

Calvin Speaks



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ADULTERY AND ITS PENALTY*

**Title not in the original*

Sermon 128. 14 January 1558. Deuteronomy 22:13-24.

13. If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and hates her,

14. And says slanderous things about her, and causes an evil report to circulate against her, and says, "I took this woman, and when I came to her I found her not a virgin";

15. Then the father and the mother of the girl shall take the tokens of the girl's virginity and bring them out to the elders of the city in the gate.

16. And the girl's father shall say to the elders, "I gave my daughter to this man as wife, and he hates her;

17. "And behold, he has said slanderous things about her, saying, 'I found your daughter not to be a virgin;' yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity." And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city.

18. And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him,

19. And they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver, and give them to the father of the damsel, because he has caused an evil report to circulate against a virgin of Israel; and she shall become his wife. He may not divorce her all his days.

20. But if this charge be true, and the girl is not found a virgin,

21. Then they shall bring the girl out to the door of her father's house, and the men of the city shall stone her with stones so that she dies; because she has done folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house. So shall you put evil away from among you.

22. If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman. So shall you put away evil from Israel.

23. If a girl, a virgin, is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her,

24. Then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them with stones that they die; the girl because she did not cry out, being in the city; and the man because he has humbled his neighbor's wife. So you shall put away evil from among you.

This whole passage serves to declare God's special concern that chastity be maintained among His people. And from this we may gather that if whoredom has full liberty among us, it is such an abomination in the sight of God that it provokes His wrath and vengeance. Such a people will have to be cursed, among whom there is open liberty for whoremongering and where this vile filthiness is not cleansed. You can see, then, what this whole doctrine applies to. At the same time, though, we must examine the things as they are. @ down here, so that we may apply every point to its proper use.

The Importance of a Good Reputation

First of all, therefore, our Lord shows the tremendous necessity of chastising anyone who brings up a slanderous report against another, for every person's reputation ought to be maintained. Moreover, if a man or woman complains that he or she has been wrongfully accused, but is found to be at fault, his or her punishment ought to be doubled.¹ And from this law we may gather a good lesson. We know how it is said that a man's good name is better and more precious than either gold or silver. And if a man is past shame, it is a sure sign that he is wedded to all wickedness. It is natural, therefore, that each man seeks to preserve his credit.

Of course, we must not be given to ambition, as those who covet nothing more than to be highly esteemed by men. A curse upon us if we operate on that principle. We ought, as St. Paul says (Rom. 12:17), to procure that which is good, not only in conscience before God, but also in the sight of men, so that we do not become a stumbling block of offense, and so that men do not hide behind us as a shield when they do evil, saying "But did not so and so do the same thing?" How horrible it would be if men should take occasion from us to offend God? You can see, then, why we ought to maintain our credit as much as possible.

For this reason it is said here that if a man, after taking a woman to wife, accuses her of immoral behavior prior to marriage, then the father and the mother shall come and maintain the honesty of their daughter, and the man who is found to have wrongfully charged his wife shall be punished both in body and in purse; and their daughter shall so remain with him that he may never divorce her. We see at this point how God would not allow the husband to accuse the wife wrongfully, and therefore it may be concluded by greater reason that it is not lawful for a stranger to slander a woman in the area of chastity, when she is found innocent. For the husband might argue that he has more liberty to do so, because he is her head and superior. But in any event, God will not have the woman falsely accused, and He commands that the husband should be punished for so doing, indeed in his very person. For in addition to the money which is here required, there was further appointed a correction by the judges.²

And let us note that this was done not only to maintain the woman's good name, but also to encourage women to live chastely, since God declares Himself the protector of their honesty. We see that God is concerned that they who live honestly and without reproof have their good name also maintained, and that the husband shall be chastised if he slanders his wife. And when God abases Himself to execute this office, should women be so beastly and wicked as to give themselves over to unchaste villainy? No, for surely this privilege cannot be too highly esteemed, and yet so many scorn it. You can see, then, what end God aimed at, and what we have to bear in mind concerning this law.

Now in connection with this let us note that when judges and magistrates are taught concerning their office, everyone should gather instruction from it. How so? If a false report is raised concerning an innocent person, the office of those bearing the sword is to maintain the good name of every person. That is what God commands them. As for us on our side, let us not wait until we are punished at the hands of judges and magistrates for falsely accusing someone, but let us keep ourselves from all slandering, since it is a thing which so greatly displeases God. Let us therefore take heed how we open our mouth to stain any man's credit. And why? Because no matter what men may do to us for it, it displeases God.

