

# **THE PURITY OF AGAPE**

**By Paul Penno**

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At a Christian school seeking to uphold dress standards the students were requested not to wear rings. When one young lady was discovered in the classroom with a ring on she was asked about it by the teacher. She replied: "Oh, the principal knows about it and it's alright."

So the teacher inquired of the principal and learned the rest of the story. Evidently he had challenged the student about the ring and learned that in their church the practice was for young women to keep themselves pure. They were to await marriage before giving themselves to another. To signify their purity they underwent a wedding ceremony to Christ in which bands were given representing their purity.

In a time when it is next to impossible to find a virgin among junior high teens, it is encouraging to see young people who desire to honor Christ by holding themselves pure and unspotted from the world.

The 1631 edition of the KJV had a misprint. Some would call it minor—just one little word accidentally missed by the typesetter. He left out the word "not" in our text today, reading "Thou shalt commit adultery." As a result, that edition is known as "The Wicked Bible" but it seems to be the version our world has chosen to claim!

The seventh commandment emphasizes the sacredness of life in showing that it must be kept pure and unadulterated. God's life is simplicity itself. The Apostle Paul says: "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." 2 Cor. 11:3. The sin of Eve was the first case of adultery, and all the specific acts of adultery since that time have been but outgrowths from that. She left the simple for the complex; the straight way of righteousness and life, for the maze of sin and death.

This "commandment is exceeding broad." People generally regard it as prohibiting the culmination of sin, whereas it deals specially with the beginning of it.

Christ's words in the sermon on the mount, show the spirituality of the commandment: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed

adultery already with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:27, 28. Christ was not adding anything to the commandment which He Himself had given; He was revealing the breadth and depth of it. His language is unqualified and unlimited. The commandment is violated by an impure thought or look, not simply upon a woman who is not one’s wife, but upon any women whatsoever. The lustful thought is adultery. From the commandment as magnified by Christ’s statement of it, we see that adultery may exist even within the marriage relation, for that relation does not sanctify lustful thought and impure action.

There are two ways of looking at the ten commandments: You can read them with the dark glasses of the old covenant, complete with the fire, thunder, lightning, and earthquakes of Mt. Sinai. Or you can read them in the sunshine of the new covenant good news.

Ancient Israel read them with the old covenant in mind; and look at their history. It was up and down (mostly down!) ever since they were at Mt Sinai. All through their history it was like a dark stormy day with only an occasional bit of gospel sunshine peeking through a rift in the clouds. Finally Israel and Judah were taken captive, their temple and city of Jerusalem were destroyed, and they crucified their Lord and Savior—all the outworking of the old covenant.

Now let’s look with new covenant eyes at the famous seventh commandment that has worried so many people. It becomes an assurance: you will never fall into that trap, you will never be ashamed or defeated. It says, “You shall not commit adultery.”

The old covenant glasses make it look like a kill-joy prohibition that multitudes think is impossible to obey. They ask, “Doesn’t God want us to have any fun? Doesn’t He understand what our nature is like? Didn’t He make us like we are, male and female? Why does He condemn us when we do what we feel like doing naturally?”

First of all, He does not condemn us. When Jesus met the woman who was caught “in the act” of adultery, He said, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (see John 8:11). God can forgive that sin; but the problem is that adultery wounds us and destroys our happiness.

You can survive if you have an arm or a leg amputated, but the wound will always be there. God pities and still loves the one who has fallen, but it’s for our own happiness that He gave us that seventh commandment to save us from ever having the wound.

Giving in to the clamors of our sinful nature brings only a momentary thrill that afterwards poisons the memory. Not only is the actual deed

a transgression of God's "law of liberty" (James 2:10-12), Jesus also said that even watching pornography is the essence of the sin (Matthew 5:27, 28).

