

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, The Ten Commandments

Session 8: Commandment 7 – No Adultery

This is Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino in his teaching on the Ten Commandments. This is session 8, Commandment 7 - No Adultery.

So, we come now to the seventh commandment. You shall not commit adultery. Now, the other day I was working on this lecture, and I thought maybe it'd be interesting to find a few funny anecdotes about adultery. And the fact is, there are dozens and dozens and dozens and maybe even hundreds.

A lot of them are simply variations of the same themes, but adultery seems to be a sin that isn't taken very seriously in society, for the most part. There are, of course, the things that harken back to ancient times, and even in the days of the Canterbury Tales, adultery was one of the main themes from which they derived their comedy. A number of famous movies and TV shows have also had an adultery theme played for laughs; people just didn't seem to take it very seriously.

It wasn't viewed as something that was much of a tragedy; rather, it was more often viewed as something that, well, to some extent, the cuckolded husband, the man whose wife is cheating, is the object of much derision. The wife whose husband is cheating doesn't get quite such hilarity, but the husband, on the other hand, typically is the brunt of the jokes. In our society today, there has been a little bit more controversy regarding the fact that we seem to have taken a much more lackadaisical attitude toward adultery.

And some people seem to think that, of course, variety is the spice of life, and the sexual morals of our day seem to be willing to tolerate a lot more adventure, you might say, a lot more cheating, let's put it plainly, than they would have in the past. And so it might be difficult for us to understand the kind of horror that ancient peoples would have associated with the practices of adultery. It's kind of difficult for even us to get our minds around the idea of killing somebody because they cheated on their spouse, even though maybe there are some people out there who felt like they wanted to kill a cheating spouse at one time or another.

But for most of us as a society, at any rate, this is something that isn't taken nearly as seriously as it was in the past. And part of this is because we have a very different understanding of the nature of the marriage relationship than people did in the ancient world. Of course, like many other crimes in the Bible, the prescribed penalty for adultery was death by stoning of both parties that were involved.

The average ancient Near Eastern person, not only in Israel but in all their neighboring societies as well, did not take this lightly. We sometimes like to

characterize the Israelites as being the good and upright and moral people, and all their neighbors as being bad and immoral, and all these kinds of things. But really, this was something that was common throughout the ancient world.

These ideas are that if you enter into a marriage relationship, you need to be faithful if you are the wife. Okay, let's look a little bit more deeply into what is going on here. Marriage in the ancient Near East.

What's love got to do with it, we might ask. Romance was not unheard of in the ancient world. I mean, there were a lot of love poems.

Egypt has some famous collections of these things. There are love poems in other societies. And of course, we have the book of the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament, which might not be quite as romantic as sometimes we seem to think it is.

We're still, the jury's still out in that one to some extent. But even though there was this kind of idea of romantic love, of finding your spouse attractive, of wanting to have a partnership, and there are some marriages in the Old Testament that just seem to, in ways, kind of epitomize what we would love to see in a marriage relationship, a kind of commitment, a mutual commitment and partnership and all that kind of thing. But for the most part, that really wasn't the way that ancient peoples thought about marriage.

Romance was not the primary basis of marriage. Marriage in the ancient world was a contractual agreement. Typically, it was arranged by the fathers.

And the main purpose of marriage was to ensure the proper transfer of the family property from one generation to the next. You would marry your son to a woman who was of approximately the same social class and level, whose family had approximately the same level of riches, and then you would be able to assure that there would be no cheating or no confusion when property was transferred from the parents to the children. Now, marriages, of course, were also the basis for political alliances.

And that continued, of course, well into nearly modern times. But the idea was that it wasn't about who you loved. It was about the power or the clout that could be derived from those relationships.

So romance, romantic love, wasn't really the major interest here. Producing legitimate children was considered the primary goal of the marriage relationship. And again, this continued until well into the modern times.

And we know the story of people like Henry VIII and his struggles in order to get a son and an heir and to find and procure a wife who would give him a son. And that was so very important to Henry because, of course, he needed to have somebody to carry on the royal line. And that same kind of attitude is a typical attitude of people in the ancient world.

They need somebody to continue to carry on their property to the land, the goods, the household, all that kind of stuff that they have accumulated needs to be passed on to the next generation. You know, in a world where their whole questions or their ideas about the afterlife were not nearly as well developed as the kind of attitudes that we have now, there was the sense that one of the ways that you secured your immortality was by having your accomplishments remembered and carried on from one generation to the next. And so having legitimate children was a way in a sense of achieving your kind of immortality in this world as well.

