

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE TEN WORDS WE THOUGHT WE KNEW
A TEN-PART SERIES | PART SEVEN OF TEN

CAN ADULTERY BEGIN BEFORE ANYONE TOUCHES?



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

HEARING SINAI THROUGH ANCIENT EARS

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

Aloha, friends.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

There is a sentence people sometimes say when a marriage is in trouble:

"Nothing physical happened."

The messages were deleted, but nothing physical happened.

The conversations became secret, but nothing physical happened.

One person received the tenderness, attention and honesty that belonged inside the covenant, but nothing physical happened.

The imagination was rehearsing a relationship the body had not entered, but nothing physical happened.

That sentence may describe an important distinction.

It does not always describe innocence.

The body may cross the line last.

Today we are asking when betrayal actually begins.

Whether this commandment feels distant, painfully personal or uncomfortably current, you belong in this conversation.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If today is your first time with us, thank you for coming.

You are an honored guest.

Nothing will be required of you.

If you would like to hear from us again, the guest card asks for only your first name and email address.

The Keiki Kids Center is available for our children, and parents are always free to keep their children with them.

After the service, the Reason Together Cafe will be open.

Come for coffee.

Stay for a thoughtful question.

Stay for an honest conversation.

The coffee is free, and so are the refills on conversation.

COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

We have reached Part Seven of The Ten Words We Thought We Knew.

Last time we discovered that the Hebrew word in the sixth commandment is more precise than the broadest modern meaning of kill.

The command forbids murder and culpable taking of human life, then Jesus carries us beneath the violent act to anger and contempt.

This week the seventh Word protects another gift that violence, secrecy and selfish desire can destroy.

It protects covenant faithfulness.

The King James Version says:

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Many people hear that sentence as a fence around one physical act.

Jesus reveals that God is also concerned with the gaze, the intention and the desire we choose to cultivate.

Faithfulness begins before anyone touches.

So does betrayal.

Before we continue, let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, You are faithful in all Your ways.

You do not abandon Your promises when Your people become difficult.

You created marriage as a covenant of faithfulness, trust and one-flesh love.

Teach us to hear this commandment as Israel first heard it.

Protect us from shallow definitions that excuse secrecy.

Protect us also from false guilt that confuses temptation with chosen sin.

Bring truth where deception has entered.

Bring safety where power has been abused.

Bring conviction without humiliation and grace without denial.

Show us Jesus Christ, the faithful Bridegroom who gave Himself for His people.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Our first reading is Exodus chapter 20, verse 14.

The King James Version says:

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Now hear the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 5, verses 27 and 28:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

But I say unto you,

That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Jesus continues in verses 29 and 30:

"And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee:

for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish,
and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee:

for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish,
and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

Those are serious words.

We will return to what they mean and what they do not mean.

First, a brief word about giving.

Faithfulness is not limited to sexuality.

It includes what we do with everything God has entrusted to us.

Financial secrecy can wound a marriage.

Generosity can become a performance.

Giving can even be used to create an appearance of devotion while truth is being hidden at home.

God desires integrity, not theater.

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Our guests are never expected to give.

If another congregation is your church home, please support the ministry God has entrusted to that church.

Those who call Reason Together Church their church home may give as the Lord leads through the giving box in the back.

Give cheerfully, voluntarily and without pressure.

Let your giving be one part of an undivided life before God.

Now let us listen again to the seventh Word.

The Hebrew verb translated "commit adultery" is na'aph.

It is more specific than a general term for all sexual sin.

It refers to adultery, the violation of a marriage covenant.

That matters because the commandment is not merely saying that bodies are dangerous.

It is saying that covenants are sacred.

To hear its force in ancient Israel, we have to remember that a marriage joined more than two private individuals.

It established a household.

It affected inheritance, property, legitimate descent and the stability of an extended family.

Children needed protection.

Land assigned to a family was meant to remain connected to that family.

The identity and future of the household were bound together with marital fidelity.

Adultery could introduce uncertainty into inheritance and tear alliances between families.

It betrayed a spouse, but the damage did not stop with a spouse.

It could destabilize an entire household.

That cultural setting explains part of the commandment's social urgency.

It does not mean God merely cared about property or bloodlines.

Malachi chapter 2 speaks directly to the personal and spiritual betrayal.

The prophet says:

"The LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth,

against whom thou hast dealt treacherously:

yet is she thy companion,

and the wife of thy covenant."

Notice the language.

Companion. Covenant. Witness.

Marriage is not merely a contract enforced by two interested parties.

God stands as witness to the promises.

Adultery is called treachery because one person uses secrecy to violate the trust of another.

Ancient Israel was a patriarchal society, and some of its civil definitions were expressed through male-headed households and inheritance structures.

We should not pretend every ancient social arrangement was identical to ours.

We should not turn cultural explanation into moral approval of every way power was exercised.

