

a sermon: EXODUS 20:14 – The Seventh Commandment
THE CALL TO SPIRITUAL AND MARITAL FIDELITY

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I. A PROPOSITION OF SPIRITUAL AND MARITAL FIDELITY

The early Church Father Novatian said, “Wives are to be loved by their husbands even as CHRIST loved The Church. And wives should love their husbands also as The Church loves CHRIST!”¹ For if we are faithful to our Covenant with The Almighty, shall we not also be faithful to our covenant with our spouses?

II. THE TEXT – EXODUS 20:14 – THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

The King James Version declares here “[And GOD spake all These Words, saying,²] Thou shalt not commit adultery!”³ From The Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, The Hebrew reads:⁴ LO’ TINN’AF! לֹא תִנָּאֵף - or literally, “Not you commit adultery!”

III. BUT WHAT IS ADULTERY? AND WHAT IS MARRIAGE?

To understand what adultery is, we must first set down what marriage is. Where did marriage come from, and by Whose Authority? In GENESIS 2:18 The Creator reveals to us why a man needs a wife and why a woman needs a husband: “And The LORD GOD said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”⁵ Therefore from Adam did GOD make Eve, and brought the two together to be as one in holy matrimony!

Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary defines marriage as “...the uniting of a man and woman for life... [in] legal union. [It is] ...a contract both civil and religious, by which the parties agree to live together in mutual affection and fidelity, till death shall separate them.” Let us note that “marriage was instituted by GOD Himself...” Let us also note why: “For the purpose of preventing the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, for promoting of domestic ...[happiness], and for securing of the maintenance and education of children.” But marriage is also spoken of in Holy Scripture as “...the union between CHRIST and His Church by The Covenant of Grace.”⁶ Therefore we should look for two senses of adultery, one as a violation of the covenant marriage contract between husband and wife, the

¹ 1, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, “Marriage,” entry for Novatian, formerly attributed to Cyprian, page 425.

² KJV, EXODUS 20:1. Note The Ten Commandments open with the declaration that They are GOD’s Word commanded to men, not man’s word suggested to men!

³ 2, KJV, EXODUS 20:14.

⁴ 3, BHS, EXODUS 20:14.

⁵ 2, KJV, GENESIS 2:18.

⁶ 4, Noah Webster, “Marriage,” noun, entry 1,3. Page MAR – MAR.

other as a violation of the faith Covenant between the people of GOD and GOD Himself!

Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines adultery as the "violation of... [and] unfaithfulness ...[to] the marriage bed... [by either the husband or the wife], ...for which civil and Church courts may grant a bill of divorcement." Adultery is further "...all manner of lewdness or unchastity, as in The Seventh Commandment" of GOD. But adultery is even more than this, in that it is also "...idolatry, or apostasy from the [sole worship of] The [one] true GOD!"⁷

The Hebrew text here is instructive. It consists of only two words. The first is the word LO' לֹא - which means simply "not."⁸ Attached to a verb, it tells one to not do what the verb itself means. The verb itself here is NA'AF נִאְפַּח - given as a command to "You" personally as an individual in the ongoing sense.⁹ NA'AF נִאְפַּח is most interesting, in that it has both a literal and a figurative meaning. First, it speaks of the husband who "commit[s] adultery, as with the wife of another [man]" and equally of the wife who commits adultery with the husband of another woman.¹⁰ Second, it speaks of engaging in "idolatrous worship" or spiritual adultery.¹¹ To understand the first sense more fully, we must probe the meaning of the second.

IV. THE SANCTITY OF THE SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE COVENANT

The Old Testament speaks of ancient Israel as The Bride of JEHOVAH. Worship of idols or any other form of false gods were strictly forbidden under The Old Covenant, as under The New. In EXODUS 34:27-28 we find The LORD Himself again explaining to Israel through Moses that The Ten Commandments are the foundation of how His Covenant people were to keep faith with Him: "And The LORD said unto Moses,

⁷ 4, Noah Webster, "Adultery," noun, entries 1,2,3. Page ADU – ADV.

⁸ 5, Whittaker's Revised-BDB Hebrew Lexicon B4782 LO' לֹא or לֹא־ adverb... Page 529.

⁹ 5, Whittaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon B6027 NA'AF נִאְפַּח verb – [to] commit adultery... Verb qal imperfect 2nd person masculine singular, page 610.

