



## **The Sanctity of Sex Part 1 (Deuteronomy 5:18)**

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This morning we're continuing our sermon series in the book of Deuteronomy entitled, "Ruled by a Gracious God." We don't typically think of those two words as belonging together – rules and grace. Rules or being ruled stir feelings of oppression, being confined, restricted, or enslaved in some way. We think of rules as joy-killing, legalistic, death-warmed-over sorts of things.

Grace or being gracious, on the other hand, rouse feelings of kindness, respect, tolerance, no judgment. Ten times out of ten, if you ask someone, "Would you like grace or would you like to be ruled?" What are they going to say? Grace all the way.

Rules feel life-taking. Grace feels life-giving. So, we dive into God's Word and conversation in Christian circles skeptical of rules and eager for grace. And that's a big problem. Why? **Because both our cultural understanding of what it means to be ruled and our cultural notion of what it means to be gracious are equally wrong.**

God's rules mark out the path of life because life is only found in submission to his authority, living the way he created and redeemed us to live. They are an expression of his grace, his undeserved favor. He doesn't owe us life. He doesn't owe us joy. We deserve nothing but judgment. Yet in the wonder of his grace, he delights to reveal the path of life and lead us down the path of life by transforming our hearts and giving us both the desire and the power to submit to his authority.

The fact that God is gracious means he delights to lavish blessings on us that we do not deserve. It means he loves us not on account of who we are, but on account of who he is. It means he loves us not because we are lovely, but in order to make us lovely. God's grace is not an "it's all good," judgement free zone sort of attitude. It's not tolerance in the form of freedom to do you. It's unmerited favor in the form of a love that transforms us more and more into the image of Christ, the supremely joyful Son of God.

**In summary, to be ruled by a gracious God is to experience the blessing of being brought into the joy and freedom of living under his authority.** Why is that important to remember? Because it reminds us that the ten commandments in Deuteronomy 5 are not cold expressions of divine oppression. They're not a power

trip or a power grab. No. They are an authoritative declaration from the King of heaven who created you for himself, “Live this way that you might live!” Love me like this, love your neighbor like this, and live. For this is the path of life. This is the path of joy.

The ten commandments are not obstacles between you and the good life. They are what it looks like to love God and everyone around you with the love he first showed you. And that’s why keeping them is not a legalistic exercise in earning God’s favor or what “conservative” Christians do. It what a faith-filled response to the favor he has poured out on us in Jesus looks like in delightfully clear and practical terms.

For Jesus doesn’t do away with the law. He fulfills the law. He desires the blessings of obedience for all who hold fast to him by faith. He grants us the gift of a restored relationship with God – a new heart that wants to obey, a new spirit that’s able to obey.

Friend, life in Jesus isn’t freedom from obedience. It’s freedom for obedience. **Because joy isn’t found in ruling yourself. Joy is found in being ruled by a gracious God!** As we prayed this morning in Ps 119:107, “Give me life, O LORD, according to your word!” So hear the life-giving Word of God in Deut 5:18. “And you shall not commit adultery.” You shall not commit adultery.

How do those words immediately hit you? Does your heart protest, “What gives God the right to tell me what to do with my body! What I do with my body is my business. He doesn’t know me. He doesn’t know what I’ve lived through. Besides, how can something that feels so good be so wrong?”

Maybe you’re gripped by the guilt and shame of something you did years ago or are doing right now. Something you knew was wrong and did anyway, hurting the very people you promised to love and who have sacrificed the most to love you. Perhaps you are one of those people. You’ve been betrayed. And the grief still hasn’t gone away.

Maybe you’re an unmarried Christian tempted to minimize what God says about honoring him with our bodies. I’m just a red-blooded male, you tell yourself. Why would God give me these desires if he didn’t want me to do something with them! It’s not like anyone’s getting hurt. It’s not like I’m committing adultery. Why would she pose for the picture if she didn’t want me to enjoy her body?



Maybe you are all-too aware of God's design for your sexuality, but you're scared of how other Christians will respond if you share the same-sex desires you've experienced lately. Or maybe you feel defeated, discouraged, and condemned in your struggle with another sort of sexual sin. You're on the edge of giving up hope of ever experiencing victory. Your heart is fast growing numb to the conviction of the Spirit. In your sane moments, it's frightening.

