

7th Commandment

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[0 : 00] Let's turn then to the passage in Exodus chapter 20 where we have the Ten Commandments. We'll find the Seventh Commandment in verse 14, Exodus chapter 20 verse 14.

You shall not commit adultery. Now as I mentioned already in talking to the children, the Seventh Commandment is concerned with that particular human relationship, the love of husband for wife, the love of man for woman.

If we're thinking of it also in terms of the question of human rights, and we've noticed that the commandments have something to say about that, this is concerned with the right of my neighbor, of his wife, of his son and his daughter, to protection.

Protection in this case from the sexual advances of others. This is a commandment that forbids that kind of interference with others.

It is the protection that is around the human family as the basic unit of society. First of all, I'd like to notice with you that this commandment teaches the normality of marriage.

[1 : 17] This is something that we've got to stress because there are some parts of the scripture that certainly make allowances for marriage not always being the case.

In other words, there's exceptions made in the New Testament by our Lord himself and by the Apostle Paul concerning the rightness sometimes of the single life.

And we must bear that in mind when we talk about marriage this morning, that our Lord and the Apostle Paul make some exceptions. That for those who have the gift of the single life of celibacy, then that is for them.

But we have to recognize that that is not the norm. That is not the biblical pattern laid down in general for everyone.

Rather, the norm, the biblical pattern is married life. And I want to look particularly at those words that we find in Genesis with regard to this.

[2 : 25] Because there we have really the beginning of the whole question of the relationship between man and woman, the whole question of marriage. Genesis chapter 2.

The whole section begins at verse 18 with the words that the Lord God says, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

There we have the normality of marriage laid down. It is not good for man to be alone. And we would ask another question. When God did make a helper suitable for man, what did he make? Did he make another man? No. He made a woman. Did he make a monkey or a machine? No. He made a woman.

Did he make many women? No. He made one woman. I want to explore that with you because I think there we have the very heart of what God has to say to us concerning his will for married life and the normality of this one man, one woman relationship.

[3 : 39] First then, this teaches us that sexual relationship between man and woman is good and not isolation.

You see, God created Adam and it was not his whole will that was then fulfilled when he had made Adam. He did not look at Adam when he was made and say, this is all good, all very good.

As he says, when he has completed his creation of the human race and he looks at all that he has made and he says, behold, it is very good. At this point, it was not complete.

And in that sense, it was not very good. Adam himself, of course, was perfect, yet it was not the whole will of God that was yet represented for the human race.

So the first thing we notice is that God's will for the human race is not for individuals in isolation from each other. Now this has a great deal to say not only about the question of marriage, it is a great deal to say about the question of community and fellowship and so on, but we don't really

have time to go into all that this morning.

[4 : 57] It has particular relevance for this question of marriage and the married relationship. This is the norm. This is God's will as revealed to us, the normal pattern for human life, that the sexual relationship between man and woman is to be the pattern.

That is God's will. It is good. Now we've got to say this without in any way denigrating the calling of some people to a single life.

As is made quite clear by the Lord Jesus and by the Apostle Paul, some are called to that particular way of life. And perhaps for particular reasons, just as, say, traditionally those who have been soldiers or involved in war or a battle, they, of course, have very often mostly been people who have been single during that time.

Not always, of course, but traditionally in the history of the world that's been the case. For a particular reason, a particular time, celibacy is something important and relevant and right.

And so too, in the Christian church, sometimes it's been right for people to remain single for a particular purpose, a particular work of God, to be able to go to places or to do things that would be impossible with a wife and family.

[6 : 27] These things have got to be said by way of exceptions, but we must recognize they are exceptions. God's will is for the norm to be this married relationship.

It is not good for the man to be alone. Then secondly, we see that this teaches us that heterosexuality is good, homosexuality is not.

