The Sanctity of Marriage
November 1, 2026

Introduction
We have a tendency to look at our culture and pine for the good ol' days. Certainly the culture is full of hedonism. Noelle Mering, author of books like *Awake, Not Woke* and *No Contact*, makes the point that the consequence of a hedonistic society is an aversion to and avoidance of discomfort because, to a hedonistic society, pleasure is the greatest good. (Thinking in Public with Albert Mohler: A Crisis in Family Estrangement — A Conversation with Noelle Mering, Oct 21, 2026) She's right, but what I think many of us miss in the laments about our current cultural moment is how ancient God's law is. The Ten Commandments were recorded somewhere in the ballpark of 3,500 years ago. That's a historical number that you and I can't really even fathom. We were bouncing off the walls this summer at the prospect of our country turning 250. There are buildings in Europe and Asia that predate our existence as a nation by over 1,000 years. 3,500+ years is not just a long time ago; it feels prehistoric. Yet, there in the ancient world God laid the foundation for His people so that they could best image Him and understand His nature and character as they lived according to His will.

One commentator notes that, "*The sixth through eighth commands present general prohibitions not to murder, commit adultery, or steal. In doing so, they set minimum standards for Israel to be a just society and indicate the context in which the people will be called further to be holy and to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and might (Deut. 6:4–9), and their neighbors with goodwill and generosity (Lev. 19:18). Thus, while the prohibition against stealing is a basic principle of justice in Israel's national life, the people are called to do more than refrain from taking another person's possessions. They are to embody the Lord's love for them by loving the stranger and sojourner as themselves (Lev. 19:33–34). When Jesus refers to the law in the Sermon on the Mount ("you have heard that it was said," Matt. 5:21ff.), he is correcting not the intended purpose of the OT law but the mistaken presumption that these laws (or their interpretation) were meant to be exhaustive of what it meant to live as a child of the kingdom of heaven. (E.g., as Jesus made clear, simply refraining from murder does not fulfill the law when a person disdains his brother as a fool; or simply refraining from adultery does not fulfill the law when a man lusts after a woman; see Matt. 5:21–24, 27–28; and note on Matt. 5:21–48.)*" (ESV Study Bible Note – Exodus 20:13-15) Hear that phrase again, "...*they set minimum standards for Israel to be a just society and indicate the context in which the people will be called further to be holy and to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and might (Deut. 6:4–9), and their neighbors with goodwill and generosity (Lev. 19:18).*

In Romans 13:9 Paul taught us that, "*For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

Exodus 20:14

Adultery Rejects the Significance of Marriage
A proper understanding of the seventh commandment necessitates a right understanding of marriage. So what is marriage? Well-crafted speeches are NEVER supposed to start with a definition. It's seen as cliché, or boring to the audience or even, some say, demonstrates a lack

of preparedness. I love words and I think that their definitions matter. I even listen to a daily word of the day podcast from Merriam-Webster. This week's words were: emissary, disparate, milieu (a personal fave), grotesque, shindig, reticent, wraith and Pyrrhic. So, whether it's considered cliché or boring or whatever, I think that it's really important to consider how Merriam-Webster chooses to define the word "marriage." Today, Merriam-Webster's website defines marriage as, "*the state of being united as spouses in a contractual relationship recognized by law.*" The shifting landscape around how marriage is viewed is demonstrated in the differences between today's definition and that of just 22 years ago (which is understandably a lifetime ago for some in this room, but barely registers in the scope of human history.) In the 2004 print version of Webster's New World Collegiate Dictionary, marriage was defined less as a contractual agreement. Listen to the first entry in that definition: "*the state of being married; relation between spouses; married life; wedlock; matrimony.*" Words like "*matrimony*", which refers to the rite or sacrament of marriage and "*wedlock*", which refers to the covenantal reality of marriage harken back to a day just on the cusp of the pervasive redefinition of marriage that began to erode society's commitment to marriage. Today, though, we have moved from the understanding of marriage as a covenantal and spiritual union of a man and a woman to merely a legal and contractual agreement between any two people (or more?). This shift may seem subtle, but it's part of a larger effort to redefine our society's norms in rejection to Judeo-Christian values (based on the Ten Commandments and God's Law) and more in line with progressive ideologies of the self and radical self-expression.

More on that in a moment, but the significance of marriage is not merely rooted in the usefulness of marriage, but in the intent behind marriage. In Ephesians 5, Paul offers up teaching on how men and women form the two sides of the marriage coin. Women are called to submit to their husbands as unto Christ and men are love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. There's another whole sermon in that text, but I want us to focus really quickly on Paul's argument about the nature of marriage in verses 32-33: "*This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*" Don't miss that. Paul is saying that God implanted marriage into the culture in order that we would have an innate understanding of God's relationship to His people. The church is called the bride of Christ. The unfaithfulness of Israel and the church is referred to metaphorically as adulterous. Marriage isn't merely a social construct, but a deeply spiritual reality. This is why marriage as an idea is under assault by the enemy and explains why adultery is prohibited among God's people.