Indeed, He has commanded that it be punished. But whether men punish it or wink at it, God will always show that He will not allow the person of any man to be wrongfully grieved. You see, then, how we must keep in mind to live uprightly together and to take heed that none be falsely charged or slandered, and that if there be any wickedness, we must do our best to remove it. But to traffic in hatred and ill will, or to be so maliciously bent on slandering as to backbite our neighbors, or to be venomous of tongue and to defame one another, is such an outrageous fault that God can in no wise permit it.

On the other hand let us note that just as God's will is that the innocent should have their good reputations maintained, even so if a man complains that he has been wronged but is found guilty and is convicted of the crime he had professed being innocent of, he deserves double punishment. We have an example of this here. If a man's daughter makes complaint against her husband, and her father and mother take her part, naturally they shall be heard. But if the young woman is found at fault, and has behaved unlawfully, even though it was before she was married, before she was bound to her husband, before she was betrothed, yet for all this it is God's will that she be stoned. Why? Because it is a kind of theft if a person, knowing himself to be at fault, will for all that be so shameless as to take to himself honor which does not pertain to him.

If a man has offended, he ought to cast his eyes to the ground. If someone accuses us, we must be sorry and desire God to bury our faults. On the other hand, if we are so

¹Calvin has in mind Ex.22:16f. and Deut.22:28f., which teach that an unengaged girl who permits herself to be seduced is not punished with death. Instead, she is to confess her fault, and be married to her seducer (unless her father objects). For her to conceal her sin, however, is to act shamelessly, like a whore (Dt.22:21). It is a kind of perjury, and when maintained in court becomes actual perjury. For Calvin this is a double offense and a capital crime, as his subsequent discussion makes plain.

²Rushdoony's comments on the punishment of the husband are worth noting. "A fine of 100 shekels of silver (Deut.22:19) was a very considerable sum. A quarter shekel was considered a notable gift for a great man (1 Sam.9:8). The annual poll tax of all males in Israel, 20 years of age and older, was half a shekel (Ex. 30:15). Under Nehemiah, with the Persian Empire providing many of the civil functions and also exacting a tax, the poll tax was cut to a 'Third part of a shekel' (Neh. 10:32). Thus, 100 shekels of silver was an extremely heavy fine and one which would virtually wipe out most husbands and make them in effect their wife's servant or slave thereafter. The fine was paid to the bride's father, and thus kept out of the control of the husband, who could nullify the effect of the penalty if the money were in his wife's possession. Control of the wife would then lead to control of the money. The father-in-law would not be subject to such control and could administer the funds for his daughter's and grandchildren's welfare. Not only was the husband so penalized, but all recourse to divorce was then barred to him." Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1973), p. 591.

It is also important to notice where the sum of 100 shekels comes from. The normal amount of the *mohar* or insurance money given to a bride by her groom was 50 shekels (Dt.22:29). In this case, the husband is accusing the father of the bride of trying to steal 50 shekels from him by providing a defiled woman as wife. The penalty for theft is double restitution (Ex. 22:4), so if the charge were sustained, and the father's complicity shown, the father would have to pay his ex-son-in-law 100 shekels. According to the *lex talionis* (eye for eye, tooth for tooth), the false accuser is to suffer the same consequences as his intended victim (Deut. 19:15-21). Thus, if the husband's charge is proven false, he must pay the father-in-law 100 shekels.

As regards the tokens of virginity themselves, Calvin says this in his *Commentaries*, at Deut. 22:13ff.: "It is plain from this passage, that the tokens of virginity were taken on a cloth, on the first night of marriage, as future proofs of chastity. It is also probable that the cloth was laid up before witnesses as a pledge, to be a sure defence for pure and modest young women; for it would have been giving too much scope to the parents if it had been believed simply on their evidence; but Moses speaks briefly as of a well-known custom." In other words, it would be too easy for the parents to produce fake evidence by spilling blood on a cloth; thus Calvin assumes the tokens were deposited with a disinterested party.

shameless and bold to twist our mouth and say, "What? I did not such a thing;" what presumptuousness is this? Yet notwithstanding, nothing is more common nowadays than this. For they who are the most immoral of all, if a man gives them even so much as a nip of the teeth for their vices, even if the fault is minor, will make the greatest outcries; and if their honor is not maintained, oh how they thunder! Who are those which nowadays have the reputation as honest men? Worthless rascals, in whom there is nothing but evil. Truly honest men are almost ashamed to be called such because the title of honesty, which ought to be sacred, is so defiled. It seems that all men unhallow it, because all claim the title, and the worst degenerates and lewdest persons (as I said before) are the ones who claim it most boldly. And not only is it the case that every man with full mouth claims himself to be honest, sound, and true dealing, but it is also the case that if you blame him for anything, no matter how much at fault he may be, he will threaten you with an action of slander. And if such men be one hundred times convicted, yet they take no account of it.

