

Part 8

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[0 : 0 0] Commandments together as a church and this morning we are at the seventh commandment which is in Exodus chapter 20 in the Old Testament it's on page 78 and it's verse 14 which reads you shall not commit adultery. Now as we're going through these sermons looking at the Ten Commandments looking at the summary of God's moral law which is given by God to people that he has already saved which you see in the verses that come just before the commandments begin. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt out of the land of slavery then he gives them this this moral law in a nutshell so that as God saved people they could then know how to live out their lives in gratitude to him and thankfulness to him for the salvation that he has given them and just to recap if you're visiting today or if you haven't been paying attention for the last few weeks and the first four commandments are expressly about how we love God how we love the Lord and number one in putting no one above him or nothing above him as our God at the center of our lives number two in worshiping him properly number three and treating him with awe in the way that we speak about him number four setting aside one day each week to stop all of our other work and and devote ourselves to worshiping him and then the commandments that follow are all about how we love the other people around us how we love our neighbor it starts number five in the home with the family unit with honoring our parents and then number six that then establishes the sanctity of human life we love our neighbor by doing everything we can to to defend them to preserving their lives but today this morning and then tonight we're looking at commandments seven and eight which bring the ways that we think about sex and about money in line with what we believe about the gospel and what we believe about the Lord our God who has brought us figuratively speaking out of

Egypt he brought us out of sin and out of the slavery that we were in under sin and then he is the God who has saved us who wants us to live out our salvation gratefully and joyfully how do we do that in relation this morning to sex and marriage all of that stuff and then tonight in relation to money and possessions and motivations in life. Commandment seven as we've just read is you shall not commit adultery what does the Bible have to say into our sex saturated society undeniably in our culture in the Western world sex is everywhere try and find a piece of commercial pop music that's not just overtly sexual the videos the lyrics everything it's almost obligatory to have a sex scene in a film films that don't have it tend to stick out like sore thumbs because it's so unusual we even sexualized children you know it's heartbreaking you see a young parent with with a toddler wearing a t-shirt with with a sexual slogan on it sexy or something like that we we bring up our children even so that they expect that everything is sexualized so that they will be sexually active while they're still in primary school an 11 year old girl here in Edinburgh had a baby last year sex is everywhere and more than that in our culture we have a relationship dynamic for sex that that means that it's everywhere thanks to romantic comedy movies thanks to sitcoms the point at which sex occurs in a relationship has drastically changed from say the 1960s onwards to where we are today before then the the social norm at least officially was that two people meet they you know they get to know each other they commit to one another they develop intimacy then you know marriage comes and then sex is at the end as an expression of all the hard work the groundwork that you've done in making this relationship exist and then it's expressed at the end and sex so sex is the end product but in our culture we have inverted that whole order so that two people meet and in order to work out whether a relationship is possible short to medium to I mean we're not even thinking about long-term sex happens at the very beginning it's what we do to try and establish and build intimacy rather than the thing we do to express intimacy that has already been created so in order to work out basic things like do I like this person could a relationship with this person work what our society tells us all around us is well you have to sleep with that person at the very beginning and if everyone believes

that you get this this sex saturated culture that we live in what does the Bible have to say though into that world surely you know the Bible is so old and so archaic and especially something like the Ten Commandments written thousands of years ago in a different culture surely it can't have much to say that's where we're wrong if we think that I want to start off though speaking about the New Testament world because we're looking this morning at the seventh commandment in relation to first Corinthians 6 which we read before and about 2000 years ago