Adultery Rejects the Sacredness of Sex

What is the purpose of the physical act of marriage? Understanding the purpose of something makes its use appropriate and effective. You can use a pair of pliers to remove a bolt, but that's what they're actually for. It would be more appropriate to use a wrench or a socket. Frankly, I think that, too often, we think of sin in terms of doing the right thing or the wrong thing. That is certainly something that we don't want to ignore as we assess our own hearts before God and faithfully confess our sins to one another, but that's not ALL there is to sin. Often sin is the outworking of taking a good thing and using it in the wrong way or using it for the wrong reason

or even using it to the wrong ends. Same question: What is the purpose of the physical act of marriage? It really serves two basic functions:

- ***Procreation***…in the past two weeks, I've mentioned the dominion mandate in Genesis 1 where God calls Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and have dominion over all the animals and the natural world. One of the purposes of sex and part of what makes it sacred is that it is tied to the basic purposes of dominion which is procreation. Having children is fundamental to human existence and the family is the fundamental building block of God's design for society and culture. Adultery destroys both of these.
- ***Intimacy***…in the act of marriage, man and woman are given to another in intimacy and mutual submission (1 Cor. 7:2-4). This physical union and the intimacy it engenders is the pretext for the entire marital covenant. Think about what is being talked about when we cite Genesis 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.*" We celebrate this fact, not in a creepy, perverse way, but in a way that understands and celebrates the beauty and goodness of intimacy.

Adultery, however, answers that question about the purpose of the marital act by leveraging sexual union for selfish and sinful reasons. It takes a good thing given by God and bends it to our desires and purposes. Adultery misappropriates that which is designed to create more image bearers of God and enhance marital intimacy in the pursuit of personal fulfillment.

This seems to be, again, why Jesus gets at the heart of adultery in Matthew 5:27-32 wherein he condemns, not only adultery, but the lust from whence it springs as the seed and the engine of adultery. Furthermore, I think it's right to infer that this applies to all manner of sexual sin. It is, after all, the removal of sex from the context of marriage that leads to fornication, homosexual sin, pornography and all kinds of gross sexual sin in the world. Make no mistake, according to Jesus, it would be better to walk around blind or without hands in this world if it meant that you were free of the lust that leads to adultery and the eternal consequences of rebellion against God.

Adultery Rejects the Sensibility of God's Design

The prohibition against adultery is certainly rooted in the design of marriage, but, and as is the case with all of God's laws, there's a certain sensibility behind such prohibitions that serve the common good of mankind and the stability of society. It's worth noting that the phrasing of this prohibition in other passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy includes the phrase "*neighbor's wife*" or "*wife of his neighbor*" or "*wife of another man*" as if to connect this sin to its destructive and predatory reality and its corrosive effect on communities and cultures. Adultery erodes the very foundation of our society, which is marriage.

God's design is not merely meant to act as a cosmic buzzkill. God didn't just look across the annals of history and locate all the ways in which mankind could imagine having a blast and put on His cosmic dad hat and make all the fun stuff against the rules. In the week 1 introduction to this series I cited Pastor Josh Howerton's lament that he thinks, "*...a lot of people think*

Christianity is a bunch of good people telling bad people how to be good." (Shawn Ryan Show)
While that isn't the point of the commandments alone, it shouldn't be lost on us that God's way is always the best way and that God's aim is always for His own glory and the good of His people. To that end, Proverbs 6:20-35 holds a robust caution for those considering adultery. I won't read all of it, but I surveyed several translations and came up with my own quick summary:

– Listen to the instructions of your mom and dad because they will guide you and protect you
– Good advice is a light and moral teaching will bring you life by protecting you from promiscuous people and seductive temptations of lust
– Don't spend your time longing for someone merely because you're taken in by their seduction and beauty or the eyes they make at you
– The financial price of a mere moment with a prostitute is negligible, but promiscuity, fornication and adultery will eat you alive
– Can you build a fire in your lap and not be burned? Or walk on burning coals and not get blisters? Adultery is no different…if you touch another man's wife, you will get burned without exception
– People will find ways to excuse a thief if he makes restitution, but there is no restitution sufficient enough to cover the cost of adultery because it is self-destructive and soul-crushing
– Adultery will wreck your reputation and erode your trustworthiness
– Adulterers need to watch their backs because they can expect that the man whose wife you slept with with come after you to bloody your nose, black your eye or even worse because adultery creates a desire for revenge and sets off a timebomb of rage in a jilted husband
– There's almost nothing that can be said to make a cheated spouse feel better

Conclusion
About one month ago, Caleb Flynn was found guilty of murdering his wife in the first degree and sentenced to life in prison. Many, if not most of you, may be familiar with this story, but it stands as a cautionary tale of the destructive ends of sin, particularly adultery. Caleb was a worship leader and American Idol contestant who started having an affair with a woman nearly half his age. By all accounts, he became so entrenched in his adulterous sin and affair that he brutally killed his wife in a calculated manner. Figuring that if she was dead, and someone else was determined to have done it, he could move on and be with his young mistress. Today, a woman is dead, a family is broken and multiple lives are ruined or impacted because of the grip of adultery. Adultery's reputation as a destroyer wins again.

However, there is forgiveness for the sin of adultery and there is hope in the face of temptation at the cross. Jesus reminds us that these sins are the result of our hardened hearts, but the gospel of Jesus Christ promises to remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh. The good news this morning is that for all the destruction and evil that comes with and from adultery, there is more life and restoration and holiness that comes at the cross.