

Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery

Exodus 20:14

[Phil Johnson](#)

If you have been watching the news lately, you're probably aware of a massive, growing scandal involving a website known as Ashley Madison. This was a sinister website that existed for one purpose: they offered a kind of anonymous social network for people seeking to commit adultery. Or at least it was *supposed* to be anonymous. Someone hacked their site, got the names and addresses of the millions of people who had signed up, and released all that information last week, exposing the names of some 30 million people who were cheating on their spouses.

The website's slogan was, "Life is short; have an affair"—which may be the stupidest bit of fleshly wisdom ever advertized by an actual multi-million-dollar company. "Life is short; have an affair." Compare that with what Scripture says in Revelation 21:8: **"As for . . . sexually immoral [people], . . . their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."**

Anyway, some prominent names have surfaced in the list of people who had secretly paid money looking for someone to have an affair with—and sadly, I've seen the names of at least a couple of well-known people who had professed to be

Christians. One Southern Baptist leader who observes and comments on trends in church leadership predicted this week that perhaps as many as 400 pastors will resign today because their names have turned up on the list. Whether that prediction turns out to be true or not, we'll see. I hope it's just an exaggerated guess. I don't know why a pastor whose sin has been exposed like that would wait till the Lord's Day to resign, but it's hard to explain why people do what they do nowadays.

What's clear is that the moral decline in our culture has been rapid, and reckless, and there are sinister people who will champion every kind of sin. Satan and his minions have never been busier, and one of their top goals is to ensnare and embarrass the people of God. So be on guard. But also, it's interesting (isn't it?) that although people openly advocate sin, and the all the major media and entertainment industries have been engaged in a decades-long effort to destigmatize every kind of iniquity—people are still naturally and rightfully ashamed of their sin, and they still try their best to keep their sin a secret. But, Scripture says, **"Be sure your sin will find you out."**

And because adultery is a particularly egregious sin, this morning I want to look at a single verse that we haven't considered together for more than a decade. It's the Seventh Commandment, found in Exodus 20:14: **"You shall not commit adultery."**

When we studied the Ten Commandments several years ago, one of the things we stressed repeatedly was that all the commandments mean much more than they actually say. Psalm 119:96 says, "**Your commandment is exceedingly broad.**" The Ten Commandments are *categories*, not narrow rules. Each commandment has sweeping implications, so that an almost infinite range of moral duties is set forth in these ten brief imperatives. Ultimately they demand from us no less than moral perfection.

We also learned in that study of the Ten Commandments that when a positive commandment is given, a negative one is also implied. And when a sin is forbidden in negative terms, some positive duty is also placed on us by implication. For example, when the Third Commandment forbids us to take the Lord's name in vain, it also means by implication that we should show honor and reverence to the Lord's name. It's not enough to abstain from using the Lord's name in blasphemous ways; we also have a positive duty to use the Lord's name in ways that show Him reverence and honor.

The Pharisees in Jesus' time were too focused on the letter of the law. And they figured they could easily avoid taking the Lord's name in vain if they simply avoided using the Lord's name at all. So they invented euphemisms to use in place of the Lord's name. They spoke of heaven, or substituted one of the attributes of God in place of His name. And they invented rules saying you shouldn't swear by God's

name, but it was OK to swear by heaven. And Jesus exposed their folly in Matthew 23:22. He said, "**whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.**"

They were playing semantic games with the letter of the law. They were using a wooden literalism so that they could circumvent the spirit of the law and still claim they were obeying the law to the letter. But Jesus said the *true* meaning of the law runs much deeper than the wooden, literal meaning of the words. It's the *spirit* of the law that counts. And again, as the Psalmist says, the law is exceedingly broad.

I want to talk for a moment about interpreting the Bible literally. And let me say this carefully, so that no one misunderstands. We believe from the depths of our hearts that Scripture means what it says. The first step in interpreting Scripture correctly is to discern its plain meaning. And except where the authors of Scripture are employing figures of speech, we ought to interpret what they have written literally. We don't believe in spiritualizing the text. We don't throw out the plain meaning of Scripture and replace it with some fanciful or spiritual alternative meaning. (And that is true when we're interpreting passages like this. When the Seventh Commandment says "**You shall not commit adultery,**" it certainly *means* that in a literal sense.)

