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Blessed are the Pure in Heart
Deuteronomy 5:18
Series: *Loving God in Every Way*

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Deuteronomy 5 – Deuteronomy chapter 5. Beloved, it is such a joy to be back with you and to bring God’s Word to you this morning. The sabbatical break was so good and encouraging and refreshing and edifying – and I look forward to telling you more about it tonight – but it is a mercy from the Lord to be able to resume this ministry of the Word this morning. Outside of one wedding and preaching once at a nursing home, I haven’t preached for 3 months. I know for some of you that makes you worried about getting home before 3 o’clock this afternoon, but that won’t happen! It feels a little bit like riding a bike after a many year’s hiatus. I’m hoping I still know how this works, and I need to strap on my helmet for extra safety! So, strap on your helmets and get on the bike – let’s dive into Deuteronomy 5.

We’re picking up our series from where we left it off in May, and so we find ourselves considering the 7th commandment of the 10 commandments. Deuteronomy 5 and verse 18 says this . . .

This 7th command is just 2 words in the Hebrew and a mere 6 words in the ESV’s translation. But as we unwrap this small package we will find a universe of meaning and application. Allow me to re-orient us as it relates to Deuteronomy 5 and the 10 commandments. So, if verse 18 is an address on your google Maps, let’s grab the map with our fingers and zoom out and get the bigger picture of where we are and of what’s going on. The nation of Israel has been powerfully rescued from slavery in Egypt by their covenant making and covenant keeping God. They have entered into a covenant relationship with Him under the Mosaic covenant and they have agreed to keep His Law and obey His voice. But on the cusp of entering the Promised Land the first time, they faltered in faith and turned in rebellious unbelief away from God and refused to enter the land. For this they were judged to wander for 40 years in the wilderness as the unbelieving generation died off slowly and another generation was raised to inherit and inhabit the Promised Land. The book of Deuteronomy is Moses’ sermon to this next generation as they sit once again on the cusp of entering into the Promised Land. He is rehearsing the providential care and power of God to get them to this point and he is exhorting them to always hear and obey God’s Law. And the heart, or better, the fountainhead of this Law is these 10 words – these 10 commandments.

And the source of that spring of God’s Law is the unique existence and character of God Himself. Because God is, and because God is who He is – He has the unique authority and right to command His people how to worship Him and how to live before Him. And this self-existent and completely holy God has shown great love for His people by rescuing them from the

bondage of slavery to the greatest world power of their day. So, his self-existent nature and redeeming love form the context into which these 10 words are spoken.

And these 10 words are given in 2 sets, or 2 tables. The first set is comprised of the 1st four commands and it can be summarized by Jesus' words to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second table is made up of the last 6 commands and can be summarized by Jesus' words that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. In other words, these commands are not merely moral commands which by keeping them we somehow earn our righteousness before the thrice holy God. NO! Rather, they are commands which show us how to love the Lord who has loved us first and redeemed us from sin. And these last 6 commands, or this second set, exhorts us to flesh out that love for God in the context of everyday life as we love our neighbors as ourselves. So, we love God by having no other gods before Him, and by worshiping Him as he has told us to. And we love God by not taking his name in vain and by honoring His exclusive day. And we love our neighbor as ourselves by honoring our dad and mom, by not taking another person's life, by not committing adultery, by not stealing, or bearing false witness, or coveting. In all these ways we show our love for God.

This is the overall context that leads us into the truth of verse 18 which again says – “And you shall not commit adultery.” This is a pretty straightforward command, but let's dig into its depths by looking at the clarity of the command, the consequence of the command and the keeping of the command.