Now, with that kind of understanding of marriage, you can understand that adultery would be a little bit of a different issue than it might be for us. In ancient Near Eastern law, there was something of an obsession with the problem and the practice of adultery. All the ancient Near Eastern law codes we have devote substantial attention to the sin of adultery.

The Middle Assyrian law codes might be the worst. They're absolutely obsessed with it and with all the possible permutations and all the possible kinds of ramifications that might come about in an adulterous affair. So there was a lot of hand-wringing among the judges and so on about how they could properly handle affairs.

We think of adultery, and we think of a man cheating on his wife or a woman cheating on her husband. That's not quite the same way that ancient Near Eastern peoples thought about adultery because, of course, they had different understandings of marriage. So adultery is essentially defined as a man having sexual relations with either a married or a betrothed woman.

It was not considered adultery if the woman was a prostitute. So a man in the ancient Near East could and was to some extent expected to frequent prostitutes, and that was not considered adultery. His wife might not like it, but he was not considered an adulterer.

If a man had relations with a woman who was otherwise unattached, well, there would probably be ramifications, particularly if her father got involved in the situation. If she were single, if she were a virgin daughter of somebody of any kind of standing, this could be a very bad thing. But there were also cases where somebody could take on a mistress, somebody could take on a concubine, and concubinage is something which is kind of misunderstood.

A concubine was sort of like a second-class wife, really, is what we're talking about here. While a wife who's got this nice little marriage contract, which lays out all of her rights for her and so on, would be the one who would be considered to carry on the family line, a concubine was generally not regarded in that way. For the concubine, typically, she got a home, she got a roof over her head, she got the possibility of having children, but she could not expect her children to inherit anything.

She was not granted the same kind of legal protections as a wife would be granted. So, yeah, sometimes a concubine would be kept in the house and treated as if she were a wife. But it wasn't quite the same sort of arrangement.

Again, there are some questions about this and how this whole thing worked. But what's clear is that concubines were primarily, again, it's going to vary from one person, one relationship to another. But for many people, it was just a sexual partner.

For other people, it was a companion. And for some people, a concubine was basically a wife without a contract. So that varied widely.

But if a married man had a concubine, that was not considered adultery. If he went to prostitutes, it was not considered adultery. If he dallied with the local whatever, it was not considered adultery.

The penalties for committing adultery for a married man having sexual relations with a married woman varied greatly. Typically, what we find in all the law codes is that they usually begin by saying, You'll kill the man and the woman. And then they start adding the caveats.

But if the man doesn't want to kill his wife, he doesn't have to. In that case, the man with whom she committed adultery also goes free. If a man chooses to cut off the nose of his wife, this was kind of the Assyrian way of doing things; then the man who committed adultery would also have his nose cut off.

There was also the possibility of cutting off the ears. And it's sort of like these are decreasing levels of severity, in a sense. He could cut off her ears.

She remains his wife. But she has no ears. And everybody who looks at her knows that she was an adulteress.

But then they would also cut off the ears of the man who had committed adultery. If the man chose to sell his wife into slavery, which apparently happened fairly frequently, then the person with whom she committed adultery would also be sold

into slavery. So the Assyrians were kind of trying to be a little bit balanced, I guess, about their approach to this, to try to be a little bit fair.

You know, what's good for the goose is good for the gander, so to speak. In the Hebrew Bible, we might hope that things would be a little different. We might hope, but our hopes would probably be disappointed.

Because in the Old Testament, the Israelite understanding of marriage was very, very similar to those of the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Canaanites, or any of the people around them. Primarily, marriage was about producing children who would then go on to inherit your stuff. And there are some beautiful exceptions.

You know, the story of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, I think, is one of those beautiful kinds of examples. Just a short little kind of throwaway line there in the first chapter, the first Samuel, where we have this lady who is barren and her husband has two wives, you know, and the one wife has children. And as is typical in those kinds of situations in the Bible where you've got one wife who's got children and the other one who doesn't, there's always a tension between the two of them.

But Hannah would weep and become very disturbed. And her husband says to her one day,, You know, don't be so upset about this. Am I not more for you than having a hundred sons, you know? So, you know, so, yeah.

So she wants to be the mother, you know, because that is the honored position, particularly if a person has several wives. Then we remember the wonderful story of Jacob and his wives, where they're competing to see who can have the most kids. You know, having children was the way that they fulfilled their lives as wives.

And boy, does this sound sexist to us today. But that's kind of the way it was back in those days. But yeah, marriages were oftentimes arranged by families, typically for the passing on of property, just as in the communities around them.

