

Keeping Your Vows

Exodus 20:14

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June 26-27, 2021

Note: Our topic this weekend deals with sexual purity as we study the 7th commandment which forbids adultery. I will be careful with my words, but I want parents to be aware this message may lead to some good conversations with your children...if they...and you are ready for it. If you sense your child is not old enough for this discussion, you may want to slip out with them now. We do have children's ministry available both hours on Sunday.

I want to begin by asking you to imagine I'm an older man (not hard to do) giving some counsel to my sons and daughters. My name is Solomon. The content I'm going to share comes right out of the Book of Proverbs, chapters 4 through 9. I recommend you read this section of Scripture for yourself.

Listen, my children to what I'm about to say. Pay attention and don't forsake my teaching because what God commands leads to life

*Whatever you do, seek wisdom, and then guard it when you get it. Don't turn away from what you know to be true, like so many do in their teens and twenties. Two paths lie in front of you. One is the path of wisdom, and the other is the path of the wicked. Be attentive and avoid wrong choices. The only way to do that is to **"keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life"** (Proverbs 4:23). Keep your heart tender before God and choose faithfulness, not folly. Keep an eye on your soul because it's a slow fade. No one crumbles in a day.*

Your purity will be tempted because the allure of illicit sex is everywhere. What may seem to be sweeter than honey will turn out to be more bitter than taking a bite out of rotten wood with worms in it. Set up some boundaries or you will end up giving your heart away...and then your body will want to go all the way. Wait for marriage or you will become ensnared and held fast by the cords of your sin. And if you get married, hold fast to your spouse.

*My son, do no lust in your heart after a young woman. My daughter, don't get swept off your feet by empty promises meant to seduce you. Here's a vivid word picture to remember: **"Can you scoop up fire onto your lap and not be burned? Can you walk on hot coals without scorching your feet? So is he who goes in to***

his neighbor's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished. (Proverbs 6:27-29)

Let me tell you what I saw one time when I looked outside. I noticed a young man headed to where he should not have been going. In the dark of the night a woman dressed provocatively came out to meet him. She grabbed him and gave him a kiss and told him to come to her house for a hook up. She had a full refrigerator and an empty bed, promising the man her husband was gone on a long business trip. Do you know what he did?

Listen to Proverbs 7:22-27: "All at once he follows her, as an ox going to the slaughter, or as a stag caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare, he does not know it will cost him his life...listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. Let not your heart turn aside to her ways...her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death."

Children, you may think you can get away with it, that somehow "And to him who lacks sense, she says, 'Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is pleasant.'" but this path leads only to danger and even death: "But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol." (Proverbs 9:16-18)

Guard your heart, my children, because it's a slow fade when you give yourself away.

We come today to commandment #7, stated in simple yet strong words in Exodus 20:14: "***You shall not commit adultery.***" This literally reads, "no adulterating."

- **This command is directed to every individual.** The tense is second person singular, meaning each one of us individually need to take it to heart.
- **It's stated in the strong negative** (like seven of the other commands). Adultery is an unconditional prohibition for everyone.

In 1631, the King James Version was reprinted by a London publisher. This expertly crafted edition was printed on fine paper stock imported from Sweden with high contrast ink from India and bound with exceptional Italian leather. However, this beautiful Bible had an egregious printing error. It was discovered the simple word "***not***" was omitted in Exodus 20:14, making it read, "*Thou shalt commit adultery.*" The publishers were fined the equivalent of a lifetime's wages and stripped of their printing license. Nearly the entire print run was seized and

destroyed. This became known as the “Wicked Bible” and only 14 copies are known to exist today.

I’m thinking there must be a lot more copies of this Bible circulating because so many today are living as if adultery is acceptable.

I’m glad we’ve come through a pandemic but we’re in the middle of another epidemic which has lasted for thousands of years, and along with its variants, is spreading rapidly. We could call it the *adultery epidemic*.

Research indicates approximately 22% of husbands and 14% of wives have committed adultery. Some studies suggest 1/3 of husbands and 1/4 of wives have sinned in this way. According to a survey in Readers Digest, which I hope is not true, 50% of all husbands and 35% of wives have broken their marriage vows. It’s difficult to get accurate stats because generally people are not honest about their infidelity.

