CHAPTER SEVEN

"Don't Even Think About It!"

You shall not commit adultery ~Exodus 20:14.

INTRODUCTION

What is adultery? According to the dictionary adultery is, "Voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than their spouse." Strong's Exhaustive Concordance defines the word adultery as, "a primitive root...figuratively, to apostatize.."

> The importance of this root exceeds appearances since its use in the Seventh Commandment constitutes a basic constituent of social law and its religious theological use unveils a major element in Israel's religion.[1]

Simply put, there is more to this Command than meets the eye! What first meets the eye are the physical truths that surround this Law.

I. ADULTERY – THE PHYSICAL ACT:

We come to this Seventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" with the realization that this Command, like the one before it, "Thou shalt do no murder," is very extensive in its meaning. In delving into this Command, we could consider: the true meaning of marriage, the practice of polygamy versus monogamy, incest, divorce, sensuality, prostitution, homosexuality, pornography, and a host of other things too evil to mention. The bottom line is that this Commandment has wrapped up in it all the elements of moral purity. It embraces God's standard for marriage and His hatred for divorce. It encompasses everything from premarital sex through divorce,

> **Matthew 5:27-28** You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' [28] But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

In commenting on the above verse, Matthew Henry states the following:

> This commandment forbids all acts of uncleanness, with all those fleshly lusts which produce those acts and war against the soul, and all those practices which cherish and excite those fleshly lusts, as looking in order to lust, which, Christ tells us, is forbidden in this commandment.[2]

Therefore, when we view the physical side of this Law we must consider that <u>adultery</u> is really the end result of a long train of events; events that, according to Jesus, begin with the thoughts. I'm

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[1] BibleSoft; Ibid

[2] BibleSoft; Ibid.

sure you've heard the statement, “No one ever falls into the sin of adultery.” What is meant by that is that this sin is a result of a series of other sins. These sins, according to Jesus, should have been dealt with at the level of the thought life!

A provision was made in the Law for the person accused of adultery to be granted a hearing before God for guilt to be either established or for them to be exonerated. The Scriptural explanation of this “hearing” and how it would work is called “the Law of Jealousies” and can be found in Numbers 5:11-31,

The penalty for violating this Seventh Commandment was death.

> **Leviticus 20:10** If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.

In our society, we might think that this is too harsh. Part of the reason for that is because we have become desensitized to the enormity of this sin. That desensitization is a result of years of subtle changes. These changes that have been woven into the fabric of our society, so that what was forbidden yesterday is acceptable today and will be commonplace tomorrow. As the world slides deeper and deeper into moral depravity, the gulf between Christians and the world should be increasing; but what is happening is, instead of adopting God’s standard as absolute, we have adopted a “distance ratio” from the world. If we feel that we are maintaining our distance, we feel that we are being good Christians. The result of this kind of thinking is exactly where we are. We are the same distance from the world that we were twenty years ago, or even fifty years ago; but look at how far the moral standards of our society have fallen. Relatively speaking, the Christian Church is roughly where the world was twenty years ago. We need to look not only at the crumbling of societies' morals; we need also to look at the crumbling of Christianity's morals. Why have we allowed this to happen? This has happened because we have been using the wrong standard. Our standard has not been the purity of God's Law, but our “distance” from the World. When the world views Christianity, what it sees is that Christians are just “behind the times”. What it should see is Christians exhibiting the absolute standard of God's Holy Law. The Apostle Paul wrote concerning these things to the Christians at Ephesus:

> **Ephesians 5:1-7** Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children [2] and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. [3] But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. [4] Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. [5] For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-- such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. [6] Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. [7] Therefore do not be partners with them.

Verse Three is of special importance, because it is speaking specifically of sexual immorality, meaning sex outside of God's boundaries. Paul says, “let it [fornication] not once be named among you.” When we look at the Church today, these things are not only named once, but they have

become commonplace. How should we deal with this? Should we go back to the standard of our parents? Should we adopt the dress code of the 40's or the beliefs of the Puritans? How far back should we go? The answer is relatively simple: Back to the Law. Back to *God's* standard. That standard was exemplified by Jesus, when He stated that this sin had its root in the mind. So then, the best place to deal with this sin is at its starting point – the mind.

This is extremely important because it is so basic, and for that reason too often overlooked or ignored. It is a major theme of the New Testament writers. Paul wrote about it in all his letters, specifically to Timothy, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). James wrote, "that the wisdom that is from above is first pure," (James 3:17). Peter told the Christians whom he wrote to that the first thing they should consciously add to their faith was purity (2 Peter 1:5). John stated that if the hope of Christ's return truly resides in us that we will purify ourselves as He is pure, (1 John 3:3).

