

# The Seventh Commandments

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[ 0 : 00 ] You might have noticed this morning as we start the service that we skipped out a couple of elements in the service. We didn't do many announcements. We also didn't do the pastoral prayer and saying the Lord's Prayer together.

I've taken a couple of elements out of the service this morning, and that's because I want to ask for permission to preach ever so slightly longer than I normally preach this morning. But the aim is that you get out of here at exactly the same time as you would normally get out of here.

So the service will be the same length, but the sermon is going to be slightly longer just because there is a lot to cover in today's topic. What I've done is I've made sure I've taken all of the cheesy humor out of the sermon to shorten it so that you just get what's important, and then we can hang out together after the service.

But if you will afford me that grace, that would be fantastic. So you're probably wondering then, well, what are we actually looking at that requires all this extra time? And it is the Seventh Commandment. We're doing a series in the Ten Commandments, and we come to Commandment No. 7, in which, if you've got your Bible, there is Exodus 20, verse 14, you shall not commit adultery. Now, if you've been with us in this series, as with the previous two commandments, this particular commandment is not just concerned with the actual act of committing adultery, but in fact provides a much bigger moral and ethical framework for bigger subjects like sex and marriage.

[ 1 : 23 ] And I know that when we talk about these subjects, I know when we talk about sexuality and marriage, it's a difficult subject, particularly broken and sinful expressions of sexuality and marriage, simply because so many of us have been directly or indirectly affected by broken sexuality, by broken marriages.

Some of you come in here this morning, and maybe this is an area that you're struggling in right now. And so I guess what my hope is as we do this, as we study this commandment, my hope is that you won't ultimately come away with a sense of feeling condemnation or shame.

I hope you will come away with a sense of healing and forgiveness, and ultimately a hopeful renewal in those particularly scarred areas of your life.

So we're going to do two things this morning. Number one, we're going to look at the command within the broader context of the Bible's teaching on sex and marriage. And then number two, we're going to look at two areas that Jesus applies this command to, and that is to lust and divorce.

So first the broader context of the command in the Bible's view of sex and marriage, and then Jesus' two comments about this command with regards to lust and divorce.

[ 2 : 40 ] So here's the first one. Let me start up front by being as clear as I can in summarizing the historic Christian view of sex or marriage, so you know where we're going.

Christians believe that the Bible teaches that marriage is an exclusive, lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, and that sex should only ever take place within the confines of that covenant relationship.

Okay? Let me say that again. Christians believe that the Bible teaches that marriage is an exclusive, lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, and that sex should only ever take place within the confines of that covenant relationship.

Now, you will actually find near unanimous agreement on this across Protestant, Roman, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox branches of Christianity over the last 2,000 years, even amongst Orthodox Jews as well.

Now, why do you have Christians come to this particular conviction? Well, like all things, it starts right at the very beginning. It starts with the very first marriage. So, Genesis chapter 2, when God creates Eve out of the side of Adam, he brings her to him, and Adam actually sings the first love

song or recites the first love poetry.

[ 3 : 57 ] Verse 23 to 24 of Genesis 2, The man said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. It's not a great poem.

Verse 24, That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Now, that idea of one flesh straight away tells us a couple of things about marriage, off the bat.

Number one, it tells us marriage is permanent. Think about your own flesh. You only tear your own flesh apart at great injury and pain to yourself. Number two, it tells us that sex is a foundational component of marriage.

The two become one flesh. That certainly has sexual overtones for all the original readers there. Sex is not all that marriage is about, but it is certainly a foundational part of a biblical definition of what marriage is.

And then number three, marriage is a covenant. So, in some of the older translations of the Bible, it says that a man will leave and cleave, leave his family and cleave to his wife, becoming one new flesh, forming this new family unit.

[ 5 : 12 ] That, I think, then tells us that marriage is not just about being romantically united to someone, but it's about the social institution of a family, of creating a new family.

And so there's responsibility, there's commitment there, rather than just kind of raw romantic and sexual engagement between two people. And how do we describe this particular institution?

What language do we give to this institution with these associated responsibilities? Well, that word for unite or cleave in the older translation, that word in the original Hebrew is actually a word that's used extensively throughout the Old Testament when Israel are being called to remain faithful to the covenant promises of God.

