

The Ten Commandments:

The Seventh Commandment

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not commit adultery

- Exodus 20:14 (NRSV)

The Seventh Commandment

No linguistic problems

- verb *na'ap*: to commit adultery
 - can have a man or woman as its subject
- distinguished from other verbs:
 - *skb* to sleep with
 - *znh* to commit harlotry/prostitution

Command relates to **adultery**, which in the Old Testament is clearly in a different category than **fornication** (= sex between two unmarried / unbetrothed people)

- eg. punishment for adultery death (Deut 22:22); whereas for seduction of a virgin, marriage or monetary payment required

The Seventh Commandment

Double standard in the definition of adultery
in Patriarchal Israel

- men: sex with another *married* woman
- women: sex with *any other* man

The Seventh Commandment

Extensions to the Commandment

Jesus' extension to the commandment:

“You have heard that 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.”

- Matthew 5:27-28

The Seventh Commandment

Possible Extensions

Fornication

“Out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.”

- Matthew 15:19

“Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the fornicator sins against the body itself.”

- 1 Corinthians 6:18

The Seventh Commandment

At the Heart of the Commandment

Themes at the heart of the Commandment:

- marriage
- sexuality
- fidelity

Marriage

What Constitutes a Marriage?

Scriptures contain many images about marriage

- erotic imagery of the Song of Songs to Son of Sirach 25:13 (there is no wickedness or wrath greater than a woman's)

“There is not a biblical theology of marriage as a unified set of ideas and concepts. Instead, one has to view the richness and diversity of the various early Christian traditions.” (Francis Fiorenza in Systematic Theology)

Marriage

What Constitutes a Marriage?

The Christian sacrament of marriage grew out of the natural institution of marriage primarily by adding elements to it, and has evolved with the natural institution over time

Marriage

The “Natural” or Secular Institution

“Natural” purpose of marriage:

The institution to protect and regulate the sexual and reproductive activities of people

- for the “good” of those directly involved
- for the “good” of society

Marriage

The “Natural” or Secular Institution

More modern developments:

- partners choose each other (“fall in love”) rather than undergoing an “arranged” marriage for political, commercial or other reasons
- effective contraception has removed the necessity of a link between sex and reproduction

Marriage

The “Natural” or Secular Institution

Christian Churches in general (including the Roman Catholic Church) recognize the legitimacy of secular marriages

Marriage

The Christian Institution

1662 Book of Common Prayer:

First, [matrimony] as ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy name

Second, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of the Christ's body.

Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity

Marriage

The Christian Institution

Modern Prayer Book (p. 423) lists:

“intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord”

Marriage

Three Bonds in a Christian Marriage (from Macquarrie)

1. Moral Bond

- begins with the exchange of vows, as they declare their consent before the church

2. Natural Bond

- begins with the sexual consummation of the marriage

3. Sacramental Bond

- begins with the prayers said over them, commending their union to God and seeking divine grace for them

The Moral Bond - Fidelity

Vows:

- to live together in the covenant of marriage, to love, to comfort, to honor, to keep, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful as long as both shall live
- to be sanctified (= set apart) as husband and wife

The Moral Bond - Fidelity

The covenant between God and his people is frequently compared to the covenant between husband and wife in Scriptures

- Hosea invokes images of Israel as an unfaithful wife to God
- commandment against idolatry and commandment against adultery both second on their respective tablets

The Moral Bond - Fidelity

“The solemn obligations undertaken by the marriage partners cannot fail to affect them in the very depths of their being. .

“ (Macquarrie)

- our commitments define us and shape

us

- are both moral and ontological
(involve mystery of being /
existence)

- essential to the attainment of full
personhood

The Moral Bond - Fidelity

“[Marriage vows] establish a relationship so profound that it can never cease to be of moral significance. For they bring into being a new unit, no longer you and I, but we -- and however much we fail to act out this unity, once each of us is committed together with the other to the intention of constituting such a unity, neither can ever be the same again, an entirely independent entity, free from all such ties.”

- John Lucas, *Theology* Vol. 78: 229, 1975

The Natural Bond - Sex

The Seventh Commandment

“points to the recognition that sexuality is enormously wondrous and enormously dangerous. The wonder of sexuality is available in a community only if it is practiced respectfully and under discipline. The danger of sexuality is that it is capable to evoking desires that are destructive of persons and of communal relations. . . . around the subject of freedom and discipline in sexuality we deal with the most intense and elemental mystery of human existence.”

- Walter Brueggemann

The Natural Bond - Sex

“At its best, sexual union is the most complete and intimate reciprocal self-giving of which two persons are capable, making them, in the biblical phrase, ‘one flesh’ (Gen. 2:24). It brings about a relation transcending in its closeness even blood-relationships.”