Jude gives a tremendous warning about the destruction that awaits those who pursue these things. Paul brings the enormity of this sin into focus in his first letter to the Christians at Corinth... in particular, Chapter 6:12 - 7:16. Here, Paul deals with the responsibility of the Christian in dealing with this sin. "The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord." 6:13 "...he who sins sexually sins against his own body." 6:18. What does that mean? Every other sin that is committed is a sin against something or someone else. Murder is a sin against someone else's life. Gluttony is a sin having to do with the abuse of food. The belly is made for food and vice versa. Drunkenness is a sign of the abuse of alcohol, i.e. substance abuse.

People today try to say that sex without boundaries is natural. Their reasoning is that sex is an appetite, and it needs to be satisfied just like eating and drinking. The difference, however, is that eating and drinking are essential to sustain the body; sex is not. The *world* would have us believe that sex is everything, and, to the advertising business, perhaps it is. We have become guilty of buying into the world's value system.

There are several Scriptural principles that address this alarming mind-set. First, our body was created *by* God and was created *for* God (Genesis 2:7, 18-24). While this holds true of humanity in general (see Revelation 4:11), it has specific bearing on those who call themselves "Christian." According to Isaiah 43:7, those who are part of God's family have been created for God's glory. Secondly, our bodies were purchased by God, for God. 1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us that we have been bought with a price and our responsibility is to glorify God with our body. We have already seen how to do that when we talked about our bodies in worship (Romans 12:1-2). Thirdly, the sex act is spiritual as well as physical. Sex is the seal of the marriage covenant, and scripture describes the act as "knowing" the other person, i.e. "And Adam *knew* Eve, his wife" (Genesis 4:1). This knowing is a depth of intimacy not experienced otherwise.

II. ADULTERY – SPIRITUAL INTIMACY:

No other sin has this capability! The Apostle Paul likens this intimacy to that enjoyed between Christ and His Church. It is a spiritual union as well as a physical one, because one of the New

Testament warnings is against Christ being joined to a prostitute with a statement of horror at the thought.

> **1 Corinthians 6:15-18** Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? *Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute*? Never! [16] Do you not know that *he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body*? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' [17] But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. [18] Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but *he who sins sexually sins against his own body*. ~Emphasis added.

How many times have we heard people, when commenting about an affair, say, "It didn't mean anything". But it does; it means a great deal. According to Jesus, this sin is a sin that can be committed in our thoughts.

One of my favorite soft drink commercials was that of a young boy watching his basketball hero workout. At the conclusion of the practice time, Shaq O'Neil came and sat next to that little boy and longingly eyed his soft drink. The little guy looks up at Shaq and says, "Don't even think about it!" In the same way, our thought lives must be disciplined regarding this sin ... don't even think about it! Because, as a person thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7).

We *can*, therefore, have covenant ties with models, movie stars, friends, neighbors, or individuals that we have never met! Jesus said that adultery consisted of a look followed by lustful contemplation. Adultery then is really the result of a long train of events; events that, according to Jesus, begin with the thoughts. Consider Proverbs 6:32 "But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself." The word judgment means "heart"—the heart of human sexuality is more than physical gratification; it is spiritual union. The word "destroys" means to corrupt, spoil, ruin, or mar. It means to decay. Even the politicians of our own nation speak of moral decay, perhaps not realizing the depth of truth. The Prophet, Malachi, also touched on this, "Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit, they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking a godly offspring. So, guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth."

The attitude of our society is that sex has no more meaning than a good sneeze; sneeze all you want, and enjoy everyone, but leave sex where God put it—between husband and wife! Malachi said, "Guard yourself in spirit". In other words, dealing with illicit sex is a spiritual problem and not just physical enjoyment.

Since this sin has an actual spiritual component as opposed to a perceived spiritual implication, it becomes a bit easier to define the parameters surrounding the spiritual side of this Law.

The spiritual aspect of this Law is readily understood, not only from the literal meaning of the word adultery, but also from its Old Testament usage by God concerning His relationship with Israel. That usage is also seen in the New Testament as God deals with His Church. Remember, the meaning of adultery is to apostatize. Apostasy is, according to Webster: "renunciation of religious faith or abandonment of a previous loyalty." It is a picture that God drew again and again

by the hands of His Prophets concerning His relationship with both Israel and Judah. In fact, God had warned Moses, “And the LORD said to Moses: 'You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them....'”

God considered Himself married to Israel: Listen to what He says through two Old Testament Prophets,

> **Isaiah 54:6** The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God.
>
> **Jeremiah 31:32** It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, declares the LORD.

The Prophet, Hosea. was instructed to marry a prostitute as an object lesson to Israel to graphically portray the enormity of her sin of spiritual adultery. As we know, Israel continued in her apostasy and was eventually brought unto judgment. That judgment was referred to by both Isaiah and Jeremiah in their preaching repentance to Judah. We are quick to recognize the errors of Israel and Judah; and we are very slow to accept the fact that we often are guilty of the very same sins. James wrote, “You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

Did you hear what he called them? “Adulterous people,” Why? Because they were choosing the world over God. You and I commit spiritual adultery when we become friendly with the world. The world is the enemy of Christ. Jesus told His Disciples in John 7 that the works of the world were evil. The Apostle, John, then went on to instruct us,

> **1 John 2:15-16** Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that Demas had forsaken him because he loved this present world. What is your relationship like with the Lord? Is it adversely affected by your attachment to the world or the things (material, emotional, etc.) that are in the world? When Paul listed the manifested works of the flesh, he started his list with adultery (see Galatians 5:19). (Now, if it is true, that the sin of adultery is a sin against our own body), would it not also be true that the sin of spiritual adultery is a sin against the body of Christ? In other words, there is, according to Proverbs 6:32, a decaying of the very soul of the body.