And as in those other societies, a higher-class woman would be obtained with a bride price. What this means is that you would have to pay in order to have the right to have this woman as your wife. Right.

So, but that's only if you're, you know, upper class, you know, that for the most part, you know, for the common folks, this probably wasn't a thing. And we had this wonderful story of King David, who wanted to obtain Saul's daughter. Well, he wasn't king at that point, but General David, who wanted to obtain the daughter of King Saul as his bride.

And Saul demanded the foreskins of one hundred Philistines for a bride price. You know, typically it would have been, yeah, riches of some sort or another. But apparently, David wasn't particularly rich at this point.

The women, for their part, would bring a dowry into the relationship. The dowry was an amount of money that would help to secure their future. Premarital, prenuptial agreements were very, very common in the ancient world.

You know, we think of this as a modern, enlightened thing. Well, that was very common in times of times past that the women had to have protection, you know, and so the women would be able to bring this property in. And if the husband divorced them, then they could take that property with them.

And that would provide for a living for themselves. So, yeah, very much a business arrangement, very, very well scripted and much legal rigmarole attached in those days to the institution of marriage. Betrothed women were considered bound to their future husbands.

Violation of betrothal was treated as adultery. And, of course, this is the situation that we have with Mary and Joseph in the New Testament, where Mary is betrothed to Joseph and then she's found to be with child. That was considered to be adultery.

And Joseph could and was within his rights to have her stoned to death, according to Old Testament law. But what does the Bible say? Being a virtuous man, he decided rather to simply put her away privately. In other words, he's going to do away, divorce, do away with the betrothal, divorce her, we might say, in a sense, and allow her to marry the father of her child.

What a guy and what a guy. But apparently, this kind of thing was more common than we would think. Men might have a variety of partners in the Old Testament.

That was not uncommon. And we see in some of the biblical patriarchs engaging in hanky panky occasionally, and some of the other people in the Bible who. Now, I'm not trying to say this was encouraged because it wasn't.

But it was clear that it happened, and it was sort of like, well, it happens, you know, it was kind of assumed to be a fact of life that men would be doing these things. And it was not. Not right, but it was not against the law.

Women, on the other hand, were bound to their husbands. And they, a woman who had relations with anybody who was not her husband, was guilty of adultery. So what about polygamy? Yep.

Just like prostitution, polygamy was permitted in the Old Testament, but it was not considered ideal. The Bible clearly has an ideal for marriage. That ideal is found in the book of Genesis, chapter two, one man, one woman for life.

That is the ideal relationship. That is what was expected. And then, of course, there were many variations that occurred later on.

Polygamy is an expensive sort of thing, you know, having one wife was considered the norm, and probably, you know, was typical. Having more than one wife meant you had some money because you could afford more than one wife. Oftentimes, people think of polygamy as being an oppressive system, a way of oppressing poor women.

But really, you have to remember that in those days with a lot of warfare, a lot of skirmishes, men doing very heavy labor and oftentimes dying young, that there were a lot of women out there who could not procure a husband of their own because, you know, there just were not enough men to go around. And in those kinds of cases, you have to wonder what would be better for most of the women. Would it be better to be the number four, five, or 600 wife of a very wealthy person or to be a single woman on the streets begging or prostituting herself? Maybe there were some jobs that she could have done, become a wise woman, perhaps, or something along those lines.

But let's face it, career opportunities for women in that society were not many. So, in a way, polygamy was for the men; it was a way to show off how wealthy they were. I really don't think it was because these men were such sex crazed stallions that they wanted to have lots and lots of wives.

It was more than having lots of wives showed that they were very wealthy and could take a lot of women in and put a roof over their heads. And feed them and all that kind of stuff. And so under those kinds of circumstances, again, the marriage for the women was considered to be a fully practical kind of thing.

What's love got to do with it? Not a whole lot, but having a roof over your head and possibly having the opportunity to have a child who might one day inherit at least a portion of a rich man's holdings. That was an opportunity that couldn't really be passed up for many of them. Men could divorce their wives.

According to the Old Testament, they could divorce them for indecency. What is indecency? That was a big question. We really don't know what that might mean.

And there was a big argument in Jesus's time, which I will come back to later, between two of the major rabbinic figures, Hillel and Shammai. And one of the rabbis said that indecency meant adultery and that the only basis for divorce under the law

was adultery. The other one said, No, indecency means anything that the woman does that displeases the man.

And his famous example was that if she burned his dinner, he could divorce her. So quite the distance there of poles between those two positions. Textual discoveries in the Persian period give some interesting light on things.