The covenant God has made with them. So, any ancient Hebrew who is reading Genesis chapter 2 in the light of the rest of the Old Testament is going to hear these covenantal overtones in this language of verse 24.

Marriage is not just two people coming together, it is two people covenanting together. And so right there, at the very beginning of the Bible, you've got the basic building blocks for the Christian view of marriage and sex.

[ 6 : 22 ] Genesis 2. Now you move along, in the storyline of the Bible, you come to the Ten Commandments, and there in this second table of the law that we're looking at, our duties to our fellow human beings, that are, you would have seen this the whole way through the series, these duties are put there, they're mapped out for the flourishing of human society.

In that second table of the law, adultery, and by that I mean sexual activity that violates the sanctity of marriage, adultery is strictly forbidden. There are a lot of things that you can do to damage a marriage, or break up a marriage, but here it is deviant sexual practices that are in view.

And we know this because if you go to a place like Leviticus chapter 18, that gives us a whole lot of case law around the seventh commandment, for the nation of Israel, it all has to do with sexual deviance.

So there are laws against adultery, there are laws against incest, there are laws against sexual interactions during menstruation, there are laws against sexual interactions with animals, there are laws against sexual interactions between people of the same sex.

From the Old Testament context, it is clear that the seventh commandment is a prohibition on all forms of sexually deviant behavior.

[ 7 : 43 ] And by deviant, what I mean there with that word is I mean sexual interactions outside of the bounds of the covenant of marriage. Now you find exactly the same thing when you move over then to the New Testament.

You'll find Jesus, Luke, who writes Luke and Acts, Paul, and the Apostle John frequently prohibiting something called sexual immorality.

You'll see those two words next to each other in the New Testament a lot of times. Sexual immorality. It's a single word actually in the Greek. And it occurs 29 times in the New Testament. It's the word pornea.

I think you can hear what that word has been translated into today. Okay. Scholars agree basically that the term is a comprehensive term that covers all forms of sexual activity that take place outside of the exclusive covenant of a marriage between a man and a woman.

So it's pretty comprehensive. It covers all the bases. And most of those guys, remember, have Leviticus 18 in their mind when they're using that term in the New Testament.

[ 8 : 53 ] So the same idea in the New Testament as you will find in the Old Testament. Sex is reserved for and is an integral part of marriage. And so the seventh commandment then prohibits, protects that.

You shall not commit adultery. Now let me pause here and let me insert a very, very important sidebar. And then we'll come back. Obviously, a biblical definition of marriage and sex, as I've just outlined it, puts same-sex marriage and same-sex sexual engagement outside the bounds of biblical Christianity.

Now that's actually been a relatively uncontroversial and uncontested teaching throughout the vast, vast majority of Christian history. It's only in the last few decades that some scholars have tried to make a case that same-sex erotic or romantic relationships can actually be reconciled with the teaching of Scripture.

Now I want to say, I think this is a massively complicated and incredibly emotionally charged subject. And so I want to tread very, very carefully here.

But let me say two things. Number one, I have, as a pastor, I have serious, serious misgivings about how evangelical churches have pastored and cared for their members who struggle with same-sex attraction.

[ 10 : 14 ] Now there are wonderful exceptions to this, but on the whole, I am not sure that the church has done particularly well in showing genuine care, compassion, grace, and support to people with this particular struggle.

So I lament, I truly, truly lament the gay bashing that has taken place in pulpits, the ostracizing, naive, pastorally destructive practices like the Christian versions of reparative therapy that have been employed.

I think the church has a lot to answer for in its treatment of same-sex attracted people. And it must, must do much, much, much, much better. That's the first thing.

That being said, number two, I remain completely unconvinced that same-sex erotic or romantic relationships are compatible with the biblical view of sex and marriage.

And so I actually, I find the revisionist scholarship that argues that the Bible affirms same-sex marriage and sex, I find that scholarship to be riddled with all sorts of incredibly speculative interpretations of key texts.

[ 11 : 29 ] The kinds of interpretations we would never use on any other part of the Bible or any other doctrines that we derive and that we hold on to dearly and believe. And I spent the last 15 years reading on this subject, pretty much everything new that comes out.

