

Sermon Title: You Shall Not Commit Adultery
Scripture Text: Exodus 20:14 (10 Commandments # 9 of 13)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-17-11

We are making our way through the Ten Commandments, which are recorded for the first time in Scripture in Exodus Chapter 20, and then they are recapitulated in Deuteronomy Chapter 5; and nine of the ten of them are reiterated and applied in various ways in the New Testament.

Today we come to the Seventh of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14; NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

I have to confess: There are some things that maybe are not as much fun or as interesting for preachers to deal with; but that's part of the reason why we commit ourselves to teaching through the Scriptures verse by verse—so that we can't dodge the things that we would rather not have to talk about (Acts 20:20, 27; cf. Prov. 30:5; Jer. 26:2; Ezek. 2:7; Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16).

We live in a culture that would make you think that the Seventh Commandment is alive and well—with the "not" removed. It is rampant in our world, this sin of adultery. I ran across a succinct statement of the moral condition of our country. It certainly captures the attitude of our world right now. It was written by a fellow pastor, who simply said: "Adultery is the reigning sin of the times." What might surprise you is that the pastor who wrote that was Thomas Watson, in 1692.

2,600 years before Watson, Solomon—who certainly knew of the pain associated with this sin (1 Kings 11:1-8; Neh. 13:26; Prov. 5:7-14)—wrote Ecclesiastes 1:9, where he said: "That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun." And his conclusion, as you work through Ecclesiastes, is: Therefore—*therefore*—here is the essence of everything—"Remember...your Creator in the days of your youth" (12:1).

Well, Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 14, is our verse for this morning—just one verse, just one simple sentence. Not very hard to outline—one point: Don't commit adultery. But then, of course, we want to ask the question: "Does this commandment apply to me?" Or, "How does this commandment apply to me?"

Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 14—just five words long: "You shall not commit adultery." Can't be very much simpler than that. It *is* the very "words of God" (Jn. 8:47).

And just to be sure that we do not miss what He said, He wrote it on a stone tablet—along with the rest of the Ten Commandments—which He delivered to His people Israel through Moses, even before they were recorded in the Bible.

The Hebrew word that is translated "commit adultery" can be used of either men or women. There are parallel words to this Old Testament word. In the New Testament, there is a word—*moicheia*—that is translated "adultery"; and a word—*porneia*—from which all of our words that have "p-o-r-n" in them, that whole family of words comes from that word; it is translated "fornication" or "immorality" or "sexual sin," depending upon which translation you might be using (e.g., Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:13, 18; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; Jude 7; Rev. 2:14, 20-21; 9:21).

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Any of these words describe the same thing. When you have sexual contact with any person other than your "husband" or "wife" (1 Cor. 7:2)—at any time, in any fashion, homosexual or heterosexual (Rom. 1:24, 26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10)—it *is* this sin.

If you are married, the custom is to call this sin "adultery"—hence that separate Greek word. If you are unmarried, the sin is called "fornication" or "immorality," but it is the same sin (Heb. 13:4); the only difference in how we describe is based upon the marital status of the person involved.

The Hebrew word was probably used here because it is the most generic of several Hebrew words that were available; and because the sin of adultery was punishable by the death penalty in the theocracy of Israel, whereas the same sin committed by unmarried people required, not death but payment of a fine and agreeing to *be* married.

God was *very* clear about this when He addressed it to Israel. Continue on, right through the same laws that God gave through Moses: Exodus 22—"If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife. If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins" (vss. 16-17). That is the penalty for an unmarried person committing this sin.

But Deuteronomy 22:22—"If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel."

There is no doubt what God's view is. Adultery is a *very* serious sin; it was to be punished more seriously than fornication because it not only is the sin itself, but it also violates a marriage "covenant" stated in the presence of God (Mal. 2:14; cf. Prov. 2:17) *in addition* to the sinful act itself.

So, I don't think we need to take time for questions. Don't commit adultery—that is what Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 14 means.

Now, how does this commandment apply to *me*? Well, this is, in a way, very much like the Sixth Commandment—we are blessed to have Jesus do an exposition on this commandment for us. So, to get the full meaning of it, I'd like you to turn with me to Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 27 through Verse 30.

