

Sermon on the Mount

June 22, 2014

Title: God's Gift of Marriage

Text: Matthew 5:27

Summary: "You shall not commit adultery." A command for another time? Or a crucial warning to keep us on track? Only when we understand God's gift of marriage can we understand the true significance of this command and God's wonderful grace for us when we fail.

"Thou shalt not..."

An ancient command:

The seventh of the Ten Commandments reads like this:

Exodus 20:14 NIV

"You shall not commit adultery."

Adultery is still very much a reality in our sex besotted and marriage-confused culture. You cannot go through the check out line at the grocery store without being confronted by the adulteries and other misbehaviors of the current darlings of Hollywood. The same things happen down the street and in our families. The next high school reunion you attend will undoubtedly come with stories of broken vows and new relationships.

On one level, we know all too much about the breaking of Commandment #7. But do we and our current culture really understand what God meant when He commanded us to not commit adultery?

In His "sermon on the mount" Jesus reiterates this familiar command:

Matthew 5:27 NIV

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'"

The very way He presents the commandment -- "You have heard that it was said..." -- shows that He is referring back to the original Torah with its Ten Commandments.

So just what is Jesus' goal in restating this familiar command? Is He simply reiterating an ancient moral code? Or is He anchoring it in something far greater: God's great purpose for His Creation?

Adultery:

The word "adultery" refers specifically to:

Voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a partner other than the lawful spouse. (American Heritage Dictionary)

Okay. But nowadays we face a couple of problems with the definition itself.

We are living in a time in which the word "married" has taken on a totally different meaning than it has ever had before. Likewise for the word "spouse." A marriage can be heterosexual or homosexual, "open" or monogamous, temporary or life-long. A marriage, it seems, can be just about anything you want it to be.

Which means that "adultery" may or may not even exist in your world view!

So what to make of God's command: "You shall not commit adultery!"

It's all about context:

Words take their meanings from their larger context.

For example, suppose you went to your very first football game, not knowing a single thing about the game. Part way through the game one of the guys with the black and white striped shirts throws a yellow flag onto the field. Then he announces that a player is being penalized for "holding."

So what in the world is "holding"? Holding what? The ball? Aren't these guys tackling each other and falling down on top of each other with every play? As you watch your team get marched back 10 yards this penalty of "holding" may seem utterly ludicrous and unfair.

But if you understand the game of football, the penalty makes a lot of sense. If anyone could latch on to an opposing player anytime he wished, the game would devolve into total chaos. Every player would grab the guy in front of him the moment the ball was snapped, and nothing else would happen.

Once you know the game, the penalty makes sense. It's not some senseless or capricious punishment meted out by biased officials. In fact, the best games are those with very few penalties. The commandment against "holding" is designed to make the game all it can be.

The same is true with God's Law. Take a command out of context and you don't necessarily know what it's all about. God's command against committing adultery requires that we know and accept God's gift of marriage. Marriage is the "game." Adultery is the "foul."

God's Image Bearers -- in Stereo

God's Image in stereo:

So what does God's gift of marriage look like, and how can we know?

God's gift of marriage -- marriage as God defines it -- is based upon the story of why God created us in the first place. The Creation Story in Genesis tells us that when God set about to create humans He purposed to create them "in His image." And from that story we learn at least 3 key things about God's gift of marriage:

First, we learn that God created humans to reflect His image "in stereo":

Genesis 1:26-27 NIV

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

**So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.**

To be made in God's image means that God made humans to be His representatives on earth. In the ancient near east the king was often referred to as being made in the divine image, and thus functioned as God's ruler on earth. What stands out in the biblical creation story is that instead of saying that a particular ruler is made in God's image, we are all defined as being made in God's image. As Gordon Wenham writes:

It appears that the OT has democratized this old idea. It affirms that not just a king, but every man and woman bears God's image and is his representative on earth. (Wenham, Genesis 1-15, p. 31)

The image of God can only exist if both sexes are present and functioning as God intended.

"Be fruitful and multiply!"

Second, we learn that a key part of our assignment as image bearers is to ourselves bring forth the next generation of God's image- bearers:

Genesis 1:28a NIV

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number...."

