

Guarding Family Life: 1. Distinctive Purity for Covenant Families

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[0 : 00] We're going to come to God's Word now and to our studies in the book of Deuteronomy. And we're reading this morning in chapter 22, the second half, from verse 13.

If you have one of the Blue Church Bibles, Visitor's Bibles, that's page 164. And we read from verse 13 to the end of the chapter.

And we're moving now on from the implications and the exposition of the sixth commandment, to guard and to keep human life, to the seventh commandment, which is all about the guarding and the keeping of marriage and the human family.

And so typically, as we've been seeing in this exposition of the law, it's not exhaustive, but several cases are put before us just to show how that command applies in these different circumstances in a very practical fashion.

So Deuteronomy chapter 22 and verse 13, if a man takes a wife and goes into her and then hates her and accuses her of misconduct and brings a bad name upon her, saying, I took this woman and when I came near her, I did not find in her evidence of virginity, then the father of the young woman and her mother shall take and bring out the evidence of her virginity to the elders in the city gate.

[1 : 23] And the father of the young woman shall say to the elders, I gave my daughter to this man to marry and he hates her. And behold, he is accused her of misconduct, saying, I did not find in your daughter evidence of virginity.

And yet this is the evidence of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloak before the elders of the city. Then the elders of that city shall take the man and whip him and they shall find him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman because he has brought a bad name upon a virgin of Israel.

And she shall be his wife. He may not divorce her all his days. But if the thing is true, that evidence of virginity was not found in the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house and the men of the city shall stone her to death with stones because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father's house.

So you shall purge the evil from your midst. If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die. The man who lay with the woman and the woman.

So you shall purge the evil from Israel. If there's a betrothed virgin and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death with stones.

[2 : 49] The young woman, because she didn't cry for help, though she was in the city. And the man, because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman.

She has committed no offense punishable by death, for this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor because he met her in the open country. And though the betrothed young woman cried for help, there was no one to rescue her.

If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed and handles her, the word there seized is not the same as in verse 25, quite different. And handles her, touches her, and lies with her.

And they're found. Then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman 50 shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has violated her.

[3 : 53] He may not divorce her all his days. A man shall not take his father's wife so that he does not uncover his father's nakedness.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Deuteronomy 22, page 164, if you have one of the church Bibles.

As we've said many times now, our God is the God of life. He created all life, and especially human life, made in his image to flourish under his blessing. And God's law, God's instruction, is therefore for life.

And that's what we've seen in chapters 19 to 22 of Deuteronomy. The implications of the sixth commandment are to preserve and to promote and to cherish life, and they are widespread and pervasive.

But likewise, for true human flourishing, then the family, which is the cradle of life, must also be very clearly cherished and guarded. And hence the seventh commandment, forbidding adultery, which is given to protect and preserve the creation ordinance of marriage.

[5 : 12] And it's the implications of this command which are clearly the concern of the rest of chapter 22 here. And the focus is on the distinctive purity that God requires in marriage and in family life for all of those who bear his name.

Now we need to note, I think, three things as we begin this morning. First of all, clearly some of the sentences for these crimes here are very severe. And that tells us that sexual sin is very serious to God because it's not merely a private matter.

It's something that affects the whole family, the whole community, and indeed the whole nation's life in Israel. And that's still very much so today. Of course, we don't live in a theocracy where the Bible's instruction is the civil law of the land.

So obviously, the key point here is not that the civil punishment should be the same today, but rather that we're to recognize that the principle is precisely the same today.

That sexual relationships belong in marriage between a man and a woman. Period. That is absolutely unmistakable here and everywhere else throughout the whole of Scripture. Second, there are obviously clear cultural differences between our society today and this patriarchal society in ancient Israel or indeed patriarchal societies in other parts of the world today.

[6 : 37] But again, that does not disqualify the message for us or indeed for any other society. We are to see what these laws demanded and what and whom they protect and punish and so on.

And I don't think feminists should be up in arms about any of these laws either because in fact, they display a very careful mix between the particular protection for women who tend to be more vulnerable than men in this area and also equality for women under the law showing that there's no bias towards men's behavior nor is there any excuse for women when their conduct is wrong and censurable.

And we'll see that. And thirdly, this whole section reminds us, I think, that sexual behavior is no private matter. It affects the whole society which is why here, as you'll see in verse 18 and verse 21 and so on, the elders of the city, that is the civil authorities, are to be involved in healthy and proper conduct, making sure that it is observed.