Or maybe you're a parent with a 12-year-old child in the room and right now you're thinking, "Oh man, I sure hope the preacher doesn't say anything that prompts an awkward question. Do we have to talk about this? How about we jump to v. 19?"

Friend, no matter which category you're in, remember what I said a few minutes ago. All that God says to us in his Word, every command, every rule, Deut 5:18 included, is a precious gift designed to show you the glory of God's goodness, to mark out the path of life, and keep you on the path of life. How grateful I am that God does not respond to our sex-crazed world by saying, "Just stop talking about it, ok!" I wish Adam and Even never figured out how to do that!" No. The 7<sup>th</sup> commandment is part of an exceedingly good and glorious vision for our sexuality. When it comes to a fundamental aspect of our humanity, God is not silent.

In fact, he says so much on this topic that we're going to spend two weeks on this single verse. Today, we're going to lay some important foundations. First, that sex is a holy and precious gift. Second, that adultery starts in the heart. Then we'll come back next week and build on those two biblical principles by considering in a shorter sermon what it practically looks like to pursue sexual purity as the path of life.

Without taking time to consider exactly what's at stake in the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, we will lack the right motivation to keep it. And if we only consider what is at stake, but don't think carefully about how God's Word, and the gospel, and the church help us to grow, the joy of pleasing God with our bodies will remain out of reach.

We need to think carefully about why God cares about what we do with our bodies. And we need to think carefully about how to practically honor God with our bodies. All that to say, if you find yourself hungry for more at the end of this sermon, that's a good thing! Come back next week and we'll pick right up where we left off.

## **1) SEX IS A HOLY AND PRECIOUS GIFT**

The 7<sup>th</sup> commandment only makes sense in the larger context of Scripture. If you don't understand the broader biblical vision of marriage and sexuality, what Deut 5:18 forbids and requires can seem rather arbitrary. So let's begin by asking, "Why does what we do with our bodies matter?"

The story of the Bible doesn't begin with us. It begins with our Creator. You are the Maker's handiwork, friend: Your physical body and all it is capable of doing and enjoying, sexuality included, is not an accident. It's not an evolutionary product of chance. It's a result of God's divine design, a design Genesis 1 declares is "very good." Why? Because he created you for a very good purpose, namely, to glorify him. In Isaiah 43:7, the Creator speaks of "everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

That purpose doesn't go away even after sin entered God's perfect world, twisting and corrupting our sexual desires in all sorts of ways. The purpose remains. That's the first reason what we do with our bodies matters. God created us for a glorious purpose and has every right to hold us accountable for fulfilling his purposes as our Righteous Creator and King. But creation isn't the only reason God has a right to tell us what to do with our bodies. He also lays claim to our bodies through the work of redemption.

1 Cor 6:19–20, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." What does Paul teach us here? That if you're a Christian, God paid for all of you, body and soul, at the cost of his own blood. Why would he do that? Because every one of us is born into this world opposed to God's purposes for our lives. We've all gone our own way instead of his and are enslaved to sin and death as a result.

It's why we need Jesus. He came to free us from the guilt of sin. He came to free us from the dominion of sin. And our redemption came at a price, a price of his own life, a price he paid willingly for the joy set before him. If God has given you spiritual life in Jesus, it is because he purchased you for himself. You are his. You were his because he created you and you are now doubly his because he redeemed you.

On both accounts, creation and redemption, the Lord has every right, absolute authority, to tell us what to do with our bodies, sexuality included. But listen. What he tells us to do (and not do) isn't random. His reasons go deeper than "because I

said so.” What God tells us to do (and not do) with our sexuality is grounded in something profoundly important about who he is.

What does the Bible tell us about God? Among other things, that he’s a faithful God. Ex 34:6, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” His love for us is not a “here today, gone tomorrow” kind of love. It’s a covenant-making, covenant-keeping kind of love. It’s more than mere sentiment or a passing feeling. It’s an oath-bound promise to secure our eternal joy in Jesus, a promise he keeps at the cost of his own life.