Jesus addresses the responsibility of the heart, and the New Testament calls both husband and wife to fidelity.

Hebrews chapter 13, verse 4 says:

"Marriage is honourable in all,
and the bed undefiled:

but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

God's command is not a permission slip for one gender and a burden for the other.

The covenant calls both to faithfulness.

The opening chapters of Genesis take us even deeper.

Genesis 2 says that a man shall leave his father and mother, cleave unto his wife and "they shall be one flesh."

Adultery is not wrong because God dislikes pleasure.

It is wrong because sexual union speaks a covenant language.

It says, "I give myself to you in an exclusive one-flesh bond."

When the body speaks that language outside the covenant, it tells a lie.

It takes what belongs inside a promise and separates it from the promise.

The seventh Word protects the truthfulness of the body.

It protects trust.

It protects the vulnerable person who has organized life around another person's vow.

It protects children from the chaos that betrayal can create.

It protects a marriage from becoming a public arrangement with a secret competitor.

That is why the command is positive before it is negative.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery" means more than "Do not have an affair."

It means, "Guard the covenant."

Nourish what you promised.

Tell the truth before secrecy develops a second life.

Treat your spouse as a person to love, not an obstacle to the life you imagine you deserve.

Then Jesus says:

"Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Some have heard this as though noticing that another person is attractive were identical to committing adultery.

Some sensitive believers have carried crushing guilt because an unwanted thought entered the mind.

Others have used the verse carelessly to say that since inward lust is adultery, an outward affair is no worse.

Neither conclusion follows from Jesus' words.

Temptation and consent are not the same thing.

An image can appear without your invitation.

Attraction can be recognized without being cultivated.

An intrusive thought can arrive and be rejected.

Jesus Himself was tempted, yet He did not sin.

The presence of temptation is not proof that you have welcomed it.

The phrase Jesus uses points to a look directed toward lusting.

It is not merely seeing.

It is looking in order to desire, possess or use the other person in the imagination.

The Greek verb translated "lust" is *epithymeo*.

It can refer broadly to strong desire, and context tells us whether that desire is good or corrupt.

The same word is used in the Greek tradition of the tenth commandment for coveting.

Jesus is joining the seventh Word to the tenth.

The outward act and the inward coveting belong to the same moral landscape.

Lust is not love that has become unusually intense.

Love seeks the good of the other person.

Lust turns the other person into material for private consumption.

Love sees a whole person made in the image of God.

Lust reduces a person to a body, an experience or an answer to an appetite.

Love can wait, sacrifice and tell the truth.

Lust demands, hides and rehearses possession.

The first glance may be unplanned.

The second look can become a decision.

The thought may arrive as temptation.

The private rehearsal gives it a room, a chair and permission to stay.

The body may cross the line last.

Jesus is not making the physical act irrelevant.

Physical adultery carries consequences that a passing temptation does not.

He is removing the hiding place of the person who says, "I have remained technically innocent while deliberately building an affair in my heart."

The kingdom of God is not satisfied with technical innocence.

Jesus wants an undivided heart.

Job gives us a practical phrase in Job chapter 31:

"I made a covenant with mine eyes;
why then should I think upon a maid?"

Job understood that eyes can be trained.

He did not wait for desire to become unmanageable.

He decided beforehand what kind of looking would govern his life.

That is not fear of women.

It is responsibility for himself.

Men sometimes quote teaching about modesty as though women are responsible for managing every man's imagination.

Women can also lust, violate trust and cultivate secret desire.

Every believer is responsible for the direction of his or her own attention.

Another person's appearance does not remove my agency.

Another person's interest does not cancel my covenant.

The seventh commandment never authorizes us to blame the person we chose to use in our imagination.

Jesus then speaks about plucking out an eye and cutting off a hand.

He is using deliberate, shocking hyperbole.

He is not commanding self-mutilation.

Removing an eye would not remove imagination.

Removing a hand would not cleanse desire.

The command against bodily harm and the purpose of Jesus' teaching rule out treating these words as instructions for literal injury.

But because the language is figurative, it is not weak.

Jesus is calling for radical action against sin.

If an app repeatedly becomes a doorway, delete it.

If a private conversation is feeding attachment, end it.

If travel arrangements create a pattern of secrecy, change them.

If alcohol lowers the boundaries you claim to value, stop treating the setting casually.

If you keep returning to pornography, do more than promise yourself that this was the last time.

Bring the struggle into truthful accountability.

Use practical barriers.

Seek wise pastoral help and qualified counseling when needed.

Grace does not ask you to injure your body.

Grace gives you courage to remove access to what is injuring your soul.

Proverbs speaks with the urgency of a parent who knows that desire can disguise a road to death.

Proverbs chapter 5 warns against the flattering path of forbidden intimacy.

Then it offers a positive vision:

"Rejoice with the wife of thy youth."