And that when it goes wrong, these things are right, as verse 21 says, matters of public outrage. An outrageous thing happens in Israel. And so as one scholar puts it, the Old Testament stands against the modern idea of private sin which doesn't hurt anyone else in this area.

And indeed, many wrong aspects of sexual conduct are not merely a threat to the integrity of society, although they are, and they are a folly going against God's plain ordering of things for this world.

[8 : 18] But it's not only that. This chapter tells us that even more seriously, these things are an offense directly against God himself. That's why three times we're told here again that evil must be purged from the midst.

Anybody who would claim to belong to God must realize that this kind of sin is a direct assault on God himself. And that means we have to take these words very seriously as Christians.

And if we want to see health and happiness flourishing in our human society, in our community, in our families, if we're to not invite disaster in these areas, we must pay heed to the creator's pattern for human flourishing.

Now, not every eventuality is covered here, of course. Once again, what we have is a number of paradigm laws, a whole range of situations that make very clear to us what is right and what is

wrong.

But also, the clear care and the clear discrimination that is always required if true justice is going to prevail. So, five distinct situations are discussed here.

[9 : 26] Virginitly and adultery and rape and fornication and incest. But I hope for the sake of clarity we're going to look at these under four headings. Pure sex, which is always what is to be promoted.

Predatory sex, which is always to be prevented and punished. Premature sex, which must always be regularized. and perverse sex, which must always be universally shunned.

So first, look at verses 13 to 24, this long section, which deal with the issue of virginitly beforehand and fidelity within marriage.

And it's absolutely plain, isn't it, here, that the blueprint from God for human flourishing must be pure sex. That is, celibacy before and out with marriage and chastity within marriage.

verses 13 to 21, you can see, are a clear celebration of virginitly. The term is five times there. And an equally clear condemnation on sexual laxity, which you'll see in verse 21 is not called liberation, but is called outrageous whoring.

[10 : 35] It's rather strong and ugly language, isn't it? You might find it offensive. But the fact is that God is much more caring about sin than he is about our sensibilities.

And very often we find in the Bible, don't we, that God simply calls a spade a spade. And what he's saying here is that in the sexual realm we either keep ourselves pure or we prostitute ourselves.

There's no middle ground. The Lord is unfashionably binary, don't you think, in this area. He wouldn't get a job in the National Trust anymore. He certainly wouldn't get a job in the BBC. But there's no naivety about the Lord either, is there?

Because his servant Moses will not play let's pretend in discussing these things. Not let's pretend that the world is all nice, sugar and spice.

That we never need to talk about ugly things or face up to reality. No. And so instead, you see, of a simple verse here that just says there should be no sex before marriage or outside marriage, what we're presented with is this whole scenario of false accusations.

[11 : 37] And of a public court case that has to find the truth. And that serves to ram home just what a serious matter this is for the Lord and indeed must be for the whole of his people.

So see what these verses emphasize for us. First of all, purity is the overriding issue, isn't it? Virginitly is what it's all about. Celibacy before and outwith the marriage bond.

Verse 14 is clear. That is how it always ought to be. A man marrying a woman ought to be able to rely on her sexual purity and her family's responsibility is to ensure that.

So that as verse 16 describes, they give their daughter to this man in good faith as a virgin. Now of course, the same is also implied for a man because of the way we have these selective example cases.

That's not said here in this verse explicitly, but it's clearly implicit, isn't it? In the punishments that are given to men in the rest of this passage. They don't think it's being unfairly harsh here on the girl.

[12 : 37] Well, it's not. Nevertheless, it is clearly a very serious thing for a woman to violate her purity in this way. And verses 20 to 21 are clear, aren't they?

It's very severe punishment, capital punishment. In fact, that is a mark of a woman's equal status before God alongside a man.

That's why she's punished severely here because she's not just a chattel. She's not just a piece of property that belongs to a man, either her father or her husband. No, she is a responsible human being in God's image.

And she deserves to be punished because of that and because she has violated that responsibility. So harsh as it is, and in these days, it was a world where civil penalties were much starker than they tend to be in our society.

In fact, it actually speaks of a woman's dignity and her status as a human being in God's image. As does, indeed, the whole tenor of verses 13 to 19 because, again, as well as this emphasis on purity, there is also a great focus on protection.