¹⁰ 5, Whittaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon B6027 NA'AF נִאְפַּח verb – [to] commit adultery. [definition 1 in the qal, referring to the literal sin of adultery of a husband with the wife of another man, or equally of a wife with the husband of another woman.]

¹¹ 5, Whittaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon B6027 NA'AF נִאְפַּח verb – [to] commit adultery. [definition 2 in the qal, referring to the figurative sin of idolatrous worship, which is in fact spiritual adultery.]

Write thou These Words: for after the tenor of These Words I have made a Covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with The LORD forty days and forty nights... And he wrote upon the tables The Words of The Covenant, The Ten Commandments!”¹² And though all men are bound by The Ten Commandments, breaking of Them by GOD’s people – both Israel and The Church - is spiritual adultery because it is a defiling of The Covenant between them and The LORD! It is, if you will, a polluting of the marriage bed of salvation between the souls of men and The Creator!

And so The Almighty laments and complains of His Old Testament Bride Israel in JEREMIAH 2:32, "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet My people have forgotten Me days without number!”¹³ The conspiracy of spiritual adultery in GOD’s people grieves the The Almighty, for it is the unfaithful heart which serves idols and the untrue soul which bows down to false gods! So GOD charges His wayward people in JEREMIAH 11:10, “They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear My Words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My Covenant which I made with their fathers!”¹⁴

Equally so, The New Testament speaks of The Church as The Bride of our Lord JESUS CHRIST. Worship of idols or any form of a false gods are likewise strictly forbidden under The New Covenant. Rather, the True Faith to which we The Church are called is That Faith which Saint Peter confessed to JESUS The Messiah in MATTHEW 16:16, “...Thou art The CHRIST, The Son of The living GOD!”¹⁵ It is upon this Faith which Peter confessed that CHRIST proclaims His New Bride The Church would be built upon! So we read in MATTHEW 16:18, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon This Rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!”¹⁶

V. THE SANCTITY OF THE FLESHLY MARRIAGE COVENANT

Marriage between a husband and wife, as we have seen, is a sacred institution given to man by The Creator Himself. It is more than merely an emotional, social, economic, or sexual union between a man and a woman.

¹² 2, KJV, EXODUS 34:27-28.

¹³ 2, KJV Bible, JEREMIAH 2:32.

¹⁴ 2, KJV, JEREMIAH 11:10.

¹⁵ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 16:16.

¹⁶ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 16:18.

It is at its root a most basic foundation of GOD's creation for man, which is spiritual. So Moses concludes from his revelation of the LORD's design of the first marriage between Adam and Eve in GENESIS 2:24, "Therefore doth a man leave his father and his mother, and hath cleaved unto his wife, and they have become one flesh!"¹⁷ Thus adultery, by defiling what GOD has ordained and created for mankind, is an affront – not only against one's spouse – but against The Creator Himself!

Our Redeemer JESUS CHRIST explains further to the hardhearted sons of Moses of His day and to us even now the unshakable Divinely decreed structure of marriage in MATTHEW 19:4-6, "...Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore GOD hath joined together, let not man put asunder!"¹⁸ So a husband and wife are joined together in a deep spiritual way in which The LORD sees their souls, though still distinct, yet also as one! Therefore the violation of the fleshly marriage covenant is not only a sin because it violates The Seventh Commandment explicitly decreed by GOD, but also because it betrays the spiritual oneness of the husband and wife before The LORD!

VI. WHERE ISRAEL FAILED, THE CHURCH IS NOW CALLED

Ancient Israel was an unfaithful bride to her husband GOD Almighty, and although she was called to holiness and fidelity, yet she failed in that calling. Now The Church is called to be The Bride of GOD Almighty in holiness and fidelity. And why should The Bride of CHRIST offer up her praise and worship to GOD alone? Consider how much The Almighty loves us His Church, that as JOHN 3:16 says, "For GOD so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!"¹⁹

GOD loves His Bride The Church so much that He offered up His Own Incarnate Body and Blood to redeem and sanctify Her! Should not The Church – we His saints who are saved by His sacrifice for us – be what Israel was not? Should not we give our love and worship to Him and Him

¹⁷ 2, KJV, GENESIS 2:24.

¹⁸ 2, KJV Bible, MATTHEW 19:4-6.