So our understanding of this commandment *begins* with the plain meaning of the words. We affirm the normal, straightforward, literal meaning of the Bible—except in those places where the context makes it clear that a figure of speech is being employed. And we don't apologize for being literalists when it comes to interpreting the Bible. Those who reject the literal meaning of the biblical text—people who treat Old Testament history and the miracles of Scripture as mythology—are in effect calling God a liar.

But there is a kind of *rigid, slavish* literalism that we need to avoid. Church history is full of errors that stem from an overly narrow literalism.

For example, the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation teaches that the bread and wine in the communion service change into the actual body and blood of Christ, so that Christ is resacrificed every time mass is observed. How do Catholics attempt to justify that doctrine biblically? By an appeal to the literal meaning of Jesus' words in John 6:53-54, where Jesus said, "**Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.**" They press the literalism of John 6 to such a degree that it overturns the plain meaning of many passages that say Christ was sacrificed once for all.

Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Christ, and they attempt to justify their false doctrine by an appeal to the

literal meaning of John 14:28, where Jesus said, "**The Father is greater than I.**" Consider that verse for a moment with me:

Here is a rule of thumb to remember when you are interpreting Scripture: the literal meaning of the text is always a good starting place, but there are many more factors that must be considered if you want to arrive at the true and *full* meaning of the text. Context is vital. The context of John 14:28, for example, deals with Christ's return to heaven at the end of His earthly ministry. We need to understand it in light of Christ's prayer in John 17:4-5. Jesus prays, "**I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.**" Suddenly it becomes clear what He meant in John 14:28. He had laid aside His heavenly glory and humbled Himself in order to come to earth and die. He was now looking forward to returning to heaven, where He would once again dwell in the very same glory God the Father dwells in. And He wanted the disciples to rejoice with Him because he was returning to His heavenly throne, rather than being sad that He was leaving them. And suddenly we understand John 14:28 in a totally different light. Here's the full verse again: "**You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.**" He was not saying the Father is greater than Him in essence; He was speaking of

His own earthly humiliation, and rejoicing that He would soon be glorified again.

Now, we *do* understand that verse in a literal sense, but it is not a myopic, mechanical literalism that divorces that verse from everything else the Bible teaches about the nature of Christ. You can't isolate a text from the rest of Scripture and guarantee that its full meaning lies only in the bare literal sense of the words. Scripture interprets Scripture, and sometimes the context sheds more light on a passage than you will get from the literal meaning of the words themselves.

This is not complex, by the way. It works the same way in our everyday speech. What we *really* mean is often determined more by context than by a bare literal meaning of words divorced from their context. If I say, "I ran into Pete Beaudoin Friday night . . ."—you're going to have to hear the rest of my conversation before you know whether I mean I hit him with my car, or encountered him unexpectedly at the Dodger game. Or I might just mean that I physically bumped into him while hurrying around a corner in the hallway of the church. *All* those are literal meanings, but the *full and true* meaning must be determined by the context. And ordinarily, the fuller the context, the more clear the meaning becomes. It's the same way when we interpret Scripture.

Rigid literalism is a particular danger for Pharisees and evangelicals. We're so keen to be faithful to the literal

meaning of Scripture that we sometimes *limit* the meaning too much. I have met seminary students who insist that when you preach on any passage of Scripture, you should never go outside the immediate context to explain it. They would never dream of quoting a verse from Matthew to shed light on a verse from the Psalms. As if the full meaning of any text must be drawn only from the barest literal meaning of the words in the text themselves.

But you cannot always do that and be faithful to the true meaning of the text. The full meaning of Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 can only be understood in light of the New Testament descriptions of the crucifixion. The symbolism of Moses smiting the rock that gave water to the Israelites in the wilderness can only be understood in light of 1 Corinthians 10:4, where the apostle Paul says that rock was a picture of Christ.

And to bring it back to the Ten Commandments, these commandments cannot be isolated from the rest of Scripture and interpreted with a wooden literalism that limits their scope to the bare sense of the words in the commandments. The larger context of Scripture teaches us that they mean far more than they actually say.

So when this commandment says, "**You shall not commit adultery,**" it certainly means *that*, but it means much more than that. This commandment, like all the others, is exceedingly broad.

