

# The Seventh Commandment

**“You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 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 be richly blessed 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 (Romans 7:13).

## **Successful Law Keeping**

Understanding that we’re not saved by our keeping of the law, one might still ask, “Knowing that obedience does yield blessing, how can I more successfully adhere to these laws?” Perhaps too often you find yourself 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)**. Perhaps there are some tips for better law-keeping. Volumes of Christian literature is dedicated to this, and I can’t say it’s all bad.

1) It is certainly consistent with Scripture to be watchful over our own hearts and be aware of initial desires or early temptations which we should avoid (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 5:28). After all, nobody can eat just one. Remove the cancer early, when it is just a thought.

2) 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.

3) 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.

4) Fasting may even be appropriate (Matthew 4:2). Although I would not promote ascetic, monastic pietism, since it's roots and essence are a bit Gnostic<sup>1</sup>, if it helps you to get alone for a while or keep your mouth closed for a day or to, feel free.

5) 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.

6) 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?

### **Not Emphasized**

Although these types of things are in the holy text and, therefore, should be taught, they certainly don't seem to be predominant. Many admonitions along these lines are almost an addendum to the main message. Perhaps the most quoted verse in 1 Thessalonians is **“pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)**. We ought not belittle or neglect his admonition. But we certainly don't view this as the main message of the epistle.

It has become the obsession in many churches to focus on successful, or victorious, Christian living. Therefore, tips on 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.

### **Lists Replacing Lists**

What's more, 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 my four-year-old 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

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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.

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 sanctifying.

## **II. Sanctifying Fidelity**

Making every effort to avoid adultery, and everything related to adultery, is an act of sanctification (personal growth, if you will). Promoting a holy household is more spiritual than any conference, seminary or cloister with all their promises of victory.

How closely 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>**

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

## **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 is wrapped up in our fidelity.

### **III. Essence of Adultery**

Let us take a moment and examine the essence and depth of this commandment.

#### **Building Block of Society**

This Seventh Commandment is directed toward protecting the sanctity of the home—the fundamental building block of society. The marital vow is a holy commitment that should not be violated by sexual unfaithfulness under any circumstances. Adultery refers to infidelity on the part of either men or women. In general, a wife who loves, and is faithful to, her husband, and a husband who loves, and is faithful to, his wife will yield a society of physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy children.

#### **Pictures Faithfulness to God**

The marriage relationship should reflect a believer’s relationship to God. Therefore extramarital sex is forbidden. People who are unfaithful to God are referred to as adulterous. Like a jealous husband Ezekiel records the judgment of God using this intimate language.

**“Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations to which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from Me, and by their eyes, which played the harlot after their idols” (Ezekiel 6:9).**

Similarly to other commandments the adulterer is expressing contempt, not only for his own body and the others involved, but, as we’ll see in a moment, God Himself.

## **Protecting Chastity**

The Seventh Commandment concerns our own, and our neighbor's, chastity. Thou shalt not commit adultery is put after the Sixth Commandment (thou shalt not kill), it has been said, for our chastity should be as dear to us as our lives, and we should be as much afraid of that which defiles the body as of that which destroys it. We would fight, and perhaps kill, to protect the chastity of a loved one, but what effort do we make to protect our own?

### **IV. To What Does This Command Pertain?**

#### **Adultery**

Adultery is the primary violation of this commandment. That is, when you have made vows to another, consummated those vows in the marriage bed, and then violated those vows through sexual union with someone other than your spouse, you have violated this commandment. Marriage vows are binding except in the case of adultery by the other spouse, desertion<sup>3</sup> or death.

#### **Fornication**

As we learned earlier, the commandments are far reaching in their application. Fornication is also a violation of this commandment. Galatians 5:19 states, **“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness...”** I mention this verse because there is a distinction between adultery and fornication. Though there is a distinction (adultery referring to married persons and fornication referring to unmarried persons), both are forbidden by this commandment.

Fornication ‘porneia’ is illicit sexual intercourse. We must understand, not only the letter, of this commandment but the spirit of it as well. The spirit of this commandment is a matter of sexual purity. If you are single, you are to be faithful to your future spouse. If you never intend to marry – a state of mind that you may not always hold to, by the way – you are to be faithful to Christ and in Christ.

#### **Reproach Upon Christ**

What we see in this sin is that it brings reproach upon Christ. Paul teaches that our intimate association with Christ actually bring Him into this sin. Paul draws a picture of this sin in such a way that it drags the very body of Christ into the harlot's bed.

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<sup>3</sup> Adultery by your spouse or desertion by your spouse is not so much a justification for the termination of the marriage covenant as an understanding that the covenant has already been violated by the unfaithful partner.

**“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!” (1 Corinthians 6:15).**

### **Destruction of Oneness**

God created sex in such a way as to build a mysterious union between two people that makes them one. Multiple sexual partners robs men and women from experiencing the union that God designed as the most intimate union a human can experience on this planet. Paul goes on to compare this physical union to our spiritual union with Him.