I actually hope in the new year to do an extended seminar on this particular subject, looking at those key texts, looking at the undergirding theology, looking at the different scholars, because I think it needs that kind of a treatment.

And what I can say in a couple of minutes on a Sunday just is not going to cover all the bases or answer questions. If you can't wait until next year and we do that seminar and you are interested in reading and finding out more, I would recommend one book to you.

And that is a book by a scholar by the name of Preston Sprinkle. He's a New Testament scholar, expert New Testament scholar, and a specialist in biblical sexuality. His book, *People to be Loved*, I don't agree with absolutely everything in the book, but I think he makes the clearest case for what the Bible teaches about sex, marriage, and same-sex relationships.

So you can have a look at that one. But this is a hard one. This is an incredibly hard one. I have friends, I have people very, very close to me, and people I've ministered to over 15 years for whom this has been their struggle.

[ 12 : 42 ] And so for me, and particularly for them, this is not abstracted theology, something we can just go and read books about and just leave it there.

As a church, I think what we have to do is, I think we have to walk this really hard, delicate line between holding on to the Bible's teaching on sexuality with courage in the face of a culture that says we are all hateful bigots for believing these things, while at the same time pouring out love. And I really mean that. Pouring out love, pouring out compassion, pouring out care for those who have this as the particular struggle that they have as they try to follow Jesus. I am encouraged, I am encouraged that there are some wonderful life-giving examples of this happening around the world.

There are groups of same-sex attracted Christians who hold the historic biblical teaching on sex and yet are creating brilliant resources and putting them out there to equip churches to care well for their members, to create alternative communities.

Maybe this, as you sit here this morning and you listen to this, maybe this is your particular struggle and you haven't known how to deal with it, you haven't known what to do with it, you're just kind of sitting on it, not sure. So, my prayer, my real, real prayer is that you will find in me, as your pastor, and in this church a place where you can wrestle with Scripture, in community, without a sense of shame and condemnation hanging over you.

[14:18] I think as we've seen throughout this series, the demands of God's law are very, very great. but His mercy is greater.

Wesley Hill, who is a New Testament professor, also a same-sex attracted Christian, but who believes in the historic teaching of the Bible, this is what he says in his book, *Washed and Waiting*, he says, one of the most striking things about the New Testament teaching on homosexuality is that right on the heels of the passages that condemn homosexual activity, there are without exception resounding affirmations of God's extravagant mercy and redemption.

God condemns homosexual behavior and amazingly, profligately, at great cost to himself, lavishes his love on homosexual persons. I've had more than one same-sex attracted person say to me, as we've been walking the road, say to me, a lot of people who are quote-unquote straight seem to think that the law demands so much of me, the biblical law demands so much of me, but a lot of those straight people are just not reading the rest of the law.

If you somehow think that they've got this extra special demand, then you're just not thinking carefully about commandments one through the other commandments. And so I think we walk this road together, we hold each other's hands together, our struggles with the different laws manifest in different ways, and so we walk together.

End of sidebar. So that's the command within the context of the Bible's overall teaching on sex and marriage. Here's how Jesus applies the seventh commandment.

[16:06] Here he is speaking in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, verse 27 to 32. He says, You have heard 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.

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.

It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. It has been said anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality makes her the victim of adultery and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Now if you've got the NIV Bible in front of you there, the way the NIV headings, which are not part of the inspired scripture, but the way they're put in your Bible, it makes it look like Jesus is speaking about adultery as one subject and then he speaks about divorce as another subject.

But you'll notice verse 32 there at the end that he rounds off the section by saying that unlawful divorce creates a situation where adultery takes place.

[17:17] So he connects both adultery and divorce with the seventh commandment. So let's look at those two things. Number one, Jesus basically says you've read the ten commandments, guys.

You've all read the ten commandments that you mustn't commit adultery, but I want to tell you something. Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully, and this can be switched around, so any woman who looks at a man lustfully, has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Now let's start with what he's not saying. He's not saying that if you see a beautiful woman and you recognize that she's a beautiful woman and you are attracted to her, that you are in that moment committing adultery.