And this morning I want to look at the Seventh Commandment in degrees. First we'll look at the letter of the commandment. Then we'll consider the spirit of the commandment. And finally, we'll see the urgency of the commandment. And that will be our outline, if you want to take notes. Point number 1:

1. THE LETTER OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Look at the commandment again: "**You shall not commit adultery.**" *Adultery*, by the strictest defined, is voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a partner other than the lawful spouse. It is a gross sin because it breaks a covenant that is made before God and defiles the marriage relationship, which was instituted by God as the first and most important of all human relationships.

Marriage was established in the garden of Eden even before the Fall of Adam. When God created Eve, Genesis 2:24 says this: "**Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**" That was God's design from the beginning: one man, one woman—and joined together they become one flesh. Adultery ruins that relationship in a way that is destructive of all other relationships. Adultery completely destroys trust, and therefore it undermines intimacy. It defiles the purity of the marriage relationship, and often it destroys the marriage

itself. It is a serious sin, one of the grossest of sins, and it carries a reproach that cannot be blotted out.

In fact, listen to Proverbs 6:32-33: **"He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away."**

We have seen that in the case of David. Here was a man after God's own heart who fell into the sin of adultery. He suffered the consequences of that one sin for the rest of his life. The child conceived in his act of adultery died. His own son Absalom turned against him. His reputation was tarnished in the eyes of Israel. The loss of his reputation almost caused him to lose his throne. And even though he repented and God forgave him the *guilt* of his sin, the *reproach* of it endured for the rest of his life. And Scripture records this as his epitaph (1 Kings 15:5): **"David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."** So the consequences of his adultery pursued him to the grave and that one incident became a blot on an otherwise exemplary reputation.

It's clear (isn't it?) that God Himself regards adultery as the grossest kind of sin. This is a very serious sin indeed. For those who might have the mistaken notion that all sins are equal and there's no such thing as lesser or greater sins, let me remind you: that is not a biblical idea. There *are* degrees

of sin, and Jesus Himself made that clear when He told Pilate in John 19:11 that Judas's sin was greater than Pilate's.

That's not to minimize the evil of so-called "lesser" sins. *Any* sin is enough to condemn a person to hell for eternity, so *every* sin is serious. But hell will be even worse for some than for others. Jesus told the people of Capernaum in Matthew 10:15 that the day of judgment would be "**more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for [their] town.** So there *are* degrees of sin just as there will be degrees of punishment in hell. And adultery is one of the grosser sins.

This is confirmed by the law God has engraved on every human heart. Virtually all human cultures—even those that are far removed from the gospel message and the Old Testament law—universally regard adultery as a horrible evil. Even modern secular society, which has tried hard to sear the human conscience against any sense of guilt, has not managed to do away with the stigma that goes with adultery.

Our society for years has desperately tried to do away with sexual mores. The popular media have openly glamorized lust and lasciviousness for decades. But still there is a strong sense that adultery is wrong. That's why there was such a scandal a few years ago when the leader of our nation confessed to an illicit relationship with a woman who was not his wife. People *know* that is wrong. And no matter how he tried to nuance his own definition of what he

had done, every woman in America knew he had been unfaithful to his wife. And his adultery attached a reproach to his name that will never be blotted out.

Adultery is a horribly destructive sin. The book of Proverbs is full of warnings against adultery, and they always focus on the bitter consequences of this sin. Some of the longest discourses in the book of Proverbs are warnings against the inevitable consequences of adultery.

And Scripture stresses the fact that those consequences are inevitable. Listen to Proverbs 6:27-29: **"Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished."** Commit adultery and you relinquish your innocence forever. You *cannot* commit this sin and not in some sense be destroyed by it. **"Be sure your sin will find you out"** (Numbers 32:23). **"He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow"** (Proverbs 22:8). And Galatians 6:7-8: **"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption."**

Now, let's move beyond the letter of the law. Clearly, this commandment forbids the *act* of adultery. But that does not exhaust the moral ramifications of this commandment. If you're taking notes, here is point 2. Let's examine—

2. THE SPIRIT OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Remember that strictly defined, adultery is voluntary sexual relations between a married person and a partner other than the lawful spouse. But in a broader biblical sense, "adultery" encompasses any sin that violates the sanctity of the marriage relationship. This commandment deals not only with external behavior, but also with inward desire. If the *act* of adultery is a sin, then any *impure desire* that might lead to adultery is a sin of the same stripe. Because as Jesus said in Mark 7:20-23,

"What comes out of a person is what defiles him.

