

Are Legalism and Licentiousness Really Equal Threats?

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[0 : 00] welcome welcome welcome long time welcome to the providence podcast my name is chris oswald senior pastor of providence community church and it has been quite some time since i've been able to record a podcast now this is all due to the fact that i keep getting relocated i am uh i am a stranger and a sojourner in my own office spaces but every time i lose an office space something happens i wind up having to sort of uh can figure out a new configuration for the podcast and we're we're up and running with i think probably what will be a makeshift situation until probably about a month from now until we'll be able to turn one of the spare bedrooms in my house into a little bit of a studio space so looking forward to that looking forward to more regular podcasting well today is the uh 9th of october it's a tuesday no it's a wednesday and we've already had a sermon on adultery last sunday and we're wrapping up we're getting ready to wrap up the ten commandment series soon this week coming up we'll be talking about uh stealing one of the things that i've noticed through this series is that you can take sort of a maximalist perspective on interpreting and applying these and that's what you see the puritans doing that's what you see in the westminster confession or the westminster catechism and the heidelberg catechism and so on and so forth and so most of my study work for this sermon series has been really in that kind of 1600 1700s a little bit of the 1800s time period where people really treated god's word as as a light uh and they were like okay here's the truth how can we apply this to as many places as possible and get the most out of this idea as possible i've referenced some of this in in a couple sermons that there is a maximalist sort of perspective that so loves the word of god that it meditates on it day and night and seeks to figure out how do we apply this text to as many places as possible how do we get as much light out of this text as possible and then there's another perspective that i would say is just very modern and evangelical and the big fear of course in evangelicalism wrongly in my opinion is legalism and so uh there the fear is always to over apply god's word to places where it doesn't speak specifically and so on and so forth and boy i'll just tell you uh that is not the way that our forefathers handled the word of god as you can see if you would read these catechisms and confessions and so forth they are really eagerly looking for places to apply these truths as far out as possible whereas we are so concerned about you know about putting something on someone putting an expectation on someone that is beyond what the bible does that we're so concerned about that that we miss a lot of opportunities for wisdom and and good application of god's word in the westminster confession we see the phrase uh good and appropriate or something like that i can't remember it exactly but it's this idea that you know the word teaches what it teaches and then there are good and appropriate uh implications of what it teaches that apply to other places in life as well i bring all that up because we've seen that uh you know that the when we turn to say the commandment about taking the lord's name in vain and then we turn to the westminster catechism we see all of these areas that we would not have thought about the same is true with adultery and murder and so on and so forth and so you'll see some of that

again uh this sunday lord willing if i'm able to preach uh then you'll you'll see that again you'll see this interpretive maximalism i would argue that that's really uh from the lord that that perspective that approach is really from the lord and i want to kind of walk you through some scriptures today specifically on the last two commandments uh murder and uh adultery so i want to point you to the development we see over time uh that is obviously led by god himself and that would show up in say matthew chapter 5 verse 21 let me read that to you matthew chapter 5 verse 21 you have heard it said that it was uh you have heard that it was said to those of old you shall not murder and whoever murders will be liable to judgment but i say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council and whoever says you fool will be liable to hellfire so if you are offering your gift at the altar and then remember that your brother has something against you leave your gift there before the altar and go first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court lest your accuser hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard and you be put in prison truly i say to you you'll never get out until you have paid the last penny so here you have an example of jesus doing this very thing same thing we see that the catechists are doing and that is is that there's this commandment do not murder and to apply that in a very strict and compartmentalized way would be to miss the heart behind the commandment what jesus is doing in matthew 5 21 through 26 is he's showing the heart behind the commandment and that heart includes uh anger and now we can go to the next section in jesus teaching in matthew 20 in matthew 5 and see that he does the exact same thing with the command related to adultery listen to matthew 5 27 you have heard it said you've heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery but i say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart if your right eye causes you to sin tear it out and throw it away for it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell and if your right hand causes you to sin cut it off throw it away for it is better that you lose one of your members than the whole body that your whole body go to hell so here again same idea we see the strict commandment itself in exodus 20 you shall not commit adultery and rather than keep it exceedingly tight and say well this only applies in this one way jesus says no it there's there's a there's layers to this and there's a there are other implications that go beyond them the most obvious one he says here that if you look at a woman with lustful intent you've already committed adultery with her in your heart now what i want you to understand is that that's uh there's a dynamic going on here that i haven't been able to figure out in another way um i only have one good illustration for this but i don't love it if that makes sense but let me share it with you because um maybe you'll be able to see why i don't love it but i think it's probably the right one okay so what we get from this development we see from exodus to matthew is that first of all we get the idea that god really god really was seeing a lot more potential violations of these commandments than we would see and so it just reminds you that my goodness what the view of humanity must look like from god's perspective who sees perfectly who sees hearts and intentions

