

## Treating a Woman Honorably

Exodus 22:16–20, 1 Thessalonians 4:1–7

Hitherto in this chapter the emphasis has been on crimes against property. The eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal,” establishes the basis for private property. The earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord God of heaven. He is the absolute owner of everything. “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof” (Ps. 24:1). God made man and generously gives us “every good and perfect gift,” a beautiful world with all its potential and fertility, that man can use and develop to produce food, clothing and every human need—agriculture, forests, mining, metals, gemstones, sunlight, stars for navigation, beasts of burden, animals hides to make shoes, and on and on and on. He gave our race what is called the “cultural mandate”: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over . . . every living thing that moves on the earth.” God made man for his glory and put him into a beautiful world. God is generous and giving, and allows us to have private property. He allows us to use our labor to increase our wealth.

I have three points this morning: (1) Not yours to take; (2) Doing the honorable thing; and (3) The father’s role. First,

### **1. Not yours to take**

In our text this morning we read, “If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife” (Ex. 22:16).

Our text today moves from property to a discussion of human sexuality. This is an application of the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” but it also relates to “Thou shalt not steal,” referred to more explicitly earlier in the chapter. Sexual intimacy with someone not one’s spouse is a taking of another person’s property. God requires every man, woman and child alive on earth to present our bodies a living sacrifice to him. It is right that he requires this, for we are his creatures, and it is he who gave us life. The unconverted do not accept this and live only for themselves, falsely thinking that they will be better off—but this is Satan’s lie. Actually, living for God is better—*way* better! “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and *all these things* shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). In the end, the Christian, who puts his faith and trust in God, and lives according to his commandments, is better off. If he or she seeks first God’s kingdom and righteousness—learning and living and following God’s Word and endeavoring to live life to God’s glory, he will be compensated in the end. “All” things will be added sovereignly by God. God will be no man’s debtor. If we live for him, he will take care of us. That is his promise. He will never break his

promise. We read in Psalm 119 that God's "commandment is exceeding broad,"<sup>1</sup> and this particular commandment teaches self-centered young men not to entice or seduce a beautiful young virgin into physical intimacy with promises of momentary happiness, heedless of the very real temporal and eternal harm that it will bring to both of them. "Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul" (Prov. 6:32).

God's law requires sexual purity. Listen to Proverbs 5:15–19: "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love."

Sexual intimacy is a gift reserved for the marital union between husband and wife. God made man male and female. His design for marriage is that it be between one man and one woman for life—a lifelong union. Marriage is defined by God in the Bible, and is not open to redefinition. There is no such thing as same-sex marriage in the Bible. It may sound democratic and equitable, but it is not. God, not man, defines marriage. He did it at the beginning of the human race, and he has never altered it. Marriage between one man and one woman for life is written on human hearts. Every person in the world intuitively understands this, but the devil, whose mission is to steal, kill and destroy, makes false promises of temporal happiness, but their end leads to hell. "The lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell" (Prov. 5:3–5).

Christian, do not be deceived! Live for God. Keep your way pure. Sexual intimacy is a precious gift that is not to be squandered but reserved for marriage. God's way is best. If you obey him, you will never regret it.

If you see a beautiful woman and desire to have her, do it God's way. Live a responsible life, prepare for the future. Learn a skill, devote yourself to it. Make a life for yourself. Work to the point of being able to support a wife and children. Does this sound unattainable? With God's help it is not. When you are financially able to take a wife, then take one. Make sure she is a Christian, living in fellowship with Christ and his church. Do not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. Find a woman who wants to live for God and form a Christian marriage. It may require waiting, but the wait will be worth it. Do it God's way; you will never regret it.

"If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife." It is wrong to take a woman's virginity

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 119:96

for one's own use without entering into biblical marriage. Marriage is an honorable estate, and a Christian marriage is worth waiting for. It is a picture of Christ's love for his church. He is the heavenly bridegroom who is coming to the earth for his bride, the church. He will take his bride to his heavenly home for the marriage supper of the Lamb, the best wedding feast that will ever be.

Marriage is an honorable estate for all kinds of people—Christian and non-Christian. But to truly enjoy marriage you have to be in Christ. You have to know that the husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church, and that the wife is to submit herself to her husband as the church submits to Christ, and to know the blessing of lifetime commitment.