Many teens, including Christian kids, throw their faith away just to have physical intimacy. Casual or recreational sex is celebrated and on the rise in our “hook-up” culture. Apps like Tinder make immorality extremely accessible. Several years ago, a billboard in California advertised an internet dating site with these words, “*Life is short, have an affair.*”

Ray Ortlund writes:

“God’s Ten Commandments are big, bold, bright signs guiding us away from the regions of darkness and death, and toward the places of light and life in Christ. The problem is, in our sin, we hate being told what to do. We think we know better. We look at temptations that cannot make our lives better and we think, ‘That would make my life better.’ The Ten Commandments point toward Sodom and Gomorrah and warn us, ‘You don’t want to go there.’ Yet we look over at that barren wasteland and think, ‘This must be our garden of Eden.’ And off we go.”

The pain and agony which comes from adultery has rocked many of you. Perhaps you’ve had a parent or other relative let you down, or your spouse has sinned against you in this way. Or, maybe you’re the one who has committed adultery and you’re so gutted by guilt and shame you’ve lost all spiritual vitality. Some of you have been sexually abused. Several of you feel so addicted to immorality you

don't think there's any way out. I pray God will minister His healing and restore your hope through His Word today.

Let's review the summary statements we've been using to help us remember the 10 Commandments.

1. One God
2. No idols
3. Revere His Name
4. Remember to Rest
5. Honor Parents
6. No murder
7. No adultery
8. No stealing
9. No lying
- 10.No coveting

Here's where we're headed...

- **The principle behind the command**
- **The prohibitions of the command**
- **The prescriptions to help us keep the command**
- **The pathway back to purity**

The Principle Behind the Command

Three weeks ago, we studied the sixth commandment's prohibition against murder and established this truth: *Since God has purposes for every person, all life must be prized and protected.*

The standard behind the seventh command is that marital faithfulness is the building block of society. Faithfulness to the covenant of marriage is the foundation of the family. In his book called, *Holy Sexuality*, Christopher Yuan writes, "*Holy sexuality consists of two paths: chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage.*" The main point I want us to get today is this: *Protect your marriage by practicing purity.*

We live in a culture which dismisses marriage as an irrelevant relic of tradition. The spirit of our times has vigorously sought to dilute the sanctity of marriage through its condescending disregard, disrespect, and redefinition. In Genesis, we

read monogamous marriage is God's plan for a man and a woman to be joined as one in a permanent relationship.

Turn to Genesis 2:18-25: ***“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.’...But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”***

To help me remember the essence of marriage I think of three words...

- **Leaving**
- **Cleaving**
- **Weaving**

We could add a fourth word to summarize what happens when adultery is committed: *grieving*.

Marriage is designed by God to be a permanent bond: *One man with one woman pledged in a public covenant-commitment to live together faithfully as husband and wife for life*. The Bible is filled with Scriptures that hold up the value of monogamous marriage and the importance of keeping our vows.

I think of Hebrews 13:4: ***“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”*** The keeping of the seventh commandment guards the integrity of every marriage and is a safeguard against sexual sin. *Any sexual expression outside the confines of a marital relationship of one man and one woman is a sin against God.*

Kevin DeYoung writes, *“God’s best gifts (marriage and sex) are the ones most apt to be twisted and perverted by the world, the flesh, and the devil.”*

God drew a defining line around the sanctity of marriage and said something like this: *“Do not sexually take someone to yourself who does not belong to you*

through marriage; and once entering the covenant of marriage, do not give yourself to anyone other than to your spouse.”

The Prohibitions of the Command

In Mark 8:38, when Jesus looked at His culture, He labeled it, ***“this adulterous and sinful generation.”*** I wonder how He would respond to our sexualized society today. A few years ago, the Los Angeles Times reported about a new line of greeting cards for couples involved in adulterous affairs. The title of the article summarized how messed up we are: *“Adulterers Need Cards Too.”*

Let’s look at what this command prohibits.

- **Adultery.** Technically, adultery is a sexual relationship between a married individual with someone other than their spouse. The word “adulterate” means to make impure by adding extraneous, improper, or inferior ingredients. Two words come to mind: *Add* and *alter*. When you add someone or something else to marriage you alter it for ill.