It’s deeper than, “I like you, because of the way you made me feel last night,” or, “I like you, at least until I find something better.” No. In the greatness of his love, before you were even born, Christian, before you had done anything good or bad, Almighty God chose you for himself, binding your welfare to his. And when you were dead in sin, without God, without hope in this world, the Spirit united you to Christ. He imparted a new principle of spiritual life within your soul, empowering and causing you to turn away from sin and surrender your life to Jesus.

He is yours and you are his, and no one can snatch you out of his hand. He’s made you part of his own body, the church. As the Son’s chosen bride, you are infinitely precious to him. Even now, he is at work in your life, preparing you for the day he presents you to himself without spot or stain of sin. That’s who God is. He’s a God of steadfast love, faithful love, covenant love, a love that unites you to himself, Christian, and will not let you go. It’s more than a mere sentiment or a fleeting passion. God gives us himself to make us like himself in the context of an eternal relationship with himself.

We see his love most clearly at the cross. But there’s another place we see it. A relationship that displays his love, reveals his love, and magnifies his love for all the world to see. It’s the institution of marriage. Human marriage is one of God’s chosen means of revealing the character of his love to the world. I’m not talking about any two people who commit to supporting one another. I’m talking about a relationship that’s rooted in complementarity (Gen 1-2), that’s designed to produce children (Mal 2), and reflects Christ and the church (Eph 5).

Only a biological man becoming one flesh with a biological woman in an exclusive, life-long union where the husband joyfully cherishes his wife and the wife joyfully submits to her husband accomplishes all three aspects of biblical marriage. Paul’s words in Eph 5 are especially helpful because they remind us marriage is not

ultimately about us. It's about God. It's a picture of his covenant love for us and our covenant loyalty to him.

Eph 5:31–32, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

While marriage requires a husband and wife to “hold fast” to one another on multiple levels, the “one flesh” nature of the relationship is most clearly and literally expressed through sexual intimacy. The physical act of sex both displays and strengthens the covenant, or “one flesh” nature of their union, a union that ultimately points to the intimate relationship between Christ and the church.

And that, brothers and sisters, is why sex is a holy and precious gift. It's a God-ordained means of making much of his covenant faithfulness, a testimony to the oneness and intimacy of Christ's relationship with the church, and a powerful witness to the gospel. Which means sex isn't ultimately about us and our nerve endings. It's about God and his glory. The physical act of sex, in the right relational context, the covenant of marriage, is nothing less than a spiritual act of worship.

If you survey the Bible, you'll discover four inseparable purposes for sex: consummation of a marriage, procreation, love, and pleasure. Dennis Hollinger draws the clear conclusion. “A morally legitimate sexual act is one that is in the context of these four purposes. When we isolate only one or several of the purposes, we distort God's intentions and fall short of his designs and hence his joy. These four purposes are found in only one location, the marriage of a man and a woman. This is where God designed sexual intimacy to be.”

That's what makes sexual activity outside of marriage so grievous. We take what God has given to display and strengthen a covenant union, to fill the earth with his image-bearers, to reveal something of his steadfast love for us in Christ, to cause us to rejoice and delight in his creation, and we use it for selfish gain. In the process, we're enacting a lie. No matter how “committed” the partners may feel, sex says, “This is a covenant union,” when there is nothing of the sort.

God designed sex to unite a man and a woman at a deeply physical, emotional, and spiritual level. The world says, “Sex is purely a physical act. Nothing more.” Experience suggests they're wrong. Why do people who spend years cycling through multiple sexual partners, who can't even remember how many people they've had sex with, feel so hollow and empty on the inside? It's because we're participating in

something that creates a one-flesh relationship, that says “one-flesh relationship,” when there is no covenant relationship. It’s living a lie.

And living a lie through sexual immorality leaves a devastating physical, emotional, and spiritual toll. When we take something God created to unite a husband and wife, to express and strengthen their covenant, one-flesh relationship, and use it for our own purposes, we suffer the consequences. Sexual sin sabotages our relationship with God, ruins our relationships with one another, hardens our conscience, blinds us to true beauty, robs our joy, corrupts our affections, compromises our witness, and if you refuse to repent, will eventually destroy your soul.

1 Cor 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.” Why? Because you’re harming yourself. You’re walking the path that leads to death. Prov 6:27–29, 32, “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; none who touches her will go unpunished...he who does it destroys himself.” The more precious the gift, the more grievous the result of its corruption.