Sexual sin, like all other sin, *originates* in the "heart" (Matt. 15:19; cf. Job 31:9, 11; Prov. 6:25; 7:25; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; Jas. 1:14; 1 Jn. 2:16). The problem is *not* your circumstances. The problem is *not* another person. They may contribute to the problem (e.g., Prov. 7:10), but the problem is inside *you*.

Last time, we learned a principle which applies to this and all other commandments: You can obey *externally* while you are maintaining a heart attitude of rebellion—in which case, you are really not dealing with the sin (cf. Ps. 51:6; 81:15; Prov. 16:2; 23:26; Jer. 3:10; 17:10; Matt. 23:25-28).

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There's this series of illustrations in Matthew Chapter 5 that all have the same formula: Jesus introduces them with: "You have heard the ancients were told..." In each case, then, He refers back to statements from God's Law which had become well-known quotations out of the Law; sometimes He includes things that had been added by the rabbis. Jesus then goes on to show that *true* righteousness—the kind that *He* calls us to— involves *more* than *merely* obeying outward things, such as what was practiced by the religious leaders of His day. He emphasized the true inner spirit of each precept to offset the shallowness and the abuses that were the rule of His day.

So, as we come to Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 27, here is what Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' " It is that same word for any sexual activity outside marriage by a married person.

We might wonder why Jesus chose *this* word, rather than the more general one that would include single or married people. We can't say for sure, but we do know that the two words—"adultery," and "fornication" or "immorality"—are synonyms insofar that they both describe any sexual activity other than between a husband and a wife; it's just that the only difference is the marital status of the person who commits the sin. Everything taught in this passage applies to everyone, regardless of marital status.

"You shall not commit adultery"—straight from Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 14—the Seventh Commandment. There was *certainly* nothing wrong with the commandment itself; *it* did not need explanation. But it was the rabbinical expression and *application* of this commandment that Jesus needed to correct.

The rabbis of His day—among the Pharisees—stopped with "the letter of the law" (Rom. 2:27). Their interpretation was ultra-simple: If you don't have sexual intercourse with anyone other than your wife or your husband, you are fine! We have had a United States President who applied that definition—splitting hairs of what kind of activity is permitted and what is not, and redefining the terms.

But there is *more* to the issue than *merely* avoiding certain actions. The rabbis stopped short of teaching the people the *full* sense of the Law. To be pure is *not* simply a matter of not doing certain wrong things, it is the active presence of righteous behavior and holy thinking (e.g., Ps. 24:4; cf. Ps. 19:14). *That* is what it means to be pure!

The rabbis did not make the obvious connection between the Seventh Commandment and the Tenth Commandment. I've been asking you to memorize the Ten Commandments, so you have probably read ahead to Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 17; it says: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

You see, the *desire* for what is not yours is at the core of *acting upon* that desire (Prov. 12:12; 21:10; Is. 32:6; Col. 3:5; Jas. 1:14-15). Sexual purity is a lot more than just avoiding forbidden acts; it is cultivating "pure heart" (Ps. 24:4; cf. Matt. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; Heb. 10:22); it is resisting impure thoughts and desires "in your heart" (Lev. 19:17; Prov. 6:25; Ecc. 7:9; Zech. 8:17; Acts 5:4; Jas. 3:14).

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When it suited their purpose, the rabbis could be *very* severe toward those who committed adultery. You have all read John 8:1-11. A man and a woman were "caught in adultery" (vs. 3); so they brought the woman—not the man—to Jesus, and demanded that He apply the Law to stone her. And Jesus used that as an opportunity to say something much more significant: "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (vs. 7). By the way: They did not bring the *man*—pretty significant.

What we have here [in Matthew 5] is the explanation, you might say, of the reason *why* Jesus handled that situation the way He did. Jesus teaches us that evil lust is the essence of adultery—just like we saw last time, when He taught us that anger is the essence of murder. Now, *it's a great big deal* if you cross the line from not murdering to murdering! The *act* is the fullest expression of it. But if you don't realize that *anger in your heart* is what *leads* you to *get to* the point of crossing the line, you won't deal with the sin at its root. He is going to do the same thing with the issue of adultery.

Now, in our day and age of paranoid political correctness and run-amuck feminism, in which the time-honored uses of the English language are being systematically overruled, I have to also point out that even though this passage—Matthew 5:27—addresses this sin on the part of a *man*, the same clearly applies to women. The command is absolute: Never commit sexual sin. It *is* the Seventh Commandment.

