

Session 20– Study Notes
Exodus 20: 14
Rev. Janice Y Cook – The Village Church

“You Shall Not Commit Adultery”

1. in OT scripture it is used quite often metaphorically in the prophetic tradition to describe Israel’s idolatrous transgressions of the covenant with God.
2. This commandment aims also to protect the lineage and inheritance rights of fathers to sons. This is another commandment designed to be protective of the family.
3. The focus of this command is physical adultery.
4. Israel’s attitude toward adultery is not unique in the ancient Near East. The phrase “the great sin” is used in Israel and elsewhere (Gen. 20:9) to describe adultery.
5. The seriousness of such a violation is seen in the prescription of the death penalty (Deut. 22:22), even for a king (2 Samuel 12:13)
6. The verb is used with both men and women as the subject and concerns those who are married and those who are betrothed (engaged). There is a double standard in the law’s treatment of men and women in this regard, however.
 - Women commit adultery if they have sex with *any* other man, married or not and were subject to the death penalty.
 - Men commit adultery only with other married women and were subject to the death penalty.
7. Any contemporary use of the commandment would be compelled to treat men and women in the same terms, if it were to remain true to the **inner-biblical** warrant to update laws in view of changing perspectives and social circumstances

Inner biblical - Inner-biblical interpretation is the light that one biblical text casts onto another – whether to solve a problem within the interpreted text or to adapt the interpreted text to the beliefs and ideas of the interpreter.

8. Sexual harassment, rape, and pornography are certainly violence against the personhood of another; they must not be considered of second-level importance just because they are not explicit in Israel’s laws. Jesus’ own extension of the command strikes at precisely this point. (Matt. 5:27-28)
9. This commandment insists that issues of sexuality are not a casual matter for the good order of God’s world.
10. Jesus moves us beyond an act (committing adultery) to a motivation (lust)

- For Jesus it is *not only the act of adultery itself*, but the *lust and desire that precede* it, that are idolatrous, that turn others into objects to be possessed and consumed, and thus rupture our relationships with God and those around us.
11. The Ten Commandments are a charter of conduct for people *already redeemed*. Who *already participate* in God's redemptive plan by being walking and talking examples of what it means to be created in God's image.
 12. As difficult as it may be to accept, we must remember that the Ten Commandments are not primarily concerned with personal, private morality.
 13. To single out the Ten Commandments and set them up as a standard of conduct for unbelievers or American society in general indicates not only a misunderstanding of the purpose of the Ten Commandments, but of the good news itself. Christ died and rose to provide another way. We should do nothing to make that way obscure.

REFLECTION

1. **What images or thoughts are raised for you when you hear the word adultery? What is the source of these images or understandings? (*Where did you get your information about this concept and this commandment?*)**
2. **Why would this action rupture our relationship with God and with others? Or would it?**
3. **Considering the presentation, what role does this commandment or any of the ten commandments play in American society or in the American legal system?**
4. **What might be the risks and ramifications of one religion or another seeking to legislate all of societies moral behaviors based on their belief system?**

Sources

1. The Book of Exodus by Brevard Childs
2. Exodus (Interpretation) by Terence Fretheim
3. The Particulars of Rapture by Rabbi Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg
4. Covenant and Conversation by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
5. The New Interpreter's Bible