

God's Concern for the Marriage

Deuteronomy 5:18

Introduction

A few years ago in an interview, actress Scarlett Johansson made a comment about marriage that she said “she would likely get skewered for.” The comment was about commitment in marriage. Specifically, she stated that she did not believe that marriage or monogamy were natural. In other words, she believes that getting married and staying faithful to one’s spouse is unnatural.

A few years prior to Johansson’s comment, Time Magazine asked the question, “Is monogamy over?” As one writer noted, “the article offered various opinions, including ‘monogamy is a charade’ that leads to ‘institutionalizing dishonesty,’ and ‘[monogamy] is just an option, not the default,’ and ‘There's no right, there's no wrong.’” But is this true? Is there no right or wrong in marriage? Is marriage and monogamy between one man and one woman over? Is it dead? Or, if it’s not dead, should it be killed?

Such comments and questions lead us to ask, “Why is a monogamous marriage so important? Why does God care so much about our marriage?” This morning, our aim is to answer these questions in light of the Seventh Command, which we encounter in Deuteronomy 5:18...

Deuteronomy 5:18

You shall not commit adultery.

Exposition

Let’s look at Deuteronomy 5:18 together. First, we notice that this is a prohibition. It is keeping us back from an action. In this case, the action is that of adultery. Now, I believe there is a tendency for us to see the word “adultery” and almost immediately interpret it was a catch-all word that include all forms of sexual immorality, but I think when we do that, we are moving too quickly beyond the context and the content of the actual verse.

Here’s what I mean: Deuteronomy 5:18 is dealing specifically with adultery. This is not to say that God’s Word does not address other issues related to our sexuality, but rather to highlight the intention behind this commandment. As we work through Deuteronomy, we will see other instructions about sexuality. Trust me. Deuteronomy has a lot to say about sexual ethics. But for now, we need to see how this command reflects God’s concern for marriage.

So, what does the Seventh Commandment prohibit?

OT scholar, Peter Craigie answers the question, saying, “The prohibition here is against sexual relationships between two persons, one or both of whom are married to another party or parties.”¹ In other words, adultery is more than sexual immorality between two people. Fundamentally, it is also a breaking of covenant. Adultery disregards the promise made before God and others in marriage. Those of you who are married or have attended a wedding know what I am talking about here.

¹ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 160.

When the husband and wife exchanged vows, they were making a promise to one another before God and before the witnesses in the audience. The vows probably went something like the following:

I require and charge you both as you stand in the presence of God and these witnesses, to remember that love and loyalty alone will avail as the foundation of a happy and an enduring home. No other human ties are more sacred than those you now assume. If these vows be kept unbroken, and steadfastly as you endeavor to do the will of your Heavenly Father, your life will be full of joy and the home which you are now establishing will abide in peace.

_____, do you take _____, to be your **wedded wife**, to live together in the Holy estate of marriage? Do you promise to love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keeping yourself only for her as long as you both will live?

_____, do you take _____, to be your **wedded husband**, to live together in the Holy estate of marriage? Do you promise to love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keeping yourself only for him as long as you both will live?

These vows are a promise. They are to be entered into solemnly. They are not a suggestion or just good advice. They are a covenant. Following the marriage ceremony, the bride and groom were likely whisked away by the officiating pastor to make sure that they signed their marriage license and that they had witnesses available to attest to the signing. This was not needless paperwork. It was a formalizing of the covenant agreement between the husband and the wife.

Thus, as you can see from the marriage vow and the wedding ceremony, there is a commitment to faithfulness. When such faithfulness is violated, we call it adultery. And that is what the Seventh Commandment prohibits. It prohibits expressions of unfaithfulness to the covenant that the husband and the wife entered together.

Now, you may say, “But why does the Seventh Commandment only deal specifically with adultery and not other forms of sexual immorality?” Again, I found Peter Craigie’s insights to be helpful for us,

The reason why adultery is singled out for attention in the Decalog is because adultery, more than other illicit sexual behavior, has to do with unfaithfulness in a relationship of commitment. Marriage was a binding commitment of faithfulness between two persons and it was in principle similar to the covenant relationship itself. The crime of adultery was the social equivalent to the religious crime of having *other gods* (5:5); both offenses involved unfaithfulness and both were therefore reprehensible to the God of the covenant, whose character it was to be totally faithful. It is this emphasis, that faithfulness (expressed in obedience) must permeate every sphere of life, both the religious and the secular, that gives a distinctive character to the Israelite law on adultery. Adultery of one partner in a marriage involved not only unfaithfulness to the other partner, but also unfaithfulness to God.²

In other words, marriage is a microcosm of faithfulness to God. Those who would be faithfully committed to God, would also be the type of person who would be faithfully committed to their spouse. For, they understood that faithfulness in all things is a defining mark of belonging to God’s people. God’s people are a faithful people. They are faithful to God. They are faithful to their parents. They are faithful to their spouses. They are faithful because God is faithful and has called them to be faithful.

² Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 160.

Obviously, then, there is more at stake in the Seventh Commandment than initially meets the eye. The marriage commitment is about far more than pleasure and personal success. Marriage is fundamentally about reflecting faithfulness to another as a testimony to the faithfulness of God.

And, as it should come as no surprise, those who are faithful to God will also be more faithful in their other relationships, especially in their marriages. Now, some of you are thinking right now, “Yea, but I’ve heard the statistics, the divorce rate among Christians is as high or higher than non-Christians, so this just doesn’t work out, preacher.” But is that actually true? We’ve all likely heard that stat before. People bemoan the divorce rate among Christians, but the problem with the statistic is in how people are defining the term “Christian.” In these studies, the term “Christian” is self-reported. In other words, if a person claims to be a Christian, then the surveyor is constrained to label them as a Christian. But when you consider the difference between a nominal Christian, that is, someone who infrequently attends church, is not reading God’s Word or praying with regularity, has no interest in small group discipleship, versus an active “Christian,” that is, someone who regularly attends church, reads God’ Word and prays, is committed to discipleship in small group settings, then what you find is that “active Christians” are 35% less likely to get divorced than the rest of the population. In other words, while the statistic is not great, it is undeniable that “active Christians” are far less likely to leave their marriages than their “unreligious counterparts” in society, which shows that there is a relationship between our commitment and faithfulness to God and our commitment and faithfulness to others.

And God knew this! Because He designed us this way when we made us in His image and then called us to marry, be fruitful and multiple all over the earth as those who reflect His character. Just is faithful, so we, as His people, who were created to reflect His character, are to be faithful to Him and to others in our lives. And this is especially the case in our marriages.

Conclusion

Thus, when God commands us not to commit adultery, to not break our vows to our spouses or cause someone else’s spouse to break their vows, He is doing so that we might reflect His faithfulness in the world. This is why God is concerned with marriage, because marriage is bigger than us. Marriage is ultimately about Him, which is why Paul points us to the great mystery of our earthly marriages point the cosmic marriage of Jesus Christ to His Bride, the Church.

Application

1) Honor marriage.

As Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

Guard against sins of the mind (Matthew 5:27-28)

One man, one woman in a monogamous, covenantal relationship before God and others until death does them part. The culture nor the government gets to redefine what God created for His glory and our good. Marriage belongs to Him and ought to be upheld in honor by all!

2) Distinguish marriage.

As Genesis 2:24 says, “That is why man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

Marriage is different than any other earthly relationship. It is uniquely glorious. I appreciate so much what Ray Ortlund wrote about marriage. He stated,

The expectation which the covenant community must accept as normative is that a new marriage will sever what is otherwise the strongest human bond, for it is the father and the mother whose very bodies give a man his life. This requirement elevates the marital union above all other personal loyalties under God. If, in marrying, a man withdraws his primary allegiance from his parents and redirects it to his wife so that they enter into a ‘one flesh’ existence, how much more does this distinguish marriage from all other relationships as well! Marriage is so profound a union that not only may one put one’s wife ahead of all others, one must do so.

No other earthly relationships under God ought to come between marriage. Men, put your wife before all others. Women, put your husband before all others. Someone may ask, “But what about children? Shouldn’t I put my children before my spouse?” If you want to care for your children best, then nurture your marriage. A child that can grow and develop in a context where there is security and stability is vital. (Personal Example with Carter and Divorced Friends – “He needed to know that we were committed to one another...”)

“But pastor, you don’t get it. My marriage is a wreck. My spouse is not a believer. While I have been faithful, my spouse has not been faithful. My spouse has been abusive to me and my children. Are you saying that I should just suck it up and for the sake of the marriage?”

Marriage Mentoring for the Struggling
Professional Counseling
Protection for the Abused
Financial Help

3) Celebrate marriage.

While Jesus nor Paul ever married, they were not cynical toward marriage. Jesus’ first miracle was performed at a wedding (John 2). Paul wrote several times about the marriage relationship (1 Corinthians 7, Ephesians 5). Singleness does not exclude one from celebrating marriage. Regardless of whether or not one gets married, marriage is still an important symbol to which we should pay close attention. Do not fall prey to the way that our culture downplays and even crudely jokes about marriage. Do not tolerate the ways that our culture seeks to tear down and redefine marriage (“Window Shopping” joke)

4) Anticipate marriage.

Earthly marriages are important, but they are not ultimate. Marriages as we know them do not last forever. Yet, there is a marriage that is coming, a marriage to which all marriages were designed to point us, and that is the marriage of Christ to His Bride. (Revelation 19:6-9)