

Sermon Series: “A Post-Lenten Look at the Decalogue”
The Sin of Love Forsaken
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What do we do with something we view as precious? We protect it! E.g., diamond on Elena’s wedding ring fell off the ring’s setting, but fortunately we had it insured— protected!— and we were able to get a replacement. E.g., I recall when I was in Ghana and Mexico and I would see some nice houses that would have six or seven foot solid walls surrounding them, and at the top of the walls that had something “special” embedded in concrete to discourage anyone from trying to scale the walls and get into their property. That something “special” embedded in concrete on top of the walls was glass shards! I have to admit that if I were a burglar that would discourage me from ever trying to get into their property— at least over the wall! That is what we do with something that is precious to us— we protect it! We put a hedge or barrier around it to be sure it is not compromised. We do that also with our most precious of relationships, like our marriages, which is our focus today. How do we protect our marriages? We make decisions it seems very day whether and where to set up protection. E.g., I recall years ago when my Mom and Dad were in the early years of their marriage, my Mom got a call from a former boyfriend of hers, and he was in town in New Orleans and he wanted to know if he could come by the house and say hello. So, my Mom asked my Dad if that was ok. What did he say? What should he have said? Good questions! I believe our passage today will help us as we consider the appropriate response— and we’ll come back to what my Dad said.

READ Exodus 20:14 (p. 66)

CONTEXT: We are going through the Decalogue for a look at the necessity of the cross, as this sermon series began as a Lenten look at the Decalogue. We have gone through the first six commandments— we should have no other God before us, no idols, don't use the Lord's name in vain, honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy, honor our Father and Mother, and don't murder. Now we come to the seventh commandment.

“Adultery in the OT involved only a man with a woman who was either married or engaged. ‘A married or unmarried man who had sexual relations with an unmarried woman had not committed adultery, although this is not to say that there were no consequences of such actions. . . In such cases, the man would normally be expected to marry the woman (see Ex. 22:16-17)’ (Peter Enns, *Exodus*, p. 422).” The penalty for adultery was death, as seen in Deuteronomy 22:22. Now, this may not sound reasonable to our modern ears. Why would it not be adultery for a married man to have sexual relations with an unmarried or unengaged woman? It is true that even though it is not adultery, it was still seen as wrong before the Lord, and the man would normally be expected to marry her; Deuteronomy 22:28-29. Nevertheless, it was not considered adultery, and there was no death penalty. There are three reasons perhaps for this. First, polygamy, while not directly endorsed by God in the OT, it was allowed. Jesus did away with polygamy by stating that if a man divorces his wife and marries another he has committed adultery (Matthew 19:9). Second, this teaching where a married man having relations with an unmarried and unengaged woman was not seen as adultery but he would be obligated to marry her would have protected women at this time in history where the major professions were nomadic caring for animals or agricultural, and women would not have been able to provide for themselves on their own. Third, perhaps also because of the hardness of the human heart at the time. Jesus stated that very thing about Deuteronomy 24:1-4 on a man giving a certificate of divorce to his wife; but Jesus said from the beginning it was not

meant to be so. A man would be joined to a woman in marriage and the covenant was not to be broken, for they were considered one flesh. Perhaps this understanding of adultery as not being committed by a married man with an unmarried woman was seen the same by the Lord. I.e., it was because of the hardness in the human heart that God allowed it to be this way for a time. But what we need to see is that adultery, sexual relations outside of the marriage commitment, is declared to be wrong. Have you ever known of a marriage where adultery happened? E.g., I recall one church where I was serving I got a call from a good friend of mine on my day off. I was busy doing something and he said, “Woody, I need to see you. Can you meet me at church?” I could sense this was important and the Lord’s leading in this, though I did not understand. I said, “Sure”, and hopped in my car and met him in the church’s parking lot, where he was waiting to meet with me in his truck. I got in the truck, and he said to me he had just come from his wife’s work place where he asked her to come outside and talk to him, and he confronted her with his evidence that she was having an affair, and she admitted it and did not want to give it up. I recall the young daughter they had thrived on the idea of being a family unit with her parents. And now it was being destroyed. I comforted my friend; we prayed together. And sure enough, his wife divorced him. The Bible is in agreement with peoples across time and cultures. E.g., C.S. Lewis made this point in his book *The Abolition of Man* in 1947 where he showed the universality of morality, such as on justice, telling the truth, and mercy, and states that the view of adultery as wrong was found also in ancient Babylonian and Old Norse writings (p. 109). I know of no culture today where adultery is applauded as a virtue. Yet today in our culture as a by-product from the sexual revolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s we are in danger of that. E.g., I recall seeing that when a woman was interviewed on the Johnny Carson show where she spoke about her current husband whom she snagged while he was married to someone else, and there was no blushing about this. The sanctity of

marriage is often seen as a joke. We laugh and take marriage lightly to our own demise. Why was it so strongly rejected in the OT that it even called for the death penalty? I suggest to you the answer is because adultery had a deeper significance.

“The Bible expands the understanding of adultery because of the serious implications it has for the most important of covenantal relationships. ‘The integrity of the Israelite’s relationship with Yahweh himself was at stake. Everywhere in the ANE [Ancient Near East], Israel included, adultery was a crime against persons; but in Israel it was first of all and even more a crime against Yahweh’ (John Durham, *Exodus*, p. 294). Cf. Genesis 39:9; Jeremiah 2:19-20; 3:1; Hosea 1:2.” READ Genesis 39:9, where Joseph responds to his master’s wife, who was trying to have an affair with him, and Joseph tries to reason with her as to why this is wrong: he says his master has not “kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” King David after having an affair with Bathsheba, getting her pregnant, and having her husband killed, states, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is every before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment” (Psalm 51:3-4). Joseph and David both recognized that ultimately our sin is against God; we are in rebellion against His authority over our lives. We as the church are called to be the bride of Christ. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25). It follows that a good barometer for how we love the Lord is how we love our spouses. Our covenant with the Lord inspires us and drives us to love our spouses. Have you ever seen that connection? E.g., I recall once I was in my quiet time and I was asking the Lord how can I serve You today, and I sensed His Holy Spirit say to me, “Get up and go

help Elena in the kitchen!” That reminds me of a book by psychologist Kevin Leman with the title, *Sex Begins in the Kitchen*.

What does Jesus say about all this? Good question! READ Matthew 5:27-30. “Jesus deepens the understanding of the seventh commandment in Matthew 5:27-30 where He equates adultery with inner lust, so grievous a sin that it is worth severing whatever may be the source of temptation! Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:22.” In 1 Corinthians 6:18 Paul says, “Flee from sexual immorality”. We are bombarded by sexual immorality every day— whether in commercials— a perfume commercial I recently saw where a woman looks like she is coming out to the water unclothed— or a tv show like Friends or The Big Bang Theory— or books and magazines— like *50 Shades of Gray* and secular romance books— or movies. Beloved, Jesus and Paul knew what we have forgotten often— we absorb the world around us. E.g., the difference between a cast iron skillet and one with teflon. E.g., I have heard that in order to keep rodents out of one’s house keep the trees at least three feet away from the roof, so you need to get out the hedgeclippers— and the same principle applies to keeping our distance from that which would decay our relationship with God and our spouses.

“Where do we need to use the ‘hedge clippers’ in our lives?” My Mom asked my Dad whether her old boyfriend from out of town to come over to the house and visit. My Dad’s answer was an emphatic: No! Whether you agree or not, the point is my Dad knew the idea of setting boundaries, clear ones, around his marriage to protect it, and the result was a wonderful marriage. Where is God calling you to set boundaries around your marriage?