Obviously, this can only happen when the two sexes come together. Making babies requires an egg and a sperm. In the conception, birthing and raising of children we reflect the Creator. We are blessed to bring a new life into the world. We provide an ordered and safe environment in which a child can grow to maturity.

God's Rule:

Third, God's purpose is that He rule in His world through His earthly image-bearers.

Genesis 1:28b NIV

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

"Ruling" over the animals does not mean exploiting them or driving them to extinction. It means that we bring God's good order to His world. And the same applies to our families.

Each marriage is intended to be a little "kingdom" in which God's image-bearers establish God's presence and rule. Any parent knows that every day is a contest between order and chaos, good and evil. Children don't come into the world as perfect images of their Creator! Isn't funny how no one has to teach them to be selfish. No one has to give them a crash course in stretching the truth! Quite the opposite: we have to patiently and persistently "civilize" them.

Paul puts it this way:

Ephesians 6:4 NIV

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

God's Gift of Marriage

Plays and Penalties:

It's deep into the 4th quarter, with only seconds on the clock. Your team has mounted an heroic goal line stand. Now, the offense is facing 4th and goal, just 2 yards away from the end zone and a game winning touchdown.

The center snaps the ball to the quarterback, who sets up to pass. A defender breaks through the offensive line and just when he's about to sack the quarterback and win the game...an offensive lineman picks him up and throws him to the game. The quarterback throws the ball to a receiver in the end zone.

What's the next thing that everyone in the stadium -- not to mention the television audience -- does? Look to see if there's a flag! The outcome of the game hangs on whether or not there's a penalty for grabbing a defensive player and preventing him from making a play. If you really know and love the game of football, you'll have to go with the flag, even if it means your team loses the game.

God's command that we never commit adultery is a command that can only be truly understood and appreciated if we understand God's gift of marriage.

Adultery: the great destroyer

Remember those 3 things that we just learned about God's gift of marriage? Well, adultery destroys each of them:

- A person committing adultery violates a most sacred promise -- the opposite of reflecting God's faithfulness and truthfulness into this world.
- Adultery strikes right at the heart of that most intimate relationship between a man and a woman -- the one relationship which empowers us to "be fruitful." Sex now becomes a source of hurt and shame, anger and betrayal, instead of the celebration of love and perhaps the conceiving of a new life.
- Adultery introduces untold chaos into the lives of all it touches: marriages go up in flames, on both sides of the adulterous relationship; children are left in limbo. Instead of a couple bringing God's good and loving order to their world, they unleash unimaginable disorder. No one fully recovers in this life from the damage and destruction of adultery.

The Book of Proverbs puts it this way:

Proverbs 6:28-29, 32-35 The Message

**Can you walk barefoot on hot coals
and not get blisters?**

**It's the same when you have sex with your neighbor's wife:
Touch her and you'll pay for it. No excuses.**

**Adultery is a brainless act,
soul- destroying, self- destructive;
Expect a bloody nose, a black eye,
and a reputation ruined for good.**

**For jealousy detonates rage in a cheated husband;
wild for revenge, he won't make allowances.
Nothing you say or pay will make it all right;
neither bribes nor reason will satisfy him.**

Living in God's good gift:

Paul, in writing to a church made up largely of former pagans, reminded them that sexual sins, including adultery disqualified them from God's Kingdom. But then he says a wonderful thing:

1 Corinthians 6:11 NIV

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

"That is what some of you *were*." But no longer. Jesus came and died for our sins so that we could be forgiven for past failures and sins. That is what had happened for the Jesus followers in ancient Corinth. Their city was awash in pornography, prostitution and every other imaginable kind of sexual perversion. Many of them had been swept up in the sin around them. But *no longer*.

The same is true for you and me. Whatever our past, Jesus calls us into His future. He promises to wash us, make us holy and grant us full status in God's family. Not only that, but He also promises to empower us to forgive those who have sinned against us and our families.

God's goal: that we bear His image in a way that is pure and clear, especially when it comes to our sexuality. That is why He gave us the good gift of Marriage.