

Sunday, July 24, 2022 | Ten

Exodus 20:14 | "Our Neighbor's Spouse"

A couple weeks ago, we kicked off a new 11-week series called "Ten," in which we'll be exploring the first set of commandments given to the Jews in Exodus and how they can still help guide the Christian today. Using parallel passages, we'll discover that the principles God tried to instill in Israel in the Old Testament find fulfillment through Jesus in the New Testament. And how, while the believer is no longer bound to the Law for salvation (i.e., justification), we can still use it to become more like Christ (i.e., sanctification).

In the first week, we studied what Christ had to say about all the commandments rather than dive headlong into the ten commandments. In Matthew 22, we learned that Jesus summed up the duty of man into two sentences: love God with everything and love others as yourself. On these two things, Jesus says, hang all the Law and the prophets. Those two commands give context to everything else in the Bible and life. So much so that **a love for God and neighbor brings certainty in a world of uncertainty.** Even without an explicit command, we can still make good decisions in uncertain situations. The Scriptures can still speak into a 22nd context because its' principles are sufficiently broad enough to encompass all human experience. It is hard to go wrong when you are consumed with love for God and others.

We finally got to the titular Decalogue in the second week by exploring the first commandment. The Ten Commandments were not created by a committee. They were, quite literally, given to us by the voice of God. Therefore, since these ideas come from outside human reasoning, the Decalogue (i.e., the "Ten Words") and all other truths within Scripture embody objective truth. Who better to teach us how we ought to live than a being whose judgment is not clouded by shifting opinions, influenced by fluctuating emotions, or pressured by changing circumstances? And the first word upon which all the other divine words stand is this: Have no other gods but God. **And if there is no god but Yahweh, then we should have no other god but God.** Why would we give anything or anyone who is not a god that sort of devotion that only God deserves? What a waste of worship that would be. And is not Jesus worthy of all of our worship?

In the third week, we unpacked the second prohibition in the Decalogue. And unlike the first command, which prohibits the *having* of other gods, the second prohibits the *making* of anything that's supposed to represent God (i.e., idols, icons, images, etc.). It's a subtle distinction, to be sure, but it's no less important. There are so-called "worship practices" in this world that are wrong. And these practices often make use of things we might call "idols."

Commandment two shows that Yahweh should not be expressed in any manmade thing because he is the one who makes, not the one who is made. However much we may try, the creature cannot create a perfect representation of its Creator. Moreover, that command also reminds us that our Creator has already created images that bear his likeness: *us* (cf. Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:10). Idolatry, in all forms, not only **downgrades** who God is but also **diminishes** who men and women were made to be.

In the fourth week, we answered the question, “What did God mean when he said, “Do not take my name in vain”? This is the broadest prohibition within the Decalogue and, therefore, one of the hardest to keep. When the Lord commanded this, he expected us to not speak or bear his name in an empty or thoughtless way. Thus, the ways in which this commandment can be broken are numerous. However, just because something is hard does not mean it's not worth doing. After all, **we, as Christians, are to live as our name implies: like Christ**. Jesus lives in us and can enable us to bring glory to his name. And only through the Lord are we able to abide by the third commandment.

In the fifth week, we unpacked the fourth prohibition in the Decalogue: Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. And that while we, as Christians, no longer observe the Sabbath as the Jews did in the O.T., we still obey the fourth commandment in principle by meeting on Sundays to remember Jesus' resurrection. Thus, not only do we have Moses to thank for our Saturdays, but we also have Jesus for our Sundays, and, ultimately, we have God to thank for our entire weekend. **The Lord's Day—i.e., Sunday—is a day of Sabbath-like rest that is set apart to the Lord so that the Christian might be more like Christ.** This is for our good because we were not designed to work all the time. Since the foundation of the world, human beings have been made to rest.

