

# The Commands of Christ

## The Seventh Commandment-A

*Exodus 20:14*  
Part Seventeen

*With Study Questions*

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# The Seventh Commandment-A

*Exodus 20:14*

**You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).**

## **I. The Law**

As we are turning the stretch in these Ten Commandments and start heading for home, a quick review of the nature of our association with the law of God might be appropriate.

- First, the law reveals to us something about the moral character of God.
- Secondly, the law is the ultimate and final authoritative declaration of what is good and ethical.
- Finally, in our greatest efforts to obey God's law two things will happen—we, and those around us, will begin to know the blessings that come with obedience and we will come to a greater understanding of our need for a Savior; since the Spirit indwelt Christian cannot help but discern how they fall short of God's perfect standard, this will happen. Speaking of the law Paul wrote:

**Therefore \_the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. <sup>-13-</sup> Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:12, 13).**

In short, the law reveals the depth of our sin—“**sin that it might appear sin.**” Apart from the law man develops a natural proclivity to call good evil and evil good, for that reason Isaiah writes:

**Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! <sup>21</sup> Woe to *those who are* \_wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight (Isaiah 5:20,**

21)!

Those who reject the law and gospel of Christ will inevitably transition from shame to boldness—seeking to justify sinful behavior by an unwarranted transition in ethics. This is why those who contend to maintain a biblical view of marriage, for example, are now accused of being mean, hateful and bigoted. Nothing is new under the sun.

## 2. Law Keeping

Understanding that we're not saved by our keeping of the law, one might still ask, "Knowing that obedience does yield blessing, at least in a temporal sense, how can I more successfully adhere to these laws?" I must restate that by blessings I am not speaking of mystical or magical fortune.

A person may seek to be obedient yet die of cancer or be struck by lightning. I am speaking of the very general and natural curses or blessings attending those who choose to lie or tell the truth, steal or help preserve property, exercise faithfulness or infidelity, etc. Simply put, it is better to do good—and doing good, generally speaking, produces the best in life.

Perhaps too often we find ourselves uttering the words of the Apostle Paul, "**For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do**" (Romans 7:15). Does God provide counsel to aid us in better law-keeping? Volumes of Christian literature are dedicated to this, some good some bad. Toward the end of obedience, I think the following is helpful:

### Watch Your Hearts

We are to be watchful over our own hearts.

**Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it *spring* the issues of *\_life* (Proverbs 4:23).**

We are to be aware of initial desires or early temptations which are to be avoided.

**But I say to you that whoever *\_looks* at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28).**

Remove the cancer early, when it is just a thought.

## **Control Your Environment**

Take deliberate control over your senses and your environment.

**Remove your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house (Proverbs 5:8).**

If you have a hard time controlling your eating habits, Bullhogs All-You-Can-Eat House of Ribs & Nachos is probably not for you. Be careful of movies and music. Don't be so naïve as to think these things are not getting into your heart.

## **Temperance**

Exercise early temperance in your behavior.

**Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly;<sup>32</sup> At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper.<sup>33</sup> Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things (Proverbs 23:31-33).**

If you get mean or lustful when you drink, maybe you shouldn't drink at all. If you get angry when you debate, maybe you shouldn't debate.

## **Pray and Fast**

Prayer and fasting are appropriate. Although I would not promote an intensive ascetic, monastic pietism, since its roots and essence are a bit Gnostic<sup>1</sup>, Jesus **“fasted forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:2)**. Prior to selecting the apostles we read:

**Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in \_\_prayer to God**

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<sup>1</sup> Gnosticism is built on the premise that material things are essentially evil. Avoiding all material things, including food, speech and other people, would then yield spirituality. Of course, it is not the material that is evil. It is man's nature. He won't be able to avoid that until Christ takes him home.

**(Luke 6:12).**

There are too many references to Jesus praying for me to include in this sermon. Suffice it to say that if Jesus, the righteous, saw a need to pray and fast, how much more do we?

### **Fear of God and Consequences**

Fear of God is a legitimate motivation for obedience. Although it is not in vogue to speak this way, make no mistake about it, disobedience results in curses and consequences. I was recently speaking with a man who has an infant and a toddler. His behavior toward his wife has caused his wife, and others, to get a restraining order. He can't control his temper. I wrote down the names of his children and his wife on a piece of paper, told him to put it in his pocket. The next time he feels like giving into his anger, pull the paper out and see the price.

