

# Do Not Commit Adultery

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Sermon Series:  
Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 5:18

***Weddings are dangerous. On the most important day of your life, expectations run high - and dangers lurk around every corner. Anything can happen.***

Before we begin today, I want to make a disclaimer. This sermon isn't just for married people—it's for single people, too! Faithfulness is part of all important relationships in your life. So, singles, don't tune out! A second and final comment: you have an unlikely preacher today. I'm the marriage rookie on the pastoral staff. Steve and I have been married five years. And I'm a pregnant marriage rookie at that. This is proof that God has a sense of humor!

Let us now listen to God's Word, as we find it in Deuteronomy 5:18: "You shall not commit adultery." Let us pray:

*Loving God,*

*You are faithful to us, according to your Word. We confess that we waver in our faithfulness to you and to others. Speak to us today through your Word, so that we might be faithful as you are faithful. In your holy name we listen, Amen.*

**W**eddings are dangerous. On the most important day of your life, expectations run high—and dangers lurk around every corner. Anything can happen.

At every wedding rehearsal I lead, I go through a tug-of-war in my mind. How should I best prepare this couple and their guests for the adventures of the next day? Should I tell the bride that she could trip over her dress on the steps? Should I tell the father-of-the-bride that he won't want to leave his daughter—and I'll nudge him until he does? Should I tell them about the dangerous possibility of all—that the rings may roll or be forgotten? Most of the time, I decide to

divulge that the rings are dangerous. They are small, they can be forgotten, they can roll.

Some of you have never considered this particular danger before. You may need convincing. I only have to go back to a wedding I officiated at last year for an example. The best man wasn't at his best that day. His primary tasks were to get the groom to the wedding and to bring the rings along. Right after the vows, I asked the couple, with my hands held out: "What do you bring as signs of your promise?" In the following moment, there was a deep and uncomfortable silence. I looked at the best man, the best man looked at the groom, the bride looked at the groom and then the best man. And, then, someone laughed anxiously, another giggled nervously. It felt like I was living the moment in slow motion. I knew this moment could come: the dangerous rings didn't roll, they were simply forgotten completely. So, I confessed that we didn't have the rings but I would pray over them in abstinence: *By your blessing, O God, may these rings be to this couple symbols of unending love and faithfulness, reminding them of the covenant promises they have made this day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

By the end of the prayer, the wedding coordinator had found the rings and pressed them into my hand—just in time to be put on with these familiar words: *This ring I give you, as a sign of my promise, and with all that I am, and with all that I have, I honor you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

***God is all about steadfast love and faithfulness. You and I are called to be like God, but we fall so short, so often.***

***This deterioration in marriage—as well as in other relationships—begins with small steps, and turn into bigger patterns.***

The best man had the best intentions that day, but he forgot the rings. If we're honest, we're not so different from the best man. Many of us are prone to forget the rings, to forget the promises that we've made to God and to our spouses. Rings are the symbol of today's commandment. Both say, "Be faithful."

Let's delve into the seventh commandment in more detail. In Deuteronomy 5:18, God says: "You shall not commit adultery." That's it. God offers no further explanation. The bond between husband and wife is an exclusive, closed bond. No one else is welcome.

This commandment is connected to the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," as Chris Falls of the Friendship Class reminded us last Sunday. There's only one God! The exclusive bond between husband and wife is like the bond between God and his people, Israel. No one else is welcome, no other gods.

Some of you may be feeling burdened already—with the heaviness of the topic at hand. Maybe you need a Biblical pep-talk. If you need to feel better about yourself, look at the Israelites. Recall that they were slow to get the message about fidelity, and were quick to turn to other gods. Aaron, Moses' brother, made an idol, a golden calf, while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments from God. When Moses descended from the mountain and saw what was going on, he was angry and threw down the two tablets the commandments were written on. Then, Moses fasted, prayed and begged for God's forgiveness. When God gave Moses the replacement copy, the first thing God said was this: "The Lord, the Lord, A God

merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). You heard correctly. The first thing God chose to say was not "you idiots!"—but was to describe Himself as abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Do those words sound familiar? "May these rings be symbols of unending love and faithfulness, reminding them of the covenant promises they have made this day." God is all about steadfast love and faithfulness. You and I are called to be like God, but we fall so short, so often.

What makes us prone to be unfaithful? On the wedding day, it seems the furthest thing from any-one's mind. In the days, months, years and decades after the wedding, the way we relate to our spouses can change. Little hurts can fester, our hopes can diminish, and our shared lives can whittle away. The bottom line is that sin can pile up. This deterioration in marriage—as well as in other relationships—begins with small steps and turns into bigger patterns.

Dr. John Gottman, a leading psychologist focusing on marriage, describes some of these dangerous patterns as the four horsemen: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling.