God's opinion is otherwise, however. His will is that anyone who takes to himself a reputation of credit which is not his by right, should be doubly punished. If he deserves to be whipped, he should be put to death, because he has abused justice and held it up to scorn, desiring that men should adjudge him an honest and good man when there is in fact wickedness in him.

You see here, then, a point well worth noting, namely that just as judges and magistrates are bound to maintain the good name of the innocent, so also on the other side if they see shameless men attempting to stand in the company of the just and to enjoy the privileges of good men and of those who are honest and without reproof, they should use greater rigor and severity towards them. And why? Because if they had stolen five dollars they would have been punished, but now they have stolen that which is worth much more, namely the name of virtue. Whom do they steal it from? from all good men. For they would put themselves in the company of such as have walked in the fear of God and have lived honest lives before men. They want to be esteemed as good men, whom they defile with their filthiness and corruptions by mingling themselves in among them. So then, since they make such confusion, they deserve to be the more grievously punished.

If a man commits robbery, and tries to justify himself and be acquitted of the crime, but is convicted of it, what is to be done with him? If a single theft of property deserves a whipping, the double case of theft of property and of name deserves the death penalty,³ for it is robbery against God to profess guiltlessness when one is in fact guilty. Such dealing defiles the throne of justice, and destroys the reputation of all honest men (as I have noted above), tending to confound all things so that men are no longer able to distinguish good from evil. All this would come to pass if this wickedness should be admitted and allowed to have its way. This is what we need to bear in mind.

Now, when we see that God wants men to proceed according to justice, there is a warning for us all; namely, that we need to have an eye to our conscience that it be pure, so that if men accuse us, God will answer for us and be our defender. This passage shows us that if we are accused we may profess our innocence before God. After all, it will not really profit us at all to be justified before men. Our wickedness maybe well hidden, and we may find some cloak for it, but God sees it. And then what will all the rest avail us? Indeed, if we are shameless, as

so many are who even though their wickedness is known even to little children do not care so long as they are not convicted by two or three witnesses, what a thing is that?

Therefore, if we care to have a good name, let us first of all walk in such an uprightness before God that if we are charged wrongfully with any matter, we may call on God to clear us and have our recourse to Him; so that we may say, "Lord, You know that I find myself guiltless, Be pleased, therefore, to stretch forth Your hand, as You have promised, to defend my innocence, as the Scripture says that God will make the righteousness of His servants to shine forth as the break of day" (Mt. 13:43). So, when we are wrongly defamed, let us wait for God to redress it, and let us know that in the end, when we have been humbled for a season, he will make manifest the injury that men have done to us. But let us always have our principal recourse to Him; and this we cannot do unless we are well assured of our own innocence. And moreover let us take heed that we live with men in such away that if we are accused they will be constrained to say, "This cannot be;" or at least they may be astonished and say, "What can this mean? This man has lived so honestly that he has never deserved any evil report," So, let our lives answer for us when men report evil of us. You can see, then, how we are to live.

And because mention is expressly made of women, let those who wish to have a good reputation for chastity, take heed to walk in such a way that no suspicion may be raised regarding them nor any occasion be given for speaking evil of them. But what do we see nowadays, but many clever dames who secretly play the harlot and who, because the world does not charge them with it, are counted as honest women. But where are their tokens of chastity?

You see then how we need to learn from what God has set down here that if a father or a mother complain, and their daughter be found innocent of all crime, then she is to have her reputation maintained; and on the other hand, if she be found guilty, then she shall the more grievously be punished, even by stoning to death. This is to be done even if she had not played the harlot previously! because she has entered a formal complaint wrongfully and has commenced her action in the court of law, unjustly claiming to herself that honorable title which she through her own fault has lost.

