

**Meeting Jesus In The Seventh Commandment**  
**Exodus 20:14**

**November 4, 2018**

**SI:** We're studying the Ten Commandments this fall.

The theme verse guiding our of our study is Romans 10:4,

Christ is the end of the law.

Doesn't mean Christ gets rid of the law or abolishes the law so don't have to keep.

End is the Greek word telos—goal, aim, fulfillment—that kind of end.

When we study each Commandment we should end up at Jesus.

His perfection, his substitution, his deliverance—and ultimately we should see how the Commandments are ways for us to respond to Jesus in faith.

Our passage this morning is only one verse, the seventh commandment.

You shall not commit adultery.

**INTRO:** Allison and I binge-watched a British murder mystery series last week. It's called *Unforgotten* starring Nicola Walker as the chief detective.

She's trying to solve a 40 year old murder.

And as she delves into the lives of a list of suspects who knew the victim, all these long-buried secrets started to come out—a lot of them are sexual secrets.

There is adultery, and fornication and children born out of wedlock, homosexuality, prostitution.

The series is set in the present day, but the murder happened in the 70s.

So occasionally characters make reference to how judgmental society was then. The implication is that these behaviors aren't really as bad and shameful as they were once thought to be.

But what's interesting is that in spite of that overt message by the film writer—that the problem is not the sexual behaviors but society's disapproval—

In spite of that message, the life stories of each of these suspects showed their sexual behavior was the problem.

If all the characters had followed the biblical sex ethic—either marriage with faithfulness to your spouse or else sexual abstinence if unmarried—

If everybody had done that, then there wouldn't have been a murder.

And there wouldn't have been all sorts of problems and heartache.

In every society on earth, from the beginning of human history to the present day, sex has always been a big deal.

And a person's behavior in this area of life has more power to cause sorrow and ruination than anything else.

The Bible itself is very candid about that.

Both heterosexual and homosexual sin are described in the Bible.

Fornication (sex between unmarried people), adultery, rape, incest—it's all found in the pages of Holy Scripture.

And alongside these true life biblical accounts are the consequences.

Jacob's family was ripped apart by several illicit sexual encounters.

Adultery cost David four of his sons and the spiritual disintegration of his family. In the NT Christians struggled to adjust to the Bible's standard of sexual purity in a Greco-Roman culture that was far more immoral than the West is today.

On the positive side, the Bible also speaks very frankly about the freedom and happiness that comes from channeling sexual desires into marriage.

Waiting for sex until marriage, faithfulness within marriage—sex within the context of love and covenant and intimacy.

This an important theme in the wisdom literature of the Bible—

particularly Proverbs and Song of Songs.

There's that verse in Proverbs:

Rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer,  
may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.

In our modern context that doesn't even make sense to people. It's foolishness.

Wait until we're married? Why? One person for life? Love?

I could quote you all sorts of dreary facts about pornography and hookup culture and abortion and cohabitation and divorce.

But you don't need a lecture on the sexual corruption of American culture.

And besides, it isn't as if most modern Americans care about keeping the Ten Commandments anyway.

But what about us?

We do want to keep the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment. We love God's law.

We recognize how good and life-affirming purity is.

We understand there is a fulfillment in sexual love only found in marriage.

We understand the harm done by sexual misbehavior.

So why is it that even though we are utterly convinced by the biblical sex ethic and want to follow it, that we still find it so hard?

This is one of the mysteries of the Christian life.

Why has God made us sexual beings with such powerful desires that are so hard to control and that make it so terribly difficult to do what we know is good and right?

What are we to think about that? What are we to do?

Let's look at this commandment under three headings—what it shows us about

1. The sinfulness of sin
2. The graciousness of Christ
3. The difficulty of holiness

## **MP#1 What the seventh commandment shows us about the sinfulness of sin**

The way the Bible treats sexual sin is curious.

On the one hand, when the Bible talks about it, it treats these sins as no different from other sins. Let me read some examples.

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: adultery, fornication, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, sexual immorality, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents . . .

In these lists are every sort of sexual sin alongside sins of speech like gossip sins of the mind like jealousy and selfishness and hatred, sinful misuse of money and alcohol, and even disobeying your parents.

And they're all lumped together as sins that will kill you spiritually and send you to hell if you don't repent of them.

So in that sense the Bible doesn't treat sexual sins any differently.

But in another sense the Bible does treat sexual sin differently.

It doesn't say it's worse than other sin or harder to be forgiven.

But it uses sexual sin as a metaphor for sin itself.

In other words, if you want to know what sin is like, look at sexual sin.

If took a Bible concordance and looked up the words adultery and prostitution.

And if you read all the verses in the Bible where those words are used.

Only a very small number of them actually refer to those literal acts.

The vast majority of the times those words are used is by the prophets who are describing the spiritual rebellion of the Israelites against God.

The prophets say: Israel, you're committing adultery against God.

Israel, you're prostituting yourself to idols.

So why does the Bible use sexual sin as a metaphor for sin itself?

It's not too hard to figure that out. Start with your own experience.

