



## **Uphold His Faithfulness with Your Body (Deuteronomy 22:13-20)**

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Our cultural attitude toward sex is a study in contradictions. We're told on the one hand that sex has no particular meaning. It's a biological urge, a physical act no different than eating or sleeping. So as long as no one gets hurt, it's all good. Writing for TIME magazine in 2014, Rachel Hill put it this way, "For people born after 1980, the most important sexual ethic is not about how or with whom you have sex, but open-mindedness. As one young man...put it, 'Nothing should be seen as alien, or looked down upon as wrong.'"

On the other hand, we're told sex matters more than anything. If you're not getting some, you're missing out. Exploring your sexual identity and satisfying your sexual desires is the key to joy and life. Popular magazines for men and women overflow with articles touting sex as a rapture of divine proportions, an out-of-this-world wonder.

On the other end of the emotional spectrum, don't try to tell someone who's been sexually abused that sex is meaningless. Their enduring sorrow and anguish suggest otherwise. Here's the truth, friend. Sex is not meaningless. And it's not just Deuteronomy 22 that says so. The entire Bible says so!

The collective testimony of Scripture reveals there is a mystery in sex, something afoot with sex that's categorically deeper than a biological necessity. In that sense, cultural voices worshipping sex are not completely off the mark. There is a divine glory, a mesmerizing wonder in sex because it's not ultimately about you or me. It's about God.

It's something good that he created to bear witness to the union, the oneness of relationship between Christ and the church. The physical intimacy and life-giving ecstasy echo a greater glory. Eph 5:29-32, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 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."

**Sex isn't about you. It's about God.** And that means the second half of Deut 22 is not a bunch of random rules and outdated penalties. It's a holy summons to uphold the faithfulness of God with your body. Moses doesn't deal with every conceivable case of sexual sin here. But he does work through enough cases at the intersection of biblical

justice and sexuality to establish clear, guiding principles for deciding what to do with our bodies in a fallen world.

### **1) OUR ACTIONS MATTER BECAUSE WE BEAR GOD'S NAME (vv. 13-21)**

In the first case study, the Lord addresses a situation (v. 13) where “a man takes a wife and goes in to her and then hates her.” So he accuses her of being sexually unfaithful before their wedding, which was a capital crime. He’s basically looking to get out of the marriage by having his wife executed.

The accusation, however, is completely false, because the girl’s parents have physical evidence that she was in fact a virgin when she got married. They have a cloak that she saved from her wedding night, stained with hymenal blood. It proves in a public court of law, before “the elders of the city in the gate” (v. 15), that the young woman’s husband is lying.

So what must the elders do? V. 18, “Then the elders of that city shall take the man and whip him, and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver...” Why? V. 19, “Because he has brought a bad name upon a virgin of Israel.” It’s the same phrase Moses used to describe the situation back in v. 14. He’s brought “a bad name” upon her. That’s the problem. It’s not the attempted murder that incurs God’s judgment so much as it is the public slander. He denigrated the public reputation of a member of God’s people.

Why does her public integrity matter? For the same reason our public integrity matter, brothers and sisters? To be part of God’s people is to bear his name. Deut 28:10, “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD...” Isa 43:1, “But now thus says the LORD, ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.’” How does Jesus instruct us to baptize people in Matt 28:19? “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

As a child takes the name of their father, so the Lord puts his name upon us. He identifies us as his own. That means the way you live, Christian, determines more than what people think about you. It determines what people believe about God. God has so bound you to himself that the public integrity of your name determines the public integrity of his name because you bear his name!

When the scoundrel falsely accuses his wife, he’s not just dragging her name through the gutter. He’s dragging Yahweh’s name through the gutter because she’s not just a virgin. She’s a virgin “of Israel.” Her sexual purity bears witness to Yahweh’s purity in the eyes of a watching world. We have the same holy privilege today as members of

the church. 1 Pe 2:12, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

All of our actions, not just our sexual actions, matter because we bear God’s name. Then and now, if one of us sins, if one of us publicly dishonors God’s name, all of us suffer. Sin always has corporate implications. It’s why Moses requires the elders to get involved. It’s not a private matter for the girl’s husband and her family. It’s a public matter because the integrity of the entire community is on the line.