In the sixth week, we dove into the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and mother." And this commandment comes right after the commandments that dealt with our relationship with God and before the commandments that dealt with everyone else. This implies that a healthy relationship with God and others is forged in the home. How we treat our parents will impact how we treat God and those people who are around us. After all, if we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Mar. 12:31), who better to start with than those “neighbors” who are closest to us? And **when the parents are honored, the child will be blessed.**

Last week, we studied the sixth commandment: “You shall not murder.” But this seems unnecessary. Murder is so wicked and awful that most of us don't need to be told not to do something so obviously wrong. But that assumption gives humanity far too much credit. All human beings, great and small, have the capacity to destroy life. To illustrate that principle, we

saw how the Bible speaks about five forms of murder: unintentional killing, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, and anger. Somewhere in those five categories, we are all guilty. Unlike every other created thing, human life is sacred because we alone bear the image of our Creator (cf. Gen. 1:27). As a potter signs his work, every man, woman, and child has been stamped by the Giver of Life. And life is that mark, i.e., existence, consciousness, volition, etc. As such, life is a precious gift not to be thrown away or destroyed. **Whether literally or emotionally, we do not commit murder because human life is sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, special.**

After speaking about the sanctity of life in the sixth commandment, the Lord talks about the sacredness of marriage in the seventh: "You shall not commit adultery." And it is appropriate that this next word in the Decalogue comes in between the one regarding murder and before the one regarding theft. After all, adultery destroys a marital relationship like murder destroys a life and steals away a person's intimacy with their partner, just like a thief steals a purse. And, in extreme cases, the three go hand-in-hand (cf. 2 Sam. 11:2-4).

Admittedly, very few people need to be told that adultery is wrong (cf. Gen. 20:9). And, statistically, this has been proven to be true. It is factually untrue to say that half of all marriages end in divorce. In reality, it is closer to a quarter.¹ Still bad, for sure, but not nearly as bad as half. So, the seventh commandment isn't so much an effort to stem the tide of sexual infidelity but a commentary on the importance of sexual fidelity. In other words, God is highlighting how much value he puts on sex and marriage.

Marriage isn't a communal affair but one of exclusivity. The seventh commandment elevates marital unions far above our base desires so that even though we may be tempted to go astray, we refuse to do so because the vow we made to our spouse in the sight of God is far more important than the feelings we might have towards some would-be adulterous partner.

READ: Exodus 20:14 (ESV)

You shall not commit adultery.

Scripturally, there are two types of adulterous acts:

- i. **Adultery that takes place in the bed.**

¹ Dickson, John, *A Doubter's Guide to the Ten Commandments*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2016), p. 130-131.

And just as the sixth commandment found its roots in Genesis, so, too, does the seventh commandment.

READ: Genesis 2:24 (ESV)

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

This same verse came up in our discussion of the fifth commandment. The point two weeks ago is the same point I make today, in marriage, a person leaves behind their old life to form a new life with their new husband or wife. Just as the priority of the parents' is replaced by their child's new spouse, no one is allowed to hold a place of honor and affection other than your spouse. Marriage is something unique and special and not to be interfered with by any kind of adulterous act. As the parents respect their child's new marital status, everyone else does as well.

Furthermore, the second tablet in the Decalogue isn't only for human interactions. It does focus our attention on our neighbors. But the primary reason we are to treat our neighbors well is so that we might maintain a healthy standing in God's eyes. This is why marriage is not only a union made between two people but a union made between two people ***in the sight of God***. Therefore, if either partner were to break that covenantal promise, it not only breaks down the relationship between husband and wife but also their relationship with God. This sin of adultery is not only a sin against one's spouse; it is a sin against one's God (cf. Gen. 39:9; Psa. 51:4; Mal. 2:13-16; 3:5). As Wright explains,

“Adultery was a crime against God inasmuch as it was a crime against the relationship between God and his people, Israel; and it was a crime against that relationship inasmuch as it was an attack upon the social basis on which it rested...Any attack on the stability of the household unit was a potential threat to the nation's relationship with God.”²

So egregious was adultery to God that he would liken it to idol worship (cf. Jer. 3:8-9; Ezek. 23:37; Hos. 4:13-14; Isa. 57:3). Meaning that marriage is a metaphor for our relationship with God (cf. Jer. 31:32).³ In the same way that we would go after false gods seeking fulfillment, an adulterer will go after a false lover seeking satisfaction from them. In both cases, these actions are unequivocally wrong, and, in both cases, these actions are unequivocally unfulfilling. In

² Wright (2021), p. 375.