and and who's so holy too you know he's not he's not in any way desensitized to sin like we are we're super desensitized to sin and he isn't and you just realize like oh my goodness like what what must we look like to him as a people you know collectively because it's a lot more than uh it's a lot worse than you would think that's for sure so there's one idea the other idea is just that um and this is the illustration i don't love but i don't know how else to talk about it is that sins tend to have like a almost like a a fetus to 50 year old kind of range if that makes any sense like okay so here's i'm me right i'm um almost 50 one one year away and i was born in 1975 in august so let's picture me in let's say may of 1975 where was i in may of 1975 did i exist yeah i did i was in my mama's belly you know i was i was hanging out there just like doing the midwestern you know fetal thing the midwestern fetus you know growing up on corn and you know all that stuff so yeah i was around i wasn't the same as i am now but it was me it was me back in april of 1975 um you know and so the idea being that i'm i'm me now i was me then but i'm definitely you know a much bigger me now than i was then and i'm just more developed i mean just in general you know lots of cellular division has taken place well that's i think what you you see a glimpse of that in jesus's teachings on these sins it's like is looking at a woman with lust in your heart adultery yes is it the same as sleeping with a woman who's not your wife no it is in the same it's the same species is that the way we should say this it's just a smaller version and if it's allowed to continue to grow it will grow into this bigger thing uh typically but even in the smaller thing it's still sin so it's uh it's still a sin it's still the same kind of sin it belongs to the same species i guess and uh it's it's just a question of how far in its development does it get and so you know i was me and you know march of 1975 just a lot smaller simpler version of me and now all these years later i'm still the same person but i'm just i've just expanded and grown okay so uh uh let's think about that with sin the verse that is the best that i know of that teaches this is in james james chapter 1 verse let's start at verse 12 blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which god has promised to those who love him let no one say when he is tempted i am being tempted by god for god cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one that's just some context for you but here's the verse that i i see kind of explaining some of this um you know development of sin verse 14 james 1 james chapter 1 verse 14 but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his

own desire then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death so it's this uh picture that is very kind of you know intentionally i did some greek work on this years ago so i i just gonna go with my gut memory here that this this that these language here was you know it was fetal language i seem to remember that certainly feels that way in the english then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death so i think that the thing you need to understand about a lot of these sins is that there is a fetal version and there is a you know adult version and it starts small and it keeps growing keeps growing keeps growing now you know this is where i think this is why i don't like the illustration because you wind up thinking about terminating a sin that is in a smaller state a fetal state obviously that's not that's not a way of thinking that you know any of us feel comfortable with so that's why i don't like this illustration maybe you can figure out a better one for me to use down the road but we're going to stick with it the idea is that uh when desire is sort of floating out there it still hasn't it still hasn't moved entirely into sin there is a moment when the sin emerges in jesus's discussion of lust he would say that that moment was when you look at a woman with you know a lustful intent um that is a baby version of what it could grow into if it is not confessed and put to death god still sees it as a kind of adultery but not the same as if it were to give full you know as if it were to fully express itself so yeah that's the idea i think you i think that when we start talking about when we start handling god's word especially god's law there is a temptation to oversimplify and make it as flat and and as particular as possible but that is not helpful to us because what's what's going on is that we need to be able to see that we need to see sin in its small seed forms so that we we know how to handle it there before it gets full grown and when you tell someone when you create this sort of um anti-legalism kind of way of living you're just setting people up to be surprised by full grown sin over and over and over again i sure hope that makes sense it's been a while since i've done a podcast guys i'm sorry if that didn't make sense but uh the big the big argument i would want to make is is that i think in line with what i said it related in a sermon related to honoring our forefathers i think we've turned the bible into like a bunch of ikea furniture where it's just extraordinarily flat you know plastic and you know self-assembly and i think that the old way the old 16th 17th 18th century way you know it that stuff looked you know baroque it looked it was extraordinarily complex and i'm not arguing that we need to do exactly the same thing and i'm not arguing that the westminster confession is god's word what i am arguing is is that these are men worthy of respect and that their approach to theology i think is probably more biblical than ours we're always looking to limit and there are always looking to sort of expand lastly i want to conclude with something that i've shared with a number of you over the years and some of you might not have heard this before but when we hear someone like tim keller for instance who i think has made good contributions of course to the kingdom but when we hear him