Brothers and sisters, there is a sober warning for us here in two directions. **First, the way you speak of a fellow believer matters more than you know.** Be careful when we’re talking about someone with your “other” friends or posting about them online. Or when you’re telling your parents what your brother or sister did last night. Do you speak the truth and only the truth? Or do you shade things just a bit to make yourself look better and make them look worse?

Social media doesn’t help us in this regard. You have the power to publicly shame someone who bears God’s name with the press of a button, friend. “Can you believe what this person said to me? Can you believe how this person treated me? Can you believe what that Christian was caught doing?” That app on your phone is a potent weapon. It can do great good or great harm for the name of Christ.

So be honest. Even if what they did to you or said to you is factually true, is your overriding aim in whatever you communicate to protect God’s name? Or are you so focused on getting even or proving you’re better that you don’t give the reputational impact of your words a second thought? How quickly we spread gossip and slander under the guise of “being real” or “I’m just saying.” My friends, God is listening. God is reading. Because his name is on the line.

**Second, what you do with your body, especially in the sexual realm, matters more than you know.** Your actions, Christian, whether you want them to or not, whether you think about them this way or not, invariably reflect on God’s honor. Why does Prov 22:1 say, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches”? Or Rom 12:17 urge, “Give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.”

God isn’t exhorting us to respect ourselves more, live for the approval of man, or idolize our reputation. He’s reminding us that spiritual integrity is a precious thing. Christian, you bear God’s name. You wear his flag. You represent his kingdom. You play

for his team. If you sin sexually, it's not a personal matter. You are denigrating the glory and honor of God.

It's why the Lord insists in v. 21 that if the charge of immorality is determined to be true, "you shall purge the evil from your midst." For the sake of his own justice, God cannot turn a blind eye to sin. It's the divine commitment that upholds the moral fabric of the universe. We guard the purity of the church today through discipline for the same reason. Our actions matter because we bear God's name.

## **2) SEXUAL SIN MALIGNS THE COVENANT FAITHFULNESS OF GOD (v. 22)**

This point is implicit in vv. 13-21 but comes into clear focus on v. 22. "If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel."

It's a classic case of adultery. A married woman has consensual relations with a man who is not her husband. It's a violation of the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (Deut 5:18), and a violation of the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Deut 5:21). Both in the OT and the New, Scripture categorically forbids all sexual activity outside the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman.

But what if they're each in loveless relationships, their passions are strong, the lighting is dimmed, and the soundtrack is just right? We sympathize, don't we? You may even find yourself supporting them! It feels so right. It looks so beautiful. Isaiah 5:20, "Woe to those who call evil good..." We will never grasp the evil of adultery if we forget the beginning and the end of the story of our lives.

Listen to what God says at the beginning before sin entered the world. Gen 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply...'" What's that teach us? Sex is God's idea, not ours. He created us with the procreative means to fulfill our God-given mission.

Gen 2:24-25, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." What's that teach us? The physical act of becoming "one flesh" is exclusively entrusted to one man and one woman in the covenant context of marriage. It's more than a biological means of filling the earth. It's a relational gift that unites a husband and wife at an incredibly deep level.

But what makes the marriage union so sacred? I read on the BBC a few months ago about the rise of “open marriages” in Europe. If everyone agrees to the arrangement, why not mix and match with multiple partners? Here’s the reason, my friend. The institution of marriage isn’t about us any more than the gift of sex is about us. It’s all about God! How do we know that? It’s because everything Genesis says about marriage and sex, everything Paul doubles down on in Eph 5, it all comes to a climax in Rev 19 at the end of the story. Because at the end of the story, we learn what marriage and intimacy in marriage has pointed to and existed for all along!

Rev 19:6-8, “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

The Bible opens with a wedding. Eve is brought to Adam his chosen bride. And the Bible ends with a wedding. The people of God are presented to our Savior Jesus without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The sexual faithfulness of a husband and wife to one another in the covenant of marriage is a picture of the spiritual faithfulness of Christ to the church in the covenant of salvation – a covenant he inaugurated at the cost of his own blood and will one day consummate to the eternal praise of his glory!