**Criticism** is familiar to most of us, and includes comments such as "you are always so \_\_\_\_\_," "you don't really care."

**Contempt** is a level beyond criticism. It's toxic disrespect and belittling, in word and deed. For example, "you are a terrible spouse."

**Defensiveness** is my personal favorite, and is the art of blaming someone else: "No, I didn't do \_\_\_\_\_. I was just too busy. You had time, why didn't you do it?"

**Stonewalling** is the avoidance of the big issues in your marriage,

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involving distance and disengagement.

With these dangerous patterns as a backdrop, you or I can be tempted to commit adultery. Someone's casual interest can turn into an emotional connection, which can turn into an emotional affair, which can turn into a sexual affair. Longing for unconditional love can lead us to wander. The grass looks greener on the other side—and it certainly looks easier than working on an existing marriage.

Statistics tell us that most of us in this room have not committed adultery. A few have, most haven't. Lest anyone feel confident, Jesus explains in Matthew 5:27-28: "You have heard it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus tells us that even a sinful glance can constitute adultery. With that high a bar, you and I miss the mark.

The price of adultery is high—whether committed by thought or desire, word or action. In adultery, a sacred covenant is violated, relationships and trusts are broken. Trust is broken between husband and wife, within a family. But the price of adultery isn't just private grief and anguish. The trust of the community is broken, too. The bonds of marriage are the building blocks of our community. When marriages break, the fabric of the community also unravels. We know this well in our very own church community over the last year. The sexual misconduct of one of our former pastors was an incredibly heavy price to pay—for the people directly involved, and also for our community. Bonds of trust are

easy to break and challenging to repair. They take God's power to heal.

Since this commandment is easy to break and challenging to keep, let's focus the rest of this message on the latter. This personal challenge to be faithful requires humility: a willingness to confess our own sins (not the sins of others), and a desire to work on ourselves, with God's help. To those of you who are single today: As I claimed in the beginning, this commandment is not just for married people. There are ways for you to keep this commandment. You are a part of a wide range of people: young, never married, engaged, separated or divorced, single parent, widow(er). I realize that this is a bittersweet message for some of you today. I invite you to think about the most important relationships in your life (with God, family, friends, co-workers, neighbors). Pick out one relationship that needs work—and consider the biggest thing that impedes that relationship. It may be one of the four horsemen or another pattern.

At the end of this message, I want you to take time to pray about two things:

What pattern does God want you to change about yourself? Maybe it's one of the four horsemen of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling. Or perhaps it's another pattern.

What kind of person does God want you to become?

To those of you who are married today: I invite you to take off your wedding band. (If you have one, it comes off.) Hold the ring in your hand or turn in around your finger. It doesn't begin or end anywhere, It is a symbol of God's steadfast love and faithfulness for you, and your love and faithfulness towards your spouse. At

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***The true adventure, the extreme sport, is in the keeping of promises—not in the dreaming and hoping of someone of something better out there.***

the end of this message, I want you to take time to pray about the same two things:

What pattern does God want you to change about yourself to strengthen your marriage?

What kind of person does God want you to become?

Use your ring to help you pray. When you are finished praying, I invite you to put your ring back on, or have your spouse put it back on, remembering God’s faithfulness and the promises that you made on your wedding day. After worship, you may want to share with your spouse what you prayed about.

Before we pray, I want to remind you of a couple in this congregation, Dave and Freddie Coulter. Dave passed away last year and Freddie passed away this month. They had been married for over 50 years. For their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, their children gave them a trophy for succeeding in the “extreme sport of marriage.” (Yes, those were the exact words on the trophy.) They brought the trophy to a marriage seminar—proudly showing it off to a room full of marriage rookies. I won’t forget their joyful smiles as they held the trophy—the symbol of the work of their life together, by the grace of God.

The true adventure, the extreme sport, is in the keeping of promises, not in the dreaming and hoping of someone or something better out there. The way to participate in the adventure is to ask God to help you become the person God made you to be—to grow in grace.

I invite all of us—single and married—to take these next minutes to pray:

What pattern does God want you to change about yourself?

Criticism, contempt, defensive-ness, stonewalling or another pattern?

What kind of person does God want you to become?

If you are married, use your rings to help you pray. Be careful—they tend to roll and be forgotten! Let us pray:

*God, you have spoken to us this morning. Many of us have heard your voice, loud and clear.*

*Some of us are still listening and waiting. You have received our confessions, and shown us sinful patterns that you long for us to change. Forgive us, heal us, and make us new people. Give us a sense of the new person you made us to be, help us become that person. Bless all who are single this morning, help them to be faithful in the important relationship of their lives. Bless all who are married this morning. Strengthen each marriage represented here by helping each person grow. Help us to be faithful, as you are faithful. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

