



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Holy Matrimony

Reverend Scott Johnson | November 30, 2025 | Exodus 20:14

Old Testament Reading

The Old Testament reading is Exodus chapter 20, verse 14. So just one short verse, but this will be our sermon text for this morning.

Exodus 20:14, and this is the inerrant and infallible word of God. You shall not commit adultery.

New Testament Reading

And let's turn to the New Testament for our New Testament reading from Matthew chapter 5, verses 27 through 30. Matthew 5:27 through 30. 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. 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. 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."

You can turn back to Exodus 20. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

The 7th Commandment

The commandment that we are looking at this morning may be of all the 10 Commandments the one that presents for us the most challenges as Christians today. And that's true not only because of the way in which the Commandments applies to our lives personally, but perhaps even more than that, or at least another challenge equal to that, is that the more that we affirm and embrace all that this commandment teaches, the more that we will find ourselves at odds with the culture and the world around us.

There's no biblical teaching that our increasingly pagan and secular society finds more disagreeable and more objectionable than the Bible's teaching on sexual morality, sexual ethics. And one question that confronts us as Christians today is when it comes to matters of sexuality, will we allow the word of God to inform us of what is right and wrong in this area, or will we be conformed to the prevailing, the dominant views of our society?

As a Christian, are you prepared to take your stand on the word of God and to believe, to accept, to embrace what it teaches on matters of sexuality, no matter how unpopular, no matter how difficult that teaching may be? Are you willing for the sake of the truth of God's word to be considered in the eyes of the unbelieving world, not just old fashioned and prude because you adhere to what the Bible says about sexuality, but in the eyes of the world increasingly, are you willing to be seen as even ignorant, bigoted, hateful, even an enemy of the public good?

A faithful stand on the seventh commandment puts us in a place where we will be the object of the scorn and of the hostility of the world around us. The very things that we affirm about sexuality in matters of marriage and sex and so on, the very things that we affirm to be good and right, those are the things that the world affirms and declares to be evil and wrong and vice versa.

And this turning upside down of right and wrong, according to the scriptures, this is characteristic of the world in which we live, a world that has fallen from the grace of God, a world under the curse of sin. Isaiah says in chapter 5, verse 20, that there are those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. And so the place that we start with as we consider the seventh commandment is when it comes to our understanding of marriage and sexuality, how do we know what is truly good and sweet and light? Well, we know because of what the word of God

declares to us. And this is where we must take our stand, no matter how contrary it may be to the spirit of the age in which we live.

And with all that in mind, as we approach the Seventh Commandment, there are a couple of ways that we could approach this commandment. One way, which is perfectly legitimate, and we'll touch on it, is that we can see it as a command for personal purity and chastity in sexual matters. And of course, that's what this command does refer to. This commandment forbids any kind of sexual immorality in thought and word and deed.

The 7th Commandment Protects and Preserves Marriage

But another way to consider or to understand the seventh commandment is not to consider just what it forbids, but more positively, what does this commandment seek to protect and preserve? And the answer to that is, is that this commandment affirms and seeks to protect the sacred institution of marriage. The commandment says, "You shall not commit adultery." And the most straightforward reading of that is that this commandment is forbidding that a husband or a wife have sexual relations with someone other than their spouse. That's because there is a sacred union between a husband and a wife. And the act of adultery destroys that bond, that union.

And so the first truth that we'll consider today as we look at the seventh commandment is the truth that God has given it to us in order to protect, to preserve, to uphold this institution, this relationship that God has given to us for good, that is the marriage relationship, the marriage union, the union between a husband and a wife. So that will be our first truth that we'll consider today, that the Seventh Commandment preserves and protects the marriage union.

Now, the world at large still upholds, at least on the surface, the ideal of lifelong marriage. That's still considered something that most people would consider to be good. However, as we all know, as a society, in reality, in practice, we are not really that committed to that ideal at all. Most of you probably know that we happen to live in the city that was once known as the divorce capital of the world. If you wanted to divorce your spouse, all you had to do was move here to Reno, live here for six weeks, and become a resident. And then after six weeks, you could file for a divorce, which would be legally binding in the rest of the country.

And the reason why Reno lost its claim to fame as the divorce capital of the world is only because the rest of the country eventually caught up with Reno. And so once the entire country

allowed for quick and easy divorces, Reno was no longer the special place to come to. But that's where we are today. It's indicative of, as a society, how lightly we take marriage and how lightly we take divorce. And so we fail to uphold the ideal of lifelong marriage, but we also fail to uphold the ideal of faithfulness in marriage. Again, this is more in practice than it is on the surface in words.