Adultery is a turning away from a promise made in the presence of witnesses and of God Himself. 2 Peter 2:14 gives a vivid description of this depravity: ***“They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls...”*** Deuteronomy 22:22 says adultery is particularly egregious: ***“If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die.”***

- **Sexual Immorality.** The heart of this command also applies to other sexual sins. Fornication is any sexual expression outside the bonds of the marital relationship, including premarital sex. This message needs to be taught because according to a new Pew Research study, *“Half of self-identified Christians in America say casual sex is sometimes or always acceptable.”*

From the biblical standpoint all sex outside the bounds of marriage is sin against God and your future marriage partner. Ephesians 5:3: ***“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”***

- **Lust.** Listen to what Jesus said about this command in Matthew 5:27-28: ***“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.”***

- **Homosexuality.** Let me say it clearly. The practice of homosexuality is a sin. There's no way around that if you are someone who believes the Scriptures. During "Gay Pride" month, we should be horrified by the celebration of homosexuality in our society. Romans 1:26-27, 32 says: ***"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error...they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."***

You will swim against the cultural current if you hold to God's design for marriage. To be pro-family and pro-marriage does not make one an anti-gay bigot. As Christians we must not equivocate – the Bible is clear in its definition of marriage. We must not only define it biblically but also defend it graciously because *"it's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray."*

Protect your marriage by practicing purity.

As our culture continues to head south, it will become increasingly important for us as a church, and as individual Christians, to hold to biblical convictions. Recently, I had a good talk with guests to Edgewood who wanted to know what our church believes about matters related to sexuality and gender so I thought it would be good for all of us to know where we stand.

1. Gender. Modern society tells us we can choose our gender, that gender is based on subjective feeling, and is "fluid." Genesis 1:27 is clear that gender is established by God Himself: ***"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."*** After God finished His creation, in Genesis 1:31 He declared it, ***"very good."***

2. Human sexuality. About 15 years ago, Pastor Brown and the pastoral team, along with the deacons, presented a revision to the Edgewood doctrinal statement which was passed unanimously by the congregation. This week, I contacted him to thank him for being so out front on this. Here's what it says:

"We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. That all

forms of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, fornication, and adultery are sinful perversions of God's gifts of sex. That the only legitimate marriage is the joining of one man and one woman."

3. Sexual abuse. All manner of sexual misconduct and abuse is abhorrent and evil. To protect our children at Edgewood, all who work with children go through background checks and attend child protection training. If you've been abused, we have a group at Celebrate Recovery which offers hope and healing.

I appreciate Jen Wilkin's insight:

"Those committed to keeping the seventh word become their sister's keeper, working to end sex trafficking and rehabilitate those it has exploited. They advocate for victims of sexual abuse. They work to raise a generation of sons and daughters who understand pornography as lethal, not just to the individual or to marriages, but to the community. They fight against messages and images that objectify women and men. And they embrace and model sexual fidelity."

4. EBC wedding policy. Several years ago, thanks to the leadership of Pastor Tim, we put together an Edgewood wedding policy. Here's one section we added when we realized cohabiting before marriage has become the norm for many Christians:

"Sexual purity is important to God and affects the spiritual life. Having a sexual relationship is the privilege of marriage (Hebrews 13:4). A couple living together prior to marriage should change their living arrangements before seeking a Christian wedding and make a commitment to sexual purity (Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)."

The most recent National Survey of Family Growth found that 43% of evangelical Protestants ages 15 to 22 said they definitely, or probably would, cohabit in the future. This same survey discovered 45% of marriages resulting from first cohabitations had already dissolved. But for evangelicals who had never cohabited, 79% of these marriages were still intact.

Because we want couples who get married by an Edgewood pastor to protect their marriages by practicing purity, we ask each of them to sign a purity pledge: *"I pledge to show my love and respect for my future spouse in ways that allow both of*

us to keep a clear conscience related to sexual purity before God, the body of Christ, and each other.”

Protect your marriage by practicing purity.

The Prescriptions to Help us Keep the Command

First, we must understand the principle. Then, we must take the prohibitions seriously and make sure we're following God's prescriptions. If we don't put up boundaries, chances are high we'll break our vows.