But Jesus goes on, and He adds a second half of His formula: "But I say to you"—not *contradicting* it, but *explaining* it—"but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (NASB-1977).

And before I explain what that means, I need to put away some misconceptions about it. I have heard people say, and I had a friend who used to tell his wife to warn him if there was any inappropriately-dressed female within sight—"Okay, look to the left!"—lest he violate the commandment. Well, let me say this: This is *not* describing someone who just *happens* to see a person of the opposite sex—even if you happen to see *more* of a person of the opposite sex than you wish was available to see.

Nor is it describing a person who notices *beauty* in a member of the opposite sex (e.g., Gen. 29:17; 39:6; 1 Sam. 9:2; 16:12; 25:3; Sol. 4:1). Nor is it talking about a natural sense of attraction to members of the opposite sex (Ecc. 9:9). God *made us* that way (Gen. 2:24); all of that is in the realm of "normal."

Look carefully at what Jesus says here: He is talking about looking at a person "with lust." The phrase "to lust for her" is a purpose clause; it translates a phrase that includes the concept of "*looking with the purpose of lusting*" (e.g., Job 31:1, 9, 11; Jer. 5:8). It is one thing to see something, to recognize it's beautiful, to be attracted to it; it is *quite something else* to then *court* inappropriate desires (Prov. 6:25). What this describes is intentionally looking; and the verb tense is present—it implies looking and *keep on* looking at a member of the opposite sex, *for* the purpose of toying with desire for a forbidden relationship (e.g., 2 Sam. 11:2-3).

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The word "lust" itself is obviously key to this; it simply means "strong desire." As a matter of fact, this Greek word is used a number of times in the New Testament in a *positive* sense of a passionate desire for *good things*. Paul used it for "the *desire* to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). But *most* of the time—including here—it describes an *evil* desire to possess a *forbidden* thing. Now, we tend to use the word "lust" *only* about sexual things, but the Greek word actually applies much broader than that; we use different words in English. Specifically in the sexual context, it means: to desire a forbidden relationship for your own pleasure, apart from marriage.

Now, in the proper setting of marriage, sex is a wonderful, beautiful, fulfilling gift of God (cf. Deut. 24:5; Prov. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 7:3-4, 9). *Anywhere else*, sex is selfish. It *does* bring fleeting gratification, but it is *always* destructive (Prov. 5:3-4); it is *always*, in the long run, *unfulfilling*. It is sin! It is wrong outside of marriage, regardless of whether you are married or not.

Now as I said, Jesus is *not* talking about what you see around you; He is talking about the *desire* for the wrong thing—that is where the sin begins.

And then Jesus describes this sin very vividly. Look what He says: When you "look" on that person for the purpose of "lusting," you have "committed adultery...already" in the "heart" (vs. 28). That's *very* significant! Just as the consequences of feeling angry are not as serious as the consequences of murder or punching someone, the consequences of adultery in your heart are not as serious as the consequences of actually having sex with someone other than your spouse. But you have to understand: The *essence* of the kind of sin is *exactly the same*! That's the point.

Now, the New Testament is quite clear that among believers in Jesus Christ, the only ways that a marriage can be ended are: the death of a spouse (Rom. 7:2-3); if one of the two partners reveals himself or herself to be an unbeliever and departs from the relationship (1 Cor. 7:15); or, one of the two has committed adultery—then the other one is permitted (not required, but permitted) to get a divorce (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).

Some people now twist what Jesus says, and they say, "Well, Jesus says that lusting *is* committing adultery; therefore, anybody who has ever had a lustful thought is guilty of adultery; and so basically, anybody can divorce anybody at any time they want to!" That's *not* what He said! He *quotes* the Seventh Commandment: "You shall not commit adultery." And *then* He says: "I'm telling you, the *essence* of that sin starts in your heart." The sin of an evil desire is *not* the same as the sin of a physical act. I hope you grasp that. The line not to cross is sexual activity; but Jesus is telling you, "Friend, figure out where the line is, *and don't go near the line*! Stop it before it gets to that point."

Here's what He says over in Matthew Chapter 15, when again He was dealing with some of the legalism of the Pharisees. He says this, starting in Verse 18 of Matthew 15—"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications"—he puts both of the words side by side there—"thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man" (vss. 18-20).

