

Seven!

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[0 : 0 0] I would like to go back to Exodus 20 and verse 14.

The seventh commandment is going through the commandments in our evening worship and then the young people are looking at them again in identity up at the house.

One or two quick more practical outworking and working through some of the issues, but it's a short commandment as well. You shall not commit adultery, self-explanatory. I could say amen. We could all go home. Maybe.

There's actually so much in this whole area that we can only really just skim the surface in many ways. But what I want to do tonight is remind ourselves that this is a key, absolutely key commandment.

Remember it's in the second table of the law which is looking at our relationships with one another. And it very much gets to the heart of what we are as people, I think in many different ways, and what we are as society.

[1 : 1 9] And I hope that at least what we'll be able to do is to trigger some thoughts and to trigger some further study in this area for ourselves in our lives. But what I want to do by way of introduction is to remind you of what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 22 and verse 37.

The Pharisees asked Jesus about the commandments, a teacher which is the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus says, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like this, love your neighbour as yourself. And then he says, all of the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments. In other words, he's saying that the ten commandments that we have are really summarised in these two commandments.

The first four commands of the ten commandments really are speaking about how we are to relate to God. And the second table of the laws, it's called the next law, remind us how we are to act with one another.

And so it's about loving God and it's about loving one another. And really what the laws do is they show us that we can't do it. It's impossible for us to be perfectly fulfilling or obeying God's law.

[2 : 3 7] So it exposes our guilt, exposes our need and drives us to Jesus. Jesus is the only one who fulfilled the whole law of God and then was crucified in the cross as a sinner because he was dying in our place, out of love and out of grace.

So we recognise that even this law is part of the second summary that Jesus gives about loving your neighbour as yourself. Now loving your neighbour as yourself doesn't mean you can have sex with everyone you want.

That's completely not what it means about loving your neighbour as yourself. What is spoken of here is a reminder for us to protect, primarily to protect the family unit, the protection of marriage and the family unit.

From the very beginning, love and the sexual expression of love has been to be contained within the parameters that God has given of marriage.

That relationship of equality, a diversity in equality, a relationship of faithfulness, of joy, of erotic adventure, of intimacy, of sacrifice, of security, a covenantal relationship, where the two become one flesh and that is not merely a physical union but it is a much deeper union that is expressed within that and for the procreation of family and children and the next generations that come from that.

[4 : 17] And so there is this real positive core, and if all the commandments, although many of them are stated negatively, do not, do not, do not, they are the corollary, the opposite which we will look at as well.

The positive side that they are protecting and that they are speaking about here, there is the positive reality of family love and marriage within that. And we know that that is an absolutely fundamental core building block relationship of society for all time.

And it is so important that in many ways it is reflective of the Trinity, in the image of God God created them, male and female, He made them in God's image.

So there is this reflect, in society and community and men and women together, we have the image of God reflected. And even more so that precious relationship is reflected in redemption in the story of grace, where God reveals the image of His church as His bride, the bride of Christ.

And there is this relational aspect to marriage that reflects a spiritual relationship between God and His people. So it is a fundamental and basic and important relationship, this relationship of marriage that is spoken of and is being protected in the negative tones of this particular command.

[5 : 44] So there is that positive element, but negatively we are faced in the society in which we live and throughout history of a different and a more brutal reality.

We recognise the abuses of sex which has damaged love and dignity and has loosened the strength of the family unit and the family bond.

When sin came into the world, in other words, God was rejected and God's ways were rejected. And God's judgment fell upon the whole of society and the world so that everything in many ways is out of sync and upside down and not right.

And the joy of sex became uncoupled from marriage in the majority of circumstances. And instead of being something which was for serving and for giving and for an expression of love, it became something for self gratification.

And instead of being relational, it became objectified so that it was just about seeing people as objects to be enjoyed and participated in rather than in relational talent.

[6 : 57] It became ungovernable and people instead of looking for love satisfied themselves and settled for sex. Outwith of that parameter and with that protection and with that love and with that surrounding that God had given it, there is a great quote from a book called The Mystery of Marriage by Mike Mason which is in the little book that I go through with people getting married.

It is, I think, a very helpful quote. It says to be naked with another person is a sort of picture or symbolic demonstration of perfect honesty, perfect trust, perfect giving and commitment.