Sex is sacred because it points to the covenant faithfulness of God. Ripped outside of marriage, sex is still a signpost, but it’s covered in graffiti. It’s denigrated and corrupted. It says “covenant relationship” when there is no covenant relationship. It says, “Covenant faithfulness” when all that’s present is human selfishness.

That’s why sexual activity outside of marriage is forbidden. It maligns the faithfulness of God. It trashes our witness to the gospel and the goodness of Jesus! So whether you’re single or married, flee adultery. Flee sexual immorality. And if you’re married, heed the words of Mal 2:15, “Guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.” Why? Because we serve a faithful God.

### **3) WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR HOW WE RESPOND TO OTHER PEOPLE’S SIN (vv. 23-24)**

In the third scenario, Moses turns to deal with the case of a “betrothed virgin,” a woman engaged to be married, who has sexual relations with a man who is not her

husband-to-be. In the Ancient Near East, engagement was a legally binding relationship. It had the same covenantal force as a marriage, so much so that the “betrothed virgin” in v. 23 is called “his neighbor’s wife” in v. 24.

Look at v. 23. “If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife.”

Did you notice every case study begins with a man’s actions? That’s insightful on several levels. Moses wisely recognizes men are often (though not always) more sexually aggressive than women. Their relatively greater physical strength means they are often the guilty party in a non-consensual relationship. And there’s a critical sense in which the Lord holds men responsible, on account of our unique leadership role, for the sexual integrity of the entire community.

That said, when a woman willfully participates in sexual sin, she is no less guilty. Is the man in v. 23 sinning? Yes. Does it appear the man took initiative in the liaison? Yes. But that doesn’t remove the woman’s responsibility for the way she responds to the man’s initiative. They’re both guilty.

Now lest we cry foul and write Moses off as a blame-the-victim chauvinist who’s protecting the patriarchy, consider two things. First, there’s no language of physical violence in v. 25. This isn’t a case of rape. It’s a case of seduction. Second, in the cities of Israel, homes were built incredibly close together. There was no privacy, at least not in the way we enjoy privacy in our homes today. People practically lived on top of one another. Help to escape the embrace of a seductive man was typically close at hand.

But the woman didn’t “cry for help.” She had a way of escape if his advances were not consensual. But she didn’t take it. And thus, despite the man’s apparent initiative, she is equally responsible for the sexual sin they committed.

Why do I linger here? Because we are told today that the world is divided into two groups: oppressors and the oppressed. If you’re categorized as an oppressor by virtue of your gender, ethnicity, or economic status, you are always responsible for your actions. If something goes wrong in a situation, it’s your fault no matter who else is involved. But if you’re numbered among the oppressed by virtue of the same categories, you are either not responsible or significantly less responsible for your actions because you’re a victim. You don’t really have a choice. It’s never your fault. End of story.

I realize I'm generalizing here, but that's an increasingly common narrative. Scripture says two important things in response. First, God is not blind to the reality of oppression or the fact that certain classes of people are often on the receiving end of social consequences of sin. There's a reason Jn 4 highlights Jesus' conversation with a woman of Samaria! Second, the way someone else sins against you or leads you into sin does not remove your personal responsibility for the way you respond. In fact, Moses dignifies the woman in v. 24 by refusing to absolve her of responsibility for her actions.

What am I not saying? That social oppression isn't real. It is. What am I saying? That even if you feel less powerful or have less of a voice or have historically suffered at the hands of other people, in any given situation, you are still responsible before God for the ethical choices you make. Moses isn't blaming the victim. He's affirming our shared dignity and moral accountability. Why? Because our faithful God is equally committed to upholding justice men and women, black and white, rich and poor.