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So, what *would* Jesus have you do when you realize that even though you haven't committed the physical act of this sin, you have the evil desire within you? Well, He gets *really graphic*, and He does aim for the heart.

Listen to this: Matthew 5:29-30—"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you"—is *that* graphic enough?—"for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell."

Now, I have good news for you: We do *not* have ushers ready with chainsaws or hot pokers for after church. Jesus is speaking hyperbolically. "Hyperbole" is when you state something to an extreme, you *overstate* something to make a point. Like: "I've told you *a million times*..." That is what "hyperbole" means. I haven't told you a million times; but when I *say* that, you know exactly what I mean.

Here's what He means—here is what Jesus is intending to say: "makes you stumble" is the key phrase here. It comes from a word that describes the stick that was used to spring a trap when it was disturbed. Like, picture the milk crate upside down, propped up with a stick; and you put some bait inside and tie a string to the stick; when the rabbit comes in to get the bait, you pull the stick, and the trap springs on him. That is the concept of "makes you stumble": falling into the trap, getting caught up in what you ought not to be in. In the New Testament, this term "makes you stumble," or "make someone stumble" or "cause" someone to "stumble" (Matt. 18:6, 8-9; Jn. 6:61; 1 Cor. 8:13) is used to describe the things and the people who get you into sin.

A lot of people misrepresent what Jesus said and what Paul wrote about causing someone to stumble. Some people think, "Well, if I hear you say something that I don't like, you've 'caused me to stumble!'" No, we haven't. Nobody "causes you to stumble" unless that person facilitates you getting into *sin*. If you have a repulsion to something you don't want to hear somebody say, *don't listen to them!* If something *offends* you, you can say it offends you; but it doesn't cause you to "stumble" unless it *leads you into sin*.

So, both of these verses use a literary device we call "hyperbole"—obvious overstatement for the purpose of making a point. And in this case, the literal meaning is obvious—and it also doesn't make sense; because even if you *did* pluck out your "right eye," you could still sin with your left eye. Even if you covered both eyes, you have a *great* imagination. Even if you cut off your "right hand," you could still steal with the left.

William Hendricksen, now with the Lord, summarized it this way; in his commentary, he says: "Take drastic action in getting rid of whatever, in the natural course of events, will tempt you to sin."

Jesus wants you to realize: This is *not* your only life! You are destined for eternity (cf. Lk. 16:22-25; Jn. 5:28-29). So live your life *now* in light of the realities of eternity—in light of who the Lord is, and what He wants for you. It is better to live that way now than—to use the words of Jesus—"than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

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Nothing, no matter how precious it might seem to you at the moment, should be allowed to doom your glorious destiny!

Back when I was young, there was a song; it made a gazillion dollars—see, there's hyperbole. It was sung and made popular by a professing Christian. It was basically talking about two people deciding to fornicate, and the last line of the song—very famous: "It can't be wrong because it *feels so right!*" My friends: It *is* wrong! If it's wrong, I don't care *what you feel!* (cf. Prov. 21:10; 28:26; Jer. 17:9) And Jesus wants you to know that—to the point that you believe it so *drastically* that you would take *drastic* action *not* to fall into the trap!

There's a vivid PG-13-rated passage of the Old Testament that confronts you with several other word pictures of the deadliness of sexual sin, and the seductive way that it looks in its temptation stages: Proverbs Chapter 5. Just let these words sink in: "My son, give attention to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding; that you may observe discretion and your lips may reserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress drip honey and smoother than oil is her speech"—she'll say things like, "It *can't* be *wrong!*"—"but in the end she is bitter as wormwood"—that's how good you feel *after* you fall into the sin—"sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps take hold of Sheol. She does not ponder the path of life; her ways are unstable"—and here is something very important—"she does not know it" (vss. 1-6). There *are* people in the world who have so successfully "seared" their "consciences" (1 Tim. 4:2) and avoided the truth that *they really don't know* that it's wrong. *You do*, and *you* are the one responsible for guarding *your* "heart" (Prov. 4:23).

