

OVERVIEW

The seventh of the original “Ten Commandments” says we are to shun adultery. This commandment had a specific original meaning. But Jesus reinterpreted all the commandments in ways and made them central to our lives today. Just so, the original application was to demand physical faithfulness of wives in marriage and spiritual exclusion of all gods except true God. Jesus extended the application to mental faithfulness of marriage partners and exclusion of acts and beliefs contrary to God.

KEY INSTRUCTIONS

Parents should lead children with faith and compassion. Adult children must rely on faith and compassion when helping aging parents. Engaging in and trusting in torture is committing spiritual adultery.

COMMANDMENT VII - “Water is Not Your Friend”

We have come to the 7th commandment, “You must not commit adultery.”

This is the commandment that made me think about whether children will be attending the service. I’ve done my best to avoid questionable language.

As with the other commandments, Jesus took its original meaning and then made a quantum leap in applying it to life now. He was a world-changer.

The original meaning of adultery is the one we know best. It is for someone else to have sex with a married or engaged woman.

Note this commandment did not originally apply to men. Sex, out of wedlock, between a married man and an unmarried woman was not adultery. It was bad but did not rise to commandment status. We have to wait for Jesus to even up the gender expectations.

Adultery was a very serious offence. Leviticus 20:10 states, **“If a man commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, both the man and the woman who have committed adultery must be put to death.”**

The best known adultery story is that of King David. He took Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers, who was away on a campaign. When she became pregnant and

his adultery could not be hidden, he had the soldier killed. As king, none of his subjects was going to try to punish him or avenge the innocent husband. But David suffered punishment, nevertheless. The child of adultery died and David's family was filled with strife and rebellion ever after.

From very early on, adultery had a second meaning. In our first scripture reading, the prophet Jeremiah accused the entire nation of Israel of committing adultery. What was that all about?

Here is a quote from Isaiah 57:7, ***“You [Israelites] have committed adultery on every high mountain. There you have worshiped idols and have been unfaithful to me.”***

This was all about exclusive commitment. Wanting exclusive commitment is easy to understand in married life.

How would you feel if during your marriage vows your spouse-to-be said, “I will be faithful to you almost all of the time? Except when I am away on a business trip.” Or “Except when my old boy friend gets out of prison.” The marriage ceremony would probably stop right there. How can you trust someone with divided loyalty?

This was God's position as well. Many Israelites wanted to worship God on holy days but also to worship the rain god, Baal, before planting their summer crop seeds. God would have none of this and so the word “adultery” was used for breaking exclusive relationship with God as well as a spouse.

Then Jesus came and re-interpreted the 7th Commandment.

As we read in the second scripture, he said adultery could happen in a person's mind even if there was no physical act. He went on to say that we had to get mental adultery out of our minds, even if it was as hard as giving up a hand or a foot.

I don't know if this has ever happened in real life, but it happens in movies. Someone is handcuffed to a post near a time bomb and their only way to escape is to cut off their own hand. It is a chilling plot device. And it makes the point. Jesus says, even if it is as difficult as sacrificing a hand, we must cut off our desire for a married person to whom we are not married.

Adultery in the mind does not refer to flash thoughts; it refers to repetitive and unrestrained desire, to day dreaming, to fanaticizing, and to preoccupation.

Why did Jesus extend the commandment against adultery from deed to thought?

It is because Jesus cared about our hearts, our inner feelings and thoughts. Intimacy is God's plan for partners in marriage. God wants marriages to reflect the vulnerability, and nurturing, and love that He offers us. Actually, God wants this commitment in all positive relationships, within families and among neighbors. As in love your neighbor as yourself. This doesn't happen when one of the partners is thinking about relationship with someone else.

So Jesus changed our approach to the seventh commandment from demanding only physical faithfulness to one demanding mental faithfulness. Adultery in the mind changes a person's heart and makes them unable to sustain intimacy with the one to whom they are committed.