If you ask people, is adultery a good thing? Nobody's going to say yes. Everyone's going to affirm that adultery is wrong. A husband, a wife should not be having an affair with others, but our actions speak louder than our words. Several years ago, there was a website devoted to facilitating adulterous relationships between married men and women. The website was called Ashley Madison and its slogan was, "Life is short, have an affair." And we might think that this is a website out there on the dark edges of the internet, but it wasn't. It was extremely popular for what I saw.

Apparently 37 million people had an account with this website. And when all of the names of the people who signed up on the website were leaked, it turns out that there was at least one, perhaps more prominent Christian leaders who had an account with that website. And so no matter how much we may as a society give lip service to the ideals of marriage and faithfulness, we don't really take marriage and adultery all that seriously. We certainly don't take marriage and adultery as seriously as God does.

In the book of Job, we read this. "If my heart has been enticed toward a woman and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door, that would be a heinous crime. That would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges." And so adultery, according to the scriptures is called a heinous crime. And it was a heinous crime in the Old Testament. The penalty for the people of Israel, for someone who was caught in adultery, it was capital punishment. That person was put to death.

Now, of course, in the New Testament age, we are not called to put adulterers to death, we're not called to put anybody to death, but nevertheless, in his teaching, our Lord Jesus did not lighten or lessen one bit the gravity and the seriousness with which the Old Testament dealt with marriage. In fact, Jesus affirmed just how absolutely sacred the marriage bond was intended to be by God.

Divorce

In his days, the Jews had an ongoing debate and argument among themselves over what constituted a just cause for divorce. And there was one party, one school of thought, that had a very permissive view of divorce. In fact, it was not unlike our own view of divorce today, and that was a man may divorce his wife for virtually any reason whatsoever, even if he did not like her cooking, that was just grounds to seek a divorce. And in response to that, Jesus said this, he says in Matthew chapter 19, verse 9, "I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery."

And so according to Jesus, according to our Lord, if a man divorces his wife for anything less than unfaithfulness on her part, and then he gets remarried, he is guilty of adultery. And he is guilty of adultery because he is supposed to have remained married to his first wife. He had entered into a lifelong commitment with her. He had made a sacred covenant with her. And so in a sense, in God's eyes, by divorcing and remarrying unjustly, he was guilty of committing the sin of adultery.

Now, there is way more that we can say about marriage and divorce in the Bible's teaching about these subjects, depending on the circumstances. These can be very, very difficult subjects that require a tremendous amount of biblical and pastoral wisdom. And we do have to read the words of Jesus in the light of other biblical teaching as well. However, the fundamental point that Jesus was making is very clear, and it's absolutely foundational for understanding God's will for marriage, and that is that God meant marriage to be a sacred, permanent bond, a lifelong union, a bond that is inviolable, unbreakable.

And so Jesus put it this way, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." And so according to God's design, the marriage between a husband and a wife was not to be broken up. It was to be a lifelong union that was not to be torn asunder. And why is this marriage bond so important? Well, first of all, it's important because God deems it important and anything that God values has infinite value in itself, but it's also important because marriage is foundational and necessary for any semblance of a functioning society. It is the most basic building block of human society. Before there were even parents and children, there was a husband and a wife. Before there was a community or government or human society, God created the institution of marriage. And so any sort of functioning society that hopes to have some measure of order and peace will be built upon the stability of marriage. And so if you want

to destroy society, destroy the institution of marriage. And in large part, we can say that we have seen that happen in our own society. We see all around us the wreckage, the destruction of broken marriages, broken homes, broken lives as a result.

Well, marriage is also important because it is a gift of God. God has created marriage. He has given us marriage for a good, to be a source of blessing, joy, and happiness. Those who enter into marriage and seek to honor God in it, marriage is meant to be, for them, a source of great happiness. Proverbs 5:18 says, "Rejoice in the wife of your youth." And since marriage is something that is so important, so good for human flourishing, is it any wonder then that when marriages break up, the result is always grief and sorrow, wives suffer, husbands suffer, children suffer, society suffers, when the marriage bond is treated as anything less than a sacred union to be kept for life.

The Institution of Marriage

And so, with all that in view then, when God says, "You shall not commit adultery," He is looking out for our good. He is protecting and preserving that which brings us blessing and good. He was protecting the sacred institution of marriage. And let's take a closer look at this institution that God created to be a blessing. As you know, when God created all things on the sixth day, He created Adam. And we learn then in Genesis 2 that Adam, initially, he was all alone on the earth. He had the animals, of course, but there was no human companion for Adam.

