

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

All Saints' Sunday (Series C)

Lessons for the Day: Revelation 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

The Thrill of the Chaste (Sixth Commandment)

November 3, 2019

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.”

You shall not commit adultery. What does this mean? *We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other.* (SC, 6th Commandment)

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

There have been more than a few studies of late that suggest that the number one reason why people are turning away from the church is because they do not agree with the church's views of sexuality. Much of that comes with our society's insistence upon LGBTQ rights, but it is also our view of monogamy (that we should have only one spouse) or the idea that sex should be reserved for marriage that doesn't resonate with a world that thinks that the church has no right to say anything about sex. We know that there are political movements in both the US and Canada that are designed to punish churches by removing their charitable status if they do not accept same-sex marriage or are opposed to the world's view of gender and sexuality, specifically the LGBTQ agenda.

If ever we needed the guidance of this commandment, it is in our day and age. God created us to be male and female. He made us different from each other, even as He created us for each other. He created us to be sexual beings. In fact, the very first thing we hear God say to Adam and Eve is, “have sex”. I realize that He wasn't quite that blunt. He told them: ***“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.”*** (Genesis 1:28, ESV) But the only way to do that was to have sex.

There is something very wonderful about the gift of sexuality that God has given to us. But, if this gift of God is not used properly, it is more harmful than beneficial to us. That is exactly why we need the guidance and direction that God provides in the sixth commandment: ***You shall not commit adultery.*** Not only does our obedience to this commandment keep us from the dark side of sexuality, but it helps us to know and enjoy the blessings of marriage and sexuality as the gifts God has intended them to be.

God created sex as a gift for the special relationship we know as marriage. God's purpose was that a man and a woman would come together as one, in a bond of faithfulness and commitment that would last forever. But sinful mankind likes to think that sex was our idea. Maybe that is why this commandment is the one people feel free to violate. There has definitely been a change over the years in terms of what even the church has been willing to say regarding human sexuality, and many denominations have issued statements on sexuality that are far removed from the biblical truth. There are churches today which condone homosexuality, even though God has condemned it in the strongest of terms. People live together in common-law relationships and think there is nothing wrong with this because it is a matter of personal choice in a world that no longer needs the confines of traditional marriage. Relationships are fluid. They come and go. The gender of the partners changes at will. In fact, when it comes to sex today, it seems that anything goes, as long as it is good for you.

But God has a far different view on the whole issue of sex, sexuality and marriage. It isn't simply a matter of, “If it feels good, do it.” God says to us, in no uncertain terms: ***You shall not commit adultery.*** To adulterate something is to make it impure by mixing it with something else, such as adding ink to clear water. To commit adultery is normally thought of being unfaithful to the marriage bed. There is no denying that this commandment places a strong emphasis on the proper relationship between husband and wife in marriage. There is no more important a relationship, and God protects it and sets boundaries for it with this commandment. But the commandment also deals with anything in thought, word or deed that makes impure that which God has made pure. It deals with anything that dirties or adulterates God's

pure and wonderful gift of sexuality and which stains or soils the love and faithfulness that are to exist between husband and wife. That is why Luther's explanation of this commandment says: *We should fear and love God so that we may lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honour each other.*

This commandment speaks to husband and wife about the importance of a faithful marital relationship, but it also speaks to all of us as sexual beings—whether single or married, youth or adult, divorced or widowed. When I was growing up, we learned the meaning of this commandment with the words: *We should fear and love God that we may lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed, and each love and honour his spouse.* I think there is great importance in that word *chaste*. To be chaste is to be pure in character and conduct. It is the opposite of indecency. A person who is chaste is not the one who does not have or enjoy a sexual relationship; rather, it refers to someone who knows how to use God's gift of sex in the proper way. And the truth is, there is a real thrill in chastity in the proper sense. More than a few studies of sexuality discovered that those who reported the highest degree of satisfaction with their sex lives were not those of the "free love" philosophy, but those who were married to their first and only spouse, and who had never cheated on that spouse. Another study found that those with the highest degree of sexual satisfaction were those who had saved themselves for marriage, rather than those who had experimented before marriage. It is also interesting to note that we are discovering, as time goes on, that the most stable marriages belong to those who didn't live together first. In fact, those who do live together are more likely to divorce than those who didn't!

Sadly, that is being set aside with the propaganda that we see all around us on television, in movies, and which we hear promoted in music and the rallies that are supposed to free us from sexual oppression. But if that is working, why is it that so many people change their partners as often as they change their socks? Why is it that those who were an 'item' yesterday have moved on to something better?

Paul tells us in our text that God wants us to *abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust.* God gives this commandment to remind us that He has established the importance of the marital relationship, which is the highest of all relationships except the relationship that we are to have with God Himself. The union of husband and wife in a proper sexual relationship is a testimony to the oneness we have with God. Today we celebrate All Saints' Sunday. We remember that those departed saints enjoy a special oneness with the God who created them; with the Saviour who redeemed them; with the Spirit, who led them to faith. We will soon come to the altar to partake of the Lord's Supper. As we do, we remember what the word, "Communion" means: it means that we are together as one because we are one as Christ unites us with Himself. God uses the sanctify of marriage, and the purity He calls us to in Christ, as a testimony to the greater oneness we have with Him. It is a oneness that cost Him dearly; for it is only through God the Son giving His life on the cross for us that our impurity can be washed away. It is because He loved us, in spite of our unfaithfulness, that we are restored into that oneness with Him. That oneness is established as the resurrected, victorious Christ gives us His very body and blood; as He gives Himself to us as a bridegroom gives himself to his bride.

God calls us to faithfulness, for He is faithful to us. This is why Paul reminds us: *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God."* God's purposes for us as male and female calls us to turn from sexual sins. This includes consensual sins such as fornication, pornography, and homosexual behaviour. It includes coercive sexual sins such as rape, incest, sexual child abuse, and other sexual assaults (which also violate the Fifth Commandment). By the way, this is one of the areas in our new catechism which has been vastly expanded. It shows the struggles we have with sexuality. Yet how blessed we are in the thrill of the chaste; when we know the blessing that sex is and can be through our obedience to this commandment.

The right way to view and to use our sexuality is not found in lustfully doing whatever we want, but in knowing true love; the love that starts with God Himself. In His mercy God has saved us from ourselves, He has set us free from the power that lust and sin have over us. He does it through the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. There is wonderful power for us in this grace of God. Whether we want to admit it or not, we are just as guilty of breaking this commandment as any other commandment. It should also be noted that this sin isn't any worse than any other sin. Where we have failed, we can come to our God with repentant hearts and know that He will forgive us. He will take

away what has adulterized us, which has made us unclean, and with His forgiving grace through the dying and rising Christ, He will make us pure again before Him. In His promises of salvation we find the right way to use and to enjoy our sexuality to the fullest. Through faith in Christ, living in obedience to God's command, we discover the thrill of the chaste, the thrill of Godly marriages and healthy attitudes towards our sexuality as a true gift and blessing from a loving God. Amen.