You know, in the Old Testament, we assume that this is all male-dominated and that the men pretty much had the upper hand and everything. But later on, we find out, even from the Persian period, that it was not uncommon for women to divorce their husbands as well. Now, this was not unheard of even in ancient times, because even the Code of Hammurabi made concessions for cases where women might need to divorce their husbands.

It was a very different case from if a man divorced his wife. But it was kind of unthinkable to them. But it apparently did happen.

And we found, in fact, legal documents from the Persian period which indicate that it was not really that uncommon for women to divorce their husbands. And there oftentimes were agreements, and there were prenuptial agreements and policies that made it possible for them to do that and not be reduced to poverty. So, yeah, in some ways, it's kind of surprisingly modern as well.

So that's kind of a little bit of an overview of the institution of marriage in ancient Israel. What about adultery in the Old Testament? Well, not that surprising. It is quite similar to what we find in other ancient Near Eastern societies.

This commandment is nice and simply placed in the Bible in a couple of words. Lotinoh, do not commit adultery. Nice and simple and straightforward.

And, again, like their neighbors, adultery is defined as a married woman having relationships with a man who is not her husband. Now, I have to say that a lot of scholars stop there. But there is the other side of this as well, because a man having a relationship with a married woman is also considered adultery.

So it's not just a woman thing. It's not just that women are the only ones who can commit adultery. It's also if a man is having relations with a married woman, that is adultery as well.

So it does work both ways to some extent. Men could legally have sexual relations with prostitutes. We already mentioned that.

Or with unmarried mistresses of some sort. But the law very heavily discourages prostitution. There are places where it is plainly said, you know, don't allow your

daughters to become prostitutes or the land will become full of immorality and lewdness and so on.

The prophets in Hosea, we have one of the most marvelous statements of, I think, ethical fairness in the Old Testament, where God says to the prophet Hosea, Don't expect me to judge your wives for committing adultery when you yourselves are out there committing adultery. So yeah, God says, no, we're not going to have a double standard here. It goes a little bit beyond what the law says because the law kind of did allow a double standard.

But God makes it clear that that is not his ideal. The penalty prescribed for adulterers in the Old Testament is death. The man who commits adultery, committing adultery with his neighbor's wife, both adulterer and adulteress, shall be put to death.

Now, in the Assyrian law code, they have almost exactly the same statement there. But then they go on to say, but if the man doesn't want to put his wife to death, etc., etc., etc., the Torah, the Old Testament law code here doesn't give that concession. But it's quite clear that that kind of thing was allowed because we have the wonderful story again of Hosea and his wife, Gomer, who committed adultery and apparently with several different men.

And as you read through the story, what becomes apparent is that Hosea was planning to sell Gomer into slavery. So, rather than stoning his wife to death, he instead shows mercy. Ancient adultery laws, even in the Bible, protect the family legacy, not the family relationships.

Ancient people did not want illegitimate children to inherit their property. It always kind of reminds me of the story of the cuckoo bird. You know, the cuckoo bird will find a nice nest where there are several eggs, and the cuckoo bird will hatch first.

And then what it does is it pushes the other eggs out of the nest. And when the mama bird comes back and she sees this cuckoo here, apparently she's not able to tell him from her own babies. And so she feeds it and tends to it.

And the cuckoo bird gets big and fat and then flies away and does its cuckoo-y things. So that's kind of the situation that men were trying to avoid here with their adultery laws: they did not want a cuckoo in their nest. They didn't want anybody inheriting their stuff who wasn't their biological offspring.

Adultery laws in the Bible were harsh. And I already started to talk about this, and I'm going to go a little bit more into this now. Grace, on the other hand, was abundant toward adulterers.

How many people in the Old Testament were killed for committing adultery? Well, you look at it, you can't really think, I can't think of any. Divorce and enslavement might well have been the typical punishments. If you know your wife is committing adultery, you could certainly divorce her, and very likely the courts would allow you to send her away without her dowry or something of that sort.

You probably forfeited that. Most likely, that would have been written right into the marriage contracts. So, we got Hosea and Gomer, we got King David, who committed adultery.

David, of course, compounded his adultery with murder. And we'll talk about his story a little bit later. But yeah, you read through the Old Testament, you don't see any evidence that the adulterers were stoned to death.

It was on the books. It was in the law code. But as I mentioned before, I think that the law codes are more like a kind of ideals and guidelines for the judges rather than set in stone.

This is the way you have to do it kind of thing. There was a lot more grace built into that law code than what the later Pharisees would allow for. Several Bible passages depict God as an aggrieved spouse of faithless Israel.