[13 : 44] Protection of the woman from a slanderous accusation that would be dangerous to her. If anything, these verses tend to assume, don't they, that the man is more likely to be the sinner, selfishly finding fault with her and falsely accusing her.

And that's why there's such a severe penalty if that accusation is found to be malicious and false. It was to be investigated and it was to be defended. The family are to present the evidence of her virginity.

That is most likely the cloak from the wedding night with evidence of the blood from that first intercourse rupturing the hymen in keeping with what the tradition of the age would be.

Again, the Bible is much more sort of down to earth and unfazed and talking about these sorts of delicate issues than we tend to be. But you see, this is how a slandered woman is going to be protected.

And it's how the slanderer is going to be punished, verse 18. He's going to be whipped and he's going to be fined. Fined actually a very large sum. It's double the 50 shekels, which was the usual bride price.

[14:47] And notice verse 19. He is never allowed to divorce this woman again for any reason whatsoever. So that punishment must be a very strong deterrent to any man not to think that he could treat a woman shamefully like that and get away with it.

There's a strong smack, I think, of the *lex talionis*, the eye for an eye about this law, isn't there? Because he is getting exactly the reverse of what he's wanting. He's wanting damages and he's wanting divorce.

And what he gets is a very strong beating and a fine and the opposite of divorce. He can never divorce her. So there's a clear emphasis, isn't there, on purity as the standard, but because it is a fallen world, on protection for a vulnerable woman and on punishment when the guilt is there upon the man.

And also, notice the emphasis on preservation of marriage. Even in these difficult circumstances, that was hardly an easy thing to overcome.

I'm sure we understand. But you see, for the woman in that situation, as damaged goods she would be in the eyes of society, no other marriage would likely be possible for her.

[16:03] So even for her in that unhappy situation, the stability and the protection of marriage was far, far better for her than for divorce. And who knows, where there is forgiveness, where there is a will to make amends, and especially when there is clear support in society all around for preserving marriage.

Well, great things can be overcome. Many great hurdles can often be overcome to bring again strength and stability to a marriage, even in very difficult circumstances. The problem in our society, of course, is that there is not that support in the community around very often to preserve.

But there is great realism here. This is instruction for a life in a far from perfect world.

This is instruction with measures for things when they do go wrong. But how much better if the if there in verse 13 never had to be?

And how much better if there is purity, if there is celibacy before marriage, so that this situation will never even arise in the first place. And likewise, as verses 22 to 24 make clear, how much better if there is chastity within marriage, which is equally promoted and protected here for the good of all.

[17:27] And therefore in a fallen world, which must be punished if it's not honored when adultery does occur. Verse 22 speaks clearly of an adulterous liaison. And notice again, both the man and the woman are held equally responsible.

Even though there's no naivety, there's no failure to recognize that men and women are often at fault in different ways and have different responsibilities in the sexual arena. That's teased out in verses 23 and 24 where it's made clear that a betrothed woman, although she wasn't yet technically completely married, was in fact as good as being another man's wife.

She's called the other man's wife at verse 24. And so a man can't just say, well, all's fair and love and war. No, he's responsible not to sin against his neighbor. He's sinning against him if he does that.

And even if it is the man who does all the pursuing, the woman also has a responsibility here. She has opportunity to shut it off. She's in the city. She can cry for help and people are there to help her, but she didn't do that.

And so she's obviously without excuse. See, what God is doing here is giving no wriggle room to avoid the blame. No, it takes two to tango, he's saying, in that situation.

[18:43] So don't deceive yourself. And adultery is a deadly thing just because it is so deadly for marriage and for family life and for society as a whole.

That's why the prophets rail against adultery as a social evil as well as just a sexual sin because it destroys. It destroys families. It destroys children. It destroys economies.

I mean, one of the reasons that we have such high house prices and such a housing crisis today is because so many families are split and living separately. One of the chief reasons for child poverty in western societies today is because of the rupture of families through adultery often.

And so God's word to us, you see, is not only not to be sinners in this whole area, but not to be fools. Read Proverbs chapter 6 later on when you go home and you will see the utter ruin that comes from adultery.

Can a man carry fire next to his chest and not be burned? Or walk on hot coals and his foot not be scorched? So is he who goes into his neighbor's wife.