The other day I spoke to a woman at the bank—what they now call a “personal banker.” I happened to mention that Norma and I have been married for fifty-four years, nine months and a few days. She kept working at her paperwork for a few moments, then exclaimed, “How long?” I repeated, “Fifty-four years, nine months and a few days.” She was absolutely dumbfounded. I could see from the photos on the credenza behind her that she has a son, but perhaps not a husband. She, like many people around us, needs Christ.

The pleasures of sexual intimacy are not yours to take outside of biblical marriage. God's way is best. Whether single or married, your responsibility is to keep yourself pure like the ten virgins in Christ's parable. The wait is worth it. Be faithful to Christ, and you will never regret it. Second,

## **2. Doing the honorable thing**

Hear our text again: “If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife.” Here is a man who seduces a virgin who is not betrothed, that is, promised to a man to be his wife. A woman who is engaged, that is, promised to a man to be his wife, is her future husband's in a certain sense already. The engaged persons, a man and a woman, are to avoid fornication. They are not to get into a physical relationship, or be in a compromising situation, until the public vows are exchanged. The example of Jesus at the wedding in Cana of Galilee represents the ideal. Marriage is an honorable estate. Entering into a Christian marriage is worth the wait.

But here is a foolish man—probably a young man, but possibly an older man who should know better. His hormones get the better of him, and he can't wait any longer. He doesn't realize it is the devil's trap. He seduces a young woman and lies with her. He steals her virginity and perhaps impregnates her.

He has committed fornication. The Bible tells us to flee fornication: “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18). The man and the woman have sinned. Both have incurred guilt. Sexual sin is all around us. It is celebrated in popular culture—movies, TV shows, billboards, popular songs, the internet. It is

everywhere. But the fact that it is common doesn't make it right. God says, "Flee fornication."

A man has seduced a woman. A sin has been committed. She is not promised to another man. What does God require?

First of all, both the man and the woman should confess their sin. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Fornication is a grievous sin, but God promises to forgive and cleanse, if we come to him on his terms. We must say with David, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:4). We must recognize that our sin is, in the first place, an offense against God. We must seek his forgiveness. He is ready to forgive all who come to him through Christ, whose blood washes away our sin and whose righteousness is ours through the Gospel.

In our text, a sin has been committed. It cannot be undone. But our text urges the young man to do the honorable thing and marry the woman, promising to financially support the woman and her child and to be faithful to her all his life long.

There are those today who say that it is unrealistic to require a young man and young woman to enter into a lifetime commitment, but this is indeed what God requires. And he himself knows what is best for us. Only God, not man, knows the future. A young man who lived with Norma and me while he attended MSU, married a wife. Both were Christians. They established a Christian home. How was he to know that she would contract cancer just before the birth of their third daughter, and that he would bury her while that daughter was barely one year old? We do not know the future, but God does, and he promises to be with us throughout our life, giving us the grace to bear with every calamity, every catastrophe, every devastating blow. The Christian can truly say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71). Imagine that! "It is *good* for me that I have been afflicted"! How is it good? It affords us the opportunity to learn from experience that God's way is best, that his comfort in affliction is real, that he will never leave us nor forsake us.

So if you've messed up, then do the honorable thing. If you have committed fornication with a young woman, do the honorable thing and marry her, support her, and be faithful to her as long as you both shall live. That is God's way, and if you do that, you will be blessed.

Don't just run away from a mess that you've created. Deal with the consequences. Do it God's way. There's a lot of pain and misery in society because people try to run away. Accept responsibility for your sins. Do the right thing.

Thirdly,

### **3. The father's role**

Our text stipulates that “If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins” (Ex. 22:17). This text needs some explanation. What is the bride-price? It is money paid to the father of the bride that was ordinarily kept in safekeeping for his daughter, in case her husband died an untimely death or sinfully abandoned her. It is very important to understand this concept.

In Genesis 31, after the patriarch Jacob had served his father-in-law Laban in the land of Padan-Aram for twenty years—seven years for each of his wives, Leah and Rachel, and another six years, acquiring his own flocks, Jacob senses that his father-in-law’s countenance is not favorable toward him as it had been before. He speaks to his two wives, trying to convince them that their family ought to move back to the land of Canaan. Rachel’s and Leah’s response is very illuminating: “Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father’s house? Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. For all these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children’s; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it” (Gen. 31:14–16).