The answer to adultery is not a cold marriage in which both people merely avoid everyone else.

Biblical faithfulness includes delight, gratitude and renewed attention inside the covenant.

It makes time. It listens. It learns the person again through changing seasons.

It refuses to compare the ordinary spouse at home with the carefully presented stranger outside it.

The fantasy person has no unpaid bills, no difficult morning and no history of disappointments because fantasy edits all of that out.

Real love lives in the unedited world.

It keeps choosing a real person.

Proverbs chapter 9 says stolen waters are sweet, but the guest does not know that the dead are there.

Sin markets the sweetness and conceals the destination.

It shows the message arriving, not the spouse finding it.

It shows the thrill, not the child's confusion.

It shows escape, not the fractured trust.

Wisdom tells the whole story before the first secret becomes a chain.

Genesis chapter 39 gives us Joseph in the house of Potiphar.

Potiphar's wife repeatedly said, "Lie with me."

Joseph answered:

"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Joseph understood several layers of trust.

Potiphar had placed responsibility in his hands.

The woman was Potiphar's wife.

Above both facts stood God.

Joseph did not call the opportunity harmless because it was secret.

He did not call consent inevitable because the pressure was repeated.

He did not negotiate for a version that stopped barely short of the act.

When she caught him by his garment, he fled.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is leave the room.

Do not stand near the exit giving temptation a lecture.

Run.

Joseph's obedience did not protect him from immediate injustice.

He was falsely accused and imprisoned.

That detail matters.

Doing the faithful thing does not guarantee that everyone will understand your story.

Integrity is not a technique for controlling your reputation.

It is obedience to God when the outcome is not yours to control.

Joseph also reminds us that sexual pressure can move through power in more than one direction.

He was a servant in a household, and she used her position to pressure him.

The Bible does not romanticize that pressure.

It records his refusal and the retaliation that followed.

Now compare Joseph with David in 2 Samuel chapter 11.

David saw Bathsheba.

He inquired about her.

He sent messengers.

He took her.

The narrative moves through a sequence of choices.

Saw.

Asked.

Sent.

Took.

This was not merely a man overwhelmed by beauty.

This was a king using access and authority.

Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah, a soldier serving David's kingdom.

When the pregnancy exposed the act, David used deception and then arranged Uriah's death.

Adultery became entangled with abuse of power, manipulation and murder.

The body did not arrive at that roof morally empty.

Entitlement had already taught David that another household could be taken for his appetite.

Nathan the prophet did not blame Bathsheba for being seen.

He confronted David.

He told a story about a rich man who took a poor man's cherished lamb.

David had treated people as possessions available to royal power.

This is essential whenever the church speaks about adultery.

Sexual assault is not adultery committed by the victim.

Coercion is not mutual unfaithfulness.

A person who was pressured, threatened, drugged, manipulated through spiritual authority or physically forced does not share the guilt of the abuser.

The guilt belongs to the one who violated consent and misused power.

No sermon on sexual faithfulness should increase an abused person's shame.

If someone is using Scripture, finances, immigration status, employment, threats or physical force to control you, seeking safety is not betraying a covenant.

Tell a trustworthy person who can help.

Contact appropriate authorities when a crime or immediate danger is involved.

The church must never protect its reputation by protecting an abuser from accountability.

Truth and safety are not enemies of grace.

They are part of walking in the light.

Our world has created forms of access David could never have imagined.

A person can carry a private theater, a secret correspondence and a concealed history in one pocket.

Technology did not invent lust.

It industrialized opportunity and made secrecy portable.

Pornography trains the gaze to consume people without covenant, responsibility or mutual knowledge.

It often depends upon an industry where exploitation, coercion and uncertainty about consent can be hidden from the viewer.

Not every exposure is chosen. Not every battle has the same history or severity.

A young person who was exposed before understanding what appeared on a screen needs patient truth, not disgust.

A person caught in compulsive use may need layered help, not a single slogan.

Yet compassion must not become denial.

Repeatedly seeking sexual images is not morally harmless because no physical meeting occurred.

It cultivates a secret pattern of possession.

It teaches the brain to expect novelty without faithfulness and bodies without persons.

It can profoundly wound a spouse who discovers that a hidden sexual world has existed inside the marriage.

The correct response is not merely, "Try harder and hide better."

It is repentance joined to truth, boundaries, accountability and care.

Digital betrayal is not limited to explicit images.

An emotional affair may begin with an ordinary friendship.

Friendship between men and women is not automatically suspect.

Healthy communities need honest, respectful relationships.

Not every private pastoral conversation is adultery.

Not every close friendship is a threat.

The issue is not fear of people.

The issue is cultivated exclusivity and secrecy.

Ask what the relationship is becoming.

Are you sharing your deepest hopes with this person while withholding them from your spouse?

Do you complain about your spouse in order to invite this person's sympathy and attachment?