At this very basic level, at the creation of man, we see it being made abundantly manifest. The same thing is confirmed, of course, later on, very explicitly throughout the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament, that God's will is definitely not in any other kind of sexual relationship apart from the one man, one woman relationship.

When God created a helper suitable for man, he did not create another man. He created a woman. And in doing so, he confirmed that this was his will, this was his good revealed will for the human race.

That this was to be the very special pattern of the human relationship of love and not any other. So at this fundamental level of the creation of the human race, we have this stress.

[7 : 53] It's not good for the man to be alone, but yet the way in which he is to be fulfilled as a human being is that he should be fulfilled in relationship with his wife and his wife fulfilled in relationship with him.

So we can see the second point is stressed. Heterosexuality, the attraction between those that are unlike is right, and the attraction between those who are like is wrong.

Then thirdly, we can see that this teaches us that monogamy is good and polygamy is not. In other words, one man, one woman, not one man, many women, or one woman, many men.

The pattern God lays down is quite clear. He did not create many women for Adam, nor did he create, if we would turn it around the other way, many men for Eve.

He created one man, one woman. His revealed will imprinted in creation and his pattern of creation, that this is to be the norm. This is to be the way of complete fulfillment.

[9 : 05] At the end of the creation, he said, it is very good. Now, it's important to stress these things, because many people will try to justify all kinds of immoral behavior today by saying, but it feels good, or it feels right, or we couldn't believe that God would condemn us for this.

Well, if these things were correct, then God would have created a different world. He would have created the world differently, and said that that kind of world was very good.

But in fact, he created the world the way it is. He created us with this inbuilt desire for this relationship. One man, one woman, and we can only be fulfilled satisfactorily, perfectly, in this life, in that way.

So then, monogamy, as I mentioned, is good. Polygamy is wrong. And then, from polygamy, all the other trends in that same direction come.

Polygamy was, we might say, permitted in some cases in the Old Testament. It seemed to be the practice that was permitted, but it was never commanded by God, and never even allowed by God in his written word as something that was good.

[10 : 37] And as we look at that pattern, as it worked itself out in the lives of the patriarchs, people like Jacob, and as it worked itself out in the life of David and Solomon, we begin to see how that causes really the breakdown of the family and the breakdown of society.

But from that same principle, the idea that God perhaps should have created one man and many women, there come all the other problems in this area.

God's will is revealed here by saying that a permanent one man, one woman relationship is good, and not promiscuity, adultery, or divorce.

These things are not what God has said is good. What God has said is good is that the man should not be alone, and he should have a suitable helper for him. One man, one woman, permanent relationship.

As Jesus said, what God has joined together, let man not separate. So quite clearly, when we look at the biblical pattern in that way, we see what God's revealed will is for us.

[11 : 51] And so when we come on to deal with some of these sins later on, we begin to see how they fit in against the background of what God has said is right, what God has created.

And we begin to see how wrong and how disruptive they are. Well, that's the first point, the normality of marriage. It's not good for a man to be alone.

And then secondly, I want to look at the enjoyment of God's gift of sexuality within marriage. Again, quite clearly, in the biblical pattern, this is laid down as part of marriage, as I mentioned to the children.

It's not something terrible or something dirty. It is part of God's will for us as the human race. Not only as the means of procreation, as the means of raising up another generation of children.

That is part of it. And it's important, of course, is that for the human race. But that is not all of it. You look at what is said here concerning Adam and Eve in verse 24 of Genesis chapter 2.

[12 : 57] For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother, be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. And there is no mention there of the purpose of that or intention of that being only the procreation of children.

In fact, there's no mention of children whatsoever. Now, we know that the Bible emphasizes that children are important and blessed and so on. But this stresses to us that it is possible for a relationship to be fulfilled where there is one man, one woman.

And they fulfill all the conditions of what's laid down here as a pattern for the one man, one woman relationship. And for them to be fulfilled in doing that.

Now, that's, again, important to stress today. When it seems that in some regards, there is an hysterical desire for people to have children.