I. The Clarity of the Command

- a. So, let's establish the clarity of the command. What exactly is being prohibited here – you shall not commit adultery?
- b. What is Prohibited?
 - i. The Hebrew word used is specifically condemning the breaking of the marriage covenant through sexual activity outside of that marriage relationship. It is not a word which addresses the many other deviant sexual practices generally known as immorality. That will be roundly condemned in chapter 22, but the concern in the 7th commandment is the preservation of the marriage covenant relationship. This is the sacred union of one woman to one man established in the Garden in Genesis 2. This is the joining of two flesh into this mysterious and glorious one flesh union of marriage. And the physical intimacy uniquely designed by God for procreation and pleasure and expression of unified trust is only to be experienced and pursued within the bounds of God-ordained marriage.
 - ii. What is being condemned here is the breaking of that union in a promiscuous act outside of the bounds of marriage, which by the very nature of the act breaks the covenant commitment of marriage. So, this adulterous act is the highest of sexual sins that can be committed because it is the breaking of a bond that God has explicitly said no one should break. So, adultery defies the very word of God and disregards the good design of God for the proper place of sexual intimacy, and it also destroys the covenant bond unique to marriage. In fact, marriage is one of the most

frequently referenced human relationship used to describe God's relationship with His people. As Ephesians 5 so clearly says, marriage pictures the love of Christ and the submission of the Church. And so, when adultery happens, it destroys this beautiful picture and breaks this sacred bond.

- iii. It is no wonder then that Job describes the adulterer as someone who pursues his craft under the cover of darkness (Job 24:15) so as to keep his sinful covenant breaking action unknown to others. It makes sense then, that the book of Proverbs says the adulterer lacks sense and destroys himself (Prov. 6:32). Which then leads to so many who commit adultery acting as if they have done nothing wrong – as though they have gotten what they deserve and absent of remorse over their sinful deed as is described in Proverbs 30:20 – they lack sense and lack remorse.
 - iv. So, what is being strictly prohibited here is the breaking of the marriage bond through illicit sexual intimacy. Like the atomic bomb which cuts apart the building block of existence and leaves nothing but destruction and chaos in its wake, so adultery severs the fundamental building block of marriage – this unyielding commitment to one another – and it leaves nothing but carnage in its path.
- c. Why is it prohibited?
- i. Which helps us understand why this is being prohibited by God here. Remember that these are the 10 words which are the heart or fountainhead of the Law. They summarize the rest of the Law in an easily memorable way and they cut to the heart of what is to stand as the moral ethic of God's people. The 10 commandments are like what street signs are to drivers. There are a ton of laws which are to regulate drivers, but the street signs are ever-present, visible reminders of the heart of those driving laws. The speed limit and when to stop and yield and go and where to turn – these are the heart of the laws for driving. So too, these 10 words in Deuteronomy 5. So, why is one of them about not committing adultery? Well, there is the obvious answer – that the marriage relationship is the most sacred of relationships before God and is the most attacked, outside of the parent/child relationship, by God's enemy. But why is it the most sacred and the most attacked? Why is our fidelity to God's command here of utmost importance?
 - ii. *It is a Worship Issue*
 1. Consider first that faithfulness to the marriage bond before God is a worship issue. Think again about the context of this command. The people of God are preparing to enter into and overtake the Promised Land. They, by God's power, will overthrow and destroy the pagan nations. And they will do this because those pagan nations are ripe for the punishment of God. For generations on end, they have worshiped other gods, and a large part of that worship has been the complete disregard of God's design and

command for marriage. In fact, as part of their worship practices they would use the sexual act as an expression of their worship. In fact, just a few months before this sermon is given by Moses, thousands of the people of Israel were lured into these immoral practices by the daughters of Moab in the worship of Baal. As a result the wrath and righteous judgment of the Lord broke out and 24,000 of them were killed by the plague.

