

The Seventh Commandment: Adultery

"You shall not commit adultery. (Exo 20:14)

Ashley Madison is an online dating service. Their slogan is "Life is short. Have an affair." They actually target people who are married or in a relationship. Founded in 2002, it already has 25 million subscribers in 35 countries. The founder, Noel Biderman said the following, "No one can show me a culture on the planet where infidelity doesn't happen. Infidelity was always there. The site fills a void in many married men and women's hearts."

A site like that reveals what Jesus said is already in the heart of man: adulteries.

This seventh commandment forbids anyone breaking his marriage covenant with sexual unfaithfulness. This was a capital crime in Israel, punished with death according to Leviticus 20:10. But while the commandment is certainly dealing with sexual sin, it is dealing with a far greater and deeper problem: unfaithfulness, disloyalty, treachery. Certainly the outworking of this disloyalty and betrayal has a physical aspect, but you wouldn't have the act of the body without there first being that act in the heart.

Paul warned that in the last days men would be traitors (2 Tim 3:4). Today, who can find a faithful man? Who can find the person whose word is his bond, who makes a promise and does not go back on it, who signs an agreement and keeps it, who signs a contract and lives by it? We are the generation of oath-breakers, of promise-breakers, of vow-breakers. To the point where it has now become far more acceptable to simply never make any vows, as if that is somehow an improvement. So people don't vow lifelong faithfulness to each other before God and man, they just live together, and try to plunder marriage of its privileges while rejecting its responsibilities. People don't covenant faithfulness to a local church by becoming a member, they just show up and suck out all the blessings they can get. And of those who do get married, over 50% break their vows. Of those who do become members of a church, how many observe and keep the covenant they made in terms of prayer, faithfulness, giving, service? Psalm 15 says that the man who will dwell in the holy place is the one who swears to his own hurt – that is, he makes promises and keeps them even at his own cost.

Websites that make money out of cheating, betrayal and treachery display what kind of world we're in, and what is in the human heart.

Adultery is much more than sex outside of marriage. Adultery is all about betrayal, unfaithfulness, treachery. And to uncover unfaithfulness to another human being is to uncover the deepest unfaithfulness of all: unfaithfulness to God. Before we do that, let's consider four forms of adultery.

1. The most obvious, and the most destructive form of adultery is sexual sin with someone other than your spouse.

The marriage act is the seal and the bond on the covenant. *24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Gen 2:24)*

A marriage is a covenant, and the marriage bed is the union that symbolises and enacts that covenant. It says, we are one: one for as long as we both live. To make a covenant and then have no physical union is not a full covenant. To join in physical union without making a covenant is to destroy the meaning of the symbol, and make its cementing and solidifying force empty. It is to rob a holy gift of God out of its place, and use it for simply one aspect of it – physical pleasure. It then makes an idol of the physical pleasure. Once you make an idol merely out of the pleasure aspect of it, soon you have no end to the forms of perversions: adultery, fornication, incest, perversions of

God's plan for one-man, one woman marriage, bestiality child-abuse, rape, necrophilia, casual promiscuity. There really is no limit or end to how you can pervert a good thing once you take it away from its intended place.

Once a sin gets a physical hook in you, the temptation is that much harder to overcome. For that reason, the Song of Solomon warns us "Do not awake love before its time". Do not arouse desires that cannot be lawfully met. Don't create an itch you cannot scratch without sin. Proverbs tells us we cannot take fire in one's bosom and not be burned, so you cannot toy with physical sin and not pay a price.

And let us avoid the kind of dodging of God's Law by saying that it is not adultery if there is no physical act. When a spouse seeks any kind of intimacy from the opposite sex that should only come from one's spouse, adultery has already begun.

But our Lord Jesus Christ, the New Covenant Lawgiver, took the standard much higher.

27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Mat 5:27-28)

2. Let's simply put this under the category of *Pornography*.

Adultery takes place in the heart, when we begin to physically covet another person who is not our spouse. To lust, as Jesus says, to look with the intention of desiring someone is adultery. No sin exists in recognising a man is handsome or a woman is beautiful, but when you begin to desire them for yourself in place of your spouse, adultery has happened.

At no other time in human history, have we been bombarded with images calling on us to lust. The sexual appeal of men and women is used to sell products that could not remotely be connected with sexuality. What has a scantily clad woman got to do with a printer? Why do the adverts for gin have women in bikinis diving off yachts? Does the bottle draw them? Or is it the dream you will have in your drunken stupor? Everywhere we look, people are called to lust after another. Not only so, there is the subtle under-message: be discontent with your spouse. Your spouse doesn't look like this, does he? Your wife doesn't look like that woman on the cover of that magazine, does she?

