

Last Sunday I addressed the 6th Word, *You shall not murder*; this Sunday we turn our attention to the 7th Word, *You shall not commit adultery*.

Throughout our series on the Ten Words, I have been reading a little book written by Dennis Prager entitled, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code*. Prager was born to orthodox Jewish parents, and is known as an author, an American conservative, and a nationally syndicated radio talk show host.

In his book, Prager writes, “There is an old joke about the Seventh Commandment...Moses comes down from Mount Sinai, and announces: ‘I have good news and bad news. The good news is that I got [God] down to ten [commandments]. The bad news is that adultery stays.’”¹ Prager goes on to explain how this perspective fails to understand both God and the Ten Words.

What is the purpose of the Ten Words? Was God attempting to saddle Israel with an arbitrary, oppressive, set of laws? No! The introduction to the Ten Words gives a window into God’s purpose in speaking them—Exodus 20:2 says, “*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*”

God had not freed Israel only to enslave them again; God spoke the Ten Words to protect their newfound freedom. The Ten Words are boundaries—there’s no question about that—but they are boundaries that protect our freedom to enjoy God and one another. When we keep the Ten Words life flourishes, when we ignore them life disintegrates.

You shall not commit adultery. Throughout history, in most places, and in most cultures, adultery has been seen in a negative light. Even in our current, secular, West Coast culture, by and large, people frown upon adultery—let me take a moment to illustrate.

illus: Just last month, the New York Yankees retired Derek Jeter’s number—it was just one more benchmark in a career already crowded with highlights.

- Jeter played 20 seasons at shortstop for the Yankees
- He is the Yankees’ all-time career leader in hits, doubles, games played, stolen bases, times on base, and at bats.
- He was selected to the All-Star game 14 times
- And he is a 5 time World Series champion

On the field, Jeter was must-watch-tv, and off the field, Jeter was New York’s most eligible bachelor and playboy. Over the course of his career, Jeter bounced from relationship to relationship—his past girlfriends are the who’s who of Hollywood Actresses and Super Models. But despite his many women, Jeter was considered the darling of the media and was widely considered an all-around good guy. Now 42 years old, he has recently married and is expecting his first child.

You don’t have to be a sports fan to know that Tiger Woods has been portrayed very differently by the media. Woods is no less talented than Jeter, in fact, it could be argued that he is the greatest golfer who ever lived. But unlike Jeter, Tiger Woods was blasted by the media, vilified in the court of public opinion, and was subsequently dropped

¹ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code*, 54.

by the majority of his sponsors. His fall from grace was attached to reports of his relationships with multiple women.

And here's the point I want to make. It wasn't that Woods had relationships with more women than Jeter, it was that Tiger Woods pursued these relationships while he was married. In Western culture, nearly every sexual boundary has been cast aside but there is something about the 7th Word that continues to resonate with people—*You shall not commit adultery*.

My question is, *why this affinity for the 7th Word?* This morning, I want to argue that the 7th Word tells us something important about humanity, about who we are, and what we've been made for. But before I talk about humanity, I want to talk about what the 7th Word reveals about God.

1. God is Faithful, Loyal, and Committed to humanity—He is the ultimate Covenant-Keeper.

God created a world free from pain and loss; humanity was created for perfect relationship with God and others. When humanity rebelled against God, sin entered the world, and ever since that time we have lived with suspicion and selfishness. In response, God acted to redeem and restore what had been lost.

God's solution was a very human solution. He chose Abraham and Sarah and entered into covenant with them, promising to be faithful, loyal, and committed to their good. In blessing this one couple, God intended to bring blessing to the entire world. Abraham and Sarah's

family grew into the nation of Israel, and God's covenant faithfulness to Israel, was meant to be on display in order to attract the surrounding nations.

Throughout the Old Testament—particularly the prophetic books—God's relationship with Israel is frequently described in terms of a marriage covenant. In Exodus 24, God and Israel engaged in a covenant ceremony that was accompanied by a pledge of allegiance.

In Jeremiah 31:31-32 we read, “*The days are coming, ’ declares the Lord, ’when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, ’ declares the Lord.*”

God spoke the following word to the prophet Hosea: “*Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.*”²

In time, Hosea married Gomer, and their marriage became a prophetic word to the people of God. Hosea was faithful to an unfaithful wife—she left their marriage bed, and bore the child of another man. Hosea's relationship with Gomer mirrored God's relationship with Israel—He was faithful to an unfaithful people.

In Hosea 2:19-20 God made the following promise to Israel: “*I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice,*

² Hosea 1:2.

*unfailing love and compassion. I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as the Lord.*³

God's marriage covenant with Israel is unlike most human marriages in the sense that He enters into an extremely one-sided marriage. Ronald Wallace writes, "the whole initiative was taken by God and borne by God."⁴

But God's loyalty, faithfulness, and covenant commitment is most fully expressed through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the person of Jesus Christ, we see the perfect union of God and humanity—He is very God of very God, and, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Wallace notes that the union between God and humanity, in Jesus, can be spoken of in reference to the marriage relationship—the two have become "one flesh."⁵ Christ's commitment to humanity is such that remains fully human, and He promises that He will never leave or abandon us.