Temptation is not sin. Remember the Bible says that Jesus was tempted in every way, yet was without sin. So simply being attracted to a beautiful member of the opposite sex is not lust. But what is lust then? The word that we have there in the original is a word we've actually come across many times in our sermons because it's quite common in Paul's writing. It's the word *epithumia*, over-desire, inordinate desire.

[18:24] And so in this instance, I take it that lust is to look at an attractive woman and not just appreciate her beauty, but to want her sexually for yourself and to entertain that fantasy in your

mind and treasure it in your heart.

That is lust. And Jesus says, well, that's breaking the seventh commandment in your heart. So you might be quote-unquote upholding the institution of marriage.

You might say, oh, look, I'll never cheat on my wife. And yet at the same time, you're an adulterer through lust in your heart. In fact, you might not even be married, but through lustful thoughts, you break the seventh commandment in your heart.

Now, the common pushback for this is my private fantasies, they don't hurt anybody. I mean, for goodness sake, you Christians are really pedantic.

You want to go and micromanage what's going on in people's heads and hearts. They don't hurt anybody. Why is Jesus such a killjoy here? Why is he meddling with what's going on in my head? And I want to say that if you have any sort of sympathy with that sentiment, then you need to consider this.

[ 19 : 32 ] There is a mountain, and I mean a mountain, like Everest size mountain, of data available to us today from Christian scholarship and interestingly from secular scholarship that points to the reality that private sexual fantasies can have a devastating effect upon marital intimacy and trust and your expectations of future marriage if you're not married.

So due to the glut, and we know this now, because due to the glut of easily available pornography, the high levels of people viewing pornography, which is, in case you were wondering, a form of lust and a violation of the seventh commandment, we have numerous, numerous, numerous studies available that point out widespread breakdown in sexual performance, in sexual intimacy, in sexual satisfaction within marriages as a result of private activity, the private activity of viewing pornography and the entertaining of private sexual fantasies.

what goes on privately in your head and privately in your heart has real world consequences on the outside. Do not kid yourself that it does not. Jesus is not being a killjoy.

He's trying to give your marriage or your prospect of future marriage life. That's what he's trying to do. He's trying to show you an ethic that will bring life. He's trying to show you an ethic that will bring intimacy, that will bring deeper gratification and trust and joy into your marriage.

If you are constantly entertaining lustful fantasies in your heart, you're the killjoy, not Jesus. So that's the first thing that he says about the seventh commandment.

[ 21 : 11 ] He says, listen guys, you've got to take this much, much, much deeper than the actual act of adultery. Take it to the level of your heart and disciplining your thought life.

Now, interestingly, the other place that Jesus goes when he applies the seventh commandment is the area of divorce. So Matthew 5, 31, in that same section, it has been said, anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.

But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Where does this strange certificate of divorce come from?

It comes from the Old Testament from Deuteronomy 24, verse 1. It says this, If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her, and sends her from his house, and after she leaves his house, she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her, and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband who divorced her is not allowed to marry her again.

So there's actually no real discussion on the certificate, it's more just if the certificate is handed out. So there's this passing reference in the Old Testament law about this practice of giving a certificate of divorce.

[ 22 : 38 ] Now how does this divorce connect with adultery? Here's Old Testament scholar Peter Craigie explaining this particular law. He says, the intent of the legislation seems to be to apply certain restrictions on the already existing practice of divorce.

If divorce became too easy, then it could be abused and would become a legal form of committing adultery. The legislation thus restricts what may have been a loophole in the older custom.

So the giving of certificate with conditions there actually restricts existing ancient Near Eastern practices that were around in the time going on.

Now scholars have spilled a lot of ink over that Hebrew phrase that describes the one condition, the reason for the certificate of divorce in that same passage. Let me remind you again what it says. It

says, if a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about it, that's the phrase, and he writes a certificate of divorce and then the sentence goes on.

So what is this something indecent? It's a strange phrase that actually only occurs twice in the Bible and in the other occurrence it's used strangely in relation to human excrement.

[ 23 : 59 ] Our very best guess is that it means something like terribly impure or terribly unclean. Whatever this indecent thing is that the wife has done it seems pretty, pretty, pretty bad.

Now here's the problem. The Pharisees around the time of Jesus they took this obscure reference in the law and they just kind of went wild with it. They just built it out in all sorts of weird and wonderful directions.