- John Macquarrie

The Natural Bond - Sex

Sexual union in the context of daily companionship and sharing “profoundly and permanently affects the partners in their inward being.” (Macquarrie)

This psycho-physical sexual union adds a new bond to marriage that perhaps cannot be totally destroyed. It creates:

- a mutual belonging
- a new community

Seventh Commandment declares God’s creational intention which “links a positive role for sexuality with commitment and loyalty” (Freiheit)

The Natural Bond - Sex

Another part of the natural bond are the children that arise from the sexual union
- the most visible example of the permanent effects of sexual union

The Sacramental Bond

A Sacramental Universe

“Teach me, my God and King, in all things
thee to see”

- George Herbert, Anglican poet

“Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round and plunk blackberries.”

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Sacramental Bond

A Sacramental Universe

“To me, the meanest flower that blows can
give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for
tears.”

- William Wordsworth

“Ever since the creation of the world his
eternal power and divine nature, invisible
though they are, have been understood
and seen through the things he has
made.” (NRSV)

- St. Paul, Romans 1:20

The Sacramental Bond

A Sacramental Universe

Duality of Experience:

- we are embodied beings existing in a very material world
- we can feel intimations of beauty, mystery, meaning through this material world (a bush, a flower, a sunset. . .)

The Sacramental Bond

A Sacramental Universe

A “sacramental” view of the universe links the two pieces of this duality:

- the material world is good
- the material world can be “door to the sacred”

The Sacramental Bond

A Sacramental Universe: Fundamental basis

material world is good:

- created by God
- in the Incarnation, God freely took on embodied existence, lived in space and time

material world can be a door to the sacred:

- God is both:
 - transcendent reality beyond the world he has made
 - immanent reality who dwells in this world and is active in it

The Sacramental Bond

A Sacramental Universe: natural sacraments

There are many “natural sacraments:” physical events, actions or rituals, that are “doors” to feelings, inner realities, meaning beyond the mechanics of the act or rite:

- touching, embracing another person
- making love
- sharing a meal together
- giving a gift
- gestures of hospitality and welcome

The Sacramental Bond

The Sacraments

Church has defined seven “sacramental”
rites or rituals: “Sacraments”

two Sacraments of the Gospel:

- Baptism
- Holy Eucharist

other Sacramental Rites that evolved under
guidance of the Holy Spirit:

- Confirmation
- Ordination
- Holy Matrimony
- Reconciliation of a Penitent
(Confession)
- Unction (Anointing of the Sick)

The Sacramental Bond

The Sacraments

1. outward or visible part = “**matter**” and/or “**form.**”
 - the material object and/or physical action that is the “door” or “portal” to the sacred
 - Catechism: “the outward and visible signs”
2. inward spiritual reality = “*res*”
 - heart of the sacrament
 - the action of God on the human spirit
 - Catechism: “the inward and spiritual grace”

The Sacramental Bond

Marriage as a Sacrament

The ministers of the sacrament are the couple themselves, not the priest

res: divine grace that blesses, aids the union

matter:

- the joining of hands at the ceremony
- the exchange of rings
- the act of sexual union that consummates the marriage

The Sacramental Bond

Sexuality in marriage as a “natural sacrament”

Sexuality in marriage can be a “natural sacrament” - the visible, “material” expression of the inner reality of love between the partners

“Marriage creates family, which is the locus for the preservation of Judaism and the Jewish people. In this setting, sexual intercourse is a religious act equivalent to prayer or Torah study, and the home becomes a holy place.” (Rabbi Peter Knobel in **Broken Tablets**)

Adultery as a Violation of the Bonds of Marriage

in a narrow sense: adultery is a violation of the bonds of marriage by having sexual intercourse outside of the marriage

in a broader sense: adultery is:

any violation of the *moral bond*: our covenantal commitment to a mutuality that is life-giving, nurturing, enhancing, respectful

any violation of the *natural bond*: a slap, a punch, a sneer, a shove; the withholding of physical affection, tenderness and care

Family

Marriage is the founding of a new family:

- the fundamental unit of community in society
- the locus of safe human intimacy
- the means by which human race perpetuates itself
- first means by which our values are transmitted to future generations
 - in particular, “the knowledge and love of the Lord”

The Seventh Commandment seeks also to protect the integrity of the family

Divorce

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

- Matthew 5:31-32 (NRSV)

Divorce

Context of Jesus' statement:

- in Jesus' day, a man could divorce his wife for nearly any reason, so long as he gave her the certificate (the requirement dating back to Moses). Women could not divorce at all.
- an ongoing debate between two Rabbinical schools of the time: Hillel school (more lenient) and Schammai school (extreme cases only)

Jesus' interpretation can be seen as offering protection for women

Divorce

“except on the ground of unchastity”

- two suggested meanings of the Greek

porneia:

- incest

- adultery: suggesting divorce is allowed
when the marriage is already broken.

Divorce

Issue is complex, for adultery and divorce are both defined in the context of marriage. But what is a “marriage”?

- the “legal” institution
- the genuine, ongoing relationship that includes an intact:
 - *moral bond* (fidelity, the covenantal, lifelong commitment to honoring, respecting, cherishing, nurturing each other)
 - *natural bond* (sharing the most intimate aspects of themselves as sexual beings only with each other as the ultimate expression of their love and fidelity)

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