This is also true in our relationship with God. Jesus explained that the path to relationship with God requires belief and exclusive commitment of our hearts as well as physical actions. Just as we preach that faith has to show in actions, Jesus says that inner faith makes our actions valid, whether in marriage or worship.

Let me suggest two very modern examples. One is based primarily on relationship in marriage and one on relationship with God.

Consider the intimacy that Jesus wants between married people. He wants two hearts as well as two fleshs to become one. What mental preoccupations block true intimacy? There is a long list; I'll mention a few. See if you feel any apply to you.

If there is an undying anger about the past, an unwillingness to admit error and ask forgiveness, an inability to forgive, a personal desire like a job or hobby that leaves out a spouse without compensation, an unwillingness to offer vulnerability, an non-negotiated demand for specific behavior (this is what I expect of you, period), demeaning or abusive treatment, anything that prevents the merging of two hearts into one, this is a stumbling block in the marriage. This is a form of adultery, putting something else between you and the true relationship you promised to have when agreeing to marry. It doesn't have to be an outside physical relationship or even involve another specific person to be adulterous.

I'm not saying this to create guilt. A perfect relationship is never achievable in this life. I'm saying this to encourage each of us to think about our own marriage and ask how we can make it more intimate, and then pray for the strength for both partners to cut off and throw aside whatever is preventing their intimacy. The goal is for our hearts to merge.

Now I'd like to offer a second example that relates directly to our ability to have an exclusive intimate relationship with God. You may not all agree with this example, but I have to preach my belief.

Over the past several years, I have had a number of conversations with Zane Stauffer. Zane is one who reads the Bible in his spare time. He has read through the Bible at least three times and is reading it again now. Go, Zane!

Zane has observed, especially in the Old Testament, there are descriptions of bad behavior and fighting and killing. Again and again Israel's neighbors invaded Israel and Israel invaded its neighbors. Whoever won stole everything from the losers they could carry and made any captives into slaves.

That is Israel versus outside nations. Within Israel there are accounts of battles for power, extermination of rival families, civil war, rebellions of children against parents, and kings and queens murdering rival members of their own families. If it's bad and can be done, it seems the Israelites did it. And so did everyone else. Reading about this mayhem can wear you out. Again, cheers to Zane for persisting in order to find the pearls of faith and goodness among the sometimes awful things that went on.

But, among all the bad things the Israelite's did, there is something they did not do. Through their long history in a rough and tumble, lawless world, through the invasions and rebellions and plundering and enslavement, there is something bad that is missing. Something the Israelites would not do. Do you know what it is?

The Israelites did not torture. Though they celebrated their victories and mourned their defeats, they did not torture their captives. Gentiles were the torturers. Remember the fiery furnace in Babylon and the whipping and crucifixion of Jesus by Romans? In the Judeo-Christian tradition, there was no resort to torture. The prophets never reported a message from God to torture anyone. Torture by Christians had to wait for the dark part of the middle ages; for example, the Catholic Church's inquisition. And this dark period has been repudiated by Catholics and Protestants alike in our modern world.

Yet today, we are having a debate in our nation about whether to allow forms of torture of captives. Now, what are called "enhanced interrogation techniques", waterboarding, sleep deprivation, and ridiculing a person when naked are not designed to cause physical death. But they cross a boundary out of the Jewish and Christian tradition described in the Bible and taught by Jesus.

Here is my point. There may be some rare special occasion for which God would forgive torture. But, if it exists it is rare. If we accept torture as common practice, we are hardening our hearts and focusing on actions and methods that dispute the teachings of Jesus. This is spiritual adultery. This is dividing our loyalty to Jesus. We are a Christian majority nation. We cannot become like our

enemies. Reliance on torture would make us adulterers in the eyes of God. This will affect our souls, badly. That is my belief.

Jesus changed the world. He extended the rules in the Jewish laws in the direction of compassion. Whether you agree or not with my specific examples, recognize that Jesus extended the prohibition against adultery from a rule about behavior into a teaching about the condition of our hearts. All the persons of our Triune God want us to be “all in”, exclusively committed to God. Our spouses want that too. Let’s try. Thanks be to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.