Do you hide the frequency, tone or content of the messages?

Would you feel betrayed if your spouse carried on the same exchange?

Are you dressing, lingering or arranging circumstances in anticipation of this person's attention?

Have you started protecting the relationship from reasonable questions?

The sentence "We are only friends" cannot make secrecy innocent.

Sometimes nothing physical has happened, but a covenant's emotional center is being quietly relocated.

The body may cross the line last.

This calls for wise boundaries, not universal suspicion.

Married couples can agree upon healthy transparency with devices, accounts and friendships.

Transparency should serve trust.

It should not become coercive surveillance.

An abusive spouse may demand passwords, track every movement and isolate a partner while calling it Biblical accountability.

Control is not covenant faithfulness.

Mutual honesty is different from domination.

Boundaries should be clear, reciprocal and freely discussed.

They should protect the marriage without erasing each person's dignity.

Some people hear this message while single and assume the seventh commandment has nothing to say to them.

It does.

You can honor marriages you are not part of.

You can refuse to cultivate intimacy with someone who has made a covenant to another person.

You can reject pornography because people are not products.

You can practice truthfulness, self-control and respect before any future marriage exists.

You can also refuse the idea that marriage is a cure for lust.

A wedding does not transform a habit of consumption into a habit of love.

Character travels into the covenant with you.

Grace can change character, but a ceremony by itself cannot.

Some married listeners may be focused entirely on the other person's failure.

Perhaps betrayal has happened, and the wound is real.

Perhaps your spouse has not committed adultery, but you use this commandment to police every harmless interaction because fear has taken control.

The seventh Word calls the unfaithful person to repent.

It also calls every person to truth.

Do not invent guilt to gain control.

Do not minimize guilt to avoid consequences.

Walk in the light.

What does repentance look like after betrayal?

It begins with ending the betrayal, not merely regretting the consequences.

The outside relationship must end.

The secret account must close.

The rehearsed lie must be replaced by truth.

Blame must stop.

The repentant person cannot say, "I did this because you were distant," as though another person's weakness made covenant violation necessary.

Marriage problems can be shared.

Adultery is a chosen response for which the person who committed it must take responsibility.

Repentance accepts appropriate accountability.

It does not demand that trust return on command.

Forgiveness and trust are related, but they are not identical.

Forgiveness can release personal vengeance before trust is rebuilt.

Trust grows through demonstrated truth over time.

Reconciliation may require pastoral care, qualified counseling and patient verification.

The wounded spouse is not ungodly for needing time.

The repentant spouse does not get to set the recovery schedule.

When abuse or coercion is present, safety comes first.

No victim should be told to return immediately to danger in order to prove forgiveness.

Church leaders should not attempt to manage criminal conduct as though it were merely a private marital disagreement.

Seek competent help. Report what must be reported.

Support the vulnerable person without forcing public disclosure.

God's hatred of treachery includes hatred of the power that hides behind religious language.

Can a marriage survive adultery?

Some do.

Through truth, repentance, wise help and extraordinary grace, trust can be rebuilt.

The restored marriage will not be restored by pretending the betrayal never occurred.

It will be restored by bringing what was hidden into the light and forming new patterns of fidelity.

Other situations include ongoing danger, continued deception or abandonment.

A short sermon cannot decide every complex case.

We can say this clearly:

Grace never requires us to call unrepentant treachery faithfulness.

Grace tells the truth and offers real transformation.

First Corinthians chapter 6 names sexual sins among many sins that marked life apart from God's kingdom.

Then Paul writes one of the most hopeful sentences in the New Testament:

"And such were some of you:

but ye are washed,

but ye are sanctified,

but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus,

and by the Spirit of our God."

"Such were some of you."

Your worst sexual sin does not have to become your permanent name.

The person who committed adultery is accountable, but not unreachable.

The person who cultivated lust is called to repent, but not to despair.

The person who has been used is not dirty beyond cleansing.

The person whose covenant was betrayed is not forgotten.

Jesus does not offer cheap secrecy.

He offers washing, sanctification and justification.

Paul continues by saying:

"Flee fornication."

Then he reminds believers:

"Ye are not your own.

For ye are bought with a price:

therefore glorify God in your body,

and in your spirit,

which are God's."

Christian freedom is not the claim that my body belongs to my appetite.

It is the joyful confession that Christ has redeemed the whole person.

Our bodies matter to God.

What we do in secret matters to God.

What has been done to us matters to God.

He neither excuses sin nor abandons the sinned against.

The deepest hope of this commandment is found in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

Throughout Scripture, God describes His relationship with His people using covenant and marriage imagery.

The tragedy is that God's people repeatedly behave like an unfaithful spouse.

We chase other gods. We give created things the love, trust and obedience that belong to the Creator.

We hide, excuse and return to the same betrayals.