¹⁹ 2, KJV, JOHN 3:16.

alone? Should we not in holiness and faithfulness seek to love Him as He loves us?

VII. THE DANGERS OF LUST AND THE CALL TO MODESTY AND CHASTITY

CHRIST warns that impure desires in a man's heart must be rooted out, lest it leads to sin. So in MATTHEW 5:27-28 He says, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."²⁰ So John Calvin observes here "...that believers are generally exhorted to [all] chastity; for, if The Law [of GOD] be a perfect rule for holy living, [as indeed It is,] it would be more than absurd to give license for fornication, adultery alone being ...[forbidden]!"²¹

For the acts of lust in the flesh flow out of the passions of lust in the heart. Those in whom The HOLY SPIRIT calls Its dwelling place, by The redemption bought in the precious Body and Blood of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, must not only refrain from all acts of sexual immorality, but also from entertaining the thoughts of sexual impurity. For if the heart dwells on the temptations of lusts, it may soon give in to follow through with the sins of lust in the flesh!

This is why Matthew Henry warns us, "This Command forbids not only the acts of fornication and adultery, but... all appetites to them, all lusting after the forbidden object; this is the beginning of the sin, lust conceiving... ; it is a bad step towards the sin; and where the lust is dwelt upon and approved, and the wanton desire is rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, it is the commission of sin, as far as the heart can do it; there wants nothing [more] but convenient opportunity for the sin itself."²²

So here we have, not merely the rigid legal forbidding of violation of the marriage covenant between a husband and a wife, but also the forbidding of fornication, whoredom, sexual immodesty and lewdness in both thought and act! So Saint Paul calls all of GOD's people in I THESSALONIANS 4:3-5, "For this is the will of GOD, even your sanctification, that ye should

²⁰ 2, KJV Bible, MATTHEW 5:27-28

²¹ 6, John Calvin, Volume III, The Seventh Commandment, EXODUS XX, page 68.

²² 7, Matthew Henry, MATTHEW 5:27-28.

abstain from fornication [which is sexual immorality ²³]: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in ...[the passion of lust ²⁴], even as the Gentiles which know not GOD!” ²⁵

John Calvin, in exploring the apparent harsh punishments attached to violation of The Seventh Commandment in DEUTERONOMY, states, “...how very pleasing to GOD is modesty, whilst... He abominates indecency... [For] It ...[is] indeed inexcusable effrontery, willfully to assail that part of the body, from the sight and touch of which all chaste [men and] women naturally recoil!” ²⁶ This Same Commandment also calls men and women to be, not only modest in behaviour, but also modest in dress, that others not be tempted into lust in their hearts and sin in their bodies!

Here for example, is what many hold in today’s heathenized, lewd and ungodly culture to be a hard saying: DEUTERONOMY 22:5 commands, “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto The LORD thy GOD!” ²⁷ But this too is forbidden by The Seventh Commandment, for it is a corruption of GOD’s design for the roles of the sexes and an abomination before The Creator! Indeed, GOD commands modesty appropriate for each sex, as John Calvin observes, “...lest women should harden themselves into forgetfulness of modesty, or men should degenerate into effeminacy unworthy of their nature... [Therefore] ...propriety and modesty are prescribed [for both men and women], not only for decency’s sake, but lest one kind of liberty should at length lead to something worse!” ²⁸

So the danger of lust dwelling in the heart – towards either the fleshly allures of those who are not our spouses or the spiritual allures of idols which tempt us away from faith in only The LORD - is that it leads to defilement of the soul and encourages the act of adultery. That adultery may be the physical polluting of the marriage covenant between husband and

²³ 8, NKJV, I THESSALONIANS 4:3 substitutes “sexual immorality” for the word “fornication” in The KJV.

²⁴ 8, NKJV, I THESSALONIANS 4:5 substitutes “the passion of lust” for the word “concupiscence” in The KJV.

²⁵ 2, KJV, I THESSALONIANS 4:3-5.

²⁶ 6, John Calvin, Volume III, The 7th Commandment, DEUTERONOMY, Chapter XXV, page 108-109.

²⁷ 2, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 22:5.

²⁸ 6, John Calvin, Volume III, The 7th Commandment, DEUTERONOMY, Chapter XXII, page 110.

wife, or it may be worse yet the spiritual polluting of the Covenant of salvation between a man and The Almighty!