[19 : 54] He who commits adultery lacks sense. He who does it destroys himself. Wounds and dishonor he will get. And his disgrace will not be wiped away.

Well, friends, that is the truth. They'll talk to men and women sometimes who have been burned like that, who bear the lasting scars, and they'll tell you it is so.

And their families will certainly tell you it is so. How pertinent these words of God are for us today, aren't they?

Of course, our world today scorns virginity. Kids at school are lampooned if they say they don't want to be sexually active. Adults are even more scorned if they choose celibacy in life, either because they're not yet married or because perhaps they never will be married.

And adultery, by contrast, is fetid so often in the media and films and TV and so on. A great lifestyle choice to spice up your fading marriage or whatever it is.

[20 : 59] Friends, that is all lies. It is pernicious lies and it is dangerous lies. God says to us, be wise, don't listen to lies.

Pure sex is not only right sex, but it is the only truly good sex. Sex that is good for men and women, for their children, for families, and for the whole of our society.

How much less human misery and how much more human flourishing we would see if only people would trust God's guidance in this area of human life.

But sadly, human beings are very slow to do that and always have been. And that's also true even among God's people. And so God's word is full of realism with instruction and laws to mitigate the evil that people can inflict upon others and upon themselves.

And one evil, of course, that has always been with us is what verses 25 to 27 speak about and that is predatory sex. And the point here couldn't be plainer, could it?

[22 : 07] Forced sex is always wrong and it must be severely punished while at the same time protecting the innocent victim's life and reputation as much as possible.

Verse 25, if a man meets a young woman who's betrothed and seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lies with her shall die. The NIV rightly translates that as rapes her because the word means to use force.

It's clearly a sexual assault. It's rape being talked about. And the severity of that is reinforced in verse 26 where it says it's like a man murdering his neighbor. And the presumption of innocence here is clearly in favor of the woman because, again, this example is deliberately flamed you see in the country.

And the woman is assumed, says verse 27, of screaming for help. It's just that there wasn't any help to be found. And so the verdict is clear and this man should die. And he must die because this crime is a crime like murder, says God.

It's a violent assault on the image of God in the human person in the most intimate way, invading, violating their deepest human nature.

[23 : 22] So let's be very clear about that. No women ever have it coming to them. Just because they may wear suggestive clothing or because some men might think they're loose or they're a slag or whatever other vulgar term predatory men tend to use about women.

No woman has that coming to them. That doesn't excuse women, of course, from sometimes being foolish and behaving irresponsibly. that is foolishness.

They shouldn't do that. But no woman deserves to be raped. And notice here the concern to vindicate this innocent woman. Verses 26 and 27, they sound like a judge's comments in open court, don't they?

Clearly proving her innocence so that there's no lingering suspicion at all that maybe she just brought it on herself. notice there's no repeat of that mantra in verse 21 or 22 or 24 about purging the evil from the midst.

Clearly purging evil is very important, but so is protecting innocent life and not shedding innocent blood. We've seen that. Justice is the first thing that's important, not just deterrence of others.

[24 : 41] if both the rapist and the abused person were put to death, well that would still be a very great deterrent, wouldn't it? But it wouldn't be just. Nor would just punishing the abused woman, as is what happens in many countries today under Sharia law when a man rapes her, she's the one who's punished.

No, her reputation must be vindicated, says God, and publicly so that that terrible ordeal doesn't blight the whole of the rest of her future life so that her marriage to her betrothed husband doesn't have to stop and not take place.

So the innocent woman here is clearly protected and the guilty man is punished. But, again, there's no naivety here either. God is not assuming that all women are sinless or that there's no possibility that a woman can share in the guilt.

No, that's implied exactly by the way that these laws are paired together. So you have to read verses 25 to 27 along with verses 23 to 24 where the example takes place in the city.

And here the woman doesn't cry for help and therefore she was compliant in the sexual liaison. In other words, she can't use the defense that oh, I was raped because in fact she could have cried for help and she didn't do so.

[26 : 05] And we know, don't we, that women can and do make false accusations of rape. In fact, if you've been reading the papers this week, you've been seeing there's been a very celebrated example of just that, a woman who accused five men of raping her and men were put in prison and it was all a sham.