If salvation depended upon the bride's flawless fidelity, there would be no wedding feast.

But Jesus is the faithful Bridegroom.

He does not exploit His bride.

He gives Himself for her.

Ephesians chapter 5 says:

"Christ also loved the church,

and gave himself for it;

That he might sanctify and cleanse it."

At the cross, the faithful One bore the judgment of the unfaithful.

He did not die because our sin was small.

He died because His love was great.

He was buried. On the third day He rose again.

The risen Christ does more than erase a record.

He gives His Spirit and begins forming faithful people.

He teaches secretive hearts to walk in light.

He teaches consuming hearts to love.

He teaches wounded hearts that another person's betrayal does not determine their worth.

The Gospel is not "Clean yourself before you come."

The Gospel is "Come to Christ, who washes sinners and makes them new."

Perhaps your adultery has been physical.

Perhaps the secret has lived in messages, images or imagination.
Perhaps you are the one who was betrayed.
Perhaps you have carried shame for abuse that was never your fault.
Jesus knows the truth completely.
You do not have to edit your story before bringing it to Him.
Turn from your sin and trust Him.
Believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again.
Receive Him as Savior and Lord.
If that is the desire of your heart, you may pray with me.
The words themselves do not save.
Jesus saves everyone who truly trusts Him.
Let us pray.
Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner.
I have sinned in my actions, my thoughts and the desires I have chosen to cultivate.
I believe that You died on the cross for my sins.
I believe that You were buried and rose again.
I turn from my sin and place my trust in You.
Forgive me, wash me and make me new.
Be my Savior and my Lord.
Teach me to walk in truth, purity and covenant faithfulness.
Heal the wounds that sin has caused.
I receive Your gift of eternal life.
I ask this in the name of Jesus.
Amen.
Let us pray together.
Our Heavenly Father, thank You for Your perfect faithfulness.
Forgive us for the ways we have reduced people to objects and covenants to inconveniences.
Expose what secrecy has protected.
Give courage to end an affair, close an account, confess a lie or leave a tempting situation.
Protect us from false guilt when temptation has been resisted.
Protect us from false innocence when desire has been deliberately fed.

Bring comfort to betrayed spouses.

Give wisdom, patience and trustworthy support to those rebuilding after betrayal.

Bring safety to anyone facing coercion, stalking, violence or spiritual manipulation.

Give churches courage to protect victims and hold abusers accountable.

Strengthen marriages with tenderness, honesty, delight and endurance.

Teach single believers to honor their bodies and the covenants of others.

Thank You that in Jesus Christ the guilty can be washed, the ashamed can be welcomed and the wounded can be held.

Make us faithful because You are faithful.

We pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Before we leave, make one response specific.

Ask God whether there is a permission you have been quietly giving yourself.

It may be a second look.

It may be a message you would not want your spouse to read.

It may be an account, a fantasy or a friendship that has become secret and exclusive.

Do not wait for the body to cross the line.

Close the door that your heart keeps leaving open.

If you need accountability, speak with a mature believer, pastor or qualified counselor who will tell you the truth and help you act wisely.

If disclosure could place you in danger because a spouse or partner is abusive, do not confront that danger alone.

Seek confidential help from someone equipped to protect you.

If you have betrayed your spouse, do not offer partial truth designed to manage the reaction.

Take responsibility and seek wise guidance for honest disclosure and repair.

If you have been betrayed, you do not have to decide the entire future today.

You may take the next truthful and safe step.

If your marriage is not in crisis, do not waste the peace.

Choose one positive act of covenant presence this week.

Put away the device. Ask a real question. Listen without preparing a defense.

Express gratitude. Plan time together.

Faithfulness is not merely the absence of an affair.

It is the repeated gift of truthful presence.

If you trusted Christ today, please let us know.

I will be available after the service, and our prayer team will be ready to pray with you.

The Reason Together Cafe is open.

There is coffee, there is time and there is room for your question.

Next time the eighth Word says:

"Thou shalt not steal."

We usually imagine a stolen object that can be placed in a pocket.

But Scripture also confronts withheld wages, dishonest measures, exploited labor and the theft of what another person was due.

We will ask:

Can you steal something that cannot be put in your pocket?

Until then, remember this: The body may cross the line last.

Guard the heart before secrecy grows hands.

Honor the covenant before temptation writes a rival story.

And rest in Jesus Christ, the faithful Bridegroom who gave Himself to make an unfaithful people clean.

Aloha Nui Loa.

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PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Can Adultery Begin Before Anyone Touches?

Hearing Sinai Through Ancient Ears

Exodus 20:14

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

*Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*

Introduction

'Nothing physical happened' may describe a real distinction, but it does not always establish innocence. A secret exchange can receive tenderness reserved for a spouse. An imagination can rehearse possession. A device can hold a rival life hidden inside a marriage. The body may cross the line last.