So we know from other Jewish literature from around the first century that the religious leaders created these long lists that constituted indecent behavior and served as the grounds of divorce. All sorts of strange things. There's even there's an account of a woman burning her husband's food and being ruled as indecent behavior and therefore grounds of divorce. Those pharisaical laws were actually incredibly patriarchal elevating the power of men and stripping women of the protection that marriage gave them in that society which was a huge protection.

So this was systemic injustice. This was systemic sexism built into the law system. Jesus takes it on and he says you cannot devalue marriage like that.

[ 25 : 18 ] The only time a marriage can be broken and he's not saying it must be broken but the only time it can be broken or be permitted to be broken is in the event of sexual immorality and my sneaking suspicion is he's actually defining there what this indecent activity is.

It can only be broken in the event of sexual deviance if one or both partners deviate sexually from the intent of the marriage then a divorce is permitted. Now the Bible does have one other place 1 Corinthians where it does make one other allowance for divorce and that is if an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage then the believing spouse is free to be divorced and remarried what the Westminster standards call desertion.

But again divorce is such an emotional and delicate topic. Maybe you're sitting here and you're thinking I've been divorced. Maybe you've remarried.

Maybe you haven't. But you're sitting and you're thinking did I have biblical grounds? I don't know.

And you're wondering if you're under some sort of judgment or condemnation as a result.

You feel maybe guilt or shame. Let me say this as clearly as I possibly possibly can. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin.

[ 26 : 39 ] Even though sometimes the pain and the shame can make it feel that way, divorce is not the unforgivable sin. You need to know that through repentance and faith in Christ you are cleansed in entirety from past mistakes, from past sins.

Any shame, any shame that you feel that you bear for having been maybe on the receiving end is completely taken away too. Christ bears our shame the Bible says.

He bears our guilt the Bible says. We are freed and cleansed in the gospel the Bible says. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That is the crystal clear message of the Bible from start to finish.

Scars might hurt for some time, maybe for a lifetime, but in God's eyes there are no blemishes because when he looks on you he sees Jesus, his pure, radiant, sinless son.

You are a radiant child of God. That is who you are in the gospel. But notice what Jesus is going after here. The first century Pharisee comes and he says as long as you follow correct protocol, you can use your marriage for whatever you want.

[ 28 : 04 ] But Jesus says marriage is to be treated as an unbreakable covenant that is only permitted to be broken in exceptional circumstances.

And the sting in his point is that if you treat your marriage like the Pharisees then you're an adulterer. You're like the person who lusts, you're a person who breaks the seventh commandment. You might be thinking, well I'm crossing all my T's and dotting all my I's with regards to the cultural protocols as far as divorce goes when in actual fact you're behaving like an adulterer. And so how is that?

Well we don't have all those pharisaical regulations today but we inhabit a secular culture that says divorce is acceptable for any number of non-biblical reasons. To give you just one example, our culture is quite happy to say that if you sense after a number of years of growing incompatibility

between you and your spouse then divorce is a very reasonable option.

I mean why beat a dead horse? Find someone you have greater compatibility with. And so we actually have all those pharisaical protocols around us, they've just changed.

[ 29 : 12 ] And Jesus comes in and he says if you divorce for any reason other than marital unfaithfulness you're an adulterer. You're violating the seventh commandment. Why? Well because you're betraying the very purpose of the institution of marriage which is to covenant together and become one flesh, to grow together into one new unit which is shaped by the different features that the two bring together.

there is a sense in which incompatibility is a prerequisite for marriage. For true compatibility to emerge, to come out of that. In fact it's grounds, marriage is grounds for greater fusing together, for greater patience to be applied, for greater empathy, for greater humility, for greater selflessness. One of the chief and underlooked biblical goals of marriage is character formation. The culture's notion of compatibility means you lose that beautiful distinct contribution that marriage can make in our lives.

We lose that opportunity to grow. Because as soon as our rough edges come against each other, instead of them getting worn down and made better, we just break things apart, separate, go different ways, dissolve the marriage.

Jesus says don't damage the institution like that. It is a wonderful, wonderful, gift given to us. It's not just about your personal fulfillment. It's about something so much bigger than that.

