to the person who hears these words and says, "But I am an adulterer. I am guilty of this. And the judgment of God, I see it, I don't dispute it but now what do I do? Are we just left to the judgment of God?" The one that says, "God sees my sinful heart and I have nowhere to hide, what about me? Is there anything for me or do I walk out with nothing but condemnation to be my lot henceforth and forevermore?" Well, let me close with the wise words of Martyn Lloyd Jones. And if that's you and if you're feeling convicted about these things, let these words be an extension of mercy from God to your grieving soul. As the good Dr. said, "Even adultery is not the unforgivable sin. It is a terrible sin but God forbid that there should be anyone who feels that he or she has sinned himself outside the love of God because of adultery. No, no, if you truly repent and realize the enormity of your sin and cast yourself upon the boundless love and mercy and grace of God found in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, you can be forgiven and I assure you of pardon." The Dr. closes by saying, "But hear the words of our blessed Lord, 'Go and sin no more.'"

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, take these words which we have said today and build into our hearts a right view of marriage and of sexual sin. Father, in the casual disobedience of our culture, Father, let our hearts, our convictions, our commitments be a great separation, a distinction. Let it be part of that by which we say, "No, I will come out of the world. I will not embrace its mindset. I won't drink in its deadly elixir." Build in us, Father, a proper view of marriage and a proper view of sexual sin that it might motivate us away from sin and toward holiness and in our Lord Jesus Christ, Father, may those that have fallen into this sin, may those that bear the wounds of violations of marriage, in the gracious and merciful work and words of our Lord Jesus Christ, O God, may they find that which gives relief to their guilty conscience, which gives courage to their faltering soul, which gives them hope of a better world to come where sin and treachery and violations will be no more and we will be around that blessed throne of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it were, casting our crowns at his feet and declaring, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!" Father, your word brings us into these great eternal realities. It helps us see sin as you see it and it strikes us. Father, having stricken us now, meet us with the grace of Christ that we might go forward in peace as we pray in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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