"Now then, my sons, listen to me and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her"—just like Jesus was saying; *cut off your hand*, if you need to—"and do not go near the door of her house, or you will give your vigor to others and your years to the cruel one"—basically saying: you'll be wasting your energy and your time—"and strangers will be filled with your strength and your hard-earned goods will go to the house of an alien"—and here's what it feels like after you think it "feels so right"—"and you groan at your final end, when your flesh and your body are consumed"—read Psalm 32, where David describes his conviction after his sexual sin (vss. 3-4); he uses those very terms—"and you say, 'How I have hated instruction! And my heart spurned reproof! I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to my instructors! I was almost in utter ruin in the midst of the assembly and congregation.'" (vss. 7-14)

Do you need anything more specific than that, to get the point? When temptation strikes, *fling it aside* right then, and decisively! (cf. Prov. 4:14-15) Don't toy with it! Don't pretend that you can handle something that God says not to play with (Prov. 14:16).

One more: from Proverbs Chapter 6, starting in Verse 23—"For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life, to keep you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty *in your heart*, nor let her"—here's a great word picture—"capture you with her eyelids. For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread"—in other words, you can waste everything—"and an adulteress hunts for the precious life. Can a man take fire in

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his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her will not go unpunished" (vss. 23-29).

So serious is this issue that Jesus made His point by introducing the grotesque idea that *losing members of your body* would be better than committing this sin! He emphasizes how incomparably better it is to prepare for eternity than to try to get away with enjoying the fleeting but sinful pleasures of this life (cf. Ps. 17:13-15; 1 Jn. 2:17). When you read about Moses in Hebrews Chapter 11, it says he chose to serve God over what it calls "the pleasures of sin for a season" (vs. 25, KJV).

You know, if sin wasn't fun, we wouldn't have a problem with it! Most people don't intentionally inflict agony on themselves. It is pleasurable—but the wreckage is awful (Prov. 7:25-27). I have walked through the wreckage of extramarital affairs and premarital exploits with more people than, honestly, I can remember. We live in a society in which—well, Thomas Watson, I do not know what words he would have used for us. Sex has become a sport; it has turned into a thrilling way to spend leisure time, just for fun. That's the world in which we live, my friends! That's the world in which our children and grandchildren are growing up! Look, you remember how your parents knew that maybe when you got to about 14, there were some things they needed to tell you. And *you* know that *you* knew them when you were 12. Friends, your kids and your grandkids know them at about 8—with *bad information*, and with all kinds of bait attached to it.

And friends, we're sitting here, *right on the brink* of tipping over into Pharisaism and saying: "Whew! Boy, at least this doesn't apply to me!" Make no bones about it: Being a Christian does *not* make you immune to sexual sin (cf. 1 Cor. 6:13-20; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:11; 4:2-3; Rev. 2:14-15).

"Take heed" lest you "fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). We read from Galatians Chapter 6—"looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (vs. 1; cf. Jude 23). In every case that I have seen a believer fall to sexual sin, it has never been an instant, one-time, sudden, whimsical event. It is *always* the result of "heart failure"—failure to guard the heart over the long haul (cf. Lk. 21:34; Rom. 6:12). It is always a *series* of events and thoughts and decisions—none of which, by themselves, seem very big—until they snowball into a disaster. This *does* apply to you! It *does* apply to me! It applies to *all of us*!

Let me spray a few spiritual bullets over you, and I'll let the Holy Spirit deflect them into your heart, as needed. But let's see if we can grasp this.

One thing I want you to know is that, unlike most other sins, sexual sin is more *consuming*. Now, you might make an argument that, for example, a drug addiction causes *physical* reaction if you don't continue in the sin. But *this* sin affects you and it involves you mentally and physically, like nothing else does. In First Corinthians 6:18, Paul writes: "Flee immorality." There's the generic word—whether you're married or not. "Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." It is a very engrossing thing (cf. Gen. 4:7b).

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Sex was created by God to be that way—to be so powerful that it is part of the glue that cements a marriage together (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Play with that glue with the wrong people, and you wind up stuck emotionally to things that you should not have to deal with!

Aren't you *glad* that we live in the century in which we have Super Glue? That stuff has atoned for more of my foul-ups over the years than a lot of other things have. But, have you ever stuck your fingers together with Super Glue? *Misusing it—not good!* And it's difficult, and it's time-consuming, and it's painful to get them unstuck. Have sex with someone you're not married to, and you have the emotional version of the same thing. Be warned.