We find this in Hosea, the first couple of chapters, Jeremiah chapters two and three, Ezekiel 16, and other places as well. This is one of the major metaphors in the Bible, where God is the husband and Israel is the spouse. It's really kind of a fascinating appropriation, particularly in the book of Hosea.

Hosea acknowledges that in the Baal religion, the worship of Baal. Baal is an interesting fellow. The word Baal means Lord, but it also means husband.

And Baal was considered to be, in some sense, the husband of the earth and the husband of Baal's worshipers. And in the book of Hosea, God appropriates that image and says to his people, No, I am your husband, and I am the one who provides you with all these good things that you have. So that image appears a number of times.

But what does Israel do? Israel is unfaithful to God by running off with all these other gods and cheating on the Lord. Ezekiel is one of the most beautiful and pathos-filled passages in the entire Old Testament, where God talks about how his heart has been grieved by the faithlessness of Israel, of his people, as they have cheated repeatedly on him. And what does God do? They say, okay, you're going to be stoned to death.

No, he says, I keep taking you back. And he vows, you know, he says, okay, I'm going to have to put you away for a while. And you're talking probably about the exile, you know, but he says, but I will take you back to myself again.

And sometimes there's kind of this condition put in there, you know, if you will return to me, then I will welcome you back. So here, using this kind of language of adultery, God is saying, yeah, you're an adulteress, but I'm not going to kill you. I'm going to welcome you back home.

I'm going to take you back to myself. Now, by the time of Jesus, the adultery laws had become institutionalized. But it appears even then that adultery was oftentimes treated lightly if the aggrieved parties were so inclined.

There are some famous adulterers, even in New Testament times. Josephus tells us about some of the things that were going on among the Herods. Now, when King Herod's favorite wife, Mariamne, was suspected of being an adulteress, whether she was or not, there's still actually some debate about that.

But Herod had her strangled to death in one of the methods that they used, which was typically not the method used for the main wife. But anyway, rather than having her stoned, as the Bible said, very often everybody knew what was going on, and they were just ignoring it or were able to overlook it. Herod, with his ego, certainly wasn't going to overlook anything of that sort.

And he was also afraid that his wife was conspiring against him as well. So, in that case of John chapter 8 and that wonderful story of the woman taken in adultery there, which may or may not be original, there are lots of questions about that. But at any rate, it sure sounds like Jesus to me.

But the story is that they bring this woman to Jesus and say, she was caught in the very act of adultery. Now the law says she should be stoned to death. But what do you say? And this is really putting Jesus, they think they're really putting Jesus in a bind, because most likely it would have been very, very rare in those days for somebody to be stoned to death for adultery.

And it is even possible that they weren't even allowed to do it without getting some kind of judicial approval. And yet what they're trying to do is to make Jesus violate or repudiate the Old Testament law. And that's really what they're trying to do is because, yeah, if Jesus says, oh, no, we can't do that.

And it's like, oh, you're saying that Moses was a liar, are you? Is that what you're trying to tell us here? You know, are you telling us that we can just ignore the laws of Moses? Typically, they're probably doing that anyway. But, but yeah, it was, they were trying to put Jesus in a bind. And, of course, Jesus wasn't going to fall for it,

because Jesus instead says those wonderful words, whoever is without sin among you, that can be the guy to cast the first stone.

Okay, so Jesus refrains from this whole question of adultery. And once again, we see this in a couple of different places in the New Testament. In Matthew chapter 19, we have the question of what the basis for marriage really is.

Remember, in the ancient world, the basis for marriage was passing on property. So some Pharisees came to him and tried to test him. They say, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason? And again, this is the debate going on in Judaism at that time.

We've got Rabbi Hillel and we've got Rabbi Shammai. One of them is saying, only if she commits adultery. And the other one is saying, if she burns your dinner, put her away.

And Jesus says, well, haven't you read that at the beginning, the creator made them male and female. And he said, for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. And the two, two, notice two, shall become one flesh.

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, while God has joined together, let no one separate. So Jesus doesn't go by the law of Moses to define marriage.

He doesn't go to the typical practice. He doesn't go to the rabbinic debates. Rather, Jesus goes directly back to creation.

What does God intend for marriage? How does God define it? What is the ideal? The ideal is one man, one woman, together for life. Now, of course, this kind of makes everybody's heads explode. Why, then, they ask, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away? Well, if God intends them to be together forever, then why does Moses say that they can separate? And Jesus replies, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard.

But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality. And there's a question of whether or not this line here, by the way, is original, because it doesn't appear in all the manuscripts.