³ Motyer, J. A., *The Message of Exodus*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2005), p. 229.

fact, adultery and idolatry were given the same euphemism: “great sin” (cf. Gen. 20:9; Ex. 32:6, 30-31; 2 Ki. 17:21).⁴ Further, God’s attitude toward adultery is seen in how the penalty for such a transgression was death, either by stoning (cf. Deut. 22:22-24) or burning (cf. Gen. 38:24; Lev. 20:10, 14; 21:9) depending on the circumstances. However, since this transgression was a private affair, it was left up to the discretion of one who had been wronged (cf. Mat. 1:18-19).

The seventh commandment prohibits more than just physical acts; it also forbids acts of the mind. Even to look at another person with illicit motives is considered adultery in God's eyes.

ii. **Adultery that takes place in the heart.**

READ: Matthew 5:27-30 (ESV)

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. 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.

Notice that Jesus puts the emphasis not on the object of a person’s lust but on the person who is lusting.⁵ This is not to say that we shouldn't be mindful of our dress. Modesty is one of the primary marks of holiness (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-6). If our attire causes another to stumble, we ought to modify that dress to better reflect a concern for those around us and our devotion to God (cf. Mat. 18:7-9; Mar. 9:42-48). However, if someone lusts after another person, that sin is not laid at the feet of the person they were lusting after but at the feet of the person who did not look away.⁶

To be clear, when Jesus says, "looks...with lustful intent," he isn't talking about mere attraction.⁷ Acknowledging that a person is beautiful or handsome is not a sin. The Greek word used is **ἐπιθυμέω** (ep-ee-thoo-meh'-oh), and it refers to when a “looking” turns into a “gazing,”

⁴ Durham, John I., *Exodus*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 3, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1987), p. 293.

⁵ Keener, Craig S., *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), p. 187.

⁶ Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 170.

⁷ France, R. T., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2007), p. 204, “The “woman” in Jesus’ declaration is thus to be understood also as another man’s wife, and the looking “in order to desire her, “ specifically of wanting (and planning?) sexual relations...The focus is thus not (as some tender adolescent consciences have read it) on sexual attraction as such, but on the desire for (and perhaps the planning of) and illicit sexual liaison....”

recognition turns into affection and observation into appetite.⁸ Literally, it means “to look deliberately at a woman lustfully, i.e., desiring or imagining a sexual relationship with her....”⁹ Thus, the Lord is speaking very specifically about a kind of “looking” that is lewd and lecherous. It is not the sort of looking where someone notices that a person is good-looking; it is the sort of looking where they are looking to satisfy some base desire.¹⁰ Every adult knows the difference between noticing someone and undressing them with their eyes. This is the kind of gazing that Jesus is referring to. It is a looking not with the eyes but in the heart.

Just as we felt when we saw Jesus elevate anger to the level of murder, to say that even a lustful look is adultery may seem extreme. But just as he did with anger, the Lord highlights the actual cause of all affairs: lust. Lust is an act in the heart in the same way that adultery is an act in the bed. To open the door to the former is to expose yourself to the possibility of the latter. Anyone who keeps themselves from a lustful gaze will be impervious to adultery (cf. Job 31:1; Pro. 6:25). It simply will not happen if the gates of our heart are closed to such visitors.

Obviously, this has application to all sexual sins—i.e., premarital sex, fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, prostitution, etc.¹¹ Participating or engaging in any of these acts is morally wrong under every conceivable scenario. Thus, the sort of movies or T.V. shows we watch ought to be subjected to Jesus’ principle. If what you’re watching on the big or small screen is causing your heart to go astray, it’s time to turn off the T.V. or leave the movie theater. However, in the world of social media, this also has application for those who scroll Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Ticktock, and whatever else comes next. Too often, the selfie is not a means to capture a moment but to flaunt one’s sexuality. We post pictures of ourselves not to immortalize a memory but to be seen. We want the clicks, likes, and hearts, and sadly, we’ll show increasingly more skin because we know that’s what gets the attention we think they want.

But imagine, for a moment, that every view or heart occurred in real life and in real-time. Like, if you were to go out tanning on the beach and someone came along and just gave you a thumbs up and then didn’t go away. Imagine that they stopped and stared at you for a long while. It would, rightfully, creep you out. And suppose that it wasn’t just one person but 10 or

⁸ DeYoung, Kevin, *The 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2018), p. 117.

⁹ Hagner, Donald A., *Matthew 1-13*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 33A, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2000), p. 120; Keener (1999), p. 189, “The Greek present text often bears a continuous sense, and probably does so here: Jesus refers not to *noticing* [author’s emphasis] a person’s beauty, but to imbibing it, meditating on it, seeking to possess it.”