I also want you to think about this: Adultery is an especially damaging sin because not only is it the physical act, but it is a *frontal denial* of a solemn oath that you make before God (Mal. 2:14). To commit adultery or fornication is to say you know better than God, and *you don't care* what you or another person have promised Him. *Every* wedding I do, I say, "We are gathered *before God and these witnesses!*" And I *make* those people say, "I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses to be your loving and faithful husband or wife, as long as we both shall live." Don't say something like that to God, and then treat it as if it is meaningless (cf. Deut. 23:23; Prov. 20:25; Ecc. 5:5-6).

Sexual sin is especially heinous because, as I said, it happens only as the result of deliberation and decision. It takes a *lot* of steps to get to the point of having sex; and so, to commit adultery requires you to have blown right past a whole array of warning signs along the way (cf. Prov. 7:7-25).

Think about this: Adultery is a special kind of theft. Oh, you might not be selling off goods that you have stolen, but it steals another man's wife or another woman's husband. It steals your honor. It steals your reputation (Prov. 6:33; 1 Cor. 9:27). It steals joy from your relationship with your own spouse—present or future.

And if you haven't thought of this, let me suggest to you that adultery and fornication can humiliate you and harm you as much physically as spiritually. I doubt I need to list all the embarrassing and debilitating diseases that you can catch by way of sexual sins. And we might be blessed to live in the era of Super Glue, but we also live in the age where sinful sex can bring you a natural form of the Death Penalty by way of AIDS (cf. Rom. 1:27b). Be warned.

We don't live in ancient Israel, where God specified that adulterers were to be stoned to death. But it is no exaggeration to say that in our world, sex outside of marriage can make you dead. It isn't politically popular to say it, but the truth is that you reduce your chance of contracting AIDS and every other sexually-transmitted disease *virtually to zero* if you will simply remain a virgin until you are married, marry a virgin, and have sex only with your spouse.

Now, *nobody* wants to say that these days—but *that's the way to cure an epidemic!* That's the way to *stop it!* We can *snuff it out* in *one* generation—all sexually-transmitted diseases—if people will just do things God's way.

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I also want to suggest to you that sexual sins drag you into a vortex of foolishness. Sexual sins can make you progressively more and more blinded to your own stupidity—and you have *plenty* of stupidity already! *I know what's in your heart*—not because I'm omniscient, but because I have read the Bible! (e.g., Gen. 6:5; Prov. 21:10a; Jer. 17:9)

Solomon had his fill of "women" (1 Kings 11:1). They enticed him into idolatry (vss. 3-8). How much did *that* help him? Or, look at this from Hosea Chapter 4, Verse 11; this is where I thought of "vortex of foolishness": "Harlotry, wine, and new wine take away the understanding." My friend, if you want to be *even more stupid* than you every thought you could be, take up immorality and drinking; *you'll get there!* So if you aren't afraid of your own stupidity, *get afraid of it right now*—and don't do things that make you even *more* stupid.

So, some exhortations:

Guard your eyes. Be careful what you watch and what you read, because that largely determines what you're going to see in your imagination and in your dreams. Don't fill your mind, through your eyes, with things that feed evil lusts (cf. Job 31:1; Ps. 101:3).

Guard your lips. Don't talk about things that should not be talked about (Eph. 5:3-4, 12). You'll spare yourself, and you'll spare others.

Guard your heart. Thinking about sin is what opens the door to acting out on specific sins (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:2). If you see the head of a rattlesnake sticking up in your garden—you'll kill it, won't you? Or you'll run screaming and go get somebody to kill it for you. If you have sinful thoughts sticking up in the garden of your mind, *lop off their heads* instead of feeding them! Overwhelm them with the intake of God's Word (Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-2; 16:8).

Guard your appearance and your actions (cf. Prov. 7:10; 1 Tim. 2:9). We read some of the fairly graphic words from Proverbs; there is *more* there. It's pretty graphic in describing the attire of the harlot, "capturing you with her eyelids" (6:25). Translate those things into our culture, and learn from them. And by the way: This applies to men and women alike, although there is *much more* danger for a woman to dress alluringly than for a man, because of the way men tend to respond. An old preacher said it many years ago, and I've never forgotten it: "If it isn't for sale, don't put it on display." There is a *big difference* between class and sensuality.