From this we may perceive that we must not forbear to punish offenses out of fear of false accusation. For nowadays, if many men are to be believed, there should be no laws to

³Actually, a single theft of property required multiple restitution, Exodus 22:1-4. Calvin is being more severe than Scripture at this point. As far as the death penalty for perjury, however, see Prov. 19:9 and Deut. 19:1 6-21. Calvin is claiming that perjury in self-defense is a "double" offense, and thus (apparently) a capital offense. This is an Inference drawn from Scripture.

In cases where one party lies about another, the penalty is eye for eye, and life for life (Deut. 19:1 6-21). One might think that in this case the husband is getting off lightly, because the wife dies if his charge is sustained. This is not necessarily the case. If Calvin is correct, the girl is executed for perjury together with harlotry. The husband is not seeking her death, but a divorce. She brings death upon herself if she insists on her innocence. Presumably (again, an inference), if she confesses her sin, she would be put away without being put to death (cf. Matt. 1:19, "Joseph, being a just man, ... was minded to put her away secretly"). Since what the husband seeks is a divorce, if he turns out to be lying, his punishment is that he may NEVER divorce her.

⁴What Calvin means by this is obscure to me. I assume he means that the girl had not been promiscuous, but had only fallen into sin on one occasion. Alternatively, he may simply mean that playing the harlot on the part of a girl was not a civil crime (except for a priest's daughter, Lev.21 :9) unless accompanied by perjury.

punish faults and of fenses.⁵ They allege that this is to be done in order to avoid other problems. In the mean time, then, are we to give way to all lawless behavior and shake off all yoke and correction from us? What would come of it in the end, except beastly confusion in all places? Therefore, though sometimes there is fear of false accusation and slander, yet we must not leave off the use of chastisements and corrections, as far as reason and objectivity permit. At the same time, remedies against false accusation ought to be provided, as the Lord does here in that He wills that the case be tried, if a husband raise a false report against his wife. There must be an orderly manner of proceeding on both sides, so that the wickedness may not remain unpunished, and also that the innocent be maintained, and the mean be observed which our Lord shows us. You see what we have to learn from this place.

The Usefulness of the Mosaic Penalties

Let us now return to the general point we touched on before, namely that God in all these laws declares what a pleasant thing chastity is in His eyes, and how He will not allow the filthiness of whoredom to reign among His people. From the punishments set down here we may gather how grievous and intolerable a wickedness it is. This is all the more clear when we consider that God does not exceed measure when He punishes sinners, but does it with discretion. Thus, where the punishment is rigorous, it is because the sin also is great and excessive.⁶ It is true, of course, that God does not always punish sins as they deserve, in that He permitted a kind of divorce among the Israelites⁷ and also when a man was guilty of fornication, he was discharged if he promised marriage to the maid and took her to wife.⁸ But although our Lord, taking note of the hardness of that people's heart, did not always ordain such precise laws as to punish them as they deserved,⁹ yet we shall not err at all if we draw this inference: that where God punished any fault of theirs it was to declare to us that the thing displeased Him, and that it is not to be tolerated lest we provoke His anger. Therefore, we must bow to Him, since we see that He has appointed certain punishments, and that it shall cost us dear if we do not benefit ourselves from them.

This is why St. Paul declares that the punishments God executes are like mirrors and lively pictures, because we may gather from them that God will always be a just judge, and will execute similar vengeance on those who commit similar wickednesses (1 Cor. 10:6). We gather this from beholding the warning God gives to them. For instance, we see that God punished those who were rebellious among His people so grievously that the earth opened and swallowed those who set themselves up against Moses and Aaron. Again we see how their lusts were punished in that God thundered down from heaven upon them the meat which they desired, though it would have been much better for them to have starved than to have paid so dear a price as to swallow up the vengeance of God along with their meat, which they had unlawfully desired. And for whoredom, there was so grievous a punishment for it and the wrath of God was so kindled against His people that they were almost rooted out. (See Num. 16, 11, 25.) Seeing that we have such warnings, says St. Paul, let us learn to fear and to take heed lest we tempt God unwittingly. We would surely be guilty of defying Him if we observe His setting before us such a boundary and threatening us by the harm that came to other men, and yet we cease not to follow the same wickedness. This

is the same as if, as I said, we were to defy Him and proclaim open war against Him.