Please turn to Malachi 2:15: “**So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.**” This same phrase is repeated in verse 16: “**So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.**” The word, “**guard**” means “*to hedge with thorns*” or “*to protect by attending to.*”

Incidentally, what I'm going to share applies to singles as well. *Be faithful to your spouse before and after you marry.* I've said this before, but it bears repeating: *Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.*

Here are some practical ways to keep your marriage covenant.

1. **Take responsibility to grow spiritually.** Your greatest challenge is not those around you, but what's going on *inside* of you. 2 Peter 3:18 says, “**But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**” If you're not in a weekday or weekend Growth Group, or involved in Intentional Discipleship, would you join one this summer?
2. **Stay committed no matter what.** An older couple was discussing their upcoming 50th anniversary in the grocery checkout line, when the young cashier interjected, “*I can't imagine being married to the same man for 50 years!*” To which the wife wisely replied, “*Well, honey, don't get married until you can!*”
3. **Set up some practical hedges.** Do you love your marriage enough to protect it? One of the most helpful books I've read in this regard is called, “Hedges” by Jerry Jenkins. He states that the greatest gift you can give to your spouse is to set up some boundaries with members of the opposite sex which include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ Avoid flirting.
 - ✓ Don't be alone with the doors closed when you're with a member of the opposite sex.
 - ✓ Be careful about how you touch a member of the opposite sex.
4. **Memorize Scripture.** Psalm 119:9, 11: ***“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments. I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”***
 5. **Watch what you watch.** We learn something about Job's pursuit of purity in Job 31:1: ***“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.”*** If you don't have an Internet filter, you need to get one. I use *Covenant Eyes*, which gets its name from this verse. I'm in a group with four other men as we hold each other accountable in this way.
 6. **Avoid spiritual mismatches.** I see a lot of Christians compromise their values and morals when they settle for dating or marrying someone who is not a Christ-follower. 2 Corinthians 6:14: ***“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”***
 7. **Recognize your weaknesses.** Many faceplant into sexual sin because of overconfidence. Listen to the warning found in 1 Corinthians 10:12: ***“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”***
 8. **Look for a way to escape temptation.** 1 Corinthians 10:13: ***“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*** In his book, “The Purity Principle,” Randy Alcorn says we keep pushing the boundaries and yet we pray for God to take the temptation away: ***“We make small incremental immoral choices that inch us closer and closer to moral catastrophes... purity is always smart; impurity is always stupid.”*** Let me illustrate by pushing this book closer and closer to the edge of this table...until it falls.
 9. **Magnify the consequences.** Imagine the scenario of telling your spouse about your sexual sin. How will your daughter look at you from now on?

What will you say to explain your immorality to your son? Proverbs 6:32-33 says: ***“He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away.”*** Satan never shows you the consequences or the humiliation – only the thrill and the excitement. *“Be careful little feet where you go for it’s the little feet behind you that are sure to follow.”*

10. Run from sexual immorality. 1 Corinthians 6:18: ***“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”***

That’s what Joseph did when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him. Listen to what he said in Genesis 39:9: ***“...How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”*** We know he had boundaries because the next verse says, ***“he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.”*** He paid the price for his integrity, but he didn’t sell out sexually. He stood firmly on the fidelity of marriage and literally ran from temptation.

On the other hand, David ran toward temptation when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. He had stopped serving and sacrificing and was home doing nothing when he glanced and then gazed and then gawked at a woman who was taking a bath. His lust led him into adultery and then he tried to cover it up when he lied and committed murder by having her husband killed. We read in 2 Samuel 11:27: ***“...But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.”***

Write this down. Any step AWAY from your spouse is a step TOWARD adultery. *Protect your marriage by practicing purity.* Remember, it’s a slow fade: *“Be careful little eyes what you see; it’s the second glance that ties your hands.”*

We’ve looked at the principle behind the command, the prohibitions, as well as some practical prescriptions. Now, let’s consider the pathway back to purity.

The Pathway Back to Purity

Many of us wonder what God’s will is for our lives. Here’s a news flash: God’s will for you is wrapped up in your purity. To say it another way, your sanctification is linked to controlling your sexual impulses. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5: ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles, who do not know God.”***

A catastrophe took place in Seaside, Florida on Thursday when a condo building collapsed, leaving more than 150 missing as of Friday morning. It's now come out this building was constructed on reclaimed wetlands and had been sinking for decades.