### **Various Mean of Grace**

Then there are the various means of grace God has provided for His children. Faith in Jesus and regular attendance at church and His table of communion; study of, and meditation in, the Scriptures; patience in the continuing work of the Spirit in your life; fervent prayer; accountability, and so on, can all help in increasing our steadfastness and obedience. So why don't we talk about this sort of stuff more often?

### **3. A Pragmatic Danger**

Having said all this (and certainly much more can be said), let me address a pragmatic danger I see in the church. It has become the obsession in many churches (and I am not immune to this temptation) to focus on successful, or victorious, Christian living. Therefore, counsel on successful Christian living (although perhaps very Biblical) becomes the main message. Personal growth takes precedence over the glory of God and the grace of the gospel and something unwittingly takes place.

### **Lists Replacing Lists**

It is inevitable that one list will merely replace another list. Instead of feeling bad because I am violating the law, now I feel bad because I am not

keeping all the tips that help me keep the law. So now I need tips on how to keep the tips. We develop an iterate Christianity. It's like when I offer an explanation and my children just keeps asking "Why?"

It is a common temptation for pastors to remove the burden of the law from the necks of their congregation by simply giving them a lesser, more obtainable, law. A law they will no doubt eventually find themselves burdened by none-the-less. Instead of feeling bad about lying, you'll feel bad about missing your quiet time.

## **A Sanctifying Law**

So what is the answer? The answer is that our best efforts at keeping the law, whether it be regular attendance at our small accountability group, or a hard core, tightening-of-our-Reeboks, volitional, willful effort to be obedient, is not the end. It is the means to an end.

The end result of our best efforts to keep the law is an increased perception of our need for Christ. Somehow we have developed the idea that we must learn to be more spiritual, we must sanctify ourselves, in order to be better law-keepers. But we don't sanctify ourselves in order to be better law-keepers. Our effort of law-keeping, whether it be fasting or running like Joseph from Potiphar's wife, is itself sanctifying and demonstrates that God is sanctifying us.

## **II. Sanctifying Fidelity**

Making every effort to avoid adultery, and everything related to adultery, is an act of sanctification (personal growth, if you will) and manifests the reality of God's work in our hearts. Promoting a holy household is a spiritual enterprise. It may be more spiritual than any conference, seminary or cloister with all their promises of victory.

I fear that a modern evangelical pietism brushes the Romish assertion that it is much more spiritual not to have a wife or family. It is asserted that acts of piety and devotion can be pursued in an unencumbered fashion apart from familial constraints. "How holy I would be if I didn't have to care for my little ones! Of what great service I could be to my Savior if my wife made no demands of my time and energy!" As we launch into the Seventh Commandment, let's consider the words of Charles Hodge.

**It is in the bosom of the family that there is a constant call for acts of kindness, of self-denial, of forbearance, and of love.**

**The family, therefore, is the sphere the best adapted for the development of all the social virtues; and it may be safely said that there is far more of moral excellence and of true religion to be found in Christian households, than in the desolate homes of priests, or in the gloomy cells of monks and nuns. A man with his children or grandchildren on his knees, is an object of higher reverence than any emaciated anchorite in his cave.<sup>2</sup>**

## **Troth**

In the old days there was a statement made in weddings that we seldom hear any more. The groom would say to his bride, "I pledge thee my troth." Troth is another word for fidelity – it's where we get our word 'truth'. Fidelity is the essence of who a person is. It is the truth of their character and existence.

There is a more modern term with which we serenade characters of ill-fame. This common derogatory term goes something like, "He's nobody!" What's being said about that person is that their fidelity is such that they aren't even to be considered as a person. Our very womanhood and manhood are wrapped up in our fidelity.

## **Next**

As we pursue the Seventh Commandment in our next meeting we will ask and seek to answer: why this is such a monstrous sin (deserving of the death penalty). What is the essence of this sin? What is included under this commandment? How does one engage in this battle? What do we learn of Christ and His faithfulness to His bride?

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 371.

## Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the nature of our relationship with the law (pages 2, 3).
2. What is biblical counsel for better law keeping (pages 3-5)?
3. To what extent should these things be emphasized? Why shouldn't they be the central focus of the church (pages 5, 6)?
4. Discuss the relationship of law keeping with sanctification (pages 6, 7).
5. How is the promotion of a healthy and godly household sanctifying? Discuss the quote by Hodge (page 7).