So then, let us learn that when God ordains any execution of punishment it is not only to chastise the offender but also to instruct us in our behavior, so that we will not be so senseless as to cast ourselves headlong into wickedness, seeing the lesson set before our eyes. And so, to be short, let all the corrections which are contained in the Law serve us for so many bridles to restrain us, and let them teach us to walk in the fear of God. Let us take them as preservative medicines, and let us not wait for mischief to light on us, but provide for ourselves beforehand and pray God that He guide us in such a way that we do not have to taste His anger.

Let us also put into practice what St. Paul says, speaking of adultery and similar matters, that no man deceive us with vain words (Eph. 5:6). "Take heed," he says, "that you be not deceived; for the world treats itself so lightly as even to dally with God and to set His justice aside; but don't you be deceived in that matter, for the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience for such things." Now if God by punishing sins shows how He detests them, in that He sets down a law in writing, and appoints judges and magistrates to execute that which He commands, I pray you is it not a most certain warning, and one such as ought to touch us to the quick? And if for all this we insist on being stubborn and hardhearted in our wickedness, is it not a rushing with our horns against God, as I have said already? [Yes, surely.] And therefore let us note that seeing God has punished adulteries so grievously, it is to show to us that it is so great a filthiness that it cannot but nourish His wrath and vengeance. Therefore, His will is that above all things faithfulness should be kept in marriage.

Unchastity and Its Punishments

The particular case in view is adultery. Without a doubt, all kinds of whoredoms displease God. We must always come

⁵ Imperfect justice is better than no justice at all. On all sides in our day, as in Calvin's, we hear voices insisting that because the courts make mistakes from time to time, penalties should be lax.

⁶ As Hebrews 2:2 says, in the Mosaic law "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense." The Mosaic law sets out a perfect (because God-given) system of civil and criminal law, appointing the proper punishments for each crime. And, as Calvin says, it is a model for all Christian nations.

⁷ Calvin has in mind Matt. 5:31, 32. In his *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* (available from Baker Book House), Calvin says of these verses, in part, "For national laws are sometimes accommodated to the manners of men but God, in prescribing a spiritual law, looked not at what men can do, but at what they ought to do." In other words, not all sins are crimes; such divorces maybe morally wrong, but legally tolerated in the interest of preventing worse social disorders. This is an interesting argument on this text, and not what is usually encountered.

On the question of whether the New Testament changes the Old Testament rules for divorce, see Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1977), pp. 97ff. A view similar to Calvin's is found in Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

⁸ It is hard to see why this is not regarded as a just punishment. Calvin maybe advocating a severity greater than God's at this point.

⁹ It seems that if Calvin has any objection to the Mosaic legislation, and I personally think he has none, it is that it is too lax. One may contrast this with the view so common nowadays, that the Mosaic Law is too severe.

back to this principle, that since God blessed man and woman when he joined them in marriage, He cursed all whoredom; just as the apostle says that marriage is holy and honorable, so that when the bed is dedicated to the name of God, that is to say, when the parties are joined together in His name and live honorably, it is as it were a hallowed estate; but adulterers and fornicators God will judge (Heb. 13:4). He is speaking not only of adulterers, those who have broken their own marriage and the marriage of others, but also generally and without exception of all those who give themselves to any manner of whoredom. With respect to this St. Paul says also that not only adulterers are shut out and banished from the kingdom of God, but fornicators also (2 Cor. 6:9).

And again we see that when he speaks of those who live a wicked and loose life, and therefore ought to be excommunicated and cast out of the Church, he speaks not only of adulterers, but of fornicators also. And the reason why is most worth noting. For what are our bodies and souls but the temples of the Holy Spirit? Seeing that God bestows on us this honor, to dwell in our souls and bodies, is that not a great reason why they should be kept holy and undefiled? And if a man soil himself by coupling himself with a harlot, is it not all the same as if he would tear in pieces the body of our Lord Jesus Christ? Let us therefore note that God detests all kinds of whoredom.

But in this place He speaks of adultery, because it constitutes a greater villainy. Why? Because if a maid promises marriage and falsifies the faith she plighted, she defiles not only her own body, and so consequently violates the temple of God, but she also dishonors her husband with whom she was coupled, so that she robs another of his good, indeed of such a good as cannot be recompensed with gold or silver. For she exposes him to open shame, whereas she should have been ready to spend her whole life for him, if need arose. Is it proper that such a thing should be allowed? Therefore, let us note that our Lord's will is that the maid who has promised marriage should be stoned if she commit whoredom, and this is because she has committed villainy against her husband in not keeping faith with her betrothed.