And marries another woman, commits adultery. Matthew chapter 19, verses 7 through 9. So, essentially, what Jesus is saying here is that adultery is about the breakdown of the marriage relationship. Not about who is cheating on whom.

It's how the relationship has been undermined, how the relationship has been broken. So, marriage to Jesus is not about your property.

It's about your relationship. About two people coming together and becoming one. Adultery isn't a disruption of the transfer of material goods or property from one generation to another.

Adultery is undermining a God-ordained relationship, which is meant to last forever. What a difference this makes, you know, in our understanding of how marriage and adultery should operate. I would say, you know, that Jesus really gets to the heart of the matter, more so than the Old Testament laws do.

He is, again, appealing to the principle behind the law, okay? Um, yeah. So, we have people who want to get divorced because they don't feel like they're compatible anymore, or something of that sort. And Jesus tells us that is not what God intended.

Now, as an aside here, we know, of course, that divorce does happen in our society. We know that there are cases, sometimes, where divorce seems to be, I can say, the best option in some relationships. Ideally, this would not be so.

And that's what Jesus is trying to tell us here. Ideally, this is not right. Ideally, this adulterates the institution of marriage and what it was intended to be, you know? So, I don't think we need to be harsh and unforgiving of people who are divorced, people even who are divorced and remarried.

I don't think that Jesus' statement here says that we need to condemn those people and put them out of the church. Rather, I think what Jesus is saying is that this is the ideal we should be striving for. Just as at the end of Matthew, chapter 5, Jesus tells us that we are to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

I don't think any of us ever really obtain that status in this life, but I think that is what we all aspire to. So, in Matthew, chapter 5, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus once again addresses the question of the Ten Commandments and his understanding thereof. You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery.

But I tell you that anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Whoa, Jesus! Why would you say such a thing? Yeah, that sounds very harsh. That sounds really quiet, you know, you've just like condemned half of the human race here, you know? Jesus moves the matter of adultery from the body to the heart.

The rabbis devoted a lot of ink to trying to define what was considered an adulterous act. And they kind of went back and forth in some of these things, as the rabbis did. That was kind of the way they argued.

It was sort of like a dialectic kind of process. Sometimes it was more like a free-for-all. But which acts would be considered adulterous? And some of the rabbis would say, you know, that, well, you might imagine a case.

And the rabbis, I'm pretty sure that a lot of these cases they're coming up with are completely hypothetical and probably completely unbelievable. But there was a debate about a case where, and, you know, trigger warning, this, I knew of a fellow who was put on administrative leave for sharing this story in a class because some students were offended. But at any rate, hopefully, nobody will put me on administrative leave here for sharing this one.

But the story goes like this. So a man is up on a roof repairing a leak in the roof of a wealthy homeowner. And he is doing this action up there, and he gets hot and sweaty.

So he takes off his clothes. So he's up there on the roof naked, working on the roof. Meanwhile, the mistress of the house comes out and decides to sunbathe in the courtyard of her house, as was kind of typical in those days.

So she's down there. She takes off her clothes, getting a nice tan all over. Well, the man working up on the roof is suddenly caught by a great wind, and the wind takes him off the house, and he lands right on top of the woman, and they have sexual contact.

I frankly think that's impossible. But that was the way that the rabbis framed the question, okay? And they say, and the question is, have they committed adultery? And they went back and forth on this. And finally, it was decided, well, he really didn't intend to do anything, and she didn't intend to.

So no, we shouldn't call this adultery, you know? But the idea that they would be entertaining the thought that this was adultery is kind of odd to us. But for them, you know, defining these kinds of issues was very important. I can think back to when I was single long, long ago.

And among my college buddies who were Christians, one of the topics of conversation was, well, how far can you go with your girlfriend before it becomes like, you know, premarital sex, you know? And so, and then the issue was, you know, what are we doing with our bodies? And what constitutes sin? Well, Jesus doesn't worry about what we're doing with our bodies. He's putting the matter in what's going on in our hearts, you know? Are we being tempted? Are we being drawn away? Are we infatuated with another person besides our spouse? Jesus says it's in the heart. Lust and adultery.

Let's think about this a little bit here. If a man looks at a woman and lusts after her, I had a professor in seminary who was telling a story about a young man that he counseled who was absolutely distraught because he was telling the professor, he says, I can't stop myself. I see pretty women and I just feel so drawn to them.

And he says, I know I'm committing adultery in my heart. And the professor said, Well, we have to look at the meaning of these words. And even today, I appreciate kind of what the guy had to say.