And if the heart is not naked along with the body, then the whole action becomes a lie and a mockery. It becomes an involvement and an absurd and tragic contradiction, the giving of the body but the withholding of the self.

It is, in effect, the very last step in human relations and therefore not one to be taken lightly. It is not a step which establishes deep intimacy but one which presupposes it.

So can you see the great difference there in God's pattern with what often happens and is experienced in the society in which we live?

[8 : 17] And obviously the world in which we live broken by sin, then all of the commands are affected negatively by that. And it happens in so many different ways. Some people battle with same-sex attraction, some people embrace that.

People are faced with division caused by sexual behaviour, others are abused by it. It is a commercialised to a huge degree in the society of western, particularly the society in which we live.

And the slavery that I prayed about earlier in our sophisticated and beautiful world is probably greater now than it ever was in the centuries past.

It is the cause of much manipulation of commerce, of sales. And that is just on the outside. In our own lives, in our own hearts, there's all kinds of lusts and confusion and slavery to sexual desires and damage.

I just want to take a tangent here for a moment because there's been a great deal of spoken in the last number of years, particularly about the church and the attitude of the church to homosexuality.

[9 : 45] And for the most part for me, certainly that has been a very unwelcome focus. It seems that today, more than ever, particularly in Scotland with same-sex marriage, being on the agenda and the church having to deal with that, the national church and all that goes with it, that for many people it's become now the definition of orthodoxy is our understanding of these matters and what our position is with regard to homosexuality.

It's the first question many people will ask when they find out you're a Christian. Oh well, that means you'll be against homosexuals, you'll be anti-gay, you'll be homophobic.

And that will often be the question that's asking. I think the debate in our society, and I don't know if it's right to call it a debate, but has become very polarised. There are many on one extreme who are vociferous in pushing the gay agenda, maybe in political terms more so, and it has seen this opportunity to smash the church because of their views.

And then on the other extreme there's the implicit homophobic behaviour that some in the church display, and the insensitivity that many in the church have displayed with respect to homosexuality.

So I just wanted to say a couple of things about why in this pulpit over the last two or three years I have not majored on and focused on and always talked about the homosexual issue where it seemed to be such a major issue in our society and in many of our Christian magazines and such like.

[11 : 33] And the first thing is because it's not the gospel. It's not the gospel. The gospel is not our view, our sexuality or our view of sex.

The gospel is that we all need grace. The gospel as I understand it is that we are all sexual sinners. Just as we break every one of God's laws I hope will go on to recognise and know and see, and that so often it becomes easy judgementalism to expose whatever sexual sin it might be that we see in our society.

It's not the gospel. The gospel is that we all need Jesus Christ. And because I know that in every congregations there are believers who struggle with same sex attraction and who may be afraid of that temptation, who may be confused, who may be feel isolated, who have questions and anger sometimes against God or certainly sometimes as people and are hurt by the throwaway comments that they hear in the church regarding these issues and about being straight or being gay.

Many who are looking for intimacy but unable to express or find that recognising the celibacy that they seek to follow as believers.

The last thing they need is formulaic or cheaply forged or often trite comments from the pulpit that don't acknowledge the battle and the struggle that people are facing.

[13 : 33] And tonight what I want to remind ourselves of is that we all need to find out identity in Jesus Christ in the gospel. Not in our marriage partners, not in our sexuality, not in our career, not in our qualifications, not in our achievements, not in our success, not in our gifts, but we find our identity in Jesus Christ.

That's what equals us together before God this evening. So I want you just for a moment, for a moment for us to think about this law that we have here, God's law, God's pattern for living.

We need to remind ourselves that although it's negatively constructed, we need to remember that God's law also is giving us the polar opposite, which is the goodness of what He has given and that sex is good.

Within its biblical parameters, within the pattern that God intended for us, it's a great thing. The expression of love, of sharing, of being one, of being honest with one another.

It's pleasurable within the marriage context and it's for making babies. In the lifelong committed relationship of marriage.

[15 : 03] We know within that, or outwith of that, should I say, the abuse of that model, that pattern may indeed well be sweet in the mouth.