¹⁰ Dickson (2016), p. 134.

¹¹ DeYong (2018), p. 115-118.

20 or 50 or however many likes you would've gotten for a picture like that with each person just standing there on the beach, ogling you with their thumbs up.

Now, yes, I know that not all likes or hearts or whatever represent people who are lusting. That's not the point I'm making. The point is that in our digital spaces, we've made ourselves readily available for anyone to take our image and do with it as they see fit. "The heart," as the prophet Jeremiah put it, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" You don't need to go to age-restricted websites to view illicit content anymore. It's as easy as scrolling social media. Digital spaces too often become digital playgrounds for our lustful hearts.

This is why Jesus' solution may have sounded extreme when you first read it, but, in this context, it makes perfect sense. Jesus said, "if your right eye offends you, pluck it out," and, "if your right hand offends you, cut it off." Why? Because he reasons that it would be better to go to heaven maimed than go to hell whole. If a part of you is prone to wander, it is perfectly reasonable to sever it entirely from your life rather than allow it to remain and cause you to stumble.

Now, was Jesus talking literally here? No. This is a classic case of hyperbole. He is not advising you to cut off your hand just because it reaches for the wrong thing or for you to pluck out your eye just because it looks too long. Even if you did, you would still have a lust problem because issues of sin are matters of the heart (cf. Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Mat. 15:19).¹² One would need to rip out their heart entirely and be given a new one to indeed be free from sin's prompting (cf. Ezk. 36:26; Rom. 6:11). However, while the Lord is not advising self-mutilation (cf. Deut. 14:1), he is urging us to take extreme measures when it comes to sexual temptations (cf. 1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:22; Col. 3:5).¹³ It would be far better for you to go without some T.V. show, movie, or social media platform than it would for you to keep those things in your life and expose yourself to temptation. Jesus may not want you to plunk out your eye or cut off your hand, but he may be telling you to delete an app.¹⁴

So, what's the takeaway?

¹² Turner (2008), p. 171.

¹³ France (2007), p. 206, "As 'removable' parts of the body they [eye and hand] serve to make the point that any loss, however painful, is preferable to the total lostness of *geënnā* [author's emphasis]."

¹⁴ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), p. 119, quoting Bruner, "Better to go limping into heaven than leaping into hell."

Whether physically or mentally, we do not commit adultery because, like marriage, sex is sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, special.

Some think the Bible is restrictive and prudish. But this assumption is wrong. Anyone wanting to see how the Scriptures view this act needs only read the book *Song of Solomon* to learn how God celebrates it and encourages sex! The catch, however, is that sex is not open. It is sacred; that is to say, it is set apart, unique, and special and only to be enjoyed within the clearly defined parameters of marriage.

Any illicit activity outside of marriage is not only wrong, but it diminishes the act of sex itself. God designed it to be more than just a physical action; it has an emotional and spiritual element. Thus, the intimacy achieved through intercourse is a gift from God meant to reinforce vows and strengthen a marriage. It is a profound "oneness" unlike any other experience. But for us to divorce the sacredness from sex and to invite others into that special space is to reduce this unique gift to mere appetite and thereby make ourselves no better than animals.

Now, I know that whenever we discuss a topic like this, generally speaking, people will fall into one of two camps: those who are in profound denial and those who are deeply convicted. To the first group, hear me when I say that all sins have a way of manifesting in due course. What you sow will bring a harvest (cf. Gal. 6:7). You may think you can handle fire, but eventually, you will get burned (cf. Prov. 6:27-33). But to the second group, to the individual whose been convicted that their past or present actions are sinful, there is hope for the adulterer. In fact, if there wasn't, no one would be safe from judgment because, aside from Jesus, there has never been a person who hasn't fallen due to lustful thoughts (cf. Mat. 12:39; 16:4).

READ: John 9:2-11 (ESV)

² Early in the morning he [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" ⁶ This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where

are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

In God's eyes, we are all of us guilty of adultery. However, for those who repent, there is forgiveness and reconciliation (cf. 1 Jn. 1:8-9). No adulterer is so far gone that they are beyond help. With Jesus, there is always hope.

Book Recommendation: *Making All Things New: Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken*, by David Powlison

Video Description

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TEXT: Exodus 20:14

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: