

7th. Part 2: Prostitution

Introduction

Before we leave the 7th commandment, it is important to relate it to the gospel. We can do this by consideration of prostitution in its physical and spiritual dimensions.

Interestingly, there are places in the OT that seem to condone or at least tolerate this sexual sin. In Genesis 38, we have the account of Judah, son of Jacob, that had sexual relations with a woman pretending to be a prostitute and concealing her identity; unknown to Judah she turned out to be his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar. Does the text condemn the prostitution? No or not exactly. Mainly, it condemns Judah's failure to provide her with a husband. Tamar was pregnant by Judah and condemned as immoral. He called for her death, but relented when she gave proof that he was the father (by things he left with her in lieu of payment for her services): As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, **"By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant."** And she said, **"Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff."** 26 Then Judah identified them and said, **"She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah"** (Gen 38.25-26).

Observations on this account and the larger biblical picture of redemptive history

- 1) Condemnation of prostitution is present in the Israelite family response and punishment. This is reflected as well in the hypocrisy of Judah. In the later Mosaic law, prostitution was punished by stoning (Deut 22.20-21).
- 2) This conduct of Judah is in the record with the account of the generations of Jacob (Gen 37.2). The "generations of" phrase puts the focus not on Jacob but on his descendants, particularly Joseph (37.2b). Genesis 37-50 cover the history of Joseph except for 38. What does this sin-filled account give us regarding the history of redemption? Among other things, it provides us with genealogical information between Abraham and David that leads to Joseph, the legal father of Jesus (Mat 1.2-3: **Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac...of Jacob, and Jacob...of Judah and his brothers, and Judah...of Perez and Zerah by Tamar...Ruth...David...of Solomon by the wife of Uriah...Joseph...Mary...Jesus**).
- 3) We have this account in Genesis, with its concentration on the broken promise of Judah to Tamar of a husband and potential descendants, to reveal the promise-keeping of the Lord of the covenant. God keeps His word despite human sin (in and through it) by sovereign grace. A great, great...grandmother of Jesus through Joseph (His legal father) that gives Him the legal right to the throne of David is Tamar, who prostituted herself deceptively.
- 4) The sinfulness of the nation of Israel is often described as adultery; her idolatry was spiritual adultery. The covenant relationship between God and His people has likeness to the marriage vow. The *unfaithfulness of Israel goes beyond adultery to wholesale prostitution*, the passionate seeking of false worship and extreme unfaithfulness; the covenant breaking is huge (as the case of Hosea shows, 2.1-13; Isa 1.21: **the faithful city has become a whore**; Jer 3.6: **The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore?"**).
- 5) In the book of Proverbs, the foolish turn to the seductions of prostitutes (7.10-20). To be wise is to turn instead to "Lady Wisdom" who calls the young to learn prudence and truth. The young face the choice of following lawless sexual gratification or seeking God's wisdom *for all of life*.
- 6) Whoring represents attempted human autonomy. Note the comprehensive nature of the 7th commandment in the call to holiness: **And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. 40 So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God** (Num 15.39-40).

Application

This sin is cited and forgiven, not to encourage or minimize, but to condemn directly and realistically, and most of all to proclaim God's forgiving grace in Christ to autonomy-claiming sinners.