The seventh commandment forbids adultery because marriage is covenant, companionship and one-flesh faithfulness before God. Jesus does not make the body irrelevant. He exposes the chosen gaze and cultivated desire that prepare outward betrayal. His teaching must be heard precisely so that deliberate lust cannot hide behind technical innocence and sensitive believers are not crushed by guilt for temptation they resisted.

This Commentary develops the sermon through Exodus, Genesis, Malachi, Job, Proverbs, Joseph, David, Jesus, Paul and the faithful Bridegroom. It also addresses pornography, emotional affairs, transparency, coercive control, abuse, repentance, forgiveness, trust and restoration with explicit safeguards for the vulnerable.

Controlling answer: Yes. Adultery can begin before physical contact when a person intentionally cultivates lust, secrecy and inward possession that violate covenant faithfulness. This is not the same as noticing attractiveness, experiencing an intrusive thought or resisting temptation. Jesus traces the outward act to the desire we choose to feed. The body may cross the line last.

1. The Seventh Word Protects a Covenant

A Specific Prohibition

Exodus 20:14 says, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' The Hebrew na'aph specifically concerns adultery rather than functioning as a general word for every sexual wrong. Precision does not weaken the command. It identifies the covenant being violated.

A Household Can Be Wounded

In ancient Israel, marriage affected spouse, children, household, inheritance and community stability. The social setting explains why betrayal had consequences beyond two private adults, but the command cannot be reduced to property or descent.

2. God Is Witness to the Promise

Companion and Wife of Covenant

Malachi calls the wife of youth a companion and wife of covenant and says the LORD was witness. Adultery is treachery because secrecy turns against a person whose life rests upon the promise.

Covenant Does Not Protect Abuse

God's witness makes vows serious, but covenant language cannot be used to hide coercion or danger. Seeking safety and truthful help is not betrayal of marriage. Treachery includes the misuse of power that demands silence.

3. One Flesh Gives the Body a Truth to Tell

Union Belongs Inside Promise

Genesis 2 joins leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh. Sexual union says, 'I give myself to you in an exclusive bond.' Outside the covenant, the body speaks a promise the life is not keeping.

The Command Is Positive Before It Is Negative

Faithfulness does more than avoid an affair. It guards trust, nourishes affection, tells the truth early and treats a spouse as a person to love rather than an obstacle to imagined happiness.

4. Fidelity Is Not a One-Gender Burden

Ancient Form Is Not Male Exemption

Ancient law was expressed through patriarchal households, but Scripture does not turn male power into sexual privilege. David is judged for taking Uriah's wife, and the New Testament calls both husband and wife to fidelity.

Each Person Governs His or Her Attention

Modesty teaching must never make women responsible for every man's imagination. Women also can cultivate lust or secrecy. Another person's appearance or interest does not remove my agency or cancel my covenant.

5. Temptation and Consent Are Not the Same

The Thought May Arrive Uninvited

Beauty may be noticed, attraction recognized and an intrusive image rejected without cultivated sin. Jesus Himself was tempted without sin. The arrival of temptation is not proof that it has been welcomed.

The Return Can Become a Decision

Jesus addresses looking toward lust. The moral movement appears when attention returns to intensify desire, gives the fantasy permission to remain and rehearses another person as an object of possession. The first glance may be unplanned. The second can become a decision.

6. Jesus Joins Adultery to Coveting

Epithymeo Describes Desire

The Greek epithymeo can describe strong desire in good or corrupt settings. Context supplies its moral direction. In Matthew 5 it is desire aimed at possessing another person in violation of faithfulness.

Lust Is Not Intense Love

Love seeks the other person's good and can wait, sacrifice and tell the truth. Lust consumes a body or imagined experience for private appetite. It turns an image-bearer into material. Jesus joins the seventh commandment to the coveting heart addressed by the tenth.

7. Cut Off Access, Not the Body

Shocking Hyperbole

Plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand would not cleanse imagination. Jesus uses forceful hyperbole, not an instruction to injure the body. The figurative form increases rather than removes the demand for decisive obedience.

Grace Builds Practical Barriers

Delete the recurring doorway. End the secret conversation. Change the travel, alcohol or device pattern that repeatedly lowers boundaries. Bring pornography or fantasy into wise accountability. Grace refuses self-harm and gives courage to remove access to what harms the soul.

8. Wisdom Guards the Eyes and Nourishes the Marriage

A Covenant With the Eyes

Job made a prior covenant governing his gaze. He accepted responsibility for attention before temptation became overwhelming. The covenant was with his own eyes, not a demand that other people disappear.

Rejoice With the Spouse of Your Youth

Proverbs 5 supplies a positive answer: delight, gratitude and renewed attention within marriage. Real love lives with bills, difficult mornings and remembered disappointments. Fantasy edits the person. Covenant love keeps choosing the real person.