And that can absolutely ruin the reputation of the man who's involved, even if later on he's vindicated, it's often too late. And so again, you see, the presumption of innocence for the woman here must not be something that is taken absolutely, as though a woman could never ever lie, as though she could never herself do something wrong, sleep with a man when she's drunk, and then feel so shamed about it that actually she gets out of it by saying, oh, well, I was raped.

And that's why very difficult questions arise for us, don't they, in this whole area and how we deal with these sort of accusations in society, how to balance rightly the presumption of innocence, while recognizing that people tell falsehoods and lies.

Currently in our law, the accuser of rape, is not given anonymity, but the person who is accused and who reports it is, and the rationale for that is that a woman will be too scared to come forward and make that confession and testimony if her name is going to be in the public eye, and it's a weighty argument, you can understand that.

But on the other hand, a man who is wrongly accused can find that they are tried by media and found guilty in the eyes of the world, even if later on they are vindicated in court.

[27 : 36] And so there's a move for men also who are being accused to have that anonymity. And that also is a powerful argument, it's a very finely balanced thing. But what it shows us above all things is that the trouble is that sin always has an entail, doesn't it?

It always multiplies misery. And when men and women stop behaving according to the pattern that God has rightly set for us, when we think that we know better in this whole realm of sexual relationships, Paul says God gives them over to their own way.

And the result is always a downward spiral of misery. And so there's a real challenge here in these verses, isn't there, for the Christian church to be different.

and even where sin has to be confronted and has to be dealt with, to show both the clarity and the determination to punish sin, but also the real discrimination that is necessary to protect those who are sinned against.

And to prevent the vulnerable from being sinned against. And to prevent the predators who so often will use churches and other places in order to do that.

[28 : 54] And we know that does happen. And we know it has happened often in the Christian church. That's why we need to be careful in the Christian church. We all need to be careful, don't we? We need to be careful, in the words of this passage, not to find ourselves out in the country with a woman who's not our wife.

We need to be careful, especially those who have responsibility in churches, where they go, with whom, and why, and who leads groups, and where they go, and why they go, they don't go. We've got to be realistic in all of these things, haven't we? Because we're all human. And sex is a very powerful force. It's powerful for good, it's God's gift to humanity, but it's also very powerful for evil if it's not used properly.

It's like petrol. In your car's fuel tank, petrol is invaluable, but if you use it to light your barbecue, you will find it's inflammable in a way you never expected.

I once found that out and I lost all my eyebrows. We have to be realistic about the power of sex. And the Bible is, and the Bible delights in sex.

[30 : 10] The Song of Songs is a celebration of sexual activity in marriage, and it is full of the power of joyful, erotic love. It celebrates sex, but it also cautions about sex.

It has a repeating refrain, don't awaken love, don't stir it up until it arises properly. That is, don't get into the realm of aroused sexual activity prematurely, because it belongs within the permanence of the marriage bond, and there alone.

And that's what verses 28 and 29 here focus on, because they're about premature sex, aren't they? Which is not God's pattern. And these verses teach us just as plainly as other parts of scripture, that sex is a gift that comes always with strings attached, with real responsibilities, which are not to be avoided, and that is the responsibility of lifelong marriage.

As I said in the reading, it's important to note here that the verse 28, the word translated seized, is not the same as the word of verse 25. It's quite erroneous to translate that also as rape, because the word doesn't imply that.

The word simply means handle or take hold of. No violence is intended. And you'll notice that it echoes the language of verse 22 about being found, being discovered.

[31 : 40] And so this situation is almost certainly that of an unmarried, unbetrothed young couple getting into premature premarital sex. There's an almost identical verse actually in Exodus 22 verse 16 where it says the man seduces a virgin.

And the outcome is exactly the same. He's to give the bride price for her and he's to make her his wife. And that is what this law prescribes. And it strengthens the protection actually of the young woman and it increases the responsibility on the man because he's got to marry her properly. With all the usual diary arrangements, all the money and all the rest of it, he's not going to get her cheap. Not like a sort of pre-registered car, new but not quite new because she's already been slept with.

No, no, no. You have violated her, God says to the man. And you pay the full price and you do it properly and you must never divorce her. It's not how things should be.

But this situation is not violating the covenant of marriage as adultery does. Nor is it violating the person as a sexual assault does. And so the answer that God gives to premature sexual union is to make it a proper sexual union.