21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,

22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

In other words, all the sins forbidden by the Ten Commandments stem from evil thoughts that arise within our own hearts. And therefore the moral law of God is focused on inward thoughts and desires even more than it is on external behavior.

This is something the Pharisees never quite understood. They imagined that by obeying the letter of the law and abstaining from external acts, they were obeying God. They

tended to think of sin mainly as an external act rather than an internal, spiritual reality. And so they were content to apply the letter of the law to their external behavior, and they missed the law's spiritual meaning.

Most of our society suffers from this same error. People think of sin as a social and political issue. They think something is wrong only if it injures other people. You hear people speak of "victimless crimes," and what they mean to suggest is that if no one else is injured by our behavior, it cannot possibly be wrong. A few years ago I read an interview with an influential theologian who said he figured any kind of sexual fantasy was OK, as long as it never resulted in an outward act of sin. Of course he was flatly contradicting what Jesus taught. But let's be honest; he was simply putting into plain words the way lots of people think about the sins that take place the mind and imagination.

Opinions like that are based on a wrong view of sin. Sin is wrong because it dishonors God, whether or not any other human is injured by it. Sin is wrong because it is an affront to a holy God, and since He looks upon the heart, an impure thought violates His standard and offends His holiness just as surely as an adulterous act. We fall into the very same error as the Pharisees if we're only concerned about keeping the outside of the cup clean while letting filth accumulate on the inside.

Jesus expressly taught this about the seventh commandment. Turn to Matthew 5:27. Here's Jesus' own exposition of this commandment. This is part of His Sermon on the Mount. He introduces the theme of His message in verse 20: **"I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."** That's his main point. The standard of righteousness set by the scribes and Pharisees falls short of the standard of *true* righteousness. An upright *heart*, not just a clean arrest record, is what God demands of those who will enter the kingdom of heaven. And in the verses that follow, Jesus give a series of corrections to the standard rabbinical misunderstanding of Moses' law.

Now it's important to understand that He is not adding to or taking away from Moses' law in any respect. He tells us this in clear language in verse 17: **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."** He is not establishing a new standard here. This is a common misunderstanding of the Sermon on the Mount. Lots of people imagine that Christ is overturning Moses and instituting a *different* standard. But He is not. And He expressly says so. He's merely refuting the rabbinical misunderstanding of the law, and especially their minimalist approach of reducing the commandments to the bare literal sense of the words. And that is why He says God demands a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of

the scribes and Pharisees. His dispute is not with Moses, but with the minimalist interpreters of Moses. And so He sets out to give the fuller meaning of Moses' commandments.

I read one Bible dictionary that said this (and I quote): "Jesus' teachings *expanded* the Old Testament law to address matters of the heart." That's nonsense. *Jesus' whole point was that the Old Testament law was meant to address matters of the heart.* And the law read in context affirms this. The Tenth Commandment, as we're going to see, expressly forbids a man to covet his neighbor's wife. Proverbs 6:25 says this about the seductress: "**Do not desire her beauty in your heart.**" Jesus is not adding a single thing that the Old Testament did not already teach. He was simply pointing out that the same moral principle that makes an act of adultery sinful also rules out any *desire* for an adulterous relationship.

Here's what Jesus says about the Seventh Commandment (Matthew 5:27):

"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 lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

In other words, an adulterous *thought* or an adulterous *desire* carries the same kind of moral guilt as an adulterous *act*.

Now I want to be clear. I said earlier that there are degrees of sin. Some sins are worse than others. And an *act* of

adultery is worse than a lustful thought. But Jesus' point is that they stem from the same evil seed, and they carry the same *kind* of guilt—even if it is a different degree of guilt.

I made this same point several years ago when we were looking at the sixth commandment. I quoted from the Sermon on the Mount to show that Jesus said hatred is morally tantamount to guilt. And someone asked me afterward if I was suggesting that there is an exact moral equivalency between the thought and the act, so that one is in every sense as bad as the other. That clearly is not what Jesus was teaching. He wasn't saying that full-fledged adultery is no worse than a lustful thought. But he *was* saying that both are violations of the Seventh Commandment. And that reminds us again that the commandment is exceedingly broad.