An old American Indian tale recounts the story of a chief who was telling a gathering of young braves about the struggle within. "It is like two dogs fighting inside of us," the chief told them. "There is one good dog who wants to do the right and the other dog wants to do the wrong. Sometimes the good dog seems stronger and is winning the fight. But sometimes the bad dog is stronger and wrong is winning the fight." "Who is going to win in the end?" a young brave asks. The chief answered "The one you feed."

The preamble to the ten commandments assures us that our Savior will cleanse the very fountain of our being—the heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8), and the good news is that we won't have to wait until we are 100 years old or until we get to heaven for that to be fulfilled. Many a man or woman burdened with the captivity to lustful thoughts yearns to be free. Believe the gospel and you will be free, says the preamble!

The seventh commandment understood as the seventh assurance means a thorough renewal, a rebuilding of the soul from the ground up. Many of us caught in the adultery trap are inheriting a warped or distorted childhood. If we are men, we have never learned to respect or understand womanhood; and if we are women, we have always been afraid of men—yearning for them but repulsed at the same time.

Only "in Christ" are we truly at ease with the opposite sex. The liberating agent is the love (agape) of Christ. He goes deep into our psyche to heal wounds that may possibly lie too deep for us even to be aware of. Jesus is the Great Physician; He loves to heal old wounds.

"But my problem," someone says, "is that I am in love with someone I'm not with." What you think is love outside of marriage is fool's gold compared to the real thing; sex only appears real. Scratch it and you find out it's worthless. That's why such love (infatuation) doesn't last. True "love (agape) never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8). It's a love that nobody is ever born with, it never comes to us through DNA; it's a love we have to import from the outside, we have to "learn" it. And the source of learning is Christ Himself.

If you love someone with agape, you cannot harm that person sexually; you cannot rob him/her of his/her God-given self-worth or self-dignity. There is no selfishness in agape. Girls, if some boy tells

you, “I love you, give me your body!” he’s fooling you. He may be fooling himself, too! (You must respect your own God-given self-dignity.) If he truly loves you, he will not try to use your body until God has made the two of you one in holy marriage. And then the true love will never die, and it will always supersede mere sex. It’s impossible to commit adultery or fornication (pre-marital sex) if agape is in the heart!

And boys, run like a scared rabbit from the girl who wants to entangle you in a web of sensuality. Rightly understood, the seventh commandment is all about true love, for it keeps “you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life.”

“Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent” (Proverbs 6:24-29). Remember: anyone whom God has not made to be your wife in holy marriage is in fact your “neighbor’s wife” because she is not yours.

Titanic is a good example of this. That story had people believing that you can fall in love in a matter of hours, have sex with them, and then regard them in your heart as the love of your life for the rest of your life. That is silly. Now I know some claim love at first sight, but I also hope the young ladies and young men will realize that love at first sight is usually cured by taking a second look!

The preamble to the ten commandments tells us that God has already saved us from the pain and humiliation that illicit sex involves. Christ has taken Adam’s place as the new Head of the human race; He took upon Himself our fallen, sinful flesh and nature. Tempted in all points like as we are, He lives in us a pure and holy life—which is happiness unalloyed. And all that He achieved in His person He has given freely to us.

There is a worldwide teaching that denies this biblical truth. It says that Jesus was “exempt” from inheriting the same flesh or the same nature as we all have. It teaches a strange idea that is not taught anywhere in God’s holy word—that when the Virgin Mary was conceived in the womb of her mother, a miracle took place that “exempted” her from inheriting the same DNA or genes and

chromosomes that every other son or daughter of Adam has inherited naturally.

This teaching is known as “The Immaculate Conception,” which means that the Virgin Mary had different flesh, a different human nature, than what we have. She escaped inheriting our DNA. And of course, she gave that same supposedly sinless or holy flesh to her Son, Jesus. So this teaching ends up telling us that Jesus could not possibly have been tempted “in all points as we are,” as the Bible says in Hebrews 4:15.

