

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 77—The Seventh Commandment, Qs. 70-72

There are two principal and essential relationships in every family. There's the first of parent and child and the second of husband and wife. Other relationships may attach themselves to these, such as brother and sister, master and servant, or magistrate and citizen, but the relationships that constitute and are essential to every family are the *parental* and *conjugal* relationships.

The *fifth* commandment protects the integrity and sanctity of the parental and filial relationships, and the *seventh* protects the yet more sacred relationship, the supreme and inviolable union between a man and a woman in marriage.

The duties required—the treasured picture and illustration of the love of God for His people.

- I. Marriage is to be held in honor by all, 1Cor 7.2; Heb 13.4.
 - A. God instituted marriage in Eden by bringing the woman to the man, Gen 2.22.
 - B. Christ honored marriage with His presence and first miracle, Jn 2.2, 11.
 - C. Marriage is a type and resemblance of the mystical union between Christ and His church, Eph 5.31-32.
 - D. The best and most instructive picture of marriage in all of Scripture is that of Isaac and Rebekah. Much profit for both parents and adult children can be gained from a careful study of Gen 24.
- II. The sexual purity both of ourselves and others is to be preserved.
 - A. In body, 1Cor 3.16-17; 6.13-20. Modesty must appear in the whole of our conduct. We should not behave or dress lasciviously and thereby intentionally tempt another to be tempted by us, Eph 5.5-8.
 - B. In mind, Job 31.1-3. God's law reaches the thoughts and commands sinful thoughts to be subdued, cast out, and mortified, 2Cor 10.5; Phil 4.8.
 - C. In heart, Job 31.9-12; Mt 5.27-28. The affections and motives of the heart give our actions their character before God.
 - D. In speech, Eph 5.3-4, 11-12; Col 3.8; 4.6. As there's tongue-murder (Mt 5.22), so there's tongue-adultery, when the mouth gives vent to adulterous desires in the heart, Lk 6.45.
 - E. In relationship with the opposite sex, 1Tim 5.1-2. We should regard one another with all purity, neither lusting after each other nor flirting with each other, but seeking to persevere one another's purity before God and men.
 - F. In singleness, keeping our own selves sexually pure, either in saving ourselves for marriage or in living in lifelong abstinence if called by God to celibacy, 1Th 4.3-5.
 - G. In marriage, keeping ourselves for our spouse alone, 1Cor 7.2-6.

The sins forbidden—a massive dunghill of filthiness abhorred by God.

- I. Adultery, Heb 13.4. Adultery is a grievous sin because: it's a breach of the covenant of marriage, it's a great dishonor to God who owns both our bodies and spirits, it's committed with deliberation, it's in the face of the clear remedy of marriage, it defiles two persons at once, it brings a bad name on Christ's holy marriage with His church.
- II. Pornography, Job 31.1-12; Mt 5.27-28. Pornography is the sin of our highly sexualized age and probably the greatest problem in the church today. May God not spare the rod on His own, Pr 13.24.
- III. Fornication, 2Sam 13.11-14; 1Th 4.3-5. Sexual sin is not the game our culture pretends it is, Eph 5.6.
- IV. Homosexuality, Rom 1.22-28; 1Cor 6.9-11; 1Tim 1.9-10. The consequences of this sin are grievous.
- V. Incest, Lev 18.6-17; 2Sam 13.11-14. Marriage makes a new family and mustn't defile an existing one.
- VI. Rape, Dt 22.25. Sex is a mutually consenting activity that belongs only in the marriage bed, Pr 5.15.
- VII. Polygamy, Mt 19.6. As there's only one Christ and Bride, so marriage is only one man and one woman.

Other considerations

- I. Helps to keep from this sin.
 - A. Watch over our senses. Boston, "The heart and the senses are like a candlewick, at the end of which lies a heap of gunpowder. Objects set fire to the senses at the wick, and these carry it along to the

heart where the corruption of lust lies as a heap of powder.” Particularly watch the eyes, Job 31.1, and the ears, Pr 7.21-22.

- B. Moderation in drinking, eating, sleeping, and recreation, Lk 21.34. Boston, “Those that pamper their body with pleasure are but one step away from uncleanness; for one sensuality makes way for another.”
- C. Keep pure and modest company, Rom 5.8-9. Multitudes have been ruined forever by the company they keep, Pr 1.10, 15-19; 1Cor 15.32-34.
- D. Busy yourself with honest work, Gen 34.1-2; 2Sam 11.1-2. Idleness is an open door and bold invitation to sexual immorality. Beware when solitude and idleness meet, for sin is at the door.
- E. Marriage, as the Lord wills, Gen 2.18. For believers, this marriage is to be in the Lord, 1Cor 7.39.
- F. Conjugal love within a marriage, Prov 5.19-20; 1Cor 7.2, 9.
- G. Shun all occasions and temptations to sexual sin, Pr 5.8. It’s a dangerous business to parley with temptation. It’s foolish to tempt Satan to tempt you—an opportunity he’ll be sure to take advantage of. There are two sins Scripture bids us run from: idolatry, 1Cor 10.14, and sexual immorality, 1Cor 6.18. This is because it’s safer to flee from them than to stand and fight them.

II. Celibacy

- A. The call to celibacy is a call that will be known between a person and God. It’s not a call to a higher calling than marriage, but a call to a life of singular devotion to God. It should not be entered upon hastily because it requires great self-control and self-denial, 1Cor 7.24; 1Tim 4.3.

III. Divorce

- A. Divorce is never a good thing, Mt 19.8, but it may sometimes be necessary given our sinful condition and the impact of our sins on one another in marriage. The Scriptures give two grounds for a lawful divorce before God: adultery, Mt 5.32, and desertion, 1Cor 7.12-17.
 - 1. Adultery grievously violates the marriage, but it doesn’t automatically sever it. Its breach can be healed by repentance and forgiveness.
 - 2. Desertion may be either physical, emotional, or spiritual. And abuse may be included as a lawful ground within the realm of desertion. Great prudence and godly counsel are needed here.

IV. Concluding thoughts:

- A. Wuttke, “The communion of the sexes is the complete giving up and appropriating of each party as the property of the other. Hence, where it is not the fruit of an already accomplished, morally-personal, spiritual unity [i.e. marriage], it is then an immoral throwing away of one’s own moral personality and an irremediable ruining of the moral personality of the other. Lost innocence is irrecoverable. Love that is not moral love is defamation.”
- B. Bushnell, “There’s a perfect harmony between our obligations to God and all the sources of pleasure and happiness God has provided, so that there’s no real collision between the statutes over us and the conditions [desires] within us. It’s only false pleasures that are denied to us, those that would brutalize the mind, or mar the health of the body [or defile the conscience and soul before God], or somehow violate the happiness of fellow beings around us.”
- C. a Lapide, “Think, when lust goads thee: in thy hand and choice are heaven and hell, salvation and damnation, bliss or misery everlasting. Choose. Think. A moment which delighteth, eternity which tortureth; on the other hand, a moment which tortureth, eternity which delighteth.”
- D. Rosetti, “True, all our lives we shall be bound to refrain our soul and keep it low; but what then? For the books we now forbear to read, we shall one day be endued with wisdom and knowledge. For the music that we will not listen to, we shall join in the song of the redeemed. For the pictures [and shows and movies] from which we turn, we shall gaze unabashedly on the beatific vision of God. For the companionship we shun, we shall be welcomed into angelic society and the communion of triumphant saints. For the amusements we avoid, we shall keep the supreme Jubilee. For all the pleasures we miss, we shall abide and forevermore abide, in the rapture of heaven.”