Here is the reason the patriarch Jacob served Laban seven years for each of his wives. It proved two things: (1) that he was a worthy husband, and (2) that his wives were valuable in their own right. In other words, for the patriarchs, taking a wife was not just a matter of saying, “I love you” to a woman, and convincing her that his love was real. It was not just a crass monetary transaction, saying, “I need a wife, so I will purchase her as I would some other commodity.” A potential husband would serve something like seven years, saving up a considerable amount of money to pay to the father of the bride. The bride’s father would not give his daughter to a prospective suitor based on empty promises. He loved his daughter and had a lot of financial investment in her. He realized her potential and worth as a human being and would not give her to just anyone who came around, telling how much he loved his daughter. No! A loving father wanted the best for his daughter. He wanted a man who would love her her whole life long and would care for her. The father cared that his daughter was cared for, even if the husband died and would not be around to continue taking care of her and her children. If Jacob was a worthy husband for Laban’s daughter, he would express his love for her by investing seven years’ labor for her. This investment was deposited with the bride’s father, who would hang onto the money until the husband had put his money where his mouth is and proved his commitment to her by investing a large financial commitment with the bride’s father. The bride’s father in turn would eventually return the bride-price to his daughter as wealth which she could hold onto and invest to take care of her and her children as they matured. The wealth of the sinner

was thus laid up for the just (cf. Prov. 13:22). The wife and her children would have “a goodly heritage” (Prov. 16:6).

In Luke 15:8–10 the Lord Jesus tells the parable of the wife who had ten silver coins, who, losing one, lit a lamp, swept her house, and searched carefully till she found it. When she found it, she called her friends and neighbors together, saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!” Of course she rejoiced, for each of her valuable silver coins represented a tenth of her old-age pension, as it were! It was an investment in her future. Jesus uses the bride’s joy at finding her lost coin as a illustration representing the “joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

A wife gives herself to her husband, investing her life in caring for him, bearing children for him, and pouring her life into their children. As she does so, she is not able to save up money for her own future. She will have a comfortable and secure future only as her husband continues to value her and care for her.

No human can possibly care for himself alone. All of us profit from the division of labor, each one doing what he or she is good at, investing our lives in laboring for others. There is no way that any one of us can possibly produce everything that we need. We cannot produce our own food, clothing, furniture, etc. Take something simple like a ball-point pen. Have any of us ever made our own ball-point pen? No! Another person with the skill to make ball-point pens invests in a factory with the equipment to make pens. He buys the raw materials from suppliers and assembles the pens. He is good at what he does, and he sells his products. A wholesaler buys a large quantity of pens and takes them to market, using the labors of shippers and traders who move the pens, eventually bringing them to market where they are purchased by users who profit from the skills and energy of thousands of people that the user never knew personally. We all—all of us—benefit from the labors of people we have never met.

In a marriage, a wife gives herself to her husband, and the husband to his wife. If they love one another and stick together, they will profit. Men and women who commit themselves to a marriage both benefit from the commitment. A man who doesn’t value his wife might want to trade her in for a new model, but in so doing ruins his own soul. God promises to bless a committed marriage.

In the case of Leah and Rachel, their father Laban had squandered his investment in his daughters. They realized that they had no future living in Padan Aram with their irresponsible father. They were willing to travel to an unknown place with their husband—a place that they had never been to before—strictly on their husband’s promise that he would care for them there. They walked in faith and became what the Bible calls “mothers in Israel”—women who showed their worth by helping to build their husband’s estate. In like manner, all of us who live responsible lives, investing and building up our own family, helping to take care of

the poor, and building a Christian culture, illustrate how God takes care of his people, ultimately giving us an inheritance in heaven, what Peter calls “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). As the church we have a responsible bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, who purchased our inheritance with his own blood in the greatest act of love every given.

Marriage is a financial transaction. Husband and wife both pour their energies and their labor into building a home where sons and daughters can thrive.

In our Old Testament text, for stealing a virgin’s virginity, the young man who stole a virgin’s virginity was required by law to pay the prevailing bride-price as restitution. Yet after paying this bride price, he still would not acquire the young woman for his wife, for her father, knowing in his heart that the young man is totally self-centered and irresponsible, refused to give his daughter to him. He would keep her himself and care for her child or children, rather than give her to the young man that had used her, thinking only of his own immediate pleasure rather than properly loving the woman and working to provide her a secure future.

This is what we have today in a culture where the government steps in and cares for young, unwed mothers and their children in the name of compassion, giving them welfare payments with money extracted through taxation from responsible Christian men and women, in effect subsidizing irresponsibility and encouraging foolish, self-centered, irresponsible behavior. God’s society is healthy, man’s is unhealthy, producing dependency rather than responsibility.

As Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.”

God’s way is best. Amen!