Hysterical, I say, because it seems to be that. When, in other cases, of course, there is the opposite extreme of a kind of hatred of children and not wanting to have children at all.

[14 : 09] Both extremes are wrong. Because God makes it clear that the relationship in itself can be and ought to be satisfying and strong. And, in fact, if it is satisfying and strong, then the basis that has been built for children who come into that family, come into that relationship, is much, much better.

It is placed here firmly by Genesis, placed firmly in the whole context of the whole personal relationship of marriage. We may sum up the three parts of this great institution that's laid down in the Bible under the headings, leave, cleave, and become one flesh.

That's the way it's in the traditional language. A man will leave his father and mother. There we have the legal or the social aspect of marriage. Whatever society we're in, marriage is recognized by a setting up of a new relationship that is recognized by the families concerned, or maybe at a wider level by society, or maybe in our modern setup, by the law of the land.

So that these things are recorded and written down. That is one aspect of marriage, a very important aspect. This is one of the things that makes marriage, marriage. Without that, without that legal, open recognition of what has taken place and setting up a new unit, there is really no marriage.

That would simply be people living in sin. There is this legal recognition. But then also, there's cleaving, or as it's translated here, they will be united.

[15 : 49] Man and his wife will be united. Now this idea is really summing up what the rest of the Bible calls the love of man for woman. Summed up by Paul in the New Testament by saying that the husband should love his wife.

There should be this mutual love for one another. Now of course, what is being commanded there in the New Testament is not what perhaps people normally think of as love.

That comes in the next stage, the third element of marriage. They shall become one flesh, what we may call sexual love. What is meant by the New Testament when it uses the word love is not the Greek word eros, which is our idea of erotic love, which also of course is a place in marriage. It is the word agape, which is the same word that is used of God's love for his people shown in Christ. The same word that's used for the Christian's love for his brother Christian. It is the word that emphasizes the love of someone not because you are attracted towards them. There are other words in the Greek language for that.

[17 : 04] Erotic love, eros. There is also Philadelphia, the love of the friend or the love of the brother, brotherly love, that kind of affection or love.

Loving someone because you're attracted towards them. But the word that is used for Christian love that is stronger and greater than any of these is the word agape, which really means the love of someone that is not necessarily attractive, but the love of someone that is shown because of your generosity of heart, that you love them and you show that love in action.

It is acting for that person's good. It is not just a feeling. It's not just an attraction, but it is really acting for their good, doing things for their good.

You think about it. What's God's love to us? It's not words, not thoughts, it's not feelings, but it is action in Jesus dying upon the cross.

God sending his son into this world. Jesus living, dying, rising again for us. That is love, the New Testament says. Love in action. And this is to be an element in the married relationship.

[18 : 31] This is to be an element in the man-woman relationship. It is not just legal, socially recognized, nor is it just erotic, but it is also to have this element of divine, God-like love.

The love for another that is seen in action. Love that doesn't really pay attention to whether you've been offended, whether you've been annoyed.

The love that forgives that. 1 Corinthians 13 really expounds the kind of love that is meant by that. And perhaps a great deal of our marriage problems, a great deal of our problems even in Christian marriages, would be overcome if there was more of this love, the Christ-like love, that Paul urges husbands to have for wives and wives to have for husbands.

But then, of course, also, this is a point we're making here. Sexual love, erotic love, has its part, its important part in the married relationship.

They will be united and they will become one flesh. And that, of course, is referring particularly and specifically to the sexual act.

[19 : 52] Not only that, it goes beyond that because they're coming together, they're being united as one implies also, maybe what you would call a more spiritual unity.

But fundamentally, the Bible is down to earth and physical and it talks about becoming one flesh. And there is, of course, as we know, a great mystery about this great attraction and great relationship.

But it is there as a fundamental unashamed part of the human relationship of marriage. And we ought to be as unashamed about this as the Bible is itself.