2. So, these people know firsthand the lure of immoral practice as an expression of worship. What God is saying here is you worship me rightly by maintaining marital faithfulness. By keeping sexual intimacy within the bound of the marriage relationship, God is honored and worshiped. Faithful obedience to this command worships God. Instead of sexual intimacy being an expression of worship at the temple with temple prostitutes and priestesses, God says – you honor me most and worship me rightly by keeping the marriage bed pure and keeping intimacy where it belongs.
3. Do you remember when Joseph was confronted with the enticements of Potiphar's wife? His denial of her overtures was dripping with true worship when he said to her – how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? (Gen. 39:9)
4. But it is not just a worship issue in the sense that it shows your valuing of and faith in God. It is also a worship issue in that this physical act of intimacy is closely connected to the worship of our heart. So, the prophets often described the spiritual idolatry of Israel as spiritual adultery – going so far as to say that they were playing the whore with another god (Jeremiah 3:8-9). The logic of Scripture throughout is that when we adulterate with idols in our spirits, we are quick to adulterate with our minds and bodies in sexual adultery. Isn't that precisely what Jesus showed the woman at the well in John 4? He showed her that she was worshipping a false god who offered her pleasure through sexual promiscuity, but who never fully delivered in lasting satisfaction. Just like she had to keep returning to that well for physical water, her soul kept returning to illicit practice in search of lasting refreshment. But she needed the living water offered her in Christ alone. And this living water would raise her out of the mud puddles of sexual infidelity and would satisfy her completely in the true worship of Christ. So, your obedience to this prohibition is a matter of heart worship. The God you value most in your inner man will be reflected in what thoughts you let dominate your mind and what actions spill over from your heart into life. Adulterous thoughts and actions are evidence of illicit and idolatrous worship of the heart. This is a worship issue.

iii. *It is a Faith Issue*

1. It is also a faith issue. And this flows out of the worship issue. Obedience to God's clear will as it relates to our sexual practice is a faith issue in the sense that it shows whether or not we truly believe God. So, God's first words about marriage after creating the marriage covenant between Adam and Eve were this – "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (Gen. 2:24)
2. When we obey the 7th commandment we worship God by believing God's word and way are best. This is why when Nathan the prophet confronted King David in 2 Samuel 12 about his adulterous act with Bathsheba he said to him – "Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight?" Adultery directly defies the word of the Lord and displays a complete lack of faith in the Word of the Lord. This is a faith issue.

iv. *It is a Contentment Issue*

1. It is also a contentment issue. I just referenced David's sin with Bathsheba, which is most certainly the most well-known case of adultery in the Scriptures. So, turn with me to 2 Samuel 12. You need to see what Nathan the prophet, under the direction of God's Spirit, says to David about his sin with Bathsheba. After kindling David's anger with the story about the stolen sheep, Nathan says this in verse 7. *Read 2 Samuel 12:7-9.*
2. Do you see how this outburst of adultery and murder is framed here by Nathan? It is an issue of contentment. David was not satisfied with all that God had given him. He was unsettled by the present blessings and he wanted what he didn't have because it appeared better to him. Discontentment is the potting soil in which the plants of all kinds of sin thrive and grow, not the least of which is the sin of adulterous lust, thought, and ultimately action.
3. And this discontentment, like a plant, takes time to grow. It is never sudden. It is not like the gourd that God provided for Jonah which grew to shade him quickly. Adultery is the overflow of the heart which is brooding in discontentment. Regardless of current or past blessings, the discontented heart always longs for the things it doesn't have. We'll talk quite a bit more about this next week when we get to not coveting, but see the connection here with adultery. Unfaithfulness in marriage is a contentment issue. This discontentment is unwilling to thrive in the soil which God has planted it in, rather it seeks to change the circumstances as though that will fix their problems and bring true satisfaction to the heart. Discontentment in marriage is unwilling to obey the command of God to invest in the marriage God has given. Rather than tend its own garden, the discontented heart would rather

climb the wall and eat the fruit of someone else's garden. Because of this discontentment this person raises his or her own felt needs over the clear prohibition of a loving and good God. Adultery is a contentment issue.

v. *It is a Representation Issue*

1. And it is also a representation issue. Meaning simply that when we break the law of God at this point we are lying about the God we are representing. God has designed marriage to represent Him and His relationship to His people. When a husband or wife walks away from the clear command of God to stay faithful in marriage then they lie about the God they say they worship. In adultery we communicate to the world around us that God's love is only faithful when we are lovable. We communicate that He is really no different than us in that His love is ultimately self-serving and lust driven. Adultery communicates that God doesn't really mean it when he promises His steadfast love will never fail. Marriage is a representation of God and his relationship to us, therefore, the breaking of the marriage bond through adultery lies about the character of God.
2. So, you can see why this prohibition made it into the top ten! It is a worship issue, a faith issue, a contentment issue, and a representation issue.