It is true that Jesus was totally sinless, His character was holy, He was righteous; but the flesh which He took upon Himself was “the likeness of [our] sinful flesh,” and in that same fallen sinful flesh “He condemned sin” (Romans 8:3, 4). He felt the allurements of all our temptations but He said “No!” to each one, and conquered sin in our fallen, sinful flesh. Glorious emancipation!

This means that the angel told the truth before the birth of Jesus when he said to Joseph, “He will save His people from their sins,” not in their sins (Matthew 1:21). We have a Savior who “is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

You have heard the story of the village at the bottom of a cliff where people would fall over and be wounded. So the town fathers bought an ambulance, but what they should have done was to put a fence up at the top. Jesus is more than a mere ambulance! But many people haven’t realized that He is the fence up at the top of the cliff. He is our only Savior, and He is a complete Savior from sin, not in it. He doesn’t need anyone to help Him. There is no co-savior.

If a person is converted, that does not mean that he/she is no longer tempted. Our fallen, sinful flesh or nature will not be eradicated until Jesus returns and glorifies His waiting saints. Only then will our sinful flesh become sinless flesh. Then “we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

In the meantime, we all still have a fallen, sinful flesh to deal with. “As [Jesus] is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). He says to us, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you,” but at the same time He assured the disciples that the same Holy Spirit who stayed with Him and saved Him from yielding to temptation will stay with us: “When He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:21, 22).

This is the precious gift that He has promised to every one who believes on Him. “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, . . . the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:16, 17, 26). The Holy Spirit is therefore the true Vicar of Christ; the Father has sent Him as Christ’s personal Representative. If Jesus were here in person, you and I could not have a chance to see Him, for there would be so many people thronging His office. But through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Himself has come to each of us who will welcome Him. He has promised to be the Helper [Comforter, KJV], which means, He sits down beside us and never leaves us. God has promised to hold us by the hand, to steady us when we are about to stumble and fall (see Isaiah 41:10, 13).

Human yearnings for love are unrealized yearnings for Christ. When you think you have found happiness by looking in someone else’s face, what your heart is really yearning for is to see the face of Jesus smiling at you. Let us not be confused and be misled by a counterfeit love.

What our hearts most yearn for is “peace with God.” Let us see His smiling face, and then heaven begins right here on earth.

The Holy Spirit will teach us, as if we were students in school, to be happy in holy marriage. We often must ask each other to forgive us, and we forgive the other, even as we appreciate that Jesus has forgiven us. Happiness begins when husband and wife can hold hands and kneel together and together ask God in prayer to bless their marriage. He wants to, and He will; the prayers He most delights to answer are those when husband and wife agree in what they ask for!

A broken home not only brings sadness and pain to the hearts of husband and wife; it wounds the Savior afresh. His honor is bound up with the happiness of our homes. He invented marriage! Its break-up embarrasses Him. It’s Satan who tells everyone that marriage is hopeless, that it’s impossible for two people to be true to each other, that God’s invention of marriage is a mistake, that He is defeated. Every time a home breaks up, there is another vote in Satan’s favor!

“I want to be happy and I want our home to remain unbroken; but my spouse is the one who is breaking up our happiness!”

A profound treasure of wisdom is found in Paul’s counsel: “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the [believing] wife, and the

unbelieving wife is sanctified by the [believing] husband; . . . For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:14, 16). A miracle?

Yes, of course; but miracles of grace are exactly what God delights to do in these last days when so many homes are poisoned by infidelity.

According to this text, if the one believing spouse can let the Holy Spirit fill his or her heart with understanding and humility and faith, the unbelieving spouse can often be led to repentance and conversion.