And when you read through the Genesis account, chapter 1, every time God creates something, or almost every time he creates something, he says that it is good. But then when he looked at Adam, he saw that there was something that was not good, and that is that Adam was alone. Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a helper fit for him." And so God went on to make Eve out of a rib from Adam, and Eve was Adam's wife. And so Genesis 2:24 says, "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." And so here is the first marriage.

It was God who officiated this first marriage between the first man, the first woman, between Adam and Eve. And because this is God's marriage, because this is God's institution, because this is the very first marriage, it is normative for every other marriage that is to come. And so what that means, first of all, is that marriage is between one man and one woman. Now it's true, when we read on in the Bible, there are many, many instances of polygamy, men having more

than one wife, but that was man's invention, not God's. God may have tolerated it, but he certainly did not approve it and bless it as his design for marriage.

And so marriage is between one man, one woman, and also marriage is between one man and one woman. According to God's design for marriage, according to marriage as God created it, according to marriage as God defines it, it is impossible that a man can be married to a man or a woman to a woman. And so in the eyes of God, there is no such thing as a same-sex marriage. It simply does not exist. Marriage is between one man and one woman.

And God's design for marriage is that it is the one and only relationship in which a man and a woman may have sexual relations. Genesis 2:24, again, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh." Now that phrase one flesh, it has a broader meaning. It does encompass the whole comprehensive union of a husband and wife sharing their lives together, becoming one in life together. But primarily in the first place, what that term refers to is the actual physical or sexual union between a husband and a wife. And so sexual relations between a husband and a wife are good. They are a gift that is given to us by God along with marriage, as part of marriage.

Unfortunately, in the history of the church, there have been some perhaps well-meaning but misguided theologians and Christian teachers who have taught that there is something wrong or with sexual relations between a husband and a wife, it's a necessary evil, that kind of thing, but not according to the scripture. There is nothing impure or wrong about sexual relations between a husband and a wife. Again, that is an aspect of marriage that is a gift, that is a blessing from God.

And what all of that means is this, is that God never intended, it was never part of God's purpose and design that there should be sexual relations between two people apart from the bonds of the marriage covenant. God created marriage so that sexual relations and marriage go hand in hand. These are two things that God hath joined together, but in our sin we have torn them asunder. And that is really the essence of sexual sin. It is isolating sexual activity from the marriage covenant, the marriage bond in which that is supposed to take place according to God.

Now, of course, there is far more to marriage than the physical relations that a husband and a wife have. That one flesh relationship means that a husband and a wife, they share their lives together. They are partners together. They live together. They love one another. They give themselves to one another. They make sacrifices for one another. And so God's ideal for

marriage is a covenant relationship, that is a relationship founded on a promise of lifelong fidelity, a covenant relationship in which each person gives himself and herself to the other in mutual love and service, and that includes giving their bodies to one another.

Adultery

And with that in mind then, with that in view, we can see that anything of a sexual nature that is contrary to or that disrupts or destroys the marriage union between a husband and a wife, anything that goes against God's design for marriage is condemned by the seventh commandment. And so on the surface, the seventh commandment, the first thing to say is that it condemns adultery. Because adultery is a violation of the marriage covenant, the Old Testament had much harsher penalties for adulterers than it had for those who had sexual relations outside of marriage. As I said earlier, the Old Testament penalty for adultery was death.

What is particularly wicked about adultery is that it involves breaking a promise. A man promises to be faithful to his wife. A wife promises to be faithful to her husband. So when one commits adultery, he or she becomes a traitor, a betrayer. He or she has committed an act of treason. And so actual adultery destroys the marriage bond.

Sexual Immorality

But the seventh commandment also forbids other kinds of sexual sins because they also are contrary to or contradict God's design for marriage. And one such sin would be what the older Bible translations call fornication and what the new Bible translations or the newer ones call sexual immorality. Both of these terms, fornication, sexual immorality, these are translations of a word in Greek that refers to any sort of sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage. And so what that means is, is that no matter how committed an unmarried couple may be to one another, no matter how much they may be in love with one another, no matter even if they are engaged with one another, sexual relations outside of marriage is sin. It is called sexual immorality. It is stealing the gift that God intends to give us only in that covenant bond of marriage.