9. Joseph Shows the Wisdom of Flight

Repeated Pressure Did Not Remove Agency

Potiphar's wife repeatedly pressured Joseph. He recognized the trust placed in him, her existing marriage and the God against whom the act would sin. When she seized his garment, he fled.

Faithfulness Does Not Control Reputation

Joseph was falsely accused and imprisoned. Obedience is not a technique that guarantees a favorable story. His experience also shows that sexual pressure can travel through unequal power and retaliation can follow refusal.

10. David Shows What Entitlement Can Take

Saw, Inquired, Sent and Took

Second Samuel 11 records a sequence of royal choices. David saw Bathsheba, asked about her, sent messengers and took her. She was Uriah's wife, Uriah was serving David's kingdom and the king controlled access.

Adultery Joined Murder

When pregnancy exposed the act, David manipulated Uriah and arranged his death. Nathan confronted David, not Bathsheba, through the story of a rich man taking a poor man's cherished lamb. Power did not convert appetite into innocence.

11. Coercion Is Not Adultery by the Victim

The Guilt Belongs to the Violator

Sexual assault, threats, drugging, spiritual manipulation and forced contact do not make the victim an adulterer. A person unable to refuse safely does not share the guilt of the one who misused power.

Safety and Truth Belong Together

If someone uses Scripture, finances, immigration status, employment or force to control another person, seeking safety is not covenant betrayal. Tell an equipped, trustworthy person. Contact appropriate authorities when crime or immediate danger is involved. A church must never protect its reputation by concealing abuse.

12. Technology Made Secrecy Portable

Pornography Trains the Consuming Gaze

Technology did not invent lust, but it placed novelty, correspondence and concealed history in one pocket. Pornography detaches bodies from covenant and personhood and may hide exploitation or coercion from the viewer.

Compassion Must Not Become Denial

Exposure histories and compulsive patterns differ and may require layered pastoral and clinical care. Repeatedly seeking sexual images is still not harmless because no meeting occurred. Repentance joins truth, barriers, accountability and patient help.

13. An Emotional Center Can Be Relocated

Friendship Is Not Automatically a Threat

Healthy communities require respectful friendships, and not every private pastoral conversation is adultery. Suspicion is not holiness. The important question is what the relationship is becoming.

Secrecy Reveals the Rival Story

Warning signs include hidden frequency or tone, sharing deepest hopes while withholding them from a spouse, inviting attachment through complaints, anticipating another person's attention and protecting the relationship from reasonable questions. Sometimes the covenant's emotional center moves before the body does.

14. Transparency Must Serve Trust

Mutual Boundaries Can Protect a Marriage

Couples may freely agree upon wise boundaries for devices, accounts, travel and friendships. Clear, reciprocal expectations can reduce ambiguity and support truth.

Control Is Not Faithfulness

An abusive spouse may demand passwords, track movement or isolate a partner while calling it accountability. Domination is not transparency. Boundaries must protect the covenant without erasing either person's dignity or safety.

15. The Seventh Word Also Addresses Singles

Honor Covenants You Did Not Make

A single believer can refuse intimacy with a married person, reject pornography, practice self-control and honor another household. Marriage is not required before a person learns truthful love.

Marriage Is Not a Cure for Lust

A wedding does not turn consumption into love. Character travels into the covenant. Grace can transform character, but a ceremony by itself cannot make secrecy, entitlement or objectification faithful.

16. Repentance Ends the Betrayal

Regret Is Not Yet Repentance

Repentance ends the outside relationship, closes the secret account, rejects blame and replaces rehearsed lies with truth. Marriage difficulties may be shared, but adultery is a chosen response for which the choosing person remains responsible.

Truth Accepts Consequences

A repentant person accepts accountability and does not demand that the wounded spouse recover on command. Wise pastoral and qualified counseling help may guide disclosure and repair. When danger or crime is present, protection and competent reporting come first.

17. Forgiveness and Trust Are Related but Distinct

Trust Grows Through Demonstrated Truth

Forgiveness can release personal vengeance before relational confidence returns. Trust develops through truthful conduct over time. The wounded spouse is not ungodly for needing verification, distance or time.

Grace Does Not Name Treachery Faithfulness

Some marriages survive adultery and form new patterns through repentance and extraordinary grace. Other situations retain danger, deception or abandonment. Grace tells the truth and offers transformation without guaranteeing immediate reconciliation.

18. Christ Is the Faithful Bridegroom

Such Were Some of You

First Corinthians 6 names sexual sins and then announces, 'Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified.' The guilty are accountable but not unreachable. The used and betrayed are not made unclean by another person's sin.

He Gave Himself for the Church

God's people repeatedly give created things the trust that belongs to the Creator. If salvation depended upon the bride's flawless fidelity, there would be no wedding feast. Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for her. He died for sinners, was buried and rose again.