**“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Corinthians 6:16,17).**

The body of a Christian is considered the temple of God. Illicit sex desecrates that temple. Although the following passage is often applied to physical fitness, it's primary application is to the human body. It is the sanctuary of God. It applies to the act of sexual immorality.

**“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).**

Like Joseph, who left his coat behind, the Christian should flee (run away-physically, if necessary) sexual immorality.

### **Homosexuality**

Homosexuality also falls into the realm of this commandment. It is not merely homosexual rape or homosexual infidelity, as some suggest, but homosexual behavior itself.

**“For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward**

**one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error” (Romans 1:26,27).**

**“You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. ‘Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion” (Leviticus 18:22,23).**

### **Other Violations**

Other violations of this commandment, according to The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards<sup>4</sup> include,

**“adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behaviour, immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce, or desertion; unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.”**

### **Lust**

Who can give a sermon on this commandment better than Christ Himself?

**“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. “And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:27-31).**

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<sup>4</sup> I would strongly recommend acquiring the Westminster Catechism and Westminster Confession. These historically sound and precious documents give well studied, well thought out, and Biblically sound statements regarding the commandments and other critical issues of the Christian faith.

As usual Christ gets to the heart of the matter. 1 Samuel 16:7 states, **“For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”** What man can claim innocence before God when confronted with Christ’s teaching on this commandment? And how pure the heart of Christ appears to us when we realize that He never violated this commandment. To look at a woman or man lustfully is a violation of this commandment. This is why Job made a covenant with his eyes. Job states, **“I HAVE made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1).** This clearly addresses the issue of pornography. Christians should make every effort to guard their eyes. Pornography is a billion-dollar business that preys on man’s lack of self-control. This should also cause us to be careful about the way we dress. Christians should be careful not to cause others to fail in this area.

### **Resist Beginnings**

Once again (similar to Christ’s admonitions regarding murder) we are encouraged to resist entertaining thoughts that grow into sinful actions. James 1:15 states, **“Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”** It has been said ‘sow a thought, reap an action, sow an action, reap a habit, sow a habit reap a character, sow a character, reap a destiny. The idea that Jesus introduces of plucking your eye out or cutting your hand off is not an argument for self-mutilation. What Jesus is expressing is that we should take drastic action to get rid of whatever, in the natural course of events, will tempt us to sin.

Use your eyelids. Resist the second look. Avoid sexual materials in books or movies. Paul advises us regarding what we should observe and think about.

**“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy— meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).**

### **A Healthy Sex Life**

One word of advice that Paul gives to aid in the keeping of this commandment involves not depriving your spouse.

**“The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote**

**yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:4,5).**

Your body is not your own and you should be ever-willing and never begrudging to share intimacy with your husband or your wife. How often? As one pastor said, “As often as necessary.” Hopefully, husbands are willing to be romantic when it comes to their relationship with their wives and wives are willing to respond positively to their husbands.

### **Flirting and Deep Struggles**

Christians should also avoid so-called innocent flirting. Most affairs start from what would appear to be innocent flirting at the office, school or even church. One of the scenes I enjoyed most in the movie ‘City Slickers’ was when, Billy rescued the attractive leading lady from two villains. She later went to thank him for what he had done. Flustered by her beauty, he simply responded by saying, “I’m married.” Don’t even entertain the thought.

Another key element to resisting is not to allow a person other than your spouse to be the one who you regularly share your deep truths and struggles with. It is too easy to fall into the “she understands me” trap.

### **V. The Supreme Groom**

Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

I can’t think of anything more sanctifying or challenging than seeking to love another the way I am loved by Christ. How important is it then to know how we are loved by our Savior? How did the Savior give Himself for His bride? He gave His very life. In all our efforts to sanctify ourselves, who is it that truly sanctifies and cleanses us? The Lamb of God. And what is His goal, which He most assuredly achieves? A glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but one that is holy and without blemish. Is this who your Savior is? I pray that be the case.

## Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the nature of our relationship with the law.
2. What are some tips for better law keeping?
3. To what extent should these things be emphasized? Why shouldn't they be the central focus of the church?
4. Discuss the relationship of tips for better law keeping with seeking to keep the law with sanctification. Is the law an end or a means to an end? If so, what is the end?
5. How is the promotion of a healthy and godly household sanctifying? Discuss the quote by Hodge.
6. Why is fidelity so important?
7. Discuss the protection of chastity.
8. Why does the commandment contain the term adultery rather than fornication?
9. How does the violation of this commandment bring reproach upon Christ?
10. Is homosexual monogamy a legitimate union?
11. Discuss the topics covered under the Westminster Catechism on this commandment.
12. How is lust different than actual adultery?
13. Why is healthy sex life with your spouse important?
14. How is simple flirting and deep talks dangerous?
15. What has Christ done for His bride?