And for that reason, though sex outside of marriage does not directly destroy the marriage union like adultery does, nevertheless, it is an attack on marriage. It weakens and diminishes the meaning of marriage. And I have to say, just based on my experience as a pastor, that there are

many, many young Christian people who have been taken in by the world's false ideas and false ways of understanding sexual relations or sex. The world says things like, it is just natural, it is just a biological impulse that everybody has, and it's not only unhealthy for you to suppress that, but it's wrong for you to suppress that. If you're in love with your boyfriend or girlfriend, if you're both consenting, then it's fine to have sex together. And likewise, it's perfectly normal, it's perfectly acceptable to live together before you get married, because how else will you know if you're compatible and really ready to be married? And we hear these things. We hear them all the time. Not only explicitly, but it's the message that we receive from shows and from movies and so on. This is just the way that our society looks at sexual relations. And it all sounds very plausible.

And if we're honest with ourselves, we want to believe these things to be true. But I want to say to the young people, don't listen to the world. Listen to the word of God. Save yourself for marriage. Save yourself for marriage, not just for the sake of your purity now, but also for the sake of your future marriage. Your future marriage will be on a much stronger footing the more faithful you are today, before you get married, to keep God's will for you, that is to abstain from sexual relations.

Now the term sexual immorality, though it does primarily refer to sexual relations between a man and a woman outside of marriage, what we call fornication, it also encompasses every other kind of sexual sin that the Bible either explicitly or implicitly condemns. And so the seventh commandment also condemns by implication, homosexuality, prostitution, incest, pedophilia, and the list goes on and on. These are all sins that are forbidden by the seventh Commandments. And like all commandments, the seventh commandment is spiritual. That means that it reaches down into our hearts. It applies to the thoughts of our minds, to the inclinations of our hearts, to the desires that arise from within us.

Spiritual Implications of Sexual Immorality

Jesus showed us just how deeply the seventh commandment reaches into our hearts. We heard his teaching from 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." And so if you are married and you lust after another person in your heart, you have been unfaithful to your wife or your husband according to the

teaching of our Lord Jesus. And so the challenge to preserve the integrity of your marriage, the strength of your marriage, begins in the heart. It really begins with the eyes.

Remember how David's adultery with Bathsheba began. In 1 Samuel chapter 11, we read that David was walking on the roof of the king's house and he saw from the roof a woman bathing and the woman was very beautiful. David first saw Bathsheba and then in his heart, he lusted after her. And then, of course, as we all know, after that, David committed the act of adultery with her. David sinned by looking and lusting. And the essence of lust is that it is self-centered. Lust is self-centered. It is an act of self-love. Another person becomes merely an object to gratify my desires, but the essence of marriage is other-centered. God gave you your sexuality to be used as a gift to another, that is to the man or to the woman to whom you will be married to or are married to, the one to whom you have committed your life to.

And of course, today, as we all know, so tragically, the sin of lust is compounded by the fact that we live in a time in which pornography is absolutely rampant. It is so easily accessible online. We can be anonymous. It is affordable. And the statistics of how many men and women regularly view pornography are not only staggering, but dismaying. According to one study, 44% of all men and 11% of all women said they viewed pornography in the last month. And so nearly half of the entire male population we can assume, perhaps on somewhat of a regular basis, or even recently, have viewed pornography. Percentage is less for women, of course, but still, 10%, 11%, that's an incredible amount. And from what I could tell from other studies, the percentages of practicing Christians who say that they have viewed pornography regularly, or use it regularly, or viewed it recently, is just a fraction less than the general population. I think it's fair to say, especially when it comes to men, that pornography is an epidemic, not only in our world today, but in the church today.

And the danger of pornography is not just that it makes you impure in heart and thought, but the regular use of pornography actually rewires your brain. It actually deforms your character. It makes you less able to give yourself an intimacy and self-sacrificial love to a spouse in marriage. Those who are regular users of pornography often find that they are incapable of engaging in an actual relationship with a living human person.

And so God gave us the seventh commandment to promote and preserve and protect marriage. And like every commandment that God has given us, we can only begin to keep it by the grace of God. But just as a matter of practical counsel, one thing that you must do to have any hope of

keeping this commandment is to put to death sexual sin before it grows out of control, to nip it in the bud, to kill it while it is still small. Because sexual sin always starts small and it grows from there.

David did not wake up one morning and say, "I think I will have an adulterous affair." But he was going about his business. He saw Bathsheba bathing. He looked again. He lusted after her. And if he had confided to a friend at that point, if he had said to a friend, "I have to confess to you a sin. I saw the wife of Uriah bathing. I had lust in my heart for her." If he had done that, he wouldn't have taken the next step that he did.