In the New Testament, God's relationship with His people is also described in terms of marriage. In 1 Corinthians 6, God calls the Church to covenant faithfulness by drawing upon marriage—and more specifically, one-flesh—imagery. We have been united to God,

³ New Living Translation.

⁴ Ronald Wallace, *The Ten Commandments: A Study of Ethical Freedom*, 120.

⁵ Wallace, 120.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:15-20.

⁷ Ephesians 5:21-33.

through Christ—body, soul, mind—and therefore, what we do with our bodies matters.⁶

In Ephesians 5, the Apostle Paul speaks to husbands and wives by drawing upon Christ's relationship to the Church. Jesus demonstrated His love for the Church—His bride—by laying down His life for her sake.⁷ In Jesus we see most clearly who God is—He is the Faithful, Loyal, Committed, Covenant-Keeper.

If what I've said about God is accurate, what are the implications for what it means to be human? Put another way, what does the 7th Word tell us about who we are, and what we've been made for?

2. Humanity has been made for Covenant Keeping.

The 7th Word, "*You shall not commit adultery*," is an extension of God's own being and action. When we know what God is like, we gain insight into what He intends for us, after all, humanity has been made in His image. We were not made to commit adultery because God does not; He is utterly faithful and loyal—He keeps His promises, He will never run out on us. We have been made to

experience this commitment from God and others; we've also been made to give it.

If we've been made for covenant-keeping, why are we so prone to covenant-breaking? The Bible's answer is "sin". 16th Century theologian, Martin Luther, describes sin in terms of humans being *curved in upon themselves*. Instead of being open to God and others, instead of living for God and others, our sinful nature is *inward* in its orientation—which is to say, our primary commitment is to live for ourselves. I am curved inward, so are you, and along with us the rest of the human race.

Consider for a moment the implications of this reality. Right now, on planet earth there are roughly 7 billion people, each of which has primary orientation to live for themselves. Here's the question...how do we cultivate a sense of shared responsibility for this planet, or for "the common good," when our primary commitment is to ourselves? We can't, we won't—at least not with any consistency. Adultery is nurtured in every human heart—married or single—by prioritizing oneself above all others. And nowhere does reality become more clear than when it comes to loyalty in marriage.

illus: As a pastor, I've had the privilege of officiating dozens of weddings. Brides and grooms typically spend months planning the wedding details: the guest list, the decorations, and the dress. But for me, the centerpiece of every wedding is the vows; the vows outline the covenant promises being made between a man and a women.

If I were to take every marriage vow I've ever heard, and reduce it to its essential nature, one thing would remain—a profession of

exclusive loyalty. In marriage, one man and one woman say to one another: "*I choose you for life—there will be no other.*"

What I've never heard at a wedding, and hope never to hear, is something like this: "*I'm telling you ahead of time, one day I may choose to be unfaithful to you. Over time, you and I are going to disagree, hurt one another, and build walls. I'm going to get bored with you, frustrated by you, and I may begin to explore greener pastures. After all, I'm in this marriage for my own happiness. Today, I give you my 'yes,' and I will continue to do so for as long as it suits me. I reserve the right to pursue my own satisfaction, and if necessary, at your expense. With this ring, I give you my pledge.*"

While I've never heard this at a wedding ceremony, I have seen it in marriages, and this commitment to self is frequently played out in sexual unfaithfulness. *You shall not commit adultery.*

One of my Regent professors, John Stackhouse writes, "We ourselves become delusional about sex, and in this one crucial respect: We keep thinking that sex can be just what we want it to be, rather than what it is..."

We might buy a car and intend it to get us around and make us happy while it does so, without us having to fuss with it...But it needs gas, oil, maintenance, and other basic upkeep, and our preferring that it didn't need those inconvenient and costly things won't keep us from running out of gas or having the engine seize up in the middle of the highway. It is what it is, and wishing otherwise doesn't make it so.

Most basically, sex *joins*. Sex *unifies*. The second chapter of the Bible uses a pretty obvious metaphor for the first marriage: "the two

become *one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24). Sex, that is, *marries* one person to another. Most cultures around the world recognize this fact (for fact it is). No matter how elaborate their wedding rituals, no matter the power of the vows they take and the pronouncements made over them, the couple isn’t truly married until they have sex. Sex *joins*.

What connects us therefore results in injury when we pull away, when the relationship ends. Couples don’t just “go their separate ways,” except in the sense of two parts of a fractured bone “going their separate ways.” Couples *break up*. They were joined, and now they’re not. And that’s *trauma*...

God tells us that sex is good and we are free to engage in it. God also tells us...that...sex is reserved for...marriage. That’s the only context in which the...power of sex can do its work without damage, namely, in the one relationship that is all about lifelong union.

The “sex only in marriage” rule...[is] a frank statement of the way things are: the way we are and the way sex is. We ignore it...in the same stupid way in which we ignore our car’s owner’s manual or...our physician’s advice. We’re free to do it, of course, and we’re free to suffer the consequences.”⁸

The 7th Word isn’t arbitrary, and it isn’t God’s attempt to ruin our fun—the 7th Word protects us from ruin. When we keep the 7th Word individuals, marriages, and families flourish; when we ignore them, disintegration takes place.