Friend don't use someone else's sin to excuse your own. You are responsible for how you respond to other people's sin. If you had a way of escape, don't take it, and choose to sin, that's on you. 2 Cor 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

#### **4) WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR HOW OTHER PEOPLE SIN AGAINST US (vv. 25-29)**

Look at v. 25. "But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die." Here the language of being "seized" suggests sexual activity involving physical violence. And in this case, because it took place in "the open country," not "the city," the woman is rightly given the benefit of the doubt. The liaison is assumed to not be consensual in the absence of evidence that she was a willing participant.

V. 26, "But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor." I want to speak directly here to those of you who have a lingering sense of guilt by association because of a time in your life when you were sexually abused or taken advantage of in some way. Friend, what I'm about to say is not all God says to you, but it is vitally important for you to hear.

You are not responsible in the eyes of God for how that person, or those people, sinned against you. Did you make unwise choices that left you vulnerable? Perhaps. I don't know your situation. But I don't need to know the details to know this. Their sin is not your fault. Deut 24:16, "Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin."

The betrothed woman in v. 25 is not responsible for what the man does to her any more than the woman who is not betrothed in v. 28 is responsible for what another man does to her. Friend, if you were abused or taken advantage of, you are not responsible for what the other person did to you. Our Father in Heaven does not shame victims of sexual sin. He vindicates them. Is the emotional impact of guilt-by-association real? Absolutely. But that doesn't change the life-giving, justice-uphold reality of God's posture toward you.

Ps 10:16–18, "The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more." God sees. God knows. Do not cling to a guilt Almighty God says is not yours to carry. And do not think humility requires taking partial responsibility for what they did to you when they try to blame you for it.

We serve a just God who promises that a day is coming when he will right every wrong. The economic protections for the violated woman in vv. 28-29 reflect as much. The Lord ensured she wouldn't be left unmarried and destitute on account of a public perception that she was "damaged goods." The man who lay with her must provide for her. He may not divorce her. He must take financial responsibility for her and whatever children come from their illicit union. It's presumably why the man in v. 28 is not stoned to death.

That does not mean, my single friend, that pleasing the Lord today requires marrying an unmarried man or woman with whom you've had sex or who becomes pregnant as a result. It could be wise. It could be profoundly unwise. It all depends. Critical factors such as, "Are you a Christian? Would you be marrying a non-Christian?" must be taken into consideration. Why? Because a pregnancy doesn't undo the authority of 2 Cor 6:14, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers."

Bottom line, we are not responsible for how other people sin against us. And if you sin against someone else, especially in the sexual realm, justice requires you to seek restoration in biblically wise ways for those you have harmed.



## CONCLUSION

The legal verdicts in Deut 22 are sobering. Whip him. Stone her to death. Both of them shall die. Stone them to death. The man who lay with her shall die. It points to more than the fact that sexual sin is serious. It points to the truth of Rom 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death." Who among us has never defamed God's name with our bodies? In the language of v. 30, who among us has not shamefully uncovered – whether in thought, word, or deed – what God says is worthy of protection and honor? Who among us has not sinned sexually, denigrating his faithfulness in the process?

Brothers and sisters, Jesus stands ready and able to cover what you have shamefully uncovered. As 1 Pe 4:8 says, "Love covers a multitude of sins." What kind of love does that? A divine love that doesn't ignore your sin but rather makes a way to wash away all your sin through the blood he shed on the cross.

God's Word is clear. The sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God. As Paul says to the church in Corinth, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

What happens when we come to Jesus with the filthy stains of our sexual sin? He washes us, making us clean. He sanctifies us, he brings us into the realm of the holy. And he justifies us, he makes us right with God. Not on account of the goodness of our name, but on account of the goodness of his name.

Must we uphold his faithfulness with our bodies? Yes. It is an unspeakable privilege to do so. But remember you're not fighting to prove to the world that you are faithful. You're not. But Jesus is. Jesus perfectly upheld the faithfulness of God with his body. Thus, he is able to cleanse you. Thus, he is able to strengthen you. Thus, he is able to save you to the uttermost.

Show the world that he is faithful, friend, by making much of him with your body. Our bodies are his by virtue of creation. If you're a Christian, your body is doubly his by virtue of redemption. 1 Cor 6:19-20, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." **Sex isn't about you. It's about God.**