II. **The Consequence of the Command**

- a. The clarity of this command leads us to the necessary consequence of the command. The stakes are high here, as we just saw, and so therefore, the consequences are severe. Under the Mosaic Law the people of God agreed with God that if they broke this 7th commandment they should be put to death. That is the command of Leviticus 20:10. The adulterer is to be stoned to death by the covenant community. In other words, the holy seriousness attached to this covenant relationship of marriage within the community of God's people is a death-level seriousness. This was the command under Mosaic Law for several reasons. When someone was unfaithful in adultery they were betraying the covenant commitment of marriage before God, they were lying about the character of God, they were despising the image of God as they took advantage of someone else, and they were endangering the community of God's people. That is why there is such a high consequence attached to this command.
- b. I have already referenced this text, but in Leviticus 18 they are commanded to faithfulness in marriage and one of the reasons given is that these wicked acts of sexual immorality are the reason God is punishing the nations they are about to conquer. So in verse 24 the text says, "Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean,²⁵ and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.²⁶ But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, . . .²⁸ lest the land vomit you out when you

make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. (Lev. 18:24-26a, 28 ESV)

- c. That is why the consequence is so severe – because the just judgment of God will be provoked against them if they do not honor Him in this crucial way.
- d. But maybe you are already thinking about that most prolific case of adultery in Israel's own history – that of King David. Neither he nor Bathsheba were put to death by the covenant community. So, even under the Law there was mercy and grace to be found. But lest that mercy make you think that adultery isn't that big of a deal and the consequence is severe in word, but not in actuality – consider David's life. Proverbs 6:32-33 says this about the adulterer, and remember, this is written by the son of David & Bathsheba, Solomon himself. So, certainly he heard this truth reiterated to him again and again by his own adulterous father. Proverbs 6:32-33 says, "He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away."
- e. So, even in the great mercy and forgiveness that was shown David, there was lifelong consequence. It ruined his family, destroyed his legacy, and brought dishonor upon his name. To this day, some 3000 years after David, one of the first things you think about when you hear his name is this legacy of adultery with Bathsheba. Adulterous actions bring carnage into the life of a family that can be devastating for generations to come. I say all of this to show you that the stakes are high here. This is a serious command with serious consequences.

III. The Keeping of the Command

- a. But are any of us really in danger of breaking this command? I mean, realistically, how many of us at Newton Bible will fall into this devastating sin of adultery over the next 20 years? Well, one is too many, that's for sure. So maybe there is that one person here who is on the trajectory to adulterous action who needs to hear these truths this morning. Or maybe there are some among us who are currently living in adultery. And I have prayed that if there is one or two or ten among us who are currently sinning against God in this way that the exposition of the Word would be used by the Spirit to convict you and bring you to humble repentance. This is a stubborn and hard to eradicate kind of sin. Once you cross that boundary and enter into the world of sexual fulfillment outside of marriage, it is humanly impossible to come back. May God break your hard heart this morning and wash you and cleanse you in Christ if you are currently walking in adultery. But what about the majority of you who, by the kind grace of God will never cross that line into the wickedness of adultery? Are you off the hook this morning? Turn with me to Matthew 5, Matthew chapter 5.
- b. If you know your Bible at all, you know where I'm going, but please don't tune this out. The 7th commandment is about more than just prohibiting the act of adultery. We know that because the author of the 7th commandment tells us that in Matthew 5. In Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount he says this in verse 27.
Read Mt. 5:27-30.

