



## 6 SAYING NO TO SAY YES

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT  
You shall not commit adultery.

*What does this mean for us?*

We are to fear and love God so that in matters of sex our words and conduct are pure and honorable, and husband and wife love and respect each other.

**T**his commandment has sometimes received a bad name as a spoilsport. It is taken as a gigantic *no* written over anything and everything connected with sex, as if it were a dump truck full of guilt, ready to drop its load on anyone caught even thinking about it.

There is a *no* in the commandment: “You shall not. . . .” But that isn’t all there is to it. God says *no* to adultery—sexual relations outside of marriage—because God wants to say a much bigger *yes* to the companionship you have with your friends and to the marriage you may have some day.

The purpose of this commandment, then, is the same as all the others: protection. As God protects the gift of life in our homes and neighborhoods, God also wants to protect what is nearest and dearest to life itself: friendship and love. So God



says no to adultery in order to protect not only you but your whole community.

*When two become one*

From the beginning of the creation, God has been concerned that all people have some companions or friends, that no one is left completely alone. Next to life itself, companionship is one of the best and most important gifts. God wants to make sure that we have plenty of it while we await the new day.

If you think over your friendships, or what it's like to be without friends, you can see some of what makes them so much fun and so important. To start with, friends are people you can enjoy—people you have things in common with, people who are interesting and fun to be with. But there's more to it. A friend is someone you can confide in and trust. You can talk to your friends about what troubles or angers you, confident they won't betray you. And when you need help, you can be pretty sure that your friends will give it to you.

It's not only a one-way street, though. Part of what makes friendship so enjoyable is that your friends do the same with you, confiding in you and leaning on you for help as it's needed.

There's only one kind of companionship closer than friendship. That is marriage. "From the beginning of creation," Jesus says, "'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mark 10:6-8).

When a man and a woman become one flesh in marriage, it has all the marks of a friendship. They enjoy one another's company, confide in one another, and depend on one another for help. But marriage goes further than friendship. It is a man and a woman giving themselves to one another completely, as lifetime partners in God's promise.

An important part of this giving is sexual. The man and the woman become one flesh in their bodies, expressing their love for one another by giving their bodies to each other.

As they become one in their bodies, husbands and wives become like one person. Though they are still two people, they are united so that they can be together without fear or



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shame, sharing all that they have—their days, months, and years; their abilities and disabilities; their gifts and needs; their whole selves.

This companionship is the first purpose of marriage. With it, God gives another gift: children. That's the second purpose of marriage. Through it, God gives life to families and new generations of people.

Marriage is both private and public. It is a private companionship, one that belongs to husbands and wives by themselves. Marriage is also public, especially as a child or children are born. The husband and wife become father and mother, taking on the offices we spoke of in relation to the Fourth Commandment.

Your community has an interest in marriage, too. For when two become one they can soon become three, or four, or more. Families provide not only the people who will keep communities going but the honor necessary for any kind of public life. Communities of people begin in marriages and families, receiving not only more people but the help and service each family gives.

Now there are some people who don't marry. Sometimes it is because they choose not to, believing that by not marrying they can make best use of the gifts and talents they have. Sometimes there are other reasons, such as not getting the right opportunity. Whatever the reason, God sees to it that no one is left completely alone, that all of us have companions. Unmarried people have their own special gifts to bring to our communities.



### *When two become three*

When two become one, they can become three in another way, besides having a child. They can become three by the interference of another person from outside the marriage. That's what happens in adultery. If marriage is a circle with two halves, adultery is a triangle that breaks it.

It doesn't only happen in marriages. Sometimes two become three in friendships. Maybe that's happened to you—you've had a close friend and lost him or her to a third person. Or maybe the third corner of the triangle hasn't been a person at all but some new interest or hobby your friend has taken up. It happens both ways. Either way, the friendship is lost.

Now there's no law, in the Commandments or anywhere else, that says friendships have to last forever. That's an important part of your freedom. As you change and develop new interests, you have to be free to change your friendships, too, making new acquaintances who share your interests. God doesn't limit us to one friend apiece.