This is why Saint James cautions us in JAMES 1:14-15, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”²⁹ And as we shall see, the adulterous heart which drips with the disease of lust, bring forth sin and death! For the adulterous heart that can not be faithful to its spiritual Covenant with The Almighty can certainly not be faithful to its covenant with its fleshly covenant with its spouse!

VIII. THE PEOPLE THAT KEEP THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

What does a people that keeps The Seventh Commandment look like? They are a people that are spiritually faithful to GOD, keeping The Covenant of Grace by Which they are redeemed and made the people of our Lord JESUS CHRIST! And they are a people that are physically faithful to their wives and husbands, keeping the covenant of marriage by which they are made one in holy matrimony!

They are a people who obey GOD’s calling to keep from the spiritual adultery into which ancient Israel fell, but which now The Church is called to keep herself from! They are a people who are chaste in body, as well as spirit, keeping themselves from all manner of lust, fornication and lewdness, and keeping themselves pure and faithful to their spouses! They are a people who live daily the words of Saint Paul, who shows us how marital fidelity is modeled after spiritual fidelity in EPHESIANS 5!

They are a people whose women daily live out what GOD commands in EPHESIANS 5:22-24, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto The Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as CHRIST is The Head of The Church: and He is The Saviour of The Body. Therefore as The Church is subject unto CHRIST, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing!”³⁰

They are a people whose men daily live out what GOD commands in EPHESIANS 5:25-29, “Husbands, love your wives, even as CHRIST also loved The Church, and gave Himself for it... That He might present It to

²⁹ 2, KJV Bible, JAMES 1:14-15.

³⁰ 2, KJV, EPHESIANS 5:22-24.

Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that It should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. [For] he that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as The Lord [does] The Church!”³¹

And they are all a people who corporately daily live out what GOD commands to His Church on earth in EPHESIANS 5:30-33, “For we are members of His Body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning CHRIST and The Church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband!”³²

IX. IN CONCLUSION

Brothers and Sisters, hear what The early Church Father Ignatius says: “[O HOLY SPIRIT,] speak to my sisters, that they love The Lord and be satisfied with their husbands, both in the flesh and in the spirit. In like manner also, exhort my brothers, in The Name of JESUS CHRIST, that they love their wives, even as The Lord loves The Church...!”³³

Let us learn a lesson from ancient Israel, the bride of JEHOVAH who fell into spiritual adultery before The LORD, and was cast aside! Let us learn from The Church, who is now called as The New Bride of The LORD in JESUS CHRIST, to be spotless and holy in faith, to worship and to love He Who redeemed Her by His very Body and Blood! Even so, as we learn to be faithful in Covenant to GOD Almighty, Who loves us more than we can begin to fathom, so let us learn to be faithful in covenant to our earthly spouses!

Ladies and gentlemen, are you not yet married? Then do not become a fornicator, and guard against the lust of the heart that would lead you to have sexual relations before you are wed! Are you now married? Then husbands, be true to your one and only wife, till death do you part! And wives, be true to your husbands likewise for all the days of your lives together on earth! Are you called by GOD to remain celibate in the service

³¹ 2, KJV, EPHESIANS 5:25-29.

³² 2, KJV, EPHESIANS 5:30-33.

³³ 1, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, “Marriage,” entry for Ignatius, page 424.

of The Lord's The Church on earth and Her people? Then serve CHRIST and His Bride in faithfulness! Are you called as a husband or wife to serve The Church and her Lord now from within the covenant of holy matrimony? Then do not cast away your spouse and children, for you are called to love them as our Saviour loves His Church!

For as we have said, "Wives are to be loved by their husbands even as CHRIST loved The Church. And wives should love their husbands also as The Church loves CHRIST!"³⁴ For if we are faithful to our Covenant with The Almighty, shall we not also be faithful to our covenant with our spouses? Therefore, as it is written, LO' TINN' AF! לֹא תִנָּאֵף לְיְהוָה³⁵ - "Thou shalt not commit adultery!"³⁶ In The name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost, AMEN!

³⁴ 1, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, "Marriage," entry for Novatian, formerly attributed to Cyprian, page 425.

³⁵ 3, BHS, EXODUS 20:14.

³⁶ 2, KJV, EXODUS 20:14.

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