And the worst part of the pornography epidemic is that it tells you you can lust privately, anonymously. Who am I hurting if I look at these pictures? Who does it harm if I watch this movie? If God is the one you are faithful to, and He told you not to lust for someone who is not your spouse, you are harming His glory. You are also harming your whole idea of what the gift of sex is. It is not a physical pleasure to be enjoyed in solitary fashion in a fantasy world with a beautiful face and body who you don't know. It is a gift to be enjoyed with someone you do know, someone you have pledged your life to, someone for whom you lay down your life. Porn distorts that completely.

Our culture encourages lust. Sadly many Christian women fall for this, thinking that if you can't beat them, join them. So she reasons, if I am going to attract a man, I'll need to appeal to some of that. So she dresses a bit provocatively, hoping it will draw attention. And it does work. But what she does not realise, is she has not attracted what is noble and honourable and faithful in a man. And once he has quenched his desire, he will discard her, or lose interest, or go elsewhere. Dress to draw people to your eyes and your face, so that you may know them and they you for who you are.

Jesus gave us a third category of adultery: unbiblical remarriage.

32 *"But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. (Mat 5:32)*

Jesus said that a divorce and then a remarriage for any other reason except adultery is an unbiblical one, and God does not regard that covenant as truly over. And therefore God regards the next marriage as adultery, and not as a new marriage.

Now there is forgiveness and restoration to those who confess unbiblical divorce. But no Christian should knowingly pursue the way the world frivolously ends marriages, divorces and remarries with abandon.

Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. 16 "For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously." (Mal 2:15-16)

Here is a fourth category of adultery: Betraying your future spouse. No one knows the future, and when a person commits pre-marital sex, he has harmed his future spouse. When you give yourself to someone before marriage, you are robbing your future spouse of enjoying you and your gift of unspoilt purity. You are bringing others into your marriage bed, others who have no right to be there, because you made no covenant with them.

Of course, today we hear this, "Well, if two people are in a faithful, loving relationship, and are committed to each other, who are you to say it is wrong?" God is authorised to say it's wrong, and He does. He does not permit people to experiment with the covenant sign of marriage without getting married, no matter how much they say they love each other. If two people are genuinely in a loving, faithful relationship, then let them do the loving, honourable thing and get married. If they are waiting to 'see if it will work', well then let them wait in the area of sexuality too. Otherwise, Paul's rule is very simple: touch not. Don't begin what you cannot lawfully conclude.

These four constitute adultery: liaisons outside of marriage, pornographic lust in the heart, unbiblical divorce and remarriage, and pre-marital sex. When you apply that standard, how many of us are left standing? How many pass that test?

Very few of us, I would think. What shall we do? What is the remedy?

In the world of fire-fighting, they talk about fire-breaks. They burn a certain part of the forest or the veld to stop a future fire from spreading. Here are four fire-breaks to put into your life to prevent the fire of adultery spreading.

First, covenant your loyalty to God.

All through the Bible, God uses the analogy of marriage as a picture of His relationship with us. In Ephesians, Paul says that husband and wife are a picture of Christ and the church. In Revelation, the church is called the Bride of Christ, and our meeting with Him is called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The Song of Solomon celebrates marital love and has long been seen as more than a description of marriage, but as a picture of God's relationship with His people. And negatively, when God wanted to talk about the unfaithfulness of His people, what word does He use? Adultery. Again and again, the prophets tell Israel that by going after other gods, by relying on other nations, they are adulterers, they are guilty of harlotry. The book of Hosea is the tragic tale of how God commands one of His prophets, Hosea, to take a wife named Gomer, who is already of doubtful

moral character. And Gomer betrays her marriage to Hosea, gives herself to others, until she ends up being sold in the market, having reached the absolute bottom. God tells Hosea to go and purchase her, and to tell her, Now you will be for me alone.” Hosea's grief and pain is to be a picture to Israel of what God has experienced with them.

All the way into the New Testament, we read, “ *4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (Jam 4:4)*

Why does God link the sin of adultery with the sin of unfaithfulness to Him?

There is a real connection between sexual immorality and unfaithfulness to God. You show me the person turning to forms of sexual sin, and I will show you a person whose heart is not satisfied in God. We turn to the substitutes of sin, when we have forsaken the fountain of living water. Show me a person in a faithful, loving walk with God, and I will show you a person who finds delight in purity, who is finding escape from temptation, who flees from it.

Second, faithfulness to God is the anchor for faithfulness to others. You cannot go deeper or more ultimate than promises to God. You can swear by no one higher. That's why, when we take oaths, we say things like 'so help me God'. To break this promise would be to lie to God, to profane the name of God, to come under His judgement. But if faithfulness to God rests lightly upon you, then faithfulness to others will rest lightly upon you. If at the core of your life is the commitment that I belong to God and must glorify Him, then it will work its way out into loyalty and truthfulness and faithfulness to others, even if they can't see you or don't know what you are doing. When faithfulness to God is at the core of your life, you cannot lie to others, betray others, cheat on others, because to do so is to betray God, lie in the sight of God, cheat in the sight of God.