Otherwise it wouldn't be temptation, would it? It wouldn't be attractive. But as God reminds us to reject His way and to reject His pattern, we'll end up as it being gravel in the stomach.

We'll be sweet in the mouth, but ultimately damaging and dangerous when we go against Him and abuse people and abuse ourselves by ignoring the parameters that He gives us.

So sex within its biblical context, great. But also we need to understand the wider biblical context that the commands are always written in, because the commands are summaries, aren't they? We've seen that before, and that we need to take in all of the Bible's teaching in this area.

And we recognise that. The Bible, in many of the commands, are categories of truth. And Jesus expresses, and the New Testament expresses, in other parts of the Bible, express the outworking sometimes of these commands and categorise them more.

[16 : 20] We recognise it's not just narrowly the committing of adultery, the breaking of the marriage, bond by giving yourself physically to someone who is not your wife or your husband.

Although that is spoken of here, and we're reminded of the pain and the betrayal and the unfaithfulness and the separation, and the damage it often causes not only to the individuals involved, but also to the children if they're children involved in that.

Someone sent me an interesting article this week, written, I think it was in the New York Times, by someone who wasn't a Christian, but who was spoken about the pain of adultery. And she was speaking as one who had committed adultery and who had also been adultery committed against her and her husband, breaking the marriage bond. Both, she said, were hugely painful and damaging in the long term.

The reality of these broken vows and broken love and broken relationship. But within that category of scripture we see it's broadened, isn't it?

Because we see that. We see that the outworking of this command must be broader than the mere committing of adultery. The Bible speaks of premarital sex and of incest and of homosexual sex and of casual sex and abuse and slavery and violence and pornography.

[17 : 51] A huge, a huge issue today, a huge problem on the internet today. A huge issue for our young people, and our not so young people I'm sure, where there is such free and easy access to pornography, which we simply don't have time to further deal with and look into today.

But these issues and rape and all the different sexual abuses that happen in the society in which we live, all desensitize, all about self gratification, all out with the parameters of relationship, and all revealing slavery to our appetites that we mentioned this morning in the passage in Hebrews.

So the Bible gives us a broader, broader areas that are, that further define this commandment, that we are to recognize as being unhelpful, unhealthy, disobeying and moving out of what God has intended for us.

So with all the commands we see there's a positive side, with all the commands we see that there's a wider biblical teaching that broadens them, but also we recognize with all the commands that they are turned inside out, that Jesus takes them and he turns them inside out.

And we saw that in the passage in Matthew, Matthew chapter 5. If we just look at that again, it's Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount where he does a lot of this turning inside out of the commands and moving them just to outward behavior into the inside intentions of our heart.

[19 : 47] You've heard it said, do not commit adultery. And he further, he doesn't rubbish that, he says, that's absolutely right, but I'm telling you, he says, anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery within his heart.

So he's turning the commands, just like murder we looked at that and how hatred is the internal motive that leads to murder. So lust is the internal motive that leads to wrong attitudes and wrong thinking.

It always starts, in other words, in our hearts. So it moves it just from what everyone else is doing outside and what attractions there might be outside to what we are thinking and what we are like inside ourselves.

It's a great reality of grace, isn't it? Grace always turns the tension and the light on ourselves. It stops wagging the finger at everybody else and it finds that there's great need to be.

We have this knotted and twisted and broken heart untangled and purified and cleaned by God Himself and it always starts in our heart. And so we have to be challenged by our own attitudes to the opposite sex.

[20 : 51] We have to be challenged by our attitude to those who we love. We have to think about what we fantasize about and what is in our imagination and what causes us satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

We need to think about coveting, what is not ours and lust, which we are asked to deal with and control and purify and seek forgiveness for.

So that there's this great secret invisible internal reality which we are asked to deal with and to move from in our Christian lives.

Paul and Corinthians the other pastor who talked about fleeing sexual limit and running from it and dealing with our minds and our hearts and our attitudes first. And that's hugely significant.

And so we have this great body of teaching and this great model of living that is utterly and completely counter cultural. That every single sinew of society and every angle that we come from absolutely laugh and mock at what God's model is for us.

[22 : 09] And one of the challenges for us is not ourselves to think similarly because we know God is good. We know God has created us and created sex and created marriage and created family and created society and created children and created us to be in that image.