But when two become three in a marriage, it's a different story. If the old self succeeds in making the circle a triangle, all the gifts God gives in marriage are broken. That's why the commandment against adultery comes right after the commandment against killing; it is the closest thing to murder. Though no person may be killed, in adultery a marriage dies.

### *Adultery kills*

The first thing adultery kills in a marriage is the companionship. It's like discovering that your closest friend has been telling your secrets, only a dozen times as bad. When a man gives his body to another woman, or a woman gives her body to another man, the trust and confidence they've had with their partners are broken. They can't be sure of each other anymore or be together without suspicion of some kind.

When the companionship between a husband and wife is broken, any children get caught, too. They don't get the kind of loving care and help from their parents that God gives through families. And even if they aren't left without a father or mother, they still bear the burdens of their parents' troubles.



Finally, the community is hurt by adultery. The third person in the triangle is usually a part of the community, too, and comes from a family. Then there are two families in trouble. But even if it's just one family, adultery breaks that family's gifts and causes problems for others.

That's why God forbids adultery. The old self can get some satisfaction in it, crowing about needs and fulfillment. But that pleasure rebounds to destroy the gifts God wants all of us to receive.

That's why Jesus has tightened up this commandment. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you," Jesus said, "that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). With the Commandments, God puts a fence around adultery where it ends—in another person's bed. With these words, Jesus puts a fence around adultery where it begins—in the desire of the heart.

It might seem that Jesus is being too strict. Sex is exciting—it can be easy for men and women to think they can treat each other casually, as though sex were just a more involved way of shaking hands. "Just looking" doesn't seem to hurt anyone.

But that's where adultery begins—in looks, in daydreams, in casual disregard. "Just looking" isn't *just* looking, Jesus says, but adultery already. The triangle is starting to form, even if it's only in your mind.

Jesus isn't only speaking of people who are already married here. "Anyone," he says, "anyone who looks lustfully." Though you may not marry for several years or get married at all, God is already at work to protect you and the gifts he will give if and when you do marry.

It's not that God considers sex evil or nasty and wants to blind you until your wedding day. Your sexuality and the desire that goes with it are God's gifts to you. But while God gives you these gifts, God wants to make sure that you are free to change friends as you need to. So God forbids you to give your body to anyone until you have publicly declared that that's the person you want to spend your life with. In this way, God protects your freedom now and the joy of the marriage you may have in the future.



### *For a lifetime*

Jesus has some strong words to say about divorce, too. "But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery" (Matthew 5:32).

Now again, those words seem terribly strict, especially to the old self. The old Adam or Eve always wants to serve its own ends and so would like to be free to do whatever pleases it.

But Christ wants to protect marriage as much as possible and to keep the old self in line. That's why he says this no to divorce. When you give yourself to your husband or wife, Christ wants to be sure that it is for your lifetime, that you receive all the gifts of marriage not only part-time but full-time.

Sometimes the old Adam or Eve will turn these words around and try to use them to its own advantage, though. In some families, the marriage may be so totally broken that divorce may be the only way to prevent further damage. In such cases, the old self will sometimes piously invoke Christ's words and say that divorce is impossible, just so it can do more damage. When that happens, divorce may be the best of bad alternatives.

There are some big nos in this commandment. God says no to adultery and anything that comes close to it. At the same time, though, God is saying a much bigger yes to you, doing everything possible to protect you and your marriage and commanding you to do the same.

God does something besides commanding and protecting; God forgives. When the old self succeeds in making a triangle—whether it is in adultery by looking, adultery in somebody else's bed, or a divorce—God doesn't come around to say, "I told you so." Instead God says, "I am the Lord your God," renews you in the promise, and keeps right on working to give you companions while you await the new day. That is a gift even greater than life and marriage: in Christ, God promises to be our God, a greater companion than anyone else could ever hope to be, forever.



### THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

*You shall not steal.*

*What does this mean for us?*

We are to fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or property, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to be peace and justice in his property and means of making a living.