[32 : 51] To regularize that relationship as soon as possible and as properly as possible. Very clear, isn't it? To adapt from Frank Sinatra, sex and marriage go together like a horse and carriage.

That's what it's saying. If you want the one, you must always have the other. If you want the romping, you have to have the responsibility. The two are always things that must be together. And there's great realism in these verses. There's clear recognition. Of course, sex is a powerful urge. But there's also a clear requirement. Sex needs a permanent union.

And if that powerful urge has been awakened and is being expressed, and they're sleeping together, God is saying, well, it's time to act like grown-ups and regularize that union in permanent marriage.

In fact, that's precisely what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. If people are not exerting self-control, if they're sleeping together, they should marry, he says. It's better to marry than to burn.

[33 : 59] Straightforward, it's realistic, and it's practical wisdom from Moses and from the Apostle Paul. Friends, I think we need that wisdom very greatly today.

In a day which is so full of sexual distortion and confusion and therefore very great sexual temptation for Christian people. I think sometimes Christian churches and also Christian parents are making it harder for their young people than they ought to.

We need to recognize that sex is a powerful urge and we need to recognize that God's answer for that powerful urge is the permanent union of marriage. And that permanent union should not be delayed endlessly.

In the Bible, wives are always talked about as the wife of your youth. In our society today, increasingly, we are so devaluing marriage and putting off marriage that marriage is something that only happens once people are middle-aged a lot of the time.

people have this crazy idea that you've got to find the perfect person. So you try one after another, after another, after another, only eventually will you actually settle down with Mr.

[35 : 08] Wright or Mrs. Wright. No, no, no. But Christians are being affected by that madness. And they're not wanting to marry too young or too soon.

But then, of course, they're finding it increasingly difficult to live with sexual continence. And you see, if in the Christian church all we do is emphasize abstinence, but don't encourage marriage, which is God's answer for abstinence, then we shouldn't be surprised if young people find it very hard in a very permissive sexual society all around us.

Now we need to be real about this as churches and as parents. Often it is Christian parents I find who are telling their young people, oh, you're far too young to get married. They're horrified at the thought that their child might get married before their career is established.

Or heaven forbid, before they actually finish university. Oh, goodness, you're still a student. Well, you're an adult, hopefully. Sometimes we may be in danger of pushing our young folk into intolerable sexual temptations.

Do we want to have that on our conscience? parents. Some parents seem to be more horrified at the thought of their 19 or 20 year old young person getting married than they are of them just staying unmarried even though they may be sleeping with their boyfriend or girlfriend.

[36 : 34] Friends, if that is what you think, let me tell you this very plainly, God is not on your side. He's not. We mustn't discourage healthy desire for young adults to marry.

Of course, it means we have to help our young ones to grow up and not keep them as children until their mid-30s. And if I can say this to those of you who are dating already, don't prolong the agony yourself.

Don't date for years and years and years. That is crazy. If you haven't got the wits to work out within a few short months if this thing is going to go the distance, please phone a friend for help. I'm mostly talking to the men, I think, here because the women, let me tell you boys, the girls know already.

They know the answer. It's yes. So why don't you just ask them? They'll tell you. I'm serious. And when you get engaged, don't stay engaged for ages and ages and ages either.

That is just inviting pressure and stress and great temptation. No couple has ever once said to me, I wish we'd been engaged so much longer. Almost every couple I marry say our engagement has seemed like an eternity.

[37 : 48] Believe me. And if you're a couple who are together and have been sleeping together, well, look, God's word is telling you here, it's not the end of the world.

It's not the best way. Let me be clear, it's not the right thing to go on like that. But God is saying it can be made right. And the real way of repentance for God is that you should take real responsibility and it's called marriage.

To accept that permanent union with all the real responsibility that goes with it, that that is the place and the only place for the powerful urge of sexual desire to be expressed.

And that's what you should do. Well, let me just mention briefly verse 30, which forbids perverse sex. A particular point here is that, again, sex can't be separated from the whole structure of proper relationships whose integrity has to be maintained if there's going to be an arena for human flourishing.

Sex is not just a private thing, it's a public thing. And nowhere does that matter more so than in the extended family. Almost certainly what it means here is not a man sleeping with his own mother, but with his stepmother, with his father's wife, either because his mother has died and his father is married again or because perhaps his father has more than one wife.