Accept that seventh commandment as an assurance: believe that the Lord has led you “out of the house of bondage,” He has freed you from the slavery of sin in “Egypt,” believe that He shed His precious blood to save you, and “you shall not commit adultery.” Nor will you encourage your spouse (or anyone else) to do so! The love of Christ is stronger than all the wickedness the devil can try to send into our homes; He so changes you and melts your heart from within that such a great change will take place in you that your spouse will fall in love with you! (See 1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

Although we are God’s offspring, He says, “I am married to you.” Eve was Adam’s offspring, yet she was married to him. So we are to recognize ourselves as united to God, channels for the stream of life from God, and are to give diligence, to preserve that stream uncontaminated. The committing of adultery, the perversion of that life, is primarily a sin against God, so much so that any injury to any person is eclipsed by it. David, referring to his sin, not only in taking the wife of Uriah, but in causing him to be killed, said, “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.” Joseph, when tempted by Potiphar’s wife, reminded her of how much confidence his master reposed in him, having given him absolute control of his household; and then, instead of saying, as one might expect, that he could not commit such a crime against his master, he said, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” We have therefore only to keep God before our eyes continually, and to be loyal to Him, allowing His life to flow through us, and there will be no danger of our doing any injury to any person on earth.

It is true in the fullest sense that we are God’s offspring, for there can be no life except from Him. “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.” It is evident, therefore, that God ought by right to have the

prime control in the bringing of every new creature into existence. Otherwise there is a violation of the commandment. This is plain from the following Scripture: "Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Love of the world, union with the world, is therefore the very essence of adultery, and as such is forbidden by the commandment. Now we read that "the lust of the flesh" is of the world. Therefore it follows that whatever is the result of carnal desire, and not the working of God's Spirit, is adultery.

Someone doubtless says: How can it be otherwise, so long as we are in the flesh? Very easily, if God is allowed to have His own way. He has given Christ's power over all flesh, and "ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." We are to recognize our bodies as the dwelling-place of God, and all our members instruments of His righteousness. He is to be allowed to work in us both to will and to do. The unrighteous man is to forsake his thoughts, but only that God may think His thoughts in him, and he is to forsake his ways, that God may reveal His ways in him, "casting down . . . every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." It is not simply on the Sabbath day, but all the time, that we are not to do our own ways, nor find our own pleasure. Even now, in individuals, God's kingdom is to come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven, in order that at last it may be so all over the earth.

If any say, "This is too high; we cannot attain to it," or, recognizing its possibility, mourn over their grievous failures, let them be comforted with the knowledge that God is able to make all grace abound, and that He does not remember the sins of our youth, but puts them away from us as far as the east is from the west. It is possible for a man to be born again, even when he is old, so that all may be heirs of God, and of Him only. By the new birth we are delivered from all the evil inherited in the first birth, and this is the comfort that parents may have, not simply for themselves, when they think of their sinful heritage, but for the children who through their ignorance or self-will, may have been born after the flesh.

The commandments of God are not mere negative precepts, but positive assurances: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." This is a promise that the stream of God's life, if we but yield to it, will flow through us undefiled, making us in all our ways perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. This is the fountain opened for sin and



uncleanness. Given free course through us, it cleanses us from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, itself remaining undefiled. For by the power of the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ, His life will, if we believe, work mightily in us to swallow up death in victory. We may then rejoice in this commandment more than in all riches, and, submitting to the everlasting life, may begin a new life, fresh and clean, and find even in this sin-cursed earth, an Eden of joy.

One day a young minister was being escorted through a coal mine. At the entrance of one of the dim passageways, he spied a beautiful white flower growing out of the black earth. "How can it blossom in such purity and radiance in this dirty mine?" the preacher asked. "Throw some coal dust on it and see for yourself," his guide replied. When he did, he was surprised that the fine, sooty particles slid right off the snowy petals, leaving the plant just a lovely and unstained as before. Its surface was so smooth that the grit and grime could not adhere to it.

A person makes his own surroundings, so to him who is a new creature, "old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." Now God says: "As the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, so shall your seed and your name remain." So God expects and provides that every child of truly Christian parents shall also be Christian, and shall live for ever. It is the same as with those whose union has been brought about by Him. "They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble, for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them."

Praise God for that blessing!