In other words, Christ was teaching that the seventh commandment rules out, by implication, every kind of immoral thought or activity. That includes every kind of fornication, every lustful look or thought, and every type of unfaithfulness.

Not only that, but as with all the commandments, where a negative prohibition is stated, a positive commandment is implied. The law says, "**You shall not commit adultery.**" It also means: You must love your spouse with a full heart. Husbands, even if you *never* entertain a fleeting desire for any other woman, if you fail to love your wife the way you

ought to love her, you have violated the spirit of this commandment. Wives, if you fail to love your husband above every other earthly entity—even if you never have a lustful thought about another man—you are guilty, too. See what a high standard this sets?

Ephesians 5:25 spells it out clearly: "**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.**" There must be a fervency and a single-minded purity in marital love so that it mirrors Christ's absolute devotion to the church—and the church's devotion to her Lord.

That's what marriage was supposed to picture in the first place. Marriage is an object lesson about the mutual love between Christ and His people. That is why marriage is so sacred in God's eyes, and that is why to violate the marriage commitment is such a serious sin in the eyes of God.

Jesus goes on to say in Matthew 5:32 that "**everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**" So even *divorce* is the same kind of sin as adultery. And the only exception Christ makes is in cases where an unfaithful spouse's act of adultery has already irreparably broken the marriage relationship. In those cases, the innocent party is free to remarry.

Throughout Scripture, God likens unbelief and spiritual rebellion to adultery. Israel in the Old Testament is repeatedly pictured as an unfaithful spouse. Israel's apostasy

was a kind of spiritual adultery. I could give many examples of this, but we only have time for one. Listen to Jeremiah 3:1-3. God, speaking through the prophet, reproves Israel for her constant backsliding. Jeremiah writes:

You have played the whore with many lovers; and would you return to me? declares the LORD.

2 Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see! Where have you not been ravished? By the waysides you have sat awaiting lovers like an Arab in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your vile whoredom.

3 Therefore the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come; yet you have the forehead of a whore; you refuse to be ashamed.

In other words, unbelief and disobedience are spiritual harlotry. The person who is unfaithful to God is a spiritual adulterer.

The same imagery is used in the New Testament. James 4:4 says, **"You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."**

That's why adultery is such a serious sin. It manifests an unfaithful heart. It is first and foremost a sin of the heart. And this commandment addresses the sin of the heart; not merely an external act.

Now let's move to the third point and see—

3. THE URGENCY OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

We see the seriousness of the seventh commandment in the penalty that was attached to it under Moses' law. Leviticus 20:10 says this: **"If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."** Deuteronomy 22:22 says, **"If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel."**

I already mentioned how the book of Proverbs again and again warns about the soul-destroying effects of sexual impurity. It's significant that virtually every time Scripture lists the gross sins that characterize the inhabitants of hell, adultery and fornication head the list. Galatians 5:19:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

20 idolatry, sorcery, [etc.]

21 . . . I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Revelation 21:8: **"As for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."**

In other words, this is a particularly hellish sin, and it destroys the souls of those who practice it.

Jesus said the same thing. If you have turned away from Matthew 5, go back there, and notice the rest of what He says about the sin of adultery. Verse 28: "**I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**" That is the context for what follows immediately. Verse 29:

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

When He talks about your eye causing you to sin, the context makes it clear that he is talking about sexual purity.

Now this is one of those cases where we must guard against applying a slavish literalism to Jesus' command. He is using a figure of speech here. This is *hyperbole*. And He is saying that if you struggle with habitual lust, you had better take the most extreme kind of measures to avoid the occasions for that lust.

He is not literally advocating self-mutilation, because that would violate everything else Scripture teaches about the sanctity of our bodies. But he is using hyperbole to stress the urgency of the Seventh Commandment. He is saying that if

you struggle with these issues, you had better do something drastic to put a stop to temptation. Get rid of your television. Stay off the Internet. Don't frequent places where you are constantly placed in temptation's way. Deal with it as drastically and as completely as possible.