[39 : 14] If you read Leviticus 18, you'll find there's a whole list of family prohibitions that are regarded as incestuous, including this one. And most of those are, in fact, part of our law in this land still today.

And the reason is, you see, that to pervert this natural order in the family unit destroys its protection, brings shame to a father for a son to sleep with his wife.

Imagine discovering your wife is sleeping with somebody else. Terrible. And then to discover that person is your own son. Well, you can read the story of Noah's sons.

You can read the story of Reuben, one of Jacob's sons, and the mess that happened there when that happened. And, of course, today, you see, when marriage has become so devalued, when households now have multiple partners, one after the other, multiple fathers of different children, multiple step relationships, so often, there is total disintegration of that family unit.

And it's no accident, I think, surely, that the vast majority of sexual abuse cases of children happen in that circumstance where there are step relatives involved. And you see, the point is that when you turn away from God's proper order for family life, his protective order, his protective boundaries, then all boundaries start to break down.

[40 : 37] Chaos will be the result, and human misery, especially the misery of the most vulnerable, and that is usually the children, will be the result. And that's why God forbids all these kinds of sexual waywardness.

Leviticus 18 warns Israel not to go that way, lest the land spew you out, as it did the dreadful pagans before you, because you are indistinguishable from them. And friends, the church in the western world needs a chapter like this today more than ever.

Because God's order for sexuality has not changed, and it will never change. Yes, the specific civil penalties and state laws for Israel may not apply in our age today, but the sanction of God's commands is unchanged.

Paul makes that so clear in writing to the New Testament church in Corinth, where precisely the situation arose. A man has his father's wife, and not even the pagans it seemed in Corinth would tolerate that kind of thing.

You're worse than them, he says. Let him be removed from among you until he repents. Purge the evil from among you. He uses the exact language of this chapter.

[41 : 55] And he goes on in chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians to say, flee from all sexual immorality, immorality. The body is not made for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, so don't go that way.

But he goes on, of course, also into chapter 7, doesn't he? And again, it's like this chapter. It's not all negative. It's not all punitive. Paul says to the married there, give each other your sexual rights and relationships.

Do it joyfully and frequently. And he says to the unmarried, as I've said, who are sexually active, get married. Make it proper. Make it right. So my closing word this morning, friends, in this whole fraught area of sexual relationships, it's not my word, it's not my wisdom, but it's God's word.

Through the apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul, two things. First, do not be deceived in this area.

Don't be deceived, says Paul, 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.

[43 : 10] That is, those who persist in defying God's way for human life will face a purging which even the worst punishments in this chapter are nothing by comparison.

reason. He says their punishment will be permanent, it will be eternal. Do not be deceived. God's warning is crystal clear all the way through the scripture.

The very last chapter of the Bible says this, outside, outside the kingdom of God are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, everyone who practices falsehood. Do not be deceived. But Paul also says, and this is just as important, do not be despairing, even if that has been you, even if that is still you today, here this morning.

Because Paul goes on, and such were some of you. But you were washed. You were sanctified, made clean.

[44 : 23] You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Through the Lord Jesus Christ he is saying there is healing and therefore there is hope.

Even for the chief of sinners, as Paul called himself, even for the chief of sexual sinners. those of us who are Christians here this morning, we are all people, aren't we, who have heard the voice of Jesus saying to us, neither do I condemn you, and now go and leave your life of sin.

Leave it behind forever. So let's show that to the world. The true healing and the true wholeness and the true hope that is real and is wonderful when you hear and when you heed Jesus' words, his words of comfort and grace and his words of challenging truth.

Don't be deceived, but don't be in despair. That's God's word to us this morning. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we're so conscious of the relevance of all of these words this morning to our own lives, to our families, to our communities, to our whole nation.

Help us, we pray, as your people to heed your warnings, but also to rejoice in your wonderful welcome of grace.

[46 : 00] Grant us, we pray, a desire and a thirst for rightness, for your instruction for life. love, and grant us, we pray, a heart for wisdom, that we should live so as to know the blessing that you long to shower upon our heads as we live according to your pattern for life, and as we cherish marriage and family life as you have given it to us, to be a joy and a delight in all its ways.

So hear us and help us, we ask, that we might shine for the Lord Jesus in our day. We ask it in his name.

Amen. In a relationship between the immortality and past the Advisors.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.