For the Person Ready to Trust Christ

Turn from sin and trust the faithful Jesus. You may pray: Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I believe You died for my sins, were buried and rose again. Forgive me, wash me and make me new. Be my Savior and Lord. Teach me to walk in truth, purity and covenant faithfulness. I receive Your gift of eternal life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Pastoral Summary

1. Na'aph specifically concerns adultery and the marriage covenant it violates.
2. Marriage joins companionship, promise, one-flesh union and divine witness.
3. The command requires fidelity from both husband and wife without a gendered double standard.
4. Temptation, attraction and intrusive thought are not identical to cultivated lust.
5. Jesus exposes the gaze chosen in order to covet and possess another person inwardly.
6. Heart adultery is real sin, but it does not erase the additional consequences of outward adultery.
7. Eye-and-hand language demands radical removal of access to sin, not bodily injury.
8. Job and Proverbs join guarded attention to positive delight inside marriage.
9. Joseph models flight from pressure even when obedience cannot control reputation.
10. David shows how entitlement, access and power can combine adultery with manipulation and murder.
11. Assault and coercion do not make the victim guilty of adultery.
12. Pornography and secret emotional exclusivity can violate covenant faithfulness before physical contact.
13. Mutual transparency can serve trust, but surveillance and domination are not faithfulness.

14. Singles honor this command by respecting bodies, truth and covenants they did not make.
15. Repentance ends betrayal, tells the truth, accepts accountability and does not demand trust.
16. Forgiveness, trust, access, reconciliation and restoration must not be collapsed.
17. The body may cross the line last, so guard the heart before secrecy grows hands.
18. Jesus Christ is the faithful Bridegroom who washes sinners and gives Himself for His people.

Covenant Faithfulness Worksheet

1. State what the seventh commandment specifically forbids and positively protects.
2. Explain how one-flesh union gives the body covenant meaning.
3. Distinguish perception, temptation, cultivated lust, secrecy and embodied betrayal.
4. Identify one repeated gaze, feed, fantasy or setting that requires a practical boundary.
5. Ask whether any relationship receives intimacy you intentionally withhold from your spouse.
6. Name one way entitlement or authority can disguise sexual pressure.
7. Explain why coercion places guilt upon the violator rather than the victim.
8. Evaluate whether device or friendship boundaries are mutual or controlling.
9. Choose one positive act of attention, gratitude or presence within your marriage.
10. If you caused betrayal, identify the first act required to end it and accept responsibility.
11. If you were betrayed, identify the next truthful and safe step without deciding everything today.
12. State the difference among forgiveness, trust, access and reconciliation.
13. Bring guilt, shame, betrayal and woundedness to Jesus Christ, the faithful Bridegroom.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Why is na'aph more specific than a general word for sexual sin?
2. How did adultery affect spouse, household, children and inheritance in ancient Israel?
3. What do companion, covenant and witness add in Malachi 2?
4. How does Genesis 2 make sexual union an embodied covenant statement?
5. Why must the command be applied without a gendered double standard?
6. How can temptation be distinguished from desire a person chooses to cultivate?
7. How does Jesus connect the seventh commandment with coveting?
8. Why should eye and hand language produce decisive boundaries rather than self-injury?
9. What positive vision does Proverbs 5 offer for marital faithfulness?
10. What do Joseph and David reveal about pressure, power and agency?
11. Why must assault and coercion never be called adultery by the victim?
12. How has technology industrialized access and made secrecy portable?
13. What distinguishes a healthy friendship from cultivated emotional exclusivity?
14. When does transparency serve trust, and when can it become coercive control?
15. How does the command address a single believer?
16. What does repentance require after betrayal?
17. Why are forgiveness, trust and reconciliation not identical?
18. What hope is contained in Paul's words, 'Such were some of you'?
19. How does Christ the faithful Bridegroom answer both guilt and woundedness?

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, You are faithful in all Your ways. Forgive us for reducing people to objects and covenants to inconveniences. Protect us from false guilt when temptation has been resisted and from

false innocence when desire has been deliberately fed. Expose the secret permission, message, account or attachment that is teaching the heart to betray.

Bring truth and tenderness to marriages. Give courage to end affairs, close hidden accounts, reject pornography and leave tempting situations. Teach husbands and wives to practice reciprocal honesty, delight and patient presence. Teach single believers to honor their bodies and the covenants of others.

Bring comfort to betrayed spouses and safety to anyone facing coercion, stalking, assault, violence or spiritual manipulation. Give churches courage to protect victims, report what must be reported and hold abusers accountable. Guard us from demanding quick trust or using forgiveness to return someone to danger.

Thank You for Jesus Christ, the faithful Bridegroom who loved the church and gave Himself for her. Thank You that sinners may be washed, sanctified and justified and that another person's betrayal cannot erase the dignity You give. Form in us truthful hearts, faithful bodies and covenant love. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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