- c. Jesus is not re-interpreting the 7th commandment here. He is not amplifying its meaning by taking it deeper than what it was in Moses' day. Rather, Jesus is teaching the fullness of meaning that has always been in the 7th commandment. The commandment has never been simply about outward conformity to not commit adultery. But that is what man is so quick to do with God's commands. We want to compartmentalize them and keep them in an easy to manage box of outward action only. But Christ teaches us here the true and full reach of the 7th commandment. It penetrates to the heart level – to what we long for, look at, and desire. In other words, the 7th commandment is a mirror which shows us the sinfulness of our hearts, not just our actions. So, if we are to keep this commandment, we must do so at the heart level. That is where these adulterous actions begin anyways. That is what Christ says in Mark 7:21 when he says, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery. . ." So, if we are to keep this command, we must deal first with its root in our hearts.
- d. And how do we do that? Well, Christ instructs us as Christians that we must take severe and drastic action to cut off everything which causes us to sin. This is not Jesus calling us to deal with sin so as to clean ourselves up and therefore make ourselves right with God by making ourselves sinless. It kind of sounds like that if you don't read the rest of Jesus' words here. But that is not what Jesus is saying. He is calling for a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees – which were the most righteous and moral people around in Jesus' day. What God requires is a righteousness which reaches into the inner man. God requires a new heart – a pure heart. In fact, that is what Jesus said in verse 8, in those famous beatitudes – Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- e. Well, we just held Jesus' teaching on the 7th commandment in front of our faces and saw in the mirror of the Word of the wickedness of our sin at the heart level. What thinking teenager and above in the room didn't internally cringe when we read verses 27-30? We are all guilty of this heart level breaking of the 7th commandment. Therefore, none of us are pure in heart and none of us will see God. And left to ourselves, this is completely true. But God has not left us to ourselves. Not only does he demand we be pure in heart to be right with Him, but he also provides a way for us to be pure before Him.
- f. In 1 Corinthians 6 we learn that no matter what our sexual sin has been we can be cleansed and justified through our completely pure and holy Lord. In verse 9 we read, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."
- g. Friends, we are all in that list. Outside of Christ we are identified by our sin. It dominates us and it destroys us. But Christ Jesus came as God in human flesh. He lived in perfect purity and holiness in full obedience to every part of God's Law.

He faced the lures and temptations to sin and yet he remained completely holy. And He became the pure and perfect sacrifice for sin. As Paul will say later in this book, in chapter 15, the gospel by which you are being saved is this – “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”

- h. Are you cleansed in Christ? Have you been made pure in heart by His saving grace? Have you turned from your sinful and rebellious pursuit of pleasure outside of Christ? Have you, by faith, looked to Christ Jesus as your only hope to give you new life, to wash you, to sanctify you, to justify you before the thrice holy God? If you have not, may today be the day of your salvation.
- i. Christian – if you are cleansed in Christ, then 1 Corinthians 6 goes on to call you to the same radical action that Jesus called us to in Matthew 5. In verse 13 it says, “The body is no meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” And in verse 15 it says, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!”
- j. And so in verse 18 it says, “Flee from sexual immorality.” And in verses 19-20 it says, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

Conclusion: So beloved, within the body of Christ, the Church, the sacred union between husband and wife is to be cherished and guarded at every turn. Husbands and wives – turn your attention to your own garden. Nourish and cherish and enjoy the trusting intimacy that God has designed for you to find in one another alone. All of us, whether married or not, must pull the weeds of discontentment as soon as you see them break above the surface. Flee from all avenues and lures which would draw you away from purity of heart. Go after the root causes of worship, and faith, and contentment, and rightly representing God. Make those your aim and rely upon the Spirit of God to empower your holiness. Seek the Lord while He may be found. Beloved – glorify God with your bodies, with your thoughts, and with your heart! Let’s pray.