What does a soul do? A soul gives the body its life and defines its character. A soul gives the body its direction. A soul gives the body its meaning. A soul gives the body its ability to portray emotion. When the soul begins to decay, death is not far away. Adultery brings decay.... That was the illustration to Israel and the Church, regarding Achan’s sin at Ai. He fulfilled his lust for the things of the world; and, as a result, brought defeat to those around him. Why? Because they were

in covenant with each other! Have you ever wondered about the significance of generational curses? It is a tendency to be passed to the next generation because of the ties of covenant.

Far too many of God's people carry the "sin curses" of the previous generation. Many of these "curses" are hidden from the eyes of other Christians, and have deeply wounded those who keep them hidden, i.e. a wounding of the soul from child abuse etc. Jesus died for it. Jesus died for and cleanses from *all* sin! There has been speculation in Christian circles about the "how" of transference of these generational curses. The possibility of such transferences being written into our DNA code is an interesting discussion. Regardless of how it is transferred, we know that we have a body of sin; and that sin can become generational. We should *also* know that Jesus died specifically to set us free from sin... whatever it is, however strong it is! There is only one way to break the power of sin, and that is through the blood of Jesus.

Is James 4:4 a description of the modern Church? He was speaking to Christians. Are we adulterers and adulteresses? This sin is what separated Israel and Judah from God. This sin is what is destroying the Church. This sin, in its physical and spiritual manifestations, should not once be named among us. Remember 1 John 1:7 "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from *all* sin." ~Emphasis added.

The Uniqueness of this Law:

What is it about this Law that sets it apart from others? Why was this Law necessary? This Law is significant because marriage is the basic building block of society, and adultery erodes that foundation. Proverbs, Chapter 2, talks about the strange woman that seeks to trap an individual in this sin with the warning that her house leads down to death and her paths to the *spirits of the dead*, once again underscoring the *spiritual* tie of this sin. Proverbs 6:27-29 asks a rhetorical question as to whether or not a person can put fire in his lap without burning his clothes. The warning there is that there will be personal consequences. Proverbs 7, especially verses 21-27, again brings strong warnings about being drawn into the sexual trap with the picture of a bird going into a snare without being aware that the issue is its life! How many times does God have to warn us about this peril? How many people, respected individuals of our society, both in and outside the Church, have proven these words. Yet, we live in a society where sexual impurity is not only becoming the norm but encouraged. "Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. [27] Her house is a highway to the grave leading down to the chambers of death" (Proverbs 7:26-27).

This is the sin that slew a whole nation (Genesis 34). This is the sin that kept Reuben from reaching the full potential of his inheritance. This is the sin by which Satan sought to trap Joseph. This is the sin that eventually stripped Samson of his power. This is the sin that brought the sons of Eli into death. This is the sin that eventually sidetracked Solomon from keeping his vows to the Lord. This is the sin that ushered in the strong preaching of John the Baptist against Herod and eventually cost him his life. It would be a tremendous let-down to end here. In John 4, Jesus dealt with the woman of Samaria, who was trapped in this sin. His words to her should be an encouragement for us, "But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to Eternal Life."

Fornication and adultery are sins of a thirsting soul. Jesus pointed that out to her when He touched on her marital status: married five times and now living with someone to whom she was not married. David said: “My soul thirsts for the living God.” (Psalm 42:2; 63:1; 143:6). He, too, tried to satisfy his thirst with an illicit relationship. He, too, failed and was confronted with his sin. He, too, fixed his eyes on his Savior and found fulfillment. What Jesus came to do was quench our thirst! Whether our thirst is physical or spiritual, Jesus wants us to be satisfied in our relationship with Him and with the “wife (spouse) of our youth”. Have you been to His well of Living Water?

Prayer for Forgiveness:

Righteous Father, I am guilty of adultery. Please help me to fully understand the spiritual component of intimacy, whether in the accomplishment of the physical act or in my thoughts. I want to bring every thought into captivity and obedience to Jesus. I want to be able to focus on what is pure, just and holy. I want my thoughts to be the starting place of intimacy with You. Please help me to be more aware of Satan’s tricks to turn my mind away from You and help me to resist him with the power of Jesus’ blood. Your Word promises that if I submit to You and resist the devil he will flee from me (James 4:7). I submit to You now, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

In Chapter Eight, we will consider how easy it is to become a thief!