Sex is a holy and precious gift because it’s something God created to testify in a profoundly physical way to his covenant faithfulness, to his steadfast love. That’s why we must guard the sanctity of sex. It’s not about being prudish, or being conservative, or doing things the “traditional” way. No. We refuse to engage in any kind of sexual activity whatsoever outside of marriage because we do not want to denigrate the covenant faithfulness of God. We want to magnify the covenant faithfulness of God. **And we magnify his covenant faithfulness by guarding the sanctity of sex.**

That’s the main point of the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment. Heb 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.” Why? Because God is committed to magnifying the glory of his covenant faithfulness. Point no. 1, sex is a holy and precious gift.

## **2) THE SIN OF ADULTERY STARTS IN THE HEART**

When the Lord says, “You shall not commit adultery?” what is he forbidding? He’s forbidding us from engaging in any sexual activity that violates the sanctity of sex in marriage. If you are married, that includes any sexual activity that doesn’t involve

your spouse or involves someone other than your spouse. If you're unmarried, that refers to any sexual activity whatsoever.

"Wait, are you saying Matthew that even if I'm not married, I can commit adultery?" Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying because that's what Jesus himself says. Matt 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."

What does it mean to look at a woman with lustful intent? Jesus isn't talking about noticing someone is physically attractive. The word we translate as "lust" or "lustful intent" means "to strongly desire what belongs to someone else." In context, it describes a lingering, leering gaze that devours or mentally uses a body God has not given you as a spouse to satisfy your sexual desires.

In other words, the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment is about more than what we do on the outside. It's about what's going on in our hearts and minds on the inside. It requires far more than not jumping into bed with someone who's not your spouse. It lays claim to our eyes. It lays claim to our minds. It addresses our fantasies and imaginations. Jesus is talking about the movies we watch, the websites we browse, the stores we visit, the books we read, the music we listen to, and messages we send.

Kevin DeYoung says it well. "Even if we don't commit the physical act with our sexual organs, we can still be guilty of sexual sin by means of our thoughts, our fantasies, our reading, our clicking, and our affections."

What's the heart attitude behind every expression of sexual immorality? In a thousand ways, it's the attitude that says, "Lord, who you are and all you have given to me is not enough. I need more. I deserve more. I demand more. And if you say "no," I'm going to get it anyway. I know what I need better than you do. I mean, come on. You're God. Do you have any idea how insanely hard it is to honor you with my body?"

Indeed, he does, friend. Jesus, the eternal Son of God incarnate, wasn't a desire-free, asexual superhuman. He was a man like us in every respect, sexuality included. He endured the hormonal upheaval of puberty. He fought for holiness in the power of the Spirit. Heb 4:15 says he was "in every respect...tempted as we are, yet without sin." What's the conclusion? "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses."



He knows your struggle. He is intimately aware of your struggle. You are not alone. His command to uphold the sanctity of sex isn't a missive born of divine ignorance. It's the result of his great love. He knows from firsthand experience that there is a supremacy of joy, an eternal satisfaction of soul, a life, and health, and peace reserved for those who magnify the covenant faithfulness of God by guarding the sanctity of sex. He's not denying you life. He is protecting your life by preserving you on the path of life.

Ps 84:11-12, "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!" Friend, this is the choice, this is the decision, from which every expression of sexual sin flows. Will I trust the Lord to not withhold any good thing from me or will I not?

If you're unmarried, do you believe that if sexual pleasure is something that would be good for you to experience right now God would already have given it to you in the form of a spouse? Do you believe that if sexual pleasure is something that is good for you to experience in the future that you can trust God to give you a spouse?

The same question applies to those who are married. Say you're married and regularly experience sexual frustration. Your spouse doesn't give you what you want when you want it. Do you believe God is withholding something good from you? Or do you believe that in the perfect sovereignty of his will, in view of his steadfast love, his unwavering faithfulness, that no sin or weakness, no ignorance or selfishness, no desire imbalance in your marriage can stop Almighty God from being good to you?