The Bible talks in these terms and so ought we. And we ought not to be ashamed of what God has called good. Good in the marriage relationship.

Well, then, also, we have to stress, in connection with this commandment, the positive quality of chastity.

[20 : 52] Now, there's a word that has probably just become a joke word. A word that has almost disappeared out of our English language, apart from perhaps it being used as a joke word.

But it is very much a New Testament word. Very much a biblical word. Because the idea is of purity. And really, what this word is saying to us, it's saying to us that both inside marriage, when you are married, and before marriage, one has to maintain a chaste, a pure attitude towards others.

In other words, it's saying that outside of a marriage relationship, apart from your relationship with your lifelong partner, your attitude towards every other person ought to be chaste or pure.

It ought not to be the attitude of, as Jesus says, looking at another person lustfully. That is the biblical standard that is required.

And this is perhaps one of the most difficult things that the Bible has to say to us concerning his whole question of the sexual relationship. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that the traditional understanding of these laws that the Pharisees and others had was completely wrong.

[22 : 22] They had, again, just an outward, a legalistic idea of it, so that it was all right as long as you didn't actually commit the act. Jesus was saying, a thought is there in your mind, that is sin.

Do you remember how, when some of the same kind of people brought before him the woman taken in adultery? You see, what they were so concerned about was the act, that she had actually committed the sinful act.

But Jesus, in pointing to them and saying, which one of you will throw the first stone? One who is without sin. When he said that, they all began to drift away because they recognized that they all themselves were guilty of exactly the same sin.

But maybe they hadn't done it in the outward act. Maybe they had. But maybe it was in the thought. So Jesus is there drawing our attention to the fact that this whole way of thinking and attitude of mind of the modern world in which we live is so wrong.

That is the attitude that is trying to get our minds all the time to treat people of the opposite sex merely as sex objects. Merely stressing their attractiveness in this particular way.

[23 : 39] Of course, we know that so much of modern life is full of that kind of attempt to get us to do that. Television, magazines, and so on. Jesus has said to us, we've got to be very rigorous in our application of what this command says.

Do not commit adultery. That means that we've got to also realize that it is how we think, how we look, how we act, as well as the actual deeds of commission, adultery, or any other of these sins.

So there's this positive quality of chastity. To seek to be pure in our relationship to others of the opposite sex apart from one that we're going to have a permanent, lifelong relationship with.

Now it's a high standard. Nobody pretends that it isn't a high standard. Does God's word ever pretend that its standards are easy? No. But they are God's standards.

And that is what we are to try to seek. To try to put in weakness in our lives. By his grace. And then finally, I just want to look briefly at the sins that are to be shunned.

[24 : 52] This commandment says, do not commit adultery. There is the very definite and necessary negative element in it. Do not commit adultery. Now of course, under this heading are included all kinds of sexual sins.

What we would call today, perhaps in more polite terms, things like extramarital and premarital sex. Also things like rape, homosexuality, prostitution, pornography.

All these different things are just covering different aspects of the breaking of this command. The turning away from the standard God has laid down of the one man, one woman, permanent relationship for human beings to be fulfilled in.

I want to just look briefly at some of the reasons the Bible kind of gives for these things being so wrong. Or maybe it should be apparent to us that this is against the initial plan and purpose of God as revealed in his creation of the human race.

But let's look at what happens when we apply some biblical thinking to this area. First of all, these sins are wrong because they, by and large, they separate what God has joined.

[26 : 17] Jesus said, what God has joined together, let man not separate. And I think there he was not only talking about the one man, one woman relationship that people shouldn't break that apart.

And that's a fundamental meaning. But he had just referred to the whole, complete, biblical view of marriage. The legal, the loving, and the sexual.

And these should not be broken apart. These should not be separated either, Jesus is saying. That, of course, is exactly what all those sins do. Those sins are concerned with arresting from its real and its proper place sexual love.