And also the fornicator is to be punished likewise. Why? Because he robs another man of his good name and breaks a holy and sacred promise. Men punish falsifiers and forgers. For example, if a man steals a public record [such as an indenture, deed, or bond], or falsifies it, he will grievously be punished. Is not marriage a greater thing than a contract of a hundred dollars, or a bargain concerning a house or land? This case concerns the fellowship for life and death. The case concerns a holy bond which God Himself has established among us, for the purpose of removing all confusion from the world so that we should not be like brute beasts which couple together without any selectivity, but that the man should have his wife and the wife her husband. And if this is violated and taken away, all order of nature is corrupted. If we play the blind idiot and wink at such garbage and so let it slip by, let us not deceive ourselves; for God will requite it with a horrible revenge. And we see it is not without cause that God has so grievously punished the fornication of such as had promised or betrothed themselves to husbands.

And since this is the case with betrothed couples, what shall be said concerning the married husband? For she is given to a husband to help him to govern his house in the name of God, and if she gives herself over villainously to whoredom, she not only robs her husband of his good name and works

him a great outrage, but she spoils also the name of the whole family, for she plays the whore with another man and the children she bears through that harlotry will bear the name of her husband. In this way the goods and substance of the man are taken from the lawful children and given to bastards who have no title to them. Is this not a more wicked villainy than if one had broken up a house, rifled all the coffers, spoiled and taken away all things, and committed the greatest robberies in the world? Yes indeed, and it ought to be less borne with, as even the heathen knew.

If we had nothing more than the law of Moses, we still ought to be ashamed to see whoredom nowadays so easily pardoned and so small account made of it. But when the heathen teach us our lesson, and manifest a better social order by far than those who at this day call themselves Christians, I pray you what a witness will that be against us at the latter day? Blind men have been of clearer sight than we. We Christians say continually that Jesus Christ has brought a true declaration of the Law, so that we should realize that it contains the perfect rule of holiness. Indeed, He did not add anything to the Law.¹⁰ At the same time, we ought to be more knowledgeable than the fathers who lived before the coming of the gospel; but how are we profiting? There is no account made nowadays of whoredom. Wedlock is broken, faith falsified, and men make no reckoning of it. It passes scotfree.

In what a state then do you think we are? Men seek to shift the matter by saying, "Oh, sir, you must bear with our weakness." Do we think that God will accept this line of reasoning? Is not His word always irrevocable? Is it not the same as if He had said, "Are you not concerned about what I have commanded you? And what are you? Do you think you are wiser than I? Well, let Me remind you that I am your Judge." So, let us note well that the sin and wickedness is doubled when men refuse to submit to what God has once spoken, but try to chop logic with Him.

So then, let us know that there is a double woe threatened us when we see God on the one hand speaking to us and telling us that whoredom is such a pestilent infection that He can in no wise suffer it, and declaring that when marriage, which He has dedicated in His Name, is corrupted, there must be punishment. When we hear that God proceeds to such severity, and also on the other hand see that by nature alone He has inspired the heathen to know that there could be no order among men unless whoredom should be severely punished, what are we able to say?

Now then first of all, when it says here that a maid who has betrothed herself to a husband is to be stoned along with the fornicator if she has allowed herself to be defiled, we must understand that, seeing she was so lewd as to falsify her faith, and that in so holy and sacred a thing as marriage, our Lord esteemed her as one given over to all vice and shame. For a woman who plays the harlot is already worse than a thief, because she has done much worse in working such wrong and villainy against her husband than if she had robbed him of his money.

¹⁰Calvin is quite clear on the point that Christ did not change the Mosaic Law insofar as it is a rule of holiness. This includes, in his mind, the death penalty for adultery. Calvin also defends the death penalty for adultery in his *Commentaries* at Deut.22:22. The death penalty for adultery was always maintained by Reformed theologians until the 20th century.

Moreover, we must return to the point that the promise made in marriage is of great importance, For we know to what end marriage was ordained, namely that men should live honestly together, and that there should be not such beastly looseness of coupling themselves together like dogs and bitches, or like bulls and cows, but that they should show that they do not bear the likeness of God in vain, Seeing then that marriage is ordained to this end, if men will walk directly contrary, is it not an open defiance of God? Is it not an attempt to pluck Him out of His throne, and to wipe out His image so that men can no more recognize themselves but become as bulls and dogs? Therefore, when men fall to such an extremity, must not God show forth His anger?