Will you live your life taking whatever feels good or looks good in your eyes? Or will you trust your Heavenly Father knows what is truly good, gives what is truly good, and will not withhold anything that is truly good from you all the days of your life? Does he know what is best? Or do you? Every expression of sexual sin is ultimately a sin against the Lord himself. It's deeply personal. It grieves his heart. Why? Because we are through our actions accusing him, indicting him, condemning him, as failing to give us what is good.

We're saying: "You are not a God of steadfast love. And I am not going to guard or uphold the sanctity of sex because I do not trust your faithfulness. Yes, you died for me. Yes, you say you have given me every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Yes, you have given me the gift of knowing and being known by you, the inestimable treasure of Jesus. But you know what, God? You're not enough. You're not good enough. You're not glorious enough. I need sexual release and I need it now."

Sexual sin, every violation of the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, is ultimately a brazen assault on the goodness and wisdom and love of God. Joseph knew that. What did he say to Potiphar's wife when she begged him to lie with her? When she promised him consequence-free ecstasy and forcefully attempted to hold onto him? Gen 39:9, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

That's why the OT prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea repeatedly equate Israel's physical acts of adultery with spiritual adultery. She wasn't just breaking a command or refusing an arbitrary rule. She was breaking her covenant relationship with Yahweh. She rejected him. She spurned his love. She violated his loyalty. In a spiritual level, she became a faithless wife. She committed adultery with all manner of idols, sexual pleasure included, instead of worshiping the one True God.

Jer 3:6-9, "The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree."

Friends, adultery starts in the heart. It denies the goodness of God. It pursues sexual activity with our minds and bodies that violates the sanctity of sex in marriage. In the process, it's more than a sin against our own body and our neighbor's (regardless of consent), it's a sin against the Lord himself. It's an expression of spiritual adultery. For whenever we ignore God's Word, whenever we take what he created to make much of his covenant faithfulness and use it to worship the idol of physical pleasure, we betray the Lover of our Souls.

He's a jealous God, brothers and sisters. He is jealous for your affections, jealous for your spiritual loyalty, jealous for your bodily worship. Why? Because he is jealous for his glory and your good in his glory. The true test of sexual sin is not whether anyone got hurt or didn't consent. It's whether God is honored by what you're doing with your mind, your eyes, your hands, or any other part of your body. Committing adultery, breaking the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, is far more than a behavioral issue for married people. It's a heart issue for all of us.

## CONCLUSION

In a world that's no different than ancient Corinth, a world where unrestrained, sexual expression is treated as completely normal, a requirement for a life well-lived, King Jesus calls us to something completely different. He calls us to make much of him with our sexuality. **For it is the covenant faithfulness of God compels us to guard the sanctity of sex.** That means there are things we must put off and things we must put on. We're going to look closely next week at how the Lord calls and equips us to do that in practical terms.

This morning, however, we need to wrestle with three foundational questions based on all God says to us in his Word. Do you believe God has a right to tell us what to do with our bodies? Do you believe sex is ultimately about God, not us? Do you believe that as something that starts in the heart, adultery isn't just a married people problem. It's a human problem. And it's not just a sin against our own body, or our neighbor. It's an assault on the goodness and wisdom of God.

The question is not whether those statements are true. The question is whether we will believe them as an expression of our submission to the authority of God's Word or deny them by doing our own thing and going our own way? Will you allow yourself to be ruled by a gracious God or will you refuse?

Here's the good news, my friend. To the degree you are convicted of sexual sin, or feel in a deeper way the importance, the goodness, the necessity, and value of fighting for sexual purity, Jesus stands ready to forgive, restore, strengthen, and sustain you. Remember what sex as God designed it proclaims! He's a faithful God, a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God!

And because he is a faithful God, he makes an exceedingly great and precious promise in Titus 2:11-14 to all who hold fast to Jesus. These are not idle words. These are not abstract words. This is God saying he will not fail to sanctify us, empower us, and help us.

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."



You are not alone in the battle. God is with you. God is for you. His grace is sufficient. His steadfast love will purify you until the day he presents you to himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. You will be holy and without blemish. That day is surely coming, brothers and sisters. We'll talk more about how God accomplishes his purifying work in our lives next Sunday. For now, let's prepare our hearts by taking heart in the covenant faithfulness of Christ. Let's pray.