[ 30 : 45 ] And so the seventh commandment protects the God-given institution of marriage. And let me close with this. This just felt like 15 minutes, right? The problem with these examples, so the lusting and the breaking of marriage and divorce, the problem with these examples is sexual deviance.

sexuality out of control. And the question is, well, why is it so out of control and how do we deal with that? What do we do about it? And Jesus goes somewhere into answering this.

I don't know if you saw it in the middle of that section we read in verse 29. why is it so hard to control, to discipline?

better for you lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell? Why is sexual deviance such a problem? Why is it so hard to control, to discipline?

Why does it cause such havoc in our society? And it's not just Christians who think that sexual deviance is causing havoc in our society. There is a growing and in some ways surprising body of literature appearing, often in quite secular publications, about the ills of pornography, the ills of hookup culture, the devastating effect on divorce in its relation to poverty, sex trafficking, even the negative effects of cohabitation prior to marriage.

[ 32 : 14 ] The British writer Louise Perry, she has a best selling book out right now at the moment. She's on all the podcasts at the moment with her book *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution* where she makes a secular feminist argument that views on sex and sexuality are out of control, and for the most part rather than liberating women, have made life worse for women in this particular area right now.

She's brilliant by the way, listen to everything she says, she's really good. It's a remarkable book to come out in this day and age. But it's like our culture has multiple personality disorder, we celebrate sex in all sorts of graphic and illicit ways and then at the same time we bemoan the numerous ills related to widespread sexual expression with little or no boundaries.

We all know it's causing havoc in our culture, but why? Well, reading between the lines of what Jesus seems to say here, it seems as if our culture, as a culture, we don't see sex for how precious and powerful it really is, like Jesus does, the way the Bible does.

we don't see sex for how precious and for how powerful it actually is. The fact that Jesus uses such strong metaphors to talk about our dealing with this problem means that he thinks sex is incredibly powerful.

Mame yourself, he says. Did you hear that? Mame yourself rather than be thrown into hell. the reason he uses such strong language is because he wants us to have a very, very, very high view of the power and the beauty of sex.

[ 34 : 00 ] Our culture doesn't see sex that way. In our culture, sex is seen as an appetite to be fulfilled, and as long as there's consent, it's an appetite that we should be free to fulfill.

But I think there is no way that we can sustain that view. Think about our songs. our most passionate songs. People don't generally write highly and emotive, passionate songs about pizza. They don't generally write highly emotional and passionate songs about beer. Those are biological appetites that we need fulfilled. People do write highly emotive and passionate songs about sexual and erotic love.

All the time. Even the Bible does. Song of songs. songs. I promise you this, if you could read ancient Hebrew, you would never read song of songs in the presence of your parents.

That would be the most awkward experience of your life, because to put it this way, there are a lot of euphemisms in the English translation. The Bible is not shy of sex, but it recognizes that it is an incredibly precious and powerful in a way that makes it quite different from all the other appetites that we have.

[ 35 : 21 ] And so if we've got this very, very powerful thing, then how do we discipline it? How do we use it in a right way so that it doesn't create havoc, so that it doesn't hurt us and it doesn't hurt the people around us and it doesn't hurt our society?

Well, part of the answer is the institution of marriage. That sex needs to stay between a man and a woman within the confines of a committed, exclusive, lifelong covenant. That's one control.

We should be very pro-marriage as Christians. But as we've seen from this passage, it's not an absolute control. It doesn't ensure that sexual deviance won't break out and cause havoc.

Otherwise, we wouldn't have to talk about divorce and you wouldn't have to talk about adultery. Plus, there are many people who for various reasons might never marry but still have to discipline their own sexuality.

The Bible is actually very pro- singleness in the service of God. But singles still have to discipline their sexuality. And so how do we control it? Well, Jesus says there's a better way.

[ 36 : 26 ] And if you get hold of this better way, you will grow in your control and discipline in this area. In this section, you see, he contrasts the consequences of sexual deviance with being maimed.

And he says, it is better, he says, that's the word, it's better to be maimed than to be thrown into hell. Now, almost all the commentators look at these verses and they point out whatever Jesus is saying here, he is not expecting us to take him literally because, think about this, it would be illogical to take him literally because if you poke out one eye, you still have the other eye to lust with.