And that sin is broken and divides and separates and this engages and doesn't care and moves away from. So in knowing what God says and knowing the context and knowing their hearts, where do we go from here?

Two areas just as I close two areas that we go to when we think about this commandment. First place we go to is to Christ. That's the first place we go to because we will never understand his commands.

We will never understand his laws. We will never find any beauty in him and in his commands unless we see the beauty of Christ himself.

We will never follow him and never say amen to his model for living unless we have recognized and seen his own beauty, his light and the ugly selfishness and greed and lust and impurity that needs forgiven and dealt with in our own attitudes.

[23 : 28] Unless we have been touched by redeeming grace, unless we've been made clean and unless we've seen absolutely yes Lord that is right. I have been selfish and I've been lustful and impure and would do anything just to gratify myself at the expense of everyone and everything else.

Forgive me and then live the life that follows that. So for us all there will be a recognition and a confession of sin.

We sung the whole of Psalm 51, an amazing, penitential, sacrificial. Psalm where there was this great recognition of confession and of forgiveness against you, you only have a sin.

He knew that God had seen into his heart and David's motives in what he did in denying the faith of his wife and lusting after Bathsheba, taking her to be his own, abusing his kingly power, possibly even against her will.

Then to get out of the mess that he had extricated him in by getting her pregnant, he has her husband murdered on the battlefield and so there's deception, there's greed, there's lust, there's lies, there's murder.

[24 : 56] And there's all kinds of mess as he relentlessly follows his own appetites.

But then there's confession and forgiveness and renewal for him. And we go to Christ in our lives with these same confessional needs.

It might not be quite so dramatic as that. It might be, but it might not be, but we need in him forgiveness and we need the power of the Holy Spirit, which is a power which says, love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, meekness, last but not least, self-control.

Self-control. You know, the Spirit of God in our lives gives us self-control, which is hugely significance in this area.

And it gives us a love and respect for other people and for the community in which we live. And it gives us the ability to protect ourselves and to protect one another and to resist temptation and to flee from it.

[26 : 05] I'm not saying for a moment that is easy. It's hugely challenging and hugely difficult in this society, but we need to go back to Hebrews this morning and say, fix our eyes on Jesus Christ and be honest with him and recognise him.

And recognise that we are children of God and we are called by God and we have an important task to do in this life.

And let's not be obsessed with sex because we're missing the point if we are. And let's not be obsessed with it thinking that we can't overcome or can't meet God's standards for us because it's impossible to the absolutely possible cross-eyed.

We won't. We will recognise that our calling is higher and that we keep his model in view for us.

So we flee to Christ, but we also flee, can I say, in the second place. And I think this is very important and it's been underplayed very much. Maybe in our thinking on this is to the Christian community.

[27 : 15] To the Christian community. That's where we flee. We flee to Christ and we also flee to the Christian community. Because sexuality is what is sexual immorality. What does it do?

Well it damages relationships. That's what it does. It damages relationships because our attitudes are wrong. Because we're thinking of people wrong. Because we're thinking of men or women wrong if we're looking at them in pornographic material.

We're thinking of marriages wrong. We're thinking of our friends in a wrong way. It's a self-centred way of thinking.

As we're in Christian community we recognise several things. We recognise that many people in this church, as in every church because we're no different and no church is any different from ours, may be in life situations that is a real battle for them.

Real difficulty. And you may be looking at other people saying it's okay for them. They're married. There's no problem for them. Or whatever it might be that you say it as you wish for what someone else has.

[28 : 33] But many people will be facing battles this evening. In this area of living there'll be those who have same-sex attraction. And they're fed up with the church always talking about homosexuality or the gay agenda.

And they may be battling with the counter-cultural choice to be celibate within that.

And they may long for intimacy and relationship but no, it will not be theirs under Christ if things don't change. But there may be others who are single, who also long for intimacy and love and for the physical expression of that.

But don't see any prospect. Women for whom the body clock may be ticking.

And who long for family and long for relationship. May be divorced people, single parents, battling to bring up their children, having known marriage but knowing the abuse of that marriage and the brokenness maybe that was very private and hurtful.