The word translated lust here, to lust after her, *epithumeo*. *Epithumeo* is a burning desire to possess something or someone. It is not a passing fancy.

That is not what this is talking about. It's not about finding someone attractive. There is another little incident in the rabbis where one of the rabbis saw a beautiful Gentile woman and he uttered an oath about, you know, praise be to God who created such beauty or something like this.

And all of his rabbi friends were kind of scandalized that he was expressing his admiration of this woman's beauty. Apparently, it wouldn't have been so bad if she'd been Jewish. But the fact that she was Gentile seemed to give them problems.

But yeah, I mean, is that adultery? Well, apparently that's not what Jesus is talking about here. Rather, it seems what Jesus is talking about is a desire to possess. We might say infatuation.

I really think that's what this is talking about. If you're thinking about it, if you're planning on it, you are undermining your relationship with your spouse. Lust undermines the integrity of the marriage relationship.

Having an infatuation with another person is breaking down the integrity of the relationship you are supposed to have with your spouse. That really seems to be what Jesus is talking about here. Adultery in his heart, rather than attempting to define adulterous acts.

Remember when Jimmy Carter did an interview with Playboy magazine a whole bunch of years ago? This was when Jimmy Carter was a... I'm showing my age here, I guess. He was the candidate Jimmy Carter at the time. The big thing about Jimmy Carter was he was really the first presidential candidate who wore his faith on his sleeve.

I do believe he was very pious. I believe he was a Christian. What that means for him as a president is another question.

He was a man who wanted to do what was right. He was a Christian man who was trying to be a follower of Jesus. The reason why I bring up Jimmy Carter is in this Playboy interview, Playboy magazine asked him what a Christian would engage in as far as sex acts go.

Jimmy Carter just blindly goes out and goes through a whole list of things that he thought Christians would be willing to do and other things that Christians probably shouldn't do. This is kind of what's going on here. For a lot of people, they're trying to define what acts, what physical acts, would constitute adultery.

If I hold hands with her, am I committing adultery? If I put my arm around her, would I do a side hug? Okay. Front to front? Maybe not. Where do we draw the line? Jesus says you draw the line in the heart, not in the body.

The problem isn't the action so much as the thought process that gives rise to the action. So, if some evil magician hypnotizes you and makes you think that his gorgeous assistant is your wife, and you go and you start smooching with his gorgeous assistant on stage and everybody's laughing at you up there, you are not committing adultery because it has nothing to do with your heart. Heart, that's where the issue really lies.

The heart was regarded as the seed of the will. This is something that, again, when we read about the heart in the Bible, I think we kind of project some of our modern thoughts, and we tend to think about the heart as the seed of the emotions. In the thinking of the ancient Hebrews, the emotions were located in different places in the body.

So you might feel something in your loins, certain kinds of feelings. You might feel other kinds of feelings in your kidneys, like guilt. You might feel your feelings might arise from your gut or from your stomach, not your brain.

They didn't know what the brain did. They didn't even know where the brain was. They didn't know what the brain did.

But the heart was usually not considered the seed of an emotion, but rather the seed of the will, oftentimes. So Jesus is talking here about lusting and committing adultery in your heart, which means that you are engaging your will in an act that undermines your relationship. So again, Jesus' words here seem to be talking about somebody who's perhaps infatuated, obsessed with the concept of cheating.

I wouldn't even say maybe fantasizing, but maybe engaging in fantasies and entertaining fantasies, and not merely a passing thought. Now, here's where it gets fun. What does Jesus say we should do about adultery? Jesus doesn't say anything about stoning a woman to death.

Rather, Jesus says, okay, so let's say you're having these adulterous thoughts. Your eye just wants to keep wandering and looking at that lady over there. Well, if your eye is causing you trouble, rip that baby right out of there and throw it away.

If you can't keep your hand from touching things that it shouldn't touch, well, cut your hand off. Because it's better for you to enter into heaven with a missing hand or a missing eye rather than to enter into hell with all of your body parts intact. Well, yeah.

What does that mean? Again, throughout Matthew chapter 5, Jesus uses that literary device of hyperbole. Nobody enters heaven missing an eye. Nobody goes into heaven missing a hand.

That's not the way heaven works. You know, Jesus is using hyperbole in order to make a point here for us. And his point is that we need to be willing to make sacrifices in order to maintain our purity, the purity of our relationships.

Now, if you can't watch a television set without thinking about how much you would love to be having relationships with that pretty star or that pretty starlet, then maybe you should give up TV. If you can't watch, well, if you can't get on certain websites without feeling tempted, then maybe you just shouldn't go to those websites. And there have been people who've done this, and it's made headlines occasionally.