And if you poke out both eyes, well, Jesus says the problem is lusting in your heart and you don't need eyes to lust in your heart. So commentators generally agree that Jesus is using incredibly strong hyperbolic kind of language to call us to deal ruthlessly with sin.

But how? How do you be ruthless with such a powerful thing? Like sex. How do you gain mastery? Well, that's why he contrasts. He says there is something better.

There is a better way. And this way is so much better that were you to enter into this way maimed, it would still be to your overwhelming advantage.

[ 37 : 46 ] You see that? You see, there is a God who never leaves us, who never walks out the door and abandons us.

There is a God who, despite our adulterous hearts, never divorces us. love for us. Although we daily worship other spiritual lovers, he never breaks covenant with us.

Even though we lust after all sorts of things other than him, his passionate love for us remains constant. We participate in indecency after indecency after indecency, but he never writes us a certificate of divorce.

instead he writes us a certificate covenanting and binding himself to us.

And in Christ he comes down and he signs that certificate with his blood. By the sheer mercy and grace of God, we are married to Christ.

[ 38 : 54 ] Christ. He is our lover and his sacrificial unbroken love to us is sealed in a blood-signed covenant. Living out the reality of that true marriage, that's the better way.

You will never defeat the power of sexual deviance. You will never be ruthless enough with it until you have been gripped by the sacrificial love of your true husband, Jesus Christ.

Christ. You've spiritually betrayed him so many times. You've spiritually abandoned the marriage on numerous occasions. You have spiritually given your body over to other lovers and he has not yet abandoned you.

To win you back, he has allowed himself to be maimed. Nails, thorns, a spear. You will never have a healthy relationship with sex and marriage until your heart is melted by your true husband bleeding out on the cross to redeem you.

We, all of us, we will never be able to expel lustful desires from our hearts until we are moved deep down by the vision of Christ's heart being pierced by a Roman spear, producing what a mixture of water and blood, blood that atones for all of our sexual sins and water that washes us completely clean in the sight of God.

[ 40 : 24 ] That's the better way. I could leave you in a library with the greatest minds for decades and you wouldn't be able to script a better way than that for life.

So I ask you to repent this morning as I say this to myself. Repent of areas where you have broken the seventh commandment and by faith in Christ pursue this better way.

Friends, in all of this, do you see why sex is so important to God? People make kind of tongue-in-cheek comments in popular media, why do Christians care so much about what people do with their genitals?

But do you see why sex is so important to God? It's because sex is a sign and a foretaste of our ultimate union with Christ. And because we are united to Christ by faith, we cannot then denigrate this powerful, powerful sign by engaging in sexual activities that are outside the bounds of Scripture.

Because when we do that, we cheapen the sacrificial love of our crucified husband, our Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you're struggling and you need help.

[ 41 : 44 ] Reach out. Find someone. Come talk to me. Come talk to somebody else. Find someone to walk this road with you. Let's pray. Father, there are high demands in the law.

They're high and yet at the same time they're quite beautiful because when we look at them and we see what life would look like if everybody around us obeyed these laws perfectly, we know we would be free from so much pain and hurt and heartache.

Yet at the same time we know we are the weak ones who break these laws. And we have often created untold pain in our own lives or been on the receiving end of untold pain through the breaking of these laws.

And so I pray that in all of this we will see the seventh commandment not just as a law but as a way to life that is found in Jesus Christ our true husband. Let us run to him, let us cling to him, let us hold on to him because we don't have the strength to walk through this cultural moment and sort all these problems out.

At a personal level, at a cultural level, at a church level, it's hard. But we have Christ who never abandons us, who never gives up on us no matter how spiritually adulterous we are.

[ 43 : 06 ] Let us cling to him, Lord. I pray for any person who's struggling with sexual sin in whatever form this morning that you would give them freedom, that you would give them the resources and the community they need to walk in holiness, Lord.

That they would see Christ clearly and his love for them. Father, help us to protect and safeguard our marriages. Help us to care and love for those who are not married and make them feel like genuine family.

help us to walk together in this, Lord, in obedience to this command. And we ask this all for Christ's name and his glory. Amen.