The 7th Word reminds us what we were made for—to both

experience a faithful, loyal love, and to give it.

In Jesus’ Sermon On The Mount, He affirms and intensifies the 7th Word. Matthew 5:27-28 recounts Jesus’ words, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*”

Jesus makes it plain that the adultery conceived in our heart can take many forms, each of which dishonours God, destroys others, and ourselves.

Let me begin by saying that noticing beauty isn’t sinful. In fact, an appreciation for beauty, human or otherwise, is a part of being made in God’s image. Neither is it sinful to be “attracted” to another person. The rightness or wrongness of our “looking” comes down to what’s happening in our heart as we look.

To lust is to look with a desire to devour. Lust is reductionistic—it reduces people to something less than human, something disposable, **something** to be consumed and then thrown away. We’ve gone beyond looking to lusting when we see a person in terms of our own gratification.

The great lie of pornography is in its promise to deliver “safe” sex. There’s nothing “safe” about pornography; it destroys our ability to connect with real people, in real relationships. The people portrayed in pornographic images are more “image” than “person.” They are two-dimensional persons: they don’t have flaws, they don’t have any

⁸ John Stackhouse, *The Reality Of Sex*, Weblog (<http://stackblog.wordpress.com/2008/03/13/the-reality-of-sex/#more-122>)

expectations of us, they don't have needs, or aspirations. We don't have to relate to them or to care about them. They are presented as bodies without souls, without minds, without feelings; they exist to be used and consumed to satisfy our desires. Pornography destroys our ability to relate to real people

We can commit adultery in our heart, or by sleeping with someone other than our spouse, but in either case we commit a kind of theft—we take something that does not belong to us.⁹

We have been made for so much more—God, our Creator, is a Covenant-Keeping-God, and we too have been made for covenant-keeping. The 7th Word calls us back to exclusive loyalty—to God, and to our spouses. It may be that you have been unfaithful; this morning God invites you to repent, to return, and to once again embrace the vocation of covenant-keeping.

And this is likely not something that you will be able to do alone. If you have strayed from your commitment to your spouse, commit to telling someone. The journey to restoration and freedom is not meant to be walked alone.

Conclusion: As I conclude this morning, I want to ground this 7th Word in the grace of God. “Grace” is one of the most important—and central—words in Christian theology. “Grace” refers to the fact that all that God gives to us—things like love, mercy, and strength—is undeserved. Which is to say, God blesses humanity on the basis of

His own kindness and generosity, not on the basis of our performance.

Grace is essentially a covenant word. God takes the initiative to enter into covenant with people like me and you, knowing how unfaithful we are (and will be)—it's an extremely one-sided covenant. He keeps His promise, He faithfully loves and forgives us, even as He is at work within us to make us a faithful people.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says, “*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*”¹⁰

Our relationship to Christ is entirely dependent upon His presence and activity—He must keep His covenant: loving, forgiving, blessing, protecting, and sustain the union between us. In many respects, a faithful marriage requires the same commitment from Jesus.

In marriage, we both choose, and we are chosen. We choose to leave other relationships behind in order to embrace an exclusive relationship with a wife or a husband. And Jesus is the One empowers us to faithfully nurture this one-flesh-exclusivity.

⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7*, 44.

¹⁰ New Living Translation.

Do you remember the miracle Jesus performed at the wedding in Cana? Though Jesus remained in the background, and few were aware of the vital part He played, He was the One who kept the wedding feast from deteriorating—the same could be said in Christian marriage. Jesus is present to empower, protect, save, and heal the marriage as it continues.¹¹ We need the Covenant-Keeping God to empower us to be covenant-keeping-people. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ find us, and sustain us, at our point of need.

The Lord's Supper: This morning as we come to the Lord's Table, we do so celebrating the truth that God is a Covenant-Keeping God. We don't come to His table because we've earned our spot; He is faithful in spite of the fact that we are not.

And so, if your week has been filled with colossal failure—the failure to love God, your spouse, kids, or friends—then this table is for you. This is both the Table of Grace and the Table of Promise. We eat this bread, and drink this cup in celebration of God's faithfulness, but in this act we also look forward to the day when we see Him face to face, when we will be fully transformed, when we will finally be a perfectly faithful, covenant-keeping-people.

As you come to the table this morning, celebrate God's grace in the present, and look forward to the grace that will one day be ours.

“The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is

for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”¹²

At this time I want to invite those serving the Lord's Supper to come and take their place—we have three stations on the main floor and one/two stations in the balcony. When the band begins to play, when you are ready, you can come forward to receive. As you tear a piece of bread from the loaf, the one serving you will say, *“The Body of Christ was broken for you.”* Then, as you dip the bread in the cup, another server will say, *“The blood of Christ was shed for you.”* At that time you can eat with thanksgiving.

Pastor Paul and the team are going to sing a song for us this morning entitled, *Faithful God*; as they sing, may your heart be drawn to worship.

Worship

Benediction

¹¹ Wallace, 123-24.

¹² 1 Corinthians 11:24-26.