Guard the company you keep. First Corinthians 15:33—"Bad company corrupts good morals," right? The fires of lust are best ignited among the kindling of "bad company." How many good things have you ever heard of that happened after midnight, involving alcohol, in bad places? Nothing good comes out of that! Get away and stay away from people who are prone to talking freely of sexual things!

Learn the truth of this verse: First Corinthians 7:2. Listen: God doesn't tell you not to commit adultery because He doesn't like you! He didn't do this to spoil your fun! He wants you to know that He created something *so wonderful* that He means for you to

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enjoy this for most of your life (Prov. 5:18-19)—so, put it where He wants it to be: within marriage! First Corinthians 7:2—"But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband." *That's His design!* That chapter goes on to explain that God gifts a certain few individuals, percentage-wise, to remain single their whole life (vss. 7-9, 32-35; cf. Matt. 19:10-12); that's a gift of God's grace, for better opportunity to serve Him. But you were created as a sexual being, and marriage is the provision of God for that aspect of your life; so *save it*, and use it only in that context, and you will be blessed.

Take "delight" in the Word of God (Ps. 119:35; cf. Job 23:12; Ps. 1:1-2; 19:10; 112:1; 119:72, 97, 162; Jer. 15:16; Rom. 7:22). Listen: I wish I had the verse you can memorize; I wish I had the pill you can take, the book you can read, that would *end* your temptability in this area! But we have a problem: "The heart" is "deceitful" and "desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9, NKJV). You have to fill your heart with God's Word (Deut. 17:19; 32:46-47; Jos. 1:8, cf. Rom. 12:2; Gal. 5:16; Col. 3:16) and *overwhelm* the snakes and the weeds that would grow up there. The more you fill your heart with God's Word, it will shape and control your moral decisions (cf. Ps. 1:1-3; 119:38; Prov. 4:18; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Thess. 2:13b).

And remember this one: God is always with you. If you know Jesus Christ, you're not immune to temptability—in this or any other area—but God is "always with you" (Matt. 28:20b; cf. Ps. 139:7-12); He always sees you (1 Chr. 28:9; Ps. 44:21; Matt. 6:4, 6, 19); He is the "judge" of every "intention" of your "heart" (Heb. 4:12).

Part of Paul's logic in First Corinthians Chapter 6—after what I read to you earlier about immorality being a sin that involves your body in a way nothing else does—he goes on to say: Would you join "the members of Christ" to "a harlot"? (vs. 15)—that's pretty graphic!

Remembering that God is always with you is going to help you live in His wonderful grace as you realize that Jesus Christ "died" for *all* of your "sins" (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 3:18)—even the ones you haven't gotten around to, but that you've toyed with.

Now, I wish it were not true, but the odds are rather staggering that in America, in 2011, addressing this many people—this is relevant to somebody; probably many somebodies. To the ones sensitive to God's Word and His Spirit, they realize it applies to all of us. But if you are involved in immorality, if you are involved in *dabbling* in something that would tend to lead toward immorality, *stop!* Stop! There's no future—not one you want to live with! (Eph. 5:5; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 22:15)

If you are *dabbling* with the thoughts of immoral things, if pornography is part of your life, *stop* right now, and realize: We are not here to pronounce condemnation, not here to rain on your parade, not here to spoil your fun; we are here to lift up Jesus Christ, to glorify God the Father. And I love what Jesus said to that woman caught in adultery. He said this: "Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more" (Jn. 8:11, NASB-1977; cf. Prov. 19:20; Phil. 3:12-14). Why not make your future brighter? Maybe you have taken the bait; maybe you have stumbled; maybe you have dabbled. I don't know where in that process you might or might not be, but I do know: I will pray for you.

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Let's pray:

Father, week in and week out, I cry out to You: Please do whatever You need to do in our lives, that we would be the more useful for Your glory—never more than right now. Father, do what needs to be done in our lives—convicting us of sin, warning us of consequences, giving us wisdom to recognize when something is perhaps glittering on the outside and poisonous on the inside. Do Your work, I pray. Father, some wish they had heard and heeded this a year ago, ten years ago, fifty years ago. Father, teach us all that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." May, out of the depths of our sin, come the fullness of the demonstration of Your grace. Oh, we would not choose to "sin that grace may abound"—but Father, sin has abounded, and Your grace is abundant! May we take our stand in Your grace. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.