Christianity started off with this tiny group Jesus 12 Apostles and with them a very short space of time it had spread throughout the known world it had conquered the known world spreading right across the Roman Empire and in that context people left right and center were believing what Christians people who have this distinct view of sexuality from the seventh commandment people were believing what these Christians were telling them about Jesus and about what believing in Jesus means to the way that you live your life how did those people then who en masse accepted Christianity how did they think in the the Greek and Roman world how did they think about sex in their world there are well there were two approaches that people took to sexuality and the first one is called platonic there was this a guy called Plato he was a non-Christian philosopher one of the most important intellectuals and thinkers in his day and he was someone who taught that the soul the spiritual things are pure and are holy and are good whereas your body is wicked and evil and your soul doesn't really need redeemed because it's so excellent anyway whereas your body is such an awful thing that it could never be redeemed it's totally irredeemable and because of that because the body is so inherently wicked all bodily acts are also wicked including sex in any context even within marriage it's awful physical pleasure for Plato is always wrong so his ideal relationship is non-physical you know it's intellectual it's spiritual we still use that language don't we when we talk about they have a platonic relationship that's where it comes from Plato people who you try and relate to each other on an exclusively non-physical basis platonic people were sexually prudish they despised sex it was inherently dirty something that good people did not do did not think about didn't talk about so that's what you have that's that's one side of the coin and the world that Christianity flourished in the other side is paganism the other stream of Roman culture was the exact opposite it was heavily sexualized and the religion of the day you had temple prostitutes and in Corinth in the letter that we're looking at this morning they had a pathodiety as the the temple goddess and her temple was full of prostitutes and people will go there and have sex with them as part of their religious life and in the life of a typical Greek or Roman man in the New Testament's world these are the kind of relationships that you would have you would have your wife there who's the mother of your children you would also normally have your mistress she is just there for your physical gratification you would have your temple prostitutes they're there as part of your religious life normally you would also have an adult male partner because Greek culture taught that the highest form of love was homo rather than heterosexual and you would also normally have a child male partner because pedophilia was was encouraged among men as a way of inducting young boys into what they taught was the highest form of physical love this is how you grow them up into people in this system that is the kind of world that's that Christianity flourished in and transforms people's lives in it appears among this mix of prudes and pagans and with with its own distinctive sexual ethic convinces a vast number of people that it offers a different way to think and to live and to believe what is the Christian approach to sex well from looking at this commandment you shall not commit adultery

I've got three points this morning number one is that we are not prudes and by we I mean Christians we are not prudes as we were just saying Christianity entered a world for the mainstream culture the norm was that you would have this rampant sexualization where everyone everywhere in a culture of Roman orgies that kind of stuff and in that culture if you wanted to opt out and pursue a different path if you wanted to be more spiritual or holy your only option was to follow Plato your only choice was to despise your body to despise all of your physical desires because nothing about your body or your bodily life is redeemable and that includes your sexuality how did the Christian message square with that well the first thing that we see when we look at the seventh commandment is that the commandment is against adultery and not sex itself okay it condemns adultery but not sex itself and why is that so important to grasp what's important to grasp because for centuries many

Christians have misunderstood this point and it has caused enormous damage early Christians even many great ones even some of the most important theologians of the last 2,000 years especially the early ones were often far more influenced by Plato and by this you know this spirit

and body distinction where the spirit scoot in the body's bad far more influenced by Plato than by Paul or by Jesus and Tertullian okay he was the guy that devised the term Trinity so hugely important theologian said that he preferred because he thought on a platonic way he preferred the extinction of the human race to any continued sexual activity even among married people quite an extreme view but a view that a lot of people had John Chris Ostum again hugely important early theologian said that sex was invented by Adam and Eve after the fall as an expression of their sin and he said that before the fall children would have been conceived by eating a special piece of fruit in the

