

Tonight we are looking at the Sixth Commandment, which, of course, in Exodus chapter 20 is: "You shall not commit adultery." But if we want to understand what adultery is, we need to first understand what marriage is supposed to be. Because then by comparing the two of them together, we will have a clear picture of what God wants us to do in this commandment.

So what does the Bible have to say about Christian marriage, then? Christian marriage is the union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. And of course, I'm emphasizing Christian marriage here, because we're not talking about marriage generally speaking. We're not talking about what the world thinks about marriage. We're not talking about what unbelievers think about marriage. We're looking at what God has to say marriage is. And so Christian marriage, then, is something that God has created for his universe from the very beginning of creation.

Genesis chapter 2 says: "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." So marriage, then, first of all involves a separation. A man leaves his father and his mother. He is separated from them so that he can hold fast to his wife. And that word "holding fast" can also mean to cling to, or even to stick to one another. It's like God has glued them together. He has made them into something new, joined them together in one in marriage. And in this way, he has also made them to be one flesh.

And that one flesh is more than just a metaphor, Christians, because the first thing that God does when he joins together husband and wife is to join them together physically, to join them together sexually. Because God has created sex for marriage. That's where he intends it to be. And within marriage, sex is a good and a godly thing. This is exactly how he has created it. And it is the means by which children come into this world. So in a very real sense, marriage is the beginning of family. A man leaves father and mother to join together with his wife to begin his own family in the Lord. That's the first thing that we see about what marriage is.

But marriage is more than just sex. After all, if it was only about that, then why would we stay married? But marriage is also the union of a husband and wife for the good of each other. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5: "In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself." So Paul assumes here, then, that we love ourselves. And that's true. That's not just loving ourselves in a sinful sense, the way that we usually think about loving ourselves. This is loving ourselves in a natural and a good sense. I take care of myself. I don't want to hurt myself. I'm not going to put myself into danger unless I have a very good reason for doing so. I nourish my body. I take care of it. I cherish it, because it is me. And that's a good thing. This is what God has created us to be. But marriage, then, is something more, because in this way God calls us to care for the other in the same way that we care for ourselves. Think about that. If I don't want myself to get hurt, I don't want them to get hurt either. If I'm not going to put myself into danger, I don't want them to be in danger, either. If I cherish myself, if I nourish my own body, I will cherish and nourish them as well. Marriage means that I love my spouse in the same way that I love myself. And that is a closeness and a union that I have with no one else, not even my own children. It is that close and that special, that God has created. So it's clearly more than just a physical union with one another.

But marriage is more than this still, Christians, because marriage is also something which helps us spiritually. Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, our reading for tonight: "But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own

husband." So in other words, marriage becomes a way to exercise self-control. It is a God-given way to control my impulses and to control my urges. Because, after all, God has created us to be sexual creatures. That's part of his creation. It is a good thing. But because of sin, those desires often get out of control. And so I need some way of keeping them reined in. I need some way of keeping them under control. And that's one of the purposes of marriage: to give me that self-control. So in this way, then, God gives marriage as a way of helping us spiritually. After all, Paul says in Galatians chapter 5 that self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit. So marriage, then, is one of the ways in which God gives us his Holy Spirit, so that we are strengthened and help one another as we head towards heaven. So all of this shows, then, that marriage is a good thing from God, something that we must cherish, something that we must uphold as holy in the world.

But with this picture of marriage in mind, then, it's very easy for us to understand what adultery is. Adultery is anything which goes against this union, whatever form it may take. You could say that adultery is a fake marriage. It is a counterfeit union, taking something that belongs to marriage and using it in a way that it was never intended by God to be used. And when we do this, it hurts or even breaks the union that God has created.