Long before the love of money begins to intrude on our hearts or pride or greed, a fascination with things sexual has taken root there.

Starting at puberty, the fixation on sex, especially in boys, is a fact of life. We would certainly affirm that the sexual urge is part of God's good creation.

Adam and Eve were drawn to each other sexually in the Garden of Eden. But we would all acknowledge that this area is where we start to experience the brokenness of a fallen world and the stirrings of our sinful nature.

Shame, hiding, fantasies, illicit thoughts. We all know how immediate and demanding sexual temptations can feel. They can grip the whole person—body and imaginations—in a powerful way. We all know how failure in this area brings intense guilt and shame.

Let's take this another step. Look at the consequences.

Not a week goes by that there isn't a story in the news about someone who has ruined himself or herself with sexual sin.

Teachers and principals with students, pastors and priests with parishioners, politicians, entertainers, journalists.

In the #metoo movement we've seen Hollywood careers and reputations shattered.

Shame, humiliation, lost jobs and positions, divorces, lawsuits, criminal charges.

In all of these stories there is so much risked for such brief pleasure.

Those involved know what they will lose if discovered but they do it anyway.

And they often become less cautious in their behavior and more compulsive.

It's as if this sin robs them of intelligence and judgment.

Samson knew Delilah couldn't be trusted but he couldn't keep from sleeping with her and it cost him his freedom and his life.

It's not that sexual sins are worse than other sins in an ultimate sense— all sin will keep you from kingdom of God—but sexual sins do have a uniquely powerful hold on people and the potential to cause shame and ruin.

And in that they are a vivid illustration of the destructive power of all sin.

If you've fallen into sexual sin, you know this from experience.

If you haven't, then don't for one minute put yourself above those who have.

If you do then you're missing this biblical warning.

All sin is adultery against our Creator who love us and cares for us.

All sin is prostituting ourselves to idols.

So how do we deal with this terrible power?

The law of God shows us our need for salvation outside ourselves

Let's see how the seventh commandment shows us

**MP#2 The graciousness of Christ**

In John 8 is the famous account of the woman caught in adultery. Now—a quick rabbit trail—your Bible probably has a foot note that says this story is not found in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts of John's Gospel. So the question is, Did John write it and then it got taken out of some early copies? Or did he not write it and it got added later? That's an important discussion. If you're interested, ask me later and I can tell you the major arguments. But we're going to look at it because the character of Jesus Christ seen in this account and the theology that it presents is consistent with all Scripture—and it's helpful for this topic of adultery and sexual sin.

You remember what happened:

The Jewish religious leaders stood a woman in front of a crowd where Jesus was present and declared that she had been caught in the act of adultery.

They said: The law of Moses requires she be stoned. What do you say, Jesus?

Of course, the obvious question is: If she was caught in the act, where's the man? They weren't interested in justice. The passage tells us their true motive.

It says they were using this question as a trap in order to accuse Jesus.

But Jesus replied: Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.

Then he bent down and began to write in the dust and John says that one by one, starting with the older men, the accusers began to drift away.

What did Jesus write? Some commentators say started writing Ten Commandments I once heard a preacher say Jesus started writing women's names—and one by one those names incriminated every man in that circle.

Actually, this preacher was a very dramatic, flamboyant person and he said.

Do you know what Jesus wrote in the dust?

He wrote Barbie, Candy, Lola, Trixie, Peaches—he had a whole list of names that I guess in his generation sounded like floozies.

He described these self-righteous Pharisees seeing the names turning red in the face and hustling out of there as fast as their legs could carry them!

Probably didn't happen that way but it's funny to imagine.

When all gone Jesus asked her: Where are they? Does no one condemn you?

She said: No, Lord.

And then Jesus replied: Neither do I condemn you.

So the one man in that circle without sin, the holy one who could have brought condemnation without hypocrisy, he did not condemn. He forgave her.

Neither do I condemn you. No condemnation.

It's the very same word the Apostle Paul uses in Romans 8:1.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

What did hearing those words mean to that woman?

Sociologists talk about two broad categories of cultures—guilt and shame. Western culture is primarily a guilt culture. Focus on the law, guilt and innocence.

So when we hear “no condemnation” we think of forgiveness.

We hear Jesus saying: Yes, you committed adultery. I forgive you.

The guilt of what you did has been taken away. It’s been paid for.

And that’s certainly true.

But in a shame culture the focus is on the judgments of others.

It’s not the breaking of some objective law as much as a loss of worth, value, prestige, reputation, and respect in the eyes of the group.

That’s what happened to this woman. She was dragged in front of the crowd.

So when Jesus says, before her and the crowd—Neither do I condemn you.

He’s not just forgiving her guilt, he’s covering her shame.

He’s saying: In my eyes, you have worth, value, prestige, reputation, respect.

The reason Jesus’ words so powerful in this story is because of the particularly devastating shame associated with sexual sin. Don’t misunderstand.

All sin is shameful, but here’s that use of sexual sin again as epitomizing all sin.

If you come to Jesus with any sin and seek his amazing grace, he will speak to your soul: Neither do I condemn you.

But that’s not all Jesus said to her, is it? Do you remember what he said next?