[12:15] Garden of Eden because again he thought that physical acts were all so evil Jerome important early apologist taught a lot about Jesus miracles thought that all physical pleasure was inherently evil so whenever he felt sexual desire even legitimate he would throw himself into bramble bushes as a way of dealing with it origin again massive early theologian thought that any physical desire was so wrong that he physically castrated himself Augustine okay we're building up an importance to the big hitters theologically Augustine was one of probably the four most important theologians of all time before he was converted before he became a Christian he was physically highly promiscuous he had a wife he was really unfaithful to her he had mistresses slept around a lot then he became a Christian through reading the book of Romans but he never dealt properly with how to deal with the guilt from his promiscuous past and he continued to think just like Plato that his body was still evil rather than that in his sin was forgiven he had a huge guilt complex which really messed up his view of sexuality and he would teach people that you know Christians in his congregation he would teach married couples not to have sex ever to withhold from all physical pleasure even within the sanctity of marriage he would teach them that while sex within marriage was not strictly wrong feeling any pleasure from it was okay that's a hard thing to reconcile and then as Christianity develops from early into medieval Christianity in the fifth century you have a rule within the church that priests are not allowed to marry and then after that the church begins to limit the days on which married couples could sleep together to the point that over half of the calendar year was banned and was off limits the church began to teach that Jesus mother Mary remained a virgin throughout her married life to Joseph because if sex is always bad even within marriage Mary wouldn't have done it and then this you know snowballs into the the prudishness of Victorian culture generally what's wrong with all of this is that when God sets out the summary of his moral standards for us okay he gives us the 10 commandments as his way of expressing it and because sex is such a big issue in the world after all he made Adam and Eve as sexual creatures God gives one tenth of his attention to human sexuality he gives us a whole commandment specifically about it but what he gives in the commandment is not this rule you shall never have sex when God gives his word on sex the thing he opposes isn't sex itself it's adultery the thing God hates is the abuse and the misuse of sex rather than sex itself we are not or if we are or Christians we should not be prudish people who despise an integral part of God's creation of what God himself calls very good in Genesis as though it's something that's always inherently bad okay it's a point one we're not prudes point two we are not pagans what the commandment says is that sex is reserved for a very specific context well it's not anti-sex it is anti adultery and we have to distinguish those two ideas adultery is not a word for for sex itself it's a word that refers specifically to sex with someone who is married to someone else someone who has promised to someone else someone who has given themselves to

someone apart from you it's sleeping with someone else's spouse why is that wrong why is it wrong for two people who are married to other people to to sleep with each other well the Bible has already established a lot about sexuality before we even get to this commandment it establishes that that God made humanity with two genders male and female that God commanded them to be fruitful and to multiply subdue the earth within that remit sex is a part of God's creation that's within marriage is not sinful that within marriage is something that God calls very good and what this commandment focuses on is when we as when we break that that perfect command is when we break the natural order that God made whether it's the marriage bond being broken whether it's sex between people who who are not married and have not committed to be with anyone the point is that it's for this relationship of commitment and this is where we're going to start looking a bit at 1st Corinthians 6 which we read earlier on in verse 13 where Paul is expanding on and he's applying the seventh commandment to Christians in this Roman world of prudes and pagans he cites one of the pagan slogans a couple of white he cites it food for the stomach and stomach for food this is

Paul giving a quote kind of the the sexual slogan of the day the idea is that when you're hungry you just eat you know eat whatever you want wherever you want you don't hesitate and what people in Corinth are saying with this is well they're taking this and I'm using it for for sexuality when you when you feel the need you just do it doesn't matter with whom doesn't matter where doesn't matter what your relationship is to the person when you're hungry you eat when you feel you need sex you you go and have it but Paul has a completely different approach to sexuality Paul saying this is sex is not made for it you know an animal instinct that we just throw about without any self-control Paul says that the body was not made to be like that and we're going to go on to see more about what that means in a minute but the application here is this the fact that the Bible promotes sex in such a specific context and one that is so at odds with the whole social norm around us is of massive relevance to us because this commandment requires us if we are

Christians to think completely counter culturally in our culture people sleep with each other to test out whether there might be some potential for a relationship one day there they try and muster up some intimacy and some feeling from the starting point of sex whereas the Bible wants us to do the exact opposite the Bible wants us to create intimacy intimacy first and then to expressly commit to that other person exclusively and then once you have that that foundation of trust and intimacy and love and commitment once that's already there then these things express themselves in sexual intimacy you know we're talking about being counter-cultural with this how does the seventh commandment affect the way that we that we choose to listen to music you know what we choose to fill our minds with how does it affect the magazines that we contribute to financially by buying them so we're not prudes we're not pagans number three what are we we are Christians we are Christians why is a Christian philosophy of sex so important what's tremendously important because many of us struggle hugely between the two extremes that we've been describing between prudishness and paganism and we struggle between these two extremes without ever clearly thinking through the the Christian approach to this topic and finding that the gospel redeems sex if you've been raised for example in a Christian environment where sex is treated as something bad something that cannot be redeemed something that's taboo that good Christians should never talk about there's such a high chance that you'll grow up just carrying on that assumption that sex is always bad that there is no good context for it and then some people who are raised like that although obviously by no means all some people raised with that they can go in various directions you can end up for example being married but you still have this guilt complex about sex and it ruins the the development and the expression of intimacy with your spouse you think I know we're married but can I still enjoy this isn't this something that's bad isn't this still sin in our marriage or you can go from the opposite direction you can go from the extreme of sex is always bad so no sex with anyone ever to abundant sex with anyone anywhere and you swing like a pendulum into into promiscuity and your sexuality becomes a mess and it's a whole web of of sin and self-defeat and loneliness you become somebody that that gives yourself wholly to other people and you know they've seen everything that you have to offer you've made yourself completely vulnerable to them you've said this is what I am and I'm giving it to you and they take it once and then they walk away and you become somebody that knows huge rejection wholesale rejection of everything that you are and that you have and all your vulnerability and your life just goes from this you know doing it once it's a second to the third time and then you get hardened and hardened and hardened and your ability to to really love and cherish and diminishes and that's the extreme that you can fall into if we don't set this set this