talking about legalism and licentiousness as two ditches and you know we have to do what we can to stay in the middle of the gospel and we don't want to get into the legalism ditch or the licentiousness ditch i will tell you straight up that i've lived around human beings for a long time and i'm a payer i'm a payer attentioner i'm a noticer and i will tell you that both from a biblical perspective a logical perspective and an experiential perspective legalists uh are definitely definitely they definitely exist and they definitely uh are wrong but i will tell you it is a way worse a way a way safer ditch to fall into than to fall into headlong into licentiousness so i don't i think we need to be clear that one ditch that the ditch of hating the law the ditch of the ditch of feeling like god's word is a burden the ditch of being antinomian the psalm 2 ditch of cast his burn what we will cast his bonds from us that is a way bigger ditch and way harder to get out of and you're going to hurt yourself a lot more if you fall into that than if you kind of accidentally go a little too legalistic and you know for a while you're kind of a you know a butt you're kind of you know a jerk and judgmental and so forth you need to deal with those things and and of course the regular preaching of the gospel will deal with both but i want to be clear that all this old uh you know sort of early 2000s late 90s explanations of legalism and licentiousness as being equal ditches not true not true at all it's not true for you and your well-being for your neighbor's good so forth a world that has no laws and no boundaries is a far worse world than a world that has too many uh ultimately people need instruction and guidance and there's a reason after why and i'm not arguing for this but there's a reason why after moments of societal chaos and revolution and throwing off of all restraint you almost always have some kind of refractory period where there's almost like a push toward like a fascism and that's because people can see the monster that exists in the darkness when you walk past the rules you know and they see this monster and it looks like this thing is going to kill the whole world and so they you know quite quickly put on a bunch of rules uh not arguing for fascism not arguing for you know stringency for stringency sake but when these westminster divines uh in the 1600s were looking at all of this i think they were wise and understanding that god's word generally speaking is just to shed light and truth and wisdom and we need to use it as much as possible as far as possible one of the ways that they did this i think is in keeping with jesus's approach is to see how um how you know a sin in its full bornness you know like stealing from someone like that's sin in its full birth stage its full size stage rather but there are all sorts of like fetal versions of that sin that still matter a great deal and if you can catch them there you still need grace even then but it's a different kind of situation for you and for yours and for human happiness and flourishing and so on and so forth so i think that'll do it for me i really wanted to do this mostly just to get back in the habit of doing it and have some really cool things planned for this podcast as soon as i get that studio space figured out which i think will probably be in about a month all right well looking forward to this weekend we've got the men's retreat happening friday saturday i guess sunday morning and getting my sermon all done here early so that we can i can kick back and hang out with the guys there uh looking forward to that tonight i know is a women's bible study last night was another women's get together lots of cool things happening at providence oh hey one last thing i'm not going to get into it now but you know you've probably been wondering what what's the next

[20:10] step with the building campaign and so forth well i'll i'll try to remember to talk about this on sunday and then i want to do a podcast on this but really what we're asking you to do right now is we're really just asking you for the whole month of october to just be praying about what god would have you give to help us get this done and um one thing that some of the uh deacons and elder guys were telling me uh that i needed to clarify because i i think it was just assumed but apparently it's not is when we ask you to give for this we'll tell you how to do that and then what we'll do is we'll say like we're this is a two-year window for this to happen we really anticipate friends that this would happen this summer but we would put a two-year window on it and then that money if you were to give it just sits there until uh we have the money we need to do it and if if at the end of that two-year period we haven't gotten there then whatever you gave just goes back to you so um once you didn't know that guys told me that that was something that people wouldn't necessarily assume me on the church budget side of things would know like well that's just the way that would have to work but um they were like yeah you should you should mention that because i think people would want to know that so for now we're just asking you to pray and then you know in like november december we will ask folks to give and if you were to give uh you know a sizable amount of money and you're like well i don't want this converted into programming or this or that it's like no that's not how this works if you give for this and we can't cross that finish line for some reason which again we don't anticipate but if for some reason we're not able to cross that finish line that money goes back to you at the end of a two-year period for us to try to make it happen uh so yeah and by the way if you have questions about any of this this is a simple project this is a funding this you know it's not a very expensive project it shouldn't take a long time all that to say this if you have questions they're probably relatively easy to answer uh if not by your now i've tried to keep the community group leaders up to date the deacons so they they probably know most of what i know but if you if you wanted to just ask me that's fine as well all right well god bless you friends i'm so grateful to be a pastor at your local church i'm so grateful that you listen to this podcast and i've heard so many kind words about the sermons recently and that's always so encouraging um yeah anyway i'm just so grateful for what god's doing at providence these days and i'll with that i'll i'll end today and check in on the kiddos i'm sitting upstairs at the church right now nox is meeting down in the basement they've got another another hour and a half to go until they're done with school and they actually get fall break next next week so they won't have school next week i know the teachers are probably pretty excited about that all right well god bless you my friends and uh until next time uh just pray that the lord's you know peace and his light would rest not only in your heart but in the heart of all those in your home be well