[29 : 47] But there's married people also remember who may be scarred by past sexual activity that's damaging their marriage. Or because they have a rotten and dull sex life themselves and are tempted by others.

By newness, by opportunities, by temptation, by someone else who seems so understanding, so loving, so sensitive to their needs.

And for others they may be battling here with pornography or with unbridled lusts in their lives. What's the answer for us? Should we deal honestly with these things?

It's Christ first. It's always Christ first. But it's also community, the Christian community. That we are to be people who throw ourselves into relationships, not sexual ones, but relationships within the community of grace.

That we come out of ourselves with all our burdens and with all our loss and with all our struggles. Whatever it may be, whether it's this or whatever other command it might be. And that we serve one another. And that we give for one another.

[31 : 03] And we deny ourselves to be there for one another. And we see the needs of other people. And we develop relationships with them and closeness with them and family unity within the Christian church.

That we find our belonging there. I know it's not the same. But rejoice and praise God that He gives you this unity and this closeness and this family that we can be part of.

A place where you can forgive and be forgiven. A place where you can be honest and vulnerable and open and not be judged and not be ignored and not be sniggered at.

And not be dealt with in a careless and loveless way. A place where we can talk about Christ and talk to Christ with one another.

Where we can bear one another's burdens. And when people can give us their burdens. Also a place of healing and forgiveness on our journey together.

[32 : 14] It's a short journey in the light of eternity. And we share that journey together. It's not going to be perfect. There's going to be struggles.

We're going to have to change. And doubtless Christ will change other people as well. But as we are changed, our perspective will change.

And we will be more Christ like in all that we do. And we will support one another through our struggles and through our battles. And until we get to a place where we can be honest with one another.

In these issues. Oh no, I'm talking about unburning the deepest secrets of your hearts to everyone. And the door and the way out of church. Don't be ridiculous. We can never do that.

But unless we have a degree of honesty and openness with at least three or four people in our church. In our family, in our Christian community. That we can be accountable to and to whom we are accountable.

[33 : 17] And they are accountable to us. Then we will find a great degree of loneliness. And a great degree of dishonesty and hypocrisy and judgmentalism within our churches.

And we will find the mountain. As we fix it on this morning. It will be like climbing a mountain all the time. But it gives us the help and the community to enable us to get through the battles.

Whatever battles we may face in our marriages. Or in our singleness or in our engaged condition. Or in whatever it might be that we battle with in this area.

Don't be alone. Don't be alone. Amen. It's power, heads and pray. Rather God we ask that we would...

Nobody here would be struggling on their own. With battles that they think nobody else has. Or they are ashamed of. Because they think nobody else would understand.

[34 : 26] Or because as they look around the church. They think everyone else has got their Christian lives together. What a joke that is, isn't it? That we would think like that Lord.

That we would think somehow that we are the only ones who struggle. Where the Bible tells us some of the greatest. As we've seen in Hebrews. Some of the people we raise up as great heroes of the faith.

Or people who had huge personal battles and struggles. And sins and brokenness and darkness in their hearts. That needed forgiveness and needed grace and needed redemption.

And if we think we are anything else. Then we have completely misunderstood grace in the gospel. So we pray for those who are struggling with all manner of different issues.

In this field, in this area. Of our sexual identity and of our relationship with God. And his Lordship over our lives.

[35 : 32] And we pray that you would help us to be pure. And we know that is impossible. Without your grace and without your forgiveness. Help us to protect.

We pray for the protection of our marriages. We pray for the protection of our children. We pray that we would be able to go against the tide.

Of a society where so much is throw away. And so much is impermanent. And to where there is awe and wonder.

At a marriage that lasts. Or would even consider lasting for life. Be with those who struggle with same sex attraction. Be with those who struggle with loneliness.

Singleness. And longing for family and longing for relationship. That they might not have. May they not be bitter. And may they not be angry with God.

[36 : 33] But may they see the joy and the privilege of where he has them at this point. And may they go to him with the battles.

Be with those who struggle in their marriage. Those whose relationships are dull. And have stopped working as it were. And where there is coldness and separation.

And temptation. Remember us all in the variety of the needs that we face. And may we find forgiveness and hope.

And a new beginning in Jesus. That is radical revolutionary. Real and living. For Jesus' sake. Amen.