straight this to a Christian way to think about sex either way whether you end up somebody that's married but it still thinks it's bad and your intimacy gets stunted or whether you end up somebody that just falls into promiscuity either way it's a terrible situation a situation where we haven't grasped how the gospel redeems all of life including who and what we are as people created as sexual creatures also it's so important that we think through this topic clearly and for you if you are a non-Christian if you're here today and you're coming out of a culture just like the pagan one in the New Testament so just like modern-day Scotland around us rampantly sexualized culture and you're coming out of that trying to assess well what is Christianity what's the gospel what does the Christian life look like take note of this what I am not asking you to do is to become a Platonist or a prude and I'm not telling you you can carry on like you have been before if you want to be a Christian what this commandment teaches us is to to take a really high view of sexuality of sex rather than a low view because that's what the two other extremes offer whether you if you're prudish and think that it's always bad you take a low view of it it's sinful and it's wicked if you're

promiscuous and pagan you take a low view of sex because it's just something you throw around willy-nilly what this commandment tells us is to really elevate sex as something that we cherish as something that we guard something that we value in a really high way what this commandment is telling you is not to be a prude not to despise your body not to think it's it's absolutely evil nor is it telling you that your body is just something cheap that you can throw around that you can freely give to anyone anywhere Christianity has a third way it's got a different approach and we start to see that really fleshed out in the Bible when we look at the way that marriage is used in the Bible to illustrate God's relationship to us okay and you see this all the way throughout the Old Testament and the new think of verses it's like in Isaiah your maker is your husband okay the the union that we have with God it's just like the union between a husband and a wife marriage is is this expression this illustration that God gives of what of what our relationship with him is like think of the New Testament think of Ephesians Christ's bride is the church the church is married to Jesus Christ and think of the verses that we read in 1st Corinthians 6 you know when Paul is speaking about about sexual purity and then he's explaining to us why we should value that what is the issue that he brings up it's that we have union with Jesus Christ verse 17 but he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit and it's the fact that we're united to the Lord that affects the way that we look at uniting ourselves to other people you know what that's saying let me I'll try and explain it in order to explain the Christian philosophy of sex the first thing that we need to look at isn't actually sex itself the thing that we need to look at first is the gospel it's this idea that through the gospel we we have what we were made for union with Jesus Christ okay and sex is something that in the end will pass away doesn't exist in heaven and the reason that it will pass away and that we will not miss it is because the joy that exists there the level of rapture the level of wonderment that will have in heaven through our union with Jesus