When we say that a trucebreaker, a cheat, a betrayer has no fear of God, what we mean is, he does not have the reality of God at the core of his life. He feels no loyalty to God, feels no danger in disobeying God, so sees no danger in betraying others.

4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Heb 13:4)

We have to have an anchor in our lives, out of which our loyalty to spouse, to children, to church, to company, to country grows out of.

Before all else, you and I need to pledge faithfulness to God. Do you know what is at the heart of faithfulness to Him? His gracious faithfulness to us. That is what we meditate on. That is what we depend upon. That is what we admire and praise, without taking it for granted. Every day, renew your faithfulness to God. Meet with Him in the Word and prayer. Every Sunday, meet with God's people and renew your faithfulness to God. Each day, avoid friendship with the world. We cannot be faithful to God and love what He hates, nor hate what He loves. Be in the world, but not of it.

Second, confess all adultery to God.

Only the grace of God, and the mercy of God can calm our convicted and pained hearts. Is there any mercy for adulterers?

The church at Corinth was a church filled with all forms of gross sexual sin. This is what Paul writes:

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,... will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1Co 6:9-11)

Paul says to them, such were some of you, but you were justified, you were sanctified, you were washed. Ah, the relief to the conscience, when we come with our betrayals, our evil desires, our treachery, our perversions, and come to the Cross, asking for cleansing, for forgiveness, for God to acquit us and give us a not-guilty verdict.

We remember the woman caught in the act of adultery. Thrown before Jesus, they asked if she should be put to death there and then, as Moses commanded. Jesus simply asked them, whoever was completely guiltless should begin the execution process. But they knew they were adulterers in their hearts, and they all left. Jesus said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Lord," she said. "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." Grace and forgiveness is not there to give us more room to sin, but to give us a fresh start to stop sinning.

Confession to your spouse is necessary too, if you have betrayed them with someone else.

Third, cut off thoughts of adultery. Right after the Lord's command regarding adultery, He said, "*29 'If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*

30 'And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.
(Mat 5:29-30)

We need to cut off all forms of media that feed sexually adulterous thoughts. That includes articles we read, songs we listen to, and images we look at. You cannot hide from all the images that bombard you. But you can choose which ones you will deliberately imbibe as entertainment.

As Christians, ought we to watch people enacting some form of sexual activity in a movie? Does it really matter whether or not the camera shows all of the body or not? Does seeing all of someone's nakedness turn it into sin, and seeing some of it keep it okay? Would it be evil for someone to spy on you in the privacy of your marriage bed? Well, what makes it okay if we become the one spying? "Oh, but they're only acting." This makes it okay? The fact that people were paid to act out a scene that would be sinful to view in real life makes it okay for us to watch?

Oh, but we don't approve of those parts. We don't watch it for those parts." Sure, tell yourself that, and tell the Hollywood producers that you really protest those parts of the movie, but you're going to watch the rest of it anyway (under protest, of course.) Do not feed sexual sin, and do not feed discontent with your spouse.

Christian, beware of only putting off evil thoughts. Do not create a vacuum in your heart, for something will usually come in to fill it. As you take out evil thoughts, and take out those songs, books, movies and websites that feed sin, make sure you then replace them with songs, books, movies and websites that encourage and nourish what is upright and godly.

If you want to know what that looks like, do the Philippians 4:8 test.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things. (Phi 4:8)

Ask yourself, does this book, or this article, or this website, or this movie, or this magazine produce in me thoughts that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuous, praiseworthy?

Here is the fourth firebreak against adultery.

Embrace contentment. Adultery, like so many sins comes out of discontent. It comes out of

refusing to accept and be grateful for what God has given you. Who goes hunting for a restaurant if you have just eaten well? Who goes looking for a new car if you have just bought one you are happy with? Who goes looking for another companion, another lover, another soul-mate if you are happy with the one you have.

“Ah, but that's the point, my spouse doesn't make me happy anymore. I have a right to happiness.” Before you have a right to be happy, you have a right to keep your vows. You have a right to seek the happiness of your spouse. And having done that, you have the obligation to choose Christian contentment. You cannot be content, and at the same time be contemplating betraying your spouse and betraying your God.

11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: (Phi 4:11)

Contentment is submitting to the portion God gives me. It is gladly accepting the slice God cuts for me. Contentment is a light that once switched on, the cockroaches of adultery and covetousness flee. Married couples, rejoice in your spouse. Stop waiting for the day your spouse will be someone else. Pray for change, but give thanks for what is. Solomon tells us “ 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. (Ecc 9:9)”

Singles, rejoice in your mobility and flexibility. Paul speaks at length about the singlemindedness with which he can serve God as a single. If you desire marriage, pray for it, aim for it, work towards it. But while you are doing something about your singleness, make sure you also do something with your singleness. Serve, encourage, be hospitable.

Websites like Ashley Madison exist because people have not come to know the faithful God who never betray us. To grow in love for Him is to grow in pure loyalty to Him, and pure loyalty to others.