And trying to make erotic love something complete, fulfilling in itself only. And, of course, we know that that is an abject failure.

It's an abject failure, first of all, but simply because it is against the way we've been made. We've been made as complete whole human beings, not made up into little compartments that individually, these compartments may be satisfied on their own.

[27 : 31] We have to be satisfied as whole people. And so God has given us a plan for our whole fulfillment. So that there's the legal, there's the loving, and there's also the sexual.

And these sins are breaking that battle. They're trying to wrest one of these out of that battle. Even if they are including in what they are trying to do the idea of a love that is greater nearly than sexual love, they're still breaking God's pattern because they're excluding what is legal, what is recognized by society at large, what is recognized by the families involved.

It is still breaking that pattern. So then, in doing this, in separating what God has joined together, there is a tendency in all of these sins, of course, some of them much greater than in others, that there's a tendency to destroy a high regard for love.

A high regard for love, love not only human love, but divine love as well. Because remember, the biblical pattern is that this special love of man for woman is a type of the great love of Christ for his church.

And if we destroy, if we mar, if we break, if we separate this special love, we have also marred and broken a very great picture that the Bible uses of the love of Christ for his church.

[29 : 04] How can children growing up in such a society as ours, with broken homes, and all the stress and tension involved in many of these situations, how can they really grasp the faithful love of God, the faithful love of Christ in life?

It may be very difficult for them to understand that if they haven't seen very much of them. But we pray God that they indeed will come to know that love for themselves.

But as well as it being all because it separates what God has joined, it also in itself brings misery and trouble. And again, the Bible is quite straightforward about this.

It doesn't just say to us, look, keep God's commandments because God says so. It does say that. But that's not all it says.

It says keep God's commandments. Because if you don't, you're going against the pattern God has created. You're going to get into trouble.

[30 : 11] You're not going to fulfill yourself. You're going to be swimming against the sleeve all the time. And you're going to take the battery because of it. That's important to stress that.

Because the Bible also does it. Let's just take one practical example. Take the example of David. David, one of the greatest figures in Old Testament history.

One of the most faithful, one of the most profound men of God in the Old Testament. Yet as we know, as everybody knows, David sinned most grievously.

Committing adultery with Bathsheba. And Eric trying to cover it up. Even went to the extent of having her husband killed in a battle. Making sure that he was in the office of action so that he would be killed.

David then sinned grievously. And it's the part where God deals with that sin that is the very interesting part. When David repents of that sin, God forgives him his sin.

[31 : 19] That is the most profound and the most moving part of the Old Testament. Where David discovers this great forgiveness of God. Yet.

And we must say this yet. Yet. God and his sovereign group will did not prevent all the negative consequences of that sin flowing on.

In David's history and the history of his family. You read through that part of the Old Testament. Second Samuel. And you will see the running soul that developed in David's family.

Yes, it involved sexual sin. And yes, it involved violence. And it all proceeded from the fact that David himself had sinned in this regard.

And it would seem had lost the respect of his family. And again, his family was made up of the sons and daughters of different wives. And we see the mess that developed.

[32 : 26] The hostility to the extent of murder that developed in his family. So if you want to be convinced of what the Bible says regarding the goodness of God's commandments.

Particularly this commandment of not committing adultery. The goodness and appropriateness of it for human action today. Read that history of David.

And see what happens when it is neglected. And we don't even have to do that. We just need to read the papers. We just need to talk with our neighbors. We just need to be aware of the world in which we are living today.

And see what happens when people deliberately go against what God has commanded. And so we come finally, therefore, to the great need of repentance and forgiveness.

In this area, as in all of us, this commandment is not given to us as a commandment sort of to beat us over the head. And to make us feel terribly ashamed.

[33 : 29] It is a commandment given to us for life. Given for us how to live as God intended us to live. To live in the best way. But like every other of the commandments, it shows us that we ourselves are imperfect.