This is a story that came up a few years back, quite an uproar in the media because there was a dentist in Iowa who fired one of his assistants because he found her too attractive. And apparently, there was a little bit of flirtatious behavior going on back and forth. And the man, being a Christian, said, I hate to do this to you.

I'll give you a nice, generous severance package, but I really cannot have you around me because it's hurting my marriage. Well, she of course sued, and it made headlines, and it went all over the place about how evil this dentist was that he would fire this woman for being attractive. But what happened? Well, eventually, actually, the case was dismissed by the courts, which is kind of, you know, one for the good guys because it wasn't like he was throwing her out in the street or something of that sort.

She was a dental assistant. There are lots of opportunities for dental assistants. And he was doing what he thought was best.

He was plucking it out, we might say, in order to save the integrity of his marriage. In 2010, there was another interesting story that made headlines all over the place because of a senior pastor at a New Jersey megachurch ordered all of his staff to

delete their Facebook accounts. Seems that a couple of his staff members had hooked up with old flames through Facebook, and the senior pastor decided this was simply too much of a potential danger and said, If you want to work on my staff, you've got to delete your Facebook accounts.

If your eye offends you, pluck it out. That's kind of the principle, I believe, that Jesus is talking about here. Now, this is not the only place in the New Testament where adultery is mentioned and, in a sense, spiritualized in this way.

Very briefly, James has a little bit broader application, kind of a spiritual adultery type thing. Remember, we talked about how in the Old Testament, God often proclaimed that Israel was like an adulterous spouse, that he loved them and he wanted them to be committed to him, but they kept cheating with other gods. James resurrects that imagery in the New Testament.

You adulterous people, he says, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. So, loving the world, according to James, constitutes cheating on the Lord. And so, once again, what we see here is that he's setting the issue of adultery in the heart, in the attitudes, rather than the actions.

So, it's a little bit different approach than some of the rabbis. Rabbis are obsessing over defining adulterous actions and trying to figure out what constitutes various forms of adultery, but rather, in Christianity and the New Testament, and should have set the pace for us, should have set the standard for us, unfortunately, it oftentimes hasn't, but in the New Testament, the focus was rather on adulterous attitudes, rather than actions. Purity of mind is what Jesus requests.

Purity of mind is what James is talking about. Having a heart that is devoted to God and not being torn by other desires, and Jesus puts the same thing into our marriage relationships, having a relationship with a spouse that is not torn, not adulterated by other desires. Purity is a matter of the mind, rather than a matter of the body.

Now, there's a lovely quote that has been attributed to Martin Luther. I actually wasn't able to find if this is Martin Luther indeed or not, but I always enjoyed this quote. According, apparently, to Martin Luther, you can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you don't have to let them build nests in your hair.

Luther recognized the fact that there will be times when, yeah, we will find other people attractive. You know, God doesn't give us a lobotomy when we get married. There will be times when we might be drawn away in some sense.

There might even be fleeting fantasies, but Luther says, and I agree, you don't have to let them become obsessions. There are ways that we can put the brakes on these

things. Watch a fun movie, or go for a walk in the woods, or go to church, or call a friend and say, Hey, could you pray for me? Lots of ways that we can diminish the temptations.

If we're willing to acknowledge, and I know this is tough sometimes, and particularly in more conservative evangelical circles, it's tough for us to admit that we're human. It's tough for us to admit that, yeah, we feel temptations, and that sometimes we even struggle with feelings that are not particularly pleasant. Not only is it tough for us to admit that, but it's also tough for us to hear that.

The sad thing is that the church is not always good at dealing with that kind of thing. When we hear that somebody is dealing with temptations, sometimes we find that there are churches that will judge and ostracize those people. We need to be able to be open with each other.

We need to be able to be vulnerable, and we need to be able to discuss our thought lives, because it is in the thought lives where the sin begins, and it is in the thought lives where it takes root, and as we'll talk about a little bit later, if we can nip it in the bud there before the birds take nest in our hair, we can prevent scandals from happening later. God wants us to have pure relationships with our spouses and with members of the opposite sex. It's difficult, but sometimes, and well, for most of us, many times it's difficult, but we're not in it alone.

We have the power of the Holy Spirit. We have the companions that God gives to us, and we've got common sense as well. So let us strive to be pure from the inside, and then let the outside take care of itself.

This is Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino in his teaching on the Ten Commandments. This is session 8, Commandment 7 - No Adultery.