The apostle Paul says, "Flee from sexual immorality." Run from it, flee from it. Just like Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife. You cannot play with fire without getting burned. And one way to fight against the sin, one way to begin to kill it while it is still small is to bring it out into the open. All sin loves secrecy and darkness. But this sin, sexual sin, thrives particularly when it is kept secret. And so if you struggle with some kind of sexual sin, find a trusted Christian friend, confess your sin, ask for prayer, have him or her help you to be accountable. Men, if pornography is a problem for you, talk to someone you know and trust about it. You can talk to me about it, but don't keep it hidden, because hidden sexual sin only grows stronger.

There's a positive side to this commandment as well. I'll touch on this briefly, but for those of you who are married, the positive side of this commandment is that husbands and wives, you are to commit yourselves to one another, to love one another, to work and pray for the growth of your marriage relationship, to tend to one another, to care for one another emotionally, physically, and so the seventh commandment is meant to protect the marriage union between a man and a woman.

The Union Between Christ and the Church

That's the first truth. But there's also another union that this commandment is meant to protect, and that is the union between a Christian and Christ. That's the second truth that we'll take from this commandment this morning, that the commandment protects the union between Christ and the Christian. The Bible teaches us that there is an inseparable connection between how we conduct ourselves sexually and our spiritual condition.

At the evening service, we've been going through 1 Corinthians, and we know from what we've read so far that in that congregation, there were problems with sexual immorality. We could probably practically say that for every congregation since then, that there have been problems with that, but it was a serious problem in the Corinthian church. And when Paul addresses this issue with them, he reminds the Corinthians of what it meant that they were Christians, that they belong to Jesus Christ. And so let me read 1 Corinthians 6, verses 15 through 18. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For as it is written, the two will become one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body."

Now, there is some challenge in understanding exactly what is meant by some of these things that the Apostle Paul says here, but one thing that he does indicate that seems to be clear is that sexual immorality strikes at the very heart of who we are as Christians. And that's because as a Christian, you are united with the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as a husband and wife are united as one in marriage, so as you belong to Jesus by faith, you are bound to him, you are united with him. There's a sense in which you are one with him. He is your bridegroom, you are his bride. And for this reason, when you as a Christian sin, by joining yourself sexually with someone other than your spouse, you violate that spiritual union that you have with Christ himself. You disrupt, you break up that communion that you have with God the Father through Jesus Christ. Sexual sin strikes at the very heart of that relationship that we have with God through Jesus Christ. And for that reason, I've never met a Christian who was thriving spiritually, who was filled with the joy and peace of Jesus Christ, who was serving others, and at the same time was engaging in habitual sexual sin.

In the very nature of the case, Christians caught in sexual sin will suffer spiritually. They will drift from Christ. They will drift from the church. And for this reason, what the seventh commandment seeks to protect is the most precious thing that we have, and that is our union with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

The apostle Paul also wrote this to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6, 9, and 10. He says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,

nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." So Paul, he lays down the truth. He says to the Corinthians, pray for the great. I'm paraphrasing what Paul says, or perhaps putting words in his mouth, but pray for grace, for repentance, because there are those who do not inherit the kingdom of God, and they include the sexually immoral, adulterers, homosexuals, and so on.

But then he says this, in verse 11, he says, "And such were some of you, 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." And so what Paul is saying here is that there is hope, there is good news in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is hope with God because in the grace that he has given us in his son, he is able and he does forgive sexual sins. God is able, he does forgive the one who has broken the seventh commandment. If your faith and trust are in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have been washed, you have been sanctified, you have been justified. And so what that means is no matter what your past is, no matter how you have grievously sinned in this way, no matter how you have broken the seventh commandment, whether in action or whether in heart, if you are trusting in Christ, in the sight of God, you are pure, you are cleansed, you have been purified from the stain and the guilt of sexual sin. It is gone from you. You have been washed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

"And such were some of you." And if you have come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness, you've also come to the one who can bring healing and wholeness and integrity to you if you have been damaged by sexual sin. It is just for sinners like you and me for people like you and me who have broken the seventh commandment, who are guilty of sexual sin, that God has extended his grace and his mercy and his love to us in his son, Jesus Christ. He has given us a son so that we may find forgiveness in him. And at the same time, we may find in him the hope of healing, restoration, wholeness, and integrity.

And so as we consider the seventh commandment and perhaps how we are convicted and the ways in which we have broken it, look to Jesus. He is the one who forgives, purifies, and cleanses, and there's hope with him. Let's pray.