Go and sin no more. Go and leave your life of sin.

Isn’t this order just like what we’ve seen in the Ten Commandments?

The Commandments begin with the Lord saying: I am your God and I’ve brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Now, my commands.

Jesus says: Neither do I condemn you. Now, go and sin no more.

It’s the order of grace. It’s the order of the Gospel.

Whenever Jesus gives a command to forgiven people, like go and sin no more.

With that command comes the supernatural power to obey him.

He said to man who was lame from birth. Pick up your mat and walk.

He picked it up and walked. Because with the command came enabling power.

I’ve forgiven your guilt, I’ve covered your shame. Go and sin no more.

Easy, right? Let’s consider what the seventh commandment teaches about

### **MP#3 The difficulty of holiness**

When I was a boy there was a pastor friend of my dad’s named Jimmy Lyons.

He was a Choctaw Indian from Oklahoma and a Presbyterian minister.

One time he spoke to a Sunday school at our church and he told how he started smoking when he was 12 years old.

He started to see his cigarette addiction as a spiritual issue tried many times to quit.

Then one night he had an emotional showdown with the Lord where he begged and pleaded to be delivered from this addiction—and he felt in his spirit that God said yes and he had been set free.

He went out into the Oklahoma night, to the edge of a field, and he hurled his last pack of cigarettes into the darkness.

He said: Two hours later I was out there with a flashlight looking for my cigs.

Everybody laughed. He did too.

Then he got serious and he told us that holiness is difficult.

Of course God has the power to deliver people immediately and completely—and sometimes you hear testimonies about that sort of thing.

But ordinarily, sanctification is hard. Think of the Apostle Paul's words.

For what I do is not the good I want to do. No, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing.

Rev. Lyons went on to say that he didn't give up.

He continued to fight and pray and have victories and relapses—this was in the days before nicotine gum and the patch—but at this point in his life, many years had passed and he had not smoked in decades.

There are Christians who weep over their inability to control their tongues—the stupid and hurtful things that come out of their mouths.

A Christian man once told me with his shoulders slumped how he could not seem to overcome his bitterness toward a person who had done him wrong years ago and how he kept rewinding and replaying that offense in his mind.

Sanctification is hard no matter what your struggle.

But once again, sexual sin epitomizes the difficulty of holiness. Bible affirms this.

Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes commandments, explains full reach of God's law

He says: You have heard that it was said: You shall murder. Read last week.

If you are angry with someone, if you denigrate with speech—murdered in heart.

And you're liable to God's judgment for that. Pretty sobering. Fire of hell.

When Jesus explains the seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery, he says some of the same things. If you lust, you commit adultery in heart.

He talks about being liable to judgment and hell.

But he adds something extra in his comment on this commandment.

It's better to cut off your hand or gouge out your eye.



What on earth does that mean? Mutilating yourself can't cure lust. Jesus is acknowledging that the struggle against sin will feel like cutting, gouging. But do it. Holiness is worth it. The fight is worth it.

Can we be more specific about the cutting and the gouging?

Proverbs 5, 6, 7—probably the most insightful and real in the whole Bible.

A father is warning his son about sexual sin, specifically adultery. Poetry.

He describes the adulteress with lips that drip honey, and speech smoother than oil, but who in the end is bitter as gall and sharp as a double edged sword.

He tells his son, stay off her street. Don't walk past her house.

Later in the poem the father tells of seeing a young man walk by, kind of curious. She comes out and chats him up. My husband is away on business. Come in.

I'm oversimplifying, but it's stressing the need to set boundaries for yourself.

That's going to be require some cutting and some pain. Places, people, things you read, things you look at, boundaries that will feel restrictive and confining.

It's also the wisdom of resisting anonymity.

Wayward wife says to the man: This can be our secret.

You have to find some Christians you can trust and talk to and tell them:

This is my secret. This is my temptation. This is my sin.

The very act of doing that, exposing it to the light, robs it of a lot of power.

But doing that will be as hard, at least initially, as cutting off your hand.

One more thing, the Bible says:

If married, be intentional about focusing your love and sexual interest and energy toward your spouse. Paul says: Give yourselves to each other.

Wives, bodies belong to husbands. Husbands, bodies belong to your wives.

That sounds a little mechanical to us.

But you have to understand his remark was revolutionary in Greco-Roman world. Men had mistresses for conversation. Prostitutes for sexual gratification.

Wives for procreation. Women were there to serve men in these capacities.

So for Paul to say: No it's to be focused in marriage—minds, hearts, bodies—and husbands and wives mutually belong to each other—revolutionary.

He knew that view of marriage would help sexually promiscuous culture of the day.

How are we to use God's law in our lives?

King David said: Oh, how I love your law?

Use it to remind yourself of the sinfulness of sin.

It's a deceptive, destructive power that must not be ignored.

Use it to remind yourself of your need for a Savior.

The amazing grace of Jesus.

When you come to him broken hearted, hear his words in your soul every day—

Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.

Use the law as your guide in the difficult path of holiness.

Yes it's hard. Jesus acknowledges that.

But it's worth it.