Some of you are sinking spiritually and right now your fidelity is experiencing a slow fade. You're not burning as brightly for the Lord as you once did. You're starting to compromise or maybe you've already crossed the line. It's time to come clean. If you're involved in sexual sin, it's time to stop. If you're in an unrighteous relationship, it's time to repent. If you're flirting with it, it's time to flee. If you're wayward, come back to the One who is the only Way.

Watch this video called Slow Fade.

Adultery is inherently secretive and dishonest because no one wants to trumpet they are breaking a promise. Tim Challies writes: *"Adultery loves the darkness and flees the light and for as long as it can it tries to remain a secret...that alone should tell us what is at the heart of adultery, for sin loves to remain in the darkness while righteousness loves the light."*

God used a prophet to get David back on track spiritually. Perhaps this sermon has done something similar for you. Let's look at a few verses from Psalm 32, a song David wrote to describe his pathway back to purity.

He confesses a threefold description of his sin in the first two verses.

"Transgression" depicts a defiant disobedience toward God, a revolt against the Almighty. **"Sin"** means to miss the mark of God's perfection either through acts of commission or omission. **"Iniquity"** represents a crookedness, deformity, or perversion. The image is of a gnarled and twisted tree.

David also uses a triad of words to express the fullness of his forgiveness. The word **"forgiven"** means, *"to lift a heavy burden and carry it away."* The word **"covered"** refers to that which is concealed. What is offensive to God is put out of sight. The idea is our sins are so covered by Jesus that they will never appear again.

The third phrase, **"counts no iniquity"** is rich in meaning. We get the words "reckon" or "impute" from this term. This is the same word used in Genesis 15:6,

where God “reckoned” righteousness to Abraham. God does not count our sins against us. In their place, He has imputed the righteousness of our Redeemer.

Verse 3 describes what happens when we try to hide our sin: ***“For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.”*** David is reflecting on those times he chose to keep quiet about his sins. When he tried to ignore his iniquities, his bones felt like they were decaying. The word ***“groaning”*** was used to describe the roar of a wounded animal, or the growl of a bear. David tells us his groaning went on all day long, or continuously, without intermission.

Have you been groaning and growling on the inside? *The secret you want most to conceal is the one you most need to reveal.* Loved one, what have you been hiding? It’s time to come clean. Repent now.

Verse 4 continues, ***“For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me.”*** Even at night David could not rest from the cries of his conscience and the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The word ***“heavy”*** means, *“to grievously afflict.”* God loves us just the way we are but loves us too much to let us keep living the way we are. As Hebrews 12:10 says, ***“...But He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.”***

Verse 5 gives us the solution to our sin. When David couldn’t find relief, he said, ***“I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.”*** Instead of concealing, David started confessing. He first acknowledged his sin by stating the obvious. Then he stopped trying to cover it up. Incidentally, we can’t expect God to cover what we’re not willing to uncover.

Notice how he takes personal responsibility by using personal pronouns – *my sin, my iniquity, my transgressions*. He doesn’t deny, minimize, or blame someone else. He doesn’t argue about what the meaning of *“is,”* is. He simply calls his sin, “sin.” It’s not an error, a mistake, a mid-life crisis, or a lapse in judgment. It’s not a fling or an affair, it’s the abomination of adultery. *The greatest holdout to the healing of my unholy hang-ups is me.*

Write this down. God wants to forgive more than we want to be forgiven. We don’t have to bargain with Him, and we don’t have to bribe Him by promising to do a bunch of good things, and we don’t have to do penance for the bad things we’ve done.

Let's go back to the building collapse in Florida. One young boy, who was trapped in the rubble, raised his hand through the debris and screamed for help. One person walking his dog at midnight saw his fingers wiggling and stopped to help. Are you ready to cry out for help? God will rescue you if you ask Him to.

Sexual sin can be forgiven! Think of what Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery in John 8:11: "***Neither do I condemn you.***" That's grace. But there's more. He also called her to a life of purity when He said, "***...Go, and from now on sin no more.***" That's truth.

We don't have to stay how we once were. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: "***Or 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 adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 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.***"

Guard your heart, my sons, and daughters, because it's a slow fade.

Protect your marriage by practicing purity.

Closing Prayer