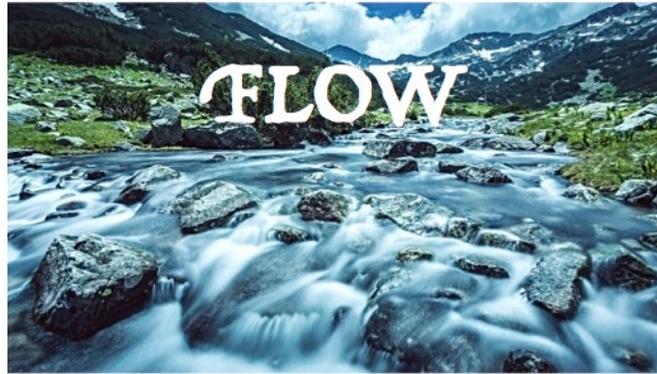


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## The 7th Commandment Adultery

by Dan Taylor

*"You shall not commit adultery."*

Deuteronomy 5:18



Jimmy Carter Confession

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*"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."*

Matthew 5:27-28

President Jimmy Carter found himself in the midst of a media feeding frenzy when he made his infamous remark “I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times.” But it was with a certain level of humility and vulnerability that he made such an admission—he was taking Jesus’ words seriously from the Matthew 5 passage above.

Of all ten commandments, this prohibition of adultery seems at first like the only one that isn’t applicable to everyone. If you’re not married you can’t commit adultery, right? Well, there is more going on in this commandment than that. Jesus expands the commandment to include our thoughts and desires, not just behavior. Elsewhere in scripture, the commandment is expanded to specifically prohibit any kind of sex not between husband and wife.

To a culture whose standard is “what is good for you is whatever satisfies you,” biblical expectations for sexual behavior seem prudish, out-dated, and even oppressive. It seems like God is the ultimate kill-joy, a tyrant who tries to control people even down to how they use their own bodies.

But that’s the difference, right? If we follow Jesus, we live in the joy that we are not our own.

1 Corinthians 6:13-20 says:

*“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, **but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.** And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 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.**”*

This is the same in marriage. It’s not oppressive for a spouse to expect the other to not sleep around. It’s because faithfulness and commitment are the foundation upon which joy can be built. It’s also because of the truth that our deepest satisfaction is not found in the unlimited pursuit of our appetites—we were not made for that—we were made for intimacy within the framework of commitment. This is actually connected to the rest of the commandments that guide our behavior toward other people. Lying, gossip, coveting, stealing, and even murder destroy intimacy because they break the trust formed in the commitment inherent in being in community with others.

Many of the times the words translated as “lust” in the Old Testament are used, it is in the context of cheating on God, not a spouse! It is related to idolatry.

Did you know this is the origin of the tzitzit, the tassels worn on the clothes of observant Jews?

*The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. **You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by chasing after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes.** Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord your God.’”*

Numbers 15:37-41

Lust is idolatry, that which moves us away from God. But it is also wronging our brother or sister—and God’s rebuke is also based on it being an issue of justice. This is true in the case of adultery being an act of betrayal toward one’s own spouse but also toward the other person and their community. But in our age of pornography, the issue of justice is even more pronounced, due to the intertwined nature of pornography and coercion, slavery, trafficking, poverty, and abuse.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7:

*“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that **no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things,** as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”*

For some of us in our community the struggle with lust is very real and consuming. That struggle was a huge part of my story, and one that was suffocating of growth—either growth toward God or growth in intimacy in human relationships. Lust as an issue is pervasive in our society but also in our churches, even our own. My own journey out of that ugliness was related to the processes of the death of my pride, painful confession and even more painful receiving of forgiveness, and beginning to pursue joy as an outgrowth of my identity as a beloved, always embraced child of God. Joy comes on the foundation of commitment.

As a final thought, listen to the words of 1 John 2:15-16, but my challenge is to hear them with a tone of voice that is not in least bit condemning, but is loving and

reaching toward you—starting from the place of assuming that being in the Father’s love is the best place to be in the world:

*“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”*

Lives forever! Not in shame before a God who we will never live up to, but reveling in a love that finally satisfies our longings for intimacy and security!

**Questions:**

1. What entices you away from God? What do you continue to believe will satisfy you, even though it hasn’t in the past? Why do you continue to believe it will satisfy you? What would actually satisfy you? How can you pursue that?
2. Is there some area of your life where you need to commit to be able to experience joy? What’s holding you back? Who could you talk to about that?

**Prayer:**

*Oh loving, forgiving, satisfying Father, life with you is rich and beautiful. We admit we too often turn toward unsatisfying substitutes, fleeting enjoyments. O Lord, we have prostituted ourselves by chasing after the lusts of our eyes and hearts—we have betrayed you and our own relationships. Thank you that like the prodigal son’s father, you receive us back, not as 2<sup>nd</sup> class children, but as your children. Beloved children! Thank you, Father, thank you! Give us strength now to remain in your love and not be distracted and enticed from your side. Lord, provide for the members of our congregation who struggle silently in the grip of lust. Embolden them for the fight and give them joy in their identity as your beloved. Amen.*