But let us always return to the chief point named before, that though this commandment is given to judges and magistrates concerning the civil order, yet ought every one of us to be admonished concerning his duty, that we walk more carefully in our calling. If those who bear the sceptre of justice in their hands allow whoredom to reign and wedlock to be broken, so that neither faith nor promise are kept any longer, they shall ~~yield an~~ account to God. **Even** so, let us ~~look after~~ our own selves; and let every man ~~so~~ walk that he will not have to face the judgment of God. For what will we gain by escaping the hands of men so that our offense is not perceived? Or else perhaps we are acquitted in court and escape punishment by some wicked shiftings and practices, and ~~no~~ man says a word to us. Yet for all that, we must come to our reckoning before God, Who will not lose one jot of His right. Even if men are negligent and play as if blind, God will in the end show that He forgot not one piece of our doings, but registered every one in His book. Let us therefore ~~take heed~~ that we walk in such a fashion that we esteem highly of ~~marriage~~.

And since we see that God ~~bears rule~~ over all, and curses adulterers and fornicators, let us be ~~moved~~ to greater fear and carefulness. We see how the pagans, for all their superstitions and idolatries, still ~~had~~ some blind motion in them whereby they were persuaded for the better maintaining of marriages that their gods or rather idols were the protectors thereof. And ~~why did~~ they think so? It was a mere folly, I grant; but yet this ~~their folly~~ proceeded from a good ground. They were corrupted ~~with~~ superstitions and had brewed a religion out of their own ~~inventions~~ and errors. Nevertheless, this always remained, ~~and was~~ so graven on their minds that it could not be wiped out, ~~that~~ God ~~meant~~ there should be such a mark of Divine protection in marriage that men should know that He had a ~~care~~ for it.

Seeing it is so, let us take good heed that we do not make God our enemy and adversary, which doubtless we shall do if we falsify the faith of marriage. If a man lies in wait for another man's wife, if a woman gives herself over to a whoremonger, be she married or betrothed, if they falsify the promise which they plighted and break the faith they gave, they are waging war with God Himself, and they shall find that they have taken on more than they can handle. Let us therefore walk in such steadiness that our Lord will accept it of us and we may find favor in His sight. Let every one of us restrict his wicked lusts and not give ourselves the right to overleap our bounds so far as to venture to corrupt so holy an order,

Now if the punishment is so grievous when a maid who is only betrothed commits fornication, so much the more should it be in the case of the married woman, as I said earlier. Why? because she wrongs her husband and sets him out to open shame, spoiling also the name of his house, robbing the

children yet unborn, and robbing those already begotten in lawful wedlock. When a woman has become such a devil, what other remedy can there be than to root out the whole evil? And this is the reason why it is expressly said, "Thou shalt put away the evil from thee." Hereby our Lord meant to give us to understand that if men allow a woman to remain unpunished when she has grown to such wickedness as not to pity her own children, they allow a monster to live. For what may one think such a woman to be except a monster? She has no regard for her own children, and takes no account of having bastards mingled with lawful children. And such a thing is contrary to all nature. So then, as I have mentioned, the fault must be extreme when the punishment is so grievous. God will have it serve us for an example, that they who have been offensive ~~by their lives~~ should serve for instruction to others in their deaths, that others may learn to keep themselves chaste. Thus you see what we have to bear in mind here.

Now concerning whoremongers, they are guilty of the same thing. Indeed, the woman is not to be spared because she has falsified her faith towards her husband and has committed an unpardonable crime. If a man rifle his neighbor's coffer, he shall be punished, and that not as a single thief but as a robber. But the whoremonger comes to defile the whole house, he comes to infect it with whoredom, he comes to rob his neighbor of his honor, credit, and good name; and in the place of the right seed, he through cursed and villainous falseness delivers a strange and bastard seed. Therefore, if a man commit such robbery, I pray you is it a sin to be punished with eight days imprisonment only, and perhaps by being put on bread and water (which is to say, to be seated at the tavern!)?

