

The Scarlet Letter - Exodus 20:14

What do you think of when you hear the name Tiger Woods? You used to think golf, but after news broke of his multiple affairs against his wife, Elin Nordegren, you probably think *adultery*.

What is adultery? Listen to this amusing story of a children's pastor in Nebraska:

As children's pastor, I listened as a fourth-grade Sunday school teacher shared a concern. Completing a quarter's lessons on the Ten Commandments, he had asked the kids, "What is the hardest Commandment for you to keep?" to which most of them responded, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." We couldn't understand why fourth graders would find that command a problem until a mother quizzed her son on what he thought committing adultery meant. Without blinking, the boy replied, "Thou shalt not sass back to adults."

The Hebrew word for *adultery* means "having sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse." Sex therapist Peggy Vaughan, author of *The Monogamy Myth*, conservatively estimates that about 60 percent of married men and 40 percent of married women will have an affair at some time during their marriage. It is almost expected. In the tabloids it is certainly celebrated. It is the stuff money is made of. We are definitely on a downward spiral morally.

God's View on Marriage and Sex

Exodus 20:14 makes God's view of marriage and sex very clear. He is not like the politicians hemming and hawing as they try to avoid taking a stand for fear they will lose some voter base. God just says it, and what He says, He means.

1. God declares that marriage is sacred.

This commandment is as much about marriage as it is about sex. It is God making clear what is essential for a healthy and prosperous society. Remember the context in which these words are spoken. It is the establishment of the nation of Israel. God is laying down the rules for a strong and prosperous nation.

Why is marriage so sacred? Look at Genesis 2:2–24.

- a. God ordained marriage (Gen. 2:20):
 - i. for His glory
 - ii. for companionship (Gen. 2:18a)
 - iii. for mutual assistance (Gen. 2:18b)
 - iv. for bearing, nurturing, and training children (Gen.1:28; Deut. 6:4–7)
 - v. as the proper context of human sexuality (Gen. 2:25; Heb. 13:4)
- b. God designed marriage (Gen. 2:24). He told the first couple to leave, cleave, and become one flesh.
- c. God blessed marriage (Gen. 1:27, 28; Matt. 19:4–6).

What does a person do when he or she commits adultery? The adulterer:

- desecrates God's order
- defies God's command
- subverts God's design for marriage
- violates the covenant of marriage (Prov. 2:16, 17; Mal. 2:10–16; Matt. 19:9)
- causes great pain and suffering (Prov. 2:18; 2 Sam. 12; Ps. 51)

God was making a statement to this band of people gathered around Mount Sinai, who were embarking on the creation of a new nation: marriage is sacred.

2. God declares that sex is sacred.

A father was once telling his little boy about the facts of life. About halfway through the father's explanation, the boy interrupted him and asked, "Do you think God knows about all this?"

Not only does God know about it; He *created* it. It was His idea! We have heard that, but it doesn't always translate. A biblical view of sex has been a bit of a stumbling block for Christians. Augustine taught that procreation was the only non-sinful end of the sex act. If a couple had sexual relations for pleasure, it was venially sinful. Sadly, the church and Christianity have been stigmatized as anti-sex.

Sex is not dirty; it is beautiful. It is not a necessary evil; it is God's blessing. Sex is a pure and wonderful thing—when it is practiced God's way, between one woman and one man in a marriage relationship.

Why did God give this commandment to the Jews of that time? Because much like our culture, Canaan's culture was sex crazed. Sex was a religion. The Canaanites had gods and goddesses of sex. Sex symbols were everywhere. They even had cult prostitutes, male and female. The act of sex was an act of worship to their god. It was not sex as the true God ordained it. Sounds like twenty-first-century America. God wanted to make it clear that Israel was to have no part of the pagan culture around them. The pagans' view and practice of sex and its practice could not coexist with God's.

The sixth commandment is God's declaration that *all* sex is to be confined to the marriage relationship. Remember the definition of adultery—having sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse. God is forbidding premarital sex, cohabitation, affairs, and any other sexual relationship outside the bonds of marriage.

The Scarlet Letter

The Scarlet Letter is Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic story of Hester Prynne, a young woman who gives birth to a child after committing adultery. For her punishment she is made to wear a scarlet A on her bosom as she is paraded down the streets, holding her baby. It is the stigma she is forced to wear—for life—for her wrong. The scarlet letter was a sign of shame.

There was a time when there was at least some shame for sexual immorality, but not now. Today the scarlet letter is *v* for *virgin* or *p* for *pure*. You are shamed for not being sexually active.

People proudly are sexually active in or out of marriage! In the 2005 movie *Hitch*, Will Smith plays a guy who wins fame as a relationship expert. In real life, Smith is married to actress Jada Pinkett Smith. His real-life views won't win hearts. Talking about his relationship with his wife, he explained to the *New York Post*:

"In our marriage vows, we didn't say 'forsaking all others.' . . . The vow that we made was that you will never hear that I did something after the fact."

He went on to say:

"If it came down to it, then one [spouse] can say to the other, 'Look, I need to have sex with somebody. I'm not going to if you don't approve of it—but please approve of it.'"

We need to return to the view that adultery is a scarlet letter, not something to celebrate.

On Guard

As believers, we must stand up against the attack on marriage. We must resist the current of society that would sweep us away in a flood of immorality. We must champion God's plan and purpose for marriage and for sex. We must remain pure in a sin-sick world.