So adultery, in the first place, then, happens when we join ourselves sexually to someone who is not our spouse. And of course, this is the way that we usually think about adultery, isn't it? We usually think about it in terms of cheating or having a mistress or whatever the case may be. And that's certainly included under this commandment. But it also includes other things too. What the world calls an open marriage, for example, where you agree to be unfaithful to one another. Just because you agree to it doesn't make it right. Just because you consent to it doesn't mean that it's somehow okay, because you're still going against that union which God has created. This would also include sex before marriage as something contrary to his will, even if the world approves of it pretty much across the board today. It doesn't matter if you love each other. It doesn't matter if you're engaged, or whatever excuse we might make. It is taking what belongs to marriage and using it for our own pleasures, for our own purposes. And when we do that, we are hurting the good purposes of God. And it's not a coincidence that those who do that find it a lot harder to stay married later. Because God created this for marriage, and anything else, any other way that we use it, breaks what God created for good.

But just as marriage is not only about sex, so also adultery happens in other ways too. Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." So impure thoughts break this commandment. Thinking about someone sexually or fantasizing about them or whatever it may be. This especially includes pornography, even though that has become very common these days through the Internet. Our desires, our thoughts, those kinds of thoughts should be directed towards our spouse alone. Because even if they're just thoughts, even if nothing comes of it, it's still thinking about another person in that way, and it hurts what God has joined together as husband and wife.

Jesus also calls divorce adultery in the same passage. He says in Matthew chapter 5 again: "But I say to you 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." Because God has joined husband and wife together. Remember how I said they're stuck together? It's like

they been glued to one another? Divorce is breaking that apart. It's breaking what God intended to be lifelong. Yes, it's permitted in cases of sexual immorality, because in that case the union has already been broken. But God wants marriage to be something that goes on for life. But in all of these cases, Jesus is clear. Adultery dissolves what God created. It tears asunder what he has joined together.

And I know that none of this is easy to talk about, nor is it easy to hear, especially in these days. But it is important that we talk about adultery clearly, because it is a dangerous sin. Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 6: "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body." So in other words, adultery does not just hurt the soul, although it certainly does that too. Adultery also hurts the body. It corrupts our minds in a way that few other sins do. Let me use the example of pornography to show you what I mean here. Porn has been proven to rewire our brains, to change the way that we think just by watching it. And what it does is it creates this unnatural amount of pleasure within us, not unlike a drug addiction, to be quite honest. And just like drugs, people who use it find it difficult to reach that same high that they once felt. They find it difficult to feel the same pleasure over and over again. And so they keep coming back to it more and more and more, trying to find it again. And they even turn to increasingly depraved things as a way of trying to find it, as a way of trying to excite themselves. But in this way, they lose something of themselves in the process, Christians. They are no longer able to relate to people normally. Their relationships suffer. Their ability to think clearly or even to feel pleasure clearly suffers because of it. It is a sin which is very difficult to quit, because it reprograms the mind to do it more and more. But adultery in all of its forms, Christians, is the same way. It is a sin against the body and for that reason affects us like no other sin. And so it's something that we do need to take very seriously. As Paul says, "Flee from sexual immorality!"

But what if I have committed adultery? What if I have fallen into one of these sins? Yeah, it might've been a while ago. Maybe it was a very long time ago that I did it, but I can't seem to get away from it. I can't seem to get over it. Is there hope for me? Can I ever be free of this sin? Can I ever find forgiveness for what I have done? Yes. There is forgiveness for you in Jesus Christ. Because remember what Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, in John chapter 8: "Jesus stood up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, sin no more.'" So go and sin no more. Christ has come to set you free from your sins, including adultery. God gives you a new beginning through the blood of Jesus Christ his Son. If you have been divorced, there is forgiveness through the blood of Jesus. If you are addicted to porn, there is the power to stop and to turn away from it through the blood of Jesus. If you have lustful and impure thoughts, there is purity in the blood of Jesus. Call on his name today, and you will find freedom and forgiveness in his name. Because Jesus Christ is willing to wash you clean and make you white through his blood today.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, purify us from all our sins so that we may be pure as you are pure. Teach us how to live holy lives through the gift of your Spirit, so that we may be self-controlled in all things. Lead husbands and wives to love and care for each other, so that they may glorify you in all that they say and do. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.