Someone says, "Well I'd have to quit my job to get away from temptation." Quit it. When a habit of lust is eating at your soul, no measure is *too* drastic. Cut it off and fling it from you.

That is the very same thing the apostle Paul meant when he commanded us to mortify our members. Colossians 3:5-6: **"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming."**

This gets intensely practical, doesn't it? If you struggle with evil habits and evil desires, there is only one way to overcome those sins: choke the very life out of them. Mortify sin in your members. Romans 8:13: **"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."**

Whether you sin with your heart or your hand or your eyes, Jesus says, deal harshly with your own sin. Cut it off. Hack it to pieces. Burn the bridges that keep bringing you back to it. Summarily remove whatever temptation you face, and replace your evil habits with godly ones.

It was Job who said, **"I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?"** He had purposefully and resolutely determined never to look at that which might stir any illicit desire in his heart.

For you married men, let me give you one other very practical bit of advice on how to avoid this sin: Ecclesiastes 9:9: **"Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life."** Proverbs 5:15-19:

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

16 Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?

17 Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.

18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth,

19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.

20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?

Be satisfied with your own wife. Learn to delight in her love, and hers alone. And learn to make yourself delightful to her, so that she doesn't fall into temptation, either. Wives, my counsel to you is exactly the same.

Some single guy is saying, "That's not very practical advice for me." Well, in a way it is. If you struggle in this area, get married. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9: **"To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion."** Some of the single guys I know need to set aside their romantic notions of feminine excellence and marry a girl who has a few imperfections like they do. Married life with a woman who loves you is vastly preferable to burning with uncontrollable passion.

All sexual sin is destructive to the soul. Adultery is particularly catastrophic because of all the lives that are damaged when a marriage is broken. Don't tolerate even the fleeting thought of this sin, but pluck it out and cast it from you.

Now I can't quit without reminding you of the good news of the gospel. There is forgiveness and cleansing even for sins as serious as adultery. David's sin was adultery, compounded with a treacherous act of murder. He committed adultery with Bath-Sheba, and he even had her husband killed. But David repented, and as soon as he repented (2 Samuel 12:13), **"David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die."**

Psalm 51 is David's prayer of repentance. The inscription on the psalm identifies it as **"A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba."** It's the perfect model of repentance for anyone who has fallen into adultery or any other sin. In that prayer, David pleads with God repeatedly to blot out his sin and cleanse his heart and restore the Joy of his salvation. David understood that no mere ritual of sacrifice or outward piety could ever cover the guilt of his sin, but (v. 17) **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."**

David also understood that real repentance is not a one-and-done act. He expresses his repentance first to Nathan in 2 Samuel 12. Then he writes Psalm 51, where he pleads repeatedly for the Lord's forgiveness and blessing:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

Verse 9:

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

And Psalm 51 isn't the only psalm of repentance that we have from this episode in David's life. Psalm 32, another psalm of repentance, written by David is generally assumed to pertain to that same episode of adultery with Bath-Sheba. In this psalm, David affirms his faith in the Lord's forgiveness. So Psalm 32 begins with this triumphant expression of gospel faith: "**Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity.**"

The gospel teaches that God's forgiveness is thorough and free—because Christ paid the full atonement for our sin, and he covers the repentant believer's sin under a robe of His own righteousness. Romans 8:1: "**There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.**" In the words of Colossians 3:3, if you are a believer, "**Your life is hidden with Christ in God.**" Psalm 103:12: "**As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.**"

That is the glory of the gospel. It offers hope and cleansing for even the guilty adulterer. It is the only remedy for a heart burdened down with the weight of guilt and a life torn asunder by the consequences of this deadly sin—or *any* sin, for that matter.

I doubt that there is a person here this morning who is not guilty of breaking the Seventh Commandment in some

degree or another. Whether through an adulterous act, a lustful thought, or a covetous look, *all* of us are guilty of breaking this commandment, and not one of us has any hope whatsoever outside of Christ. I hope you are *in* Christ—trusting, repenting, hating the sin of unfaithfulness and leaning on the power of His grace to enable you to go and sin no more.

If not—if you are trusting anything else as your hope for eternity—you need to pluck it out and cast it far from you; and seek the forgiveness and cleansing Christ freely offers all who come to Him.