We see that the punishments which are used nowadays against adulterers and fornicators are but a mere mockery of God, of justice, of laws, and of all civil order. For when a man is put in prison for committing adultery, or for playing the fornicator, it is the same as if he were put there for every man to bring him a glass of wine and say, "Taste, this is the best." If he were in his own house, he would be contented with ordinary, but in prison he is given greater choice than if he were in a common tavern. Every man comes to visit him; after all, the poor prisoner must be pitied! You know what is ordinarily done in such ~~cases~~.¹¹

As for me, I pray God that whoredom might rather go unpunished altogether than to continue in the present way of things. For it sets justice out to open shame and scorns God and all of His commandments. And therefore we need not marvel if whoredoms be so rife, seeing they which offend are sent to the tavern. But let us suppose that the law were ~~observed~~,¹² and that adulterers and fornicators were locked up tight, there to fast with bread and water. What is all that? "Oh," says one, "they shall fast three days, or (as some say) nine."

Now of course, if a ~~thief~~ is taken and accused, he shall be indicted, he shall be clapped up by the heels in the stocks, he shall be manacled and tied with a halter, and in the end sent to

¹¹ Our modern prisons are not such picnics as Calvin alleges Geneva's were; but adulterers are not placed there either. What would Calvin say about our modern system, where fornication and adultery are not regarded as crimes at all, and where this laxity is even defended by some modern "Calvinists" under all kinds of pretexts!

¹² Calvin has the laws of Geneva in mind.

the gallows; or if he gets off lightly for some petty filching, he shall be whipped. Why? Because he is a *thief*, he has robbed a man, he has cut a purse in the open market place!

And what has the whoremonger done? There can be no doubt but that he has done worse in entering into the bed which God had sanctified in His own Name than if he had committed all the thefts in the world. He has committed whoredom like a beast, and is not this an intolerable offense, and such a one as ought to be punished to the full? If we refuse to open our eyes and see it plain, yet the Law of Moses will condemn us. But besides this, the pagans (who have observed a better order than we, and have had laws to punish whoremongers and to keep wedlock undefiled) shall rise up against us in the latter day, and shall prove that we did not offend out of ignorance, or for lack of warning, but out of willful malice, because we wanted to foster such wickedness.

Does the New Covenant Change these Punishments?

It is indeed true that this wicked laxity has come from great antiquity, as the Papists will say that we are not under the Law but under grace and therefore we must not punish whoredom.¹³ But it is a mocking of God when we take the Law of grace for a lawless liberty to commit all wickedness. And although our Lord Jesus Christ did not punish the woman taken in adultery (John 8:11), we may not draw from this that He has given us permission to commit adultery. Why? He also refused to be a judge, for when they wanted Him to part the inheritance between two brethren, He refused to do so. Must we therefore say that such partings are not lawful? No, no. But this was to show that He did not come to be an arbiter and a judge. Again let us note that he says, "No man accuses thee, therefore I condemn thee not."¹⁴

Let us realize, then, that He did not come to take away the Law of His Father to destroy all order or to make His church a

pig sty as it is nowadays, by granting men the liberty to do all manner of evil. No, no. Be it far from us to impute such a crime to our Lord Jesus Christ, for that were a blaspheming of Him above measure. But let us know that what we have here in this law ought to serve us for instruction unto the end of the world, that we may walk in such chastity that when we have kept marriages undefiled among us, we may look for the blessing of God, and that shall cause us to prosper.

Prayer

Now let us kneel down in the presence of our good God with acknowledgement of our faults, praying Him to make us feel them more than we have previously, that we may be so clean rid of all our wicked desires that, renouncing all our vices, we may dedicate both our souls and bodies to our good God in such a way that He may be glorified in all things. May we keep such faithfulness and trust one towards another that we may thereby show that we are true brethren, and that He may receive us for His children. May this encourage us to call upon Him, and to lift up our hearts to Him, to approach more and more near to Him, and to cleave to His righteousness with all purity of heart. That it may please Him to grant this grace not only to us but also to all people and nations . . .

¹³Nowadays it is not Papists but Protestants who too often use this argument.

¹⁴Calvin uses two arguments to show that Christ did not set aside the death penalty in John 8. First, it is because Christ did not come to earth to take on the role of civil magistrate. The office of magistrate is proper and necessary, but it was not the work of Christ. Second, even in this situation, Christ referred to the Law, which required the testimony of two witnesses. When all had been said and done, there were no witnesses, and thus no charge, and thus no occasion for judgment. Calvin's line of argument is developed in Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1974), pp. 702ff. Calvin himself reiterates his viewpoints in his *Commentaries*, both at Deut. 22:22ff, and at John 8:1ff.

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