[27 : 10] Christ and through the the level of unity that we will have with everyone else who loves Jesus that depth of joy will actually render even the the greatest sexual union in the most ideal and perfect conditions the joy that we will have in Christ actually makes the the the best joy of sex obsolete it renders a thing of past something that we don't look back to because what we have in heaven is so much greater you know it's like going from not even going from black and white to color because that's that's a low view of sex within marriage but it's like going from color TV to high definition widescreen cinema screen you know the joy is so much greater through union with Christ and that's why in order to give us an illustration of the depth of joy and love of the mind-blowing intimacy that we will have with Jesus Christ in heaven God gave us marriage with sex as its ultimate expression of intimacy and the way that you view one the way that you view the gospel and the way that you view the other the way that you view sex they're completely linked your your view of the gospel has a knock-on effect direct effect on how you look at sex what marriage and within that the joy of sexuality means to us as Christians is massive in terms of gospel theology because we take the gospel seriously and we value our union with Christ more than anything else because we find our greatest joy through being joined together with Jesus because of that we're not prudes we're not pagans our love for Jesus transforms our view of sex so what do you do with that well what transforming effect does it have Paul sums it up 1st Corinthians 6 verse 20 therefore honor God with your bodies honor God with your bodies and your body show that what you have in Jesus is important prize it and I want to give an example as we come towards the end of what this looks like and to give an example from the Puritans okay and if you know much about them or if you know nothing about them I'll explain it and surprise you Puritan to us as a negative word isn't it you know people are dull people are doing dreary people that never smile they're puritanical you know it's such a negative term a historian once said puritanism is the fear that someone somewhere may be happy that's what we think of the Puritans they were religious people they were Christians and kind of 17th 18th century and we have this stereotype of them as negative as doer as dull people people that had joyless lives kill joys in fact in reality in history the vast majority of them were completely different and they lived in a social context where the mainstream church was very much anti-sex you know the body is bad we're very

Victorian and Prudish we don't talk about it it's taboo and you know Roman Catholicism in their context was explicitly in many respects anti-sex and their surrounding culture was either Victorian and Prudish and you know reflecting the church or it was sleazy and it was promiscuous but the Puritans were people in the midst of this context who were radically committed to following the Bible and to having the Bible shape their opinions and their viewpoints including when it comes to

sexuality and what you see in them if you read Puritan sermons on the song of Solomon if you look at how Puritans gave Puritan ministers gave marriage counseling to to their congregation you find that whereas in the surrounding culture people were either very repressed about sex or you know just had this hopeless promiscuity the Puritans were not like that they were actually they were strict on sex you know there is one context for it but within that context they were liberated they were really happy people their culture said it was bad and a taboo subject but they read the Bible and saw that it wasn't taboo because it's one-tenth of the Ten

Commandments and they saw that the Bible talked about sex in the right context as extremely good so the Puritans took their lead from scripture and what you see in them they're a tremendous historical example to us of redeeming sexuality through the gospel finding the place that God wants us to have it and as an expression of what of the gospel and it created people who whose marriage is not perfect because they were humans but who knew what they were doing who were generally happy and fulfilled now I want to conclude I want to end saying this that for those of us who have really got things wrong sexually this command is here to tell us that that we need to repent and it tells us where to find forgiveness in Jesus Christ that's how to sort out messed up sexuality through turning to Jesus finding union with him is the thing that resets how we think about this topic and this commandment is there to teach us a new way to be for those of you who have been profoundly uncomfortable listening to this sermon I have been uncomfy preaching it but it's a topic that we have to face up to because it's one-tenth of God's attention in the Ten Commandments devoted to how we approach sex as Christians and furthermore we live in a society where sex which is one of the greatest gifts of God is everywhere in our faces as though it's cheap and as though it's worthless it's twisted appallingly and we cannot afford to stay silent on this as Christians in a culture that is obsessed with sex which but which at the same time does not understand it at all I hope that through reflecting on this that God's word will shape us to be people that stand out sexually every bit as much as the first century Christians did when with their belief in the seventh commandment they spread the gospel in their message and teaching about union with Christ and in the way they reflected that with their sexuality and through them the world was changed and I hope and I pray that through us that people will be changed through the fact that in our sexual ethics that we are redeemed people who live differently let's pray together Lord our gods we thank you so much for union with Christ we thank you that what we have in Him and what we have to look forward to in Him is such a great joy such a rapturous ecstasy such an eternal fulfillment we thank you that it's so awesome that it will make even the greatest of joyful gifts that you give to us in this life pass away and we thank you that we have that in Christ to look forward to for those of us who struggle so much with this commandment who struggle to to think about sexuality and about who we are and to redeem it and to reconcile it with your word we pray that your word will encourage us that through knowing answered prayer and repentance and through seeing the direction that your word points us in and the motivation it gives us to go there we pray that you would shape us and renew us Lord we also pray that through your renewal of our lives in every area that you would help us as Christians to to have every bit as much of a transforming effect in our society as Christians did in the first few centuries when the gospel spread all over the known world and we pray for this in Jesus name amen