

Sexual Immorality

Baptist Catechism

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Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we look to your word, your law shows us your holiness and your righteousness and what you require of us, and yet the primary use of the law is to show us that we are unable to do that which you require of us but thank you that the Gospel promises to work in us all that the law requires, to forgive us of our sins and to make us righteous people. Show us your way that we might put our hope and faith in you and that our works would flow from our faithfulness in trusting you in all that you are for us in Christ. Amen.

Please be seated.

Well, tonight is my great privilege to preach on the seventh commandment and to be honest with you in preparation for this, I was reminded in my preparations of a statement that I heard many years ago but in my preparations was reaffirmed, that if I was to preach on the topic of sexual sin as often as the Bible addresses sexual sin, my sermons would be very different. It would probably be just about three out of every four sermons would be addressing sexual sin. I'm making that number up but you understand my point. Don't check the math on that but it's addressed more than any other sin, in part because adultery is linked to idolatry not just because of the pagan rituals but because to be involved in idolatry was itself a form of adultery because of the relationship we have with God, and sometimes as you read through the Scriptures, it's hard to know is he talking about primarily the spiritual adultery that comes from idolatry or physical adultery, and sometimes it's clearly both. In fact, one of the big changes in terms of the Reformation that came was over this point, not over adultery per se, but long before Luther came on the scene, there were many people who were already writing and arguing and declaring the need for reformation. Hundreds of years before Luther was born, there were many, Wycliffe up in England, for example, others that were calling for reformation, and even before Luther, Erasmus writes in the "Praise of Folly" and other works, specifically chronicling the need for reformation, but the link that made Luther unique was the doctrinal side of it because you look at passages like Romans 1, the theology, the exchanging of truth of God for a lie leads to corrupt morals. What Luther understood was just fixing all of the morals without fixing the doctrine would get us nowhere. If you start

to look at the Scriptures through that lens, you start to see the connection between the corruption, the moral corruption, and the theological corruption in Israel. Even in this chapter, Jeremiah 5, where the Israelites are called "well-fed lusty horses, each one neighing after his neighbor's wife," what kind of a description is that? You know, that's a powerful metaphor but it's linked to their own adultery toward God. They knew his ordinances and would not keep them and when they go into exile, the two primary issues that they go into exile for is idolatry and Sabbath breaking, and idolatry and Sabbath breaking are linked to adultery.

The seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," is not just talking about the spiritual, it's talking about the physical and in the New Testament it's clear. Paul writes, for example, in 1 Corinthians 6 that those who engage in sexual immorality, there is no place for them in the kingdom of God. 2 Peter 2, I believe it's verse 14 says that the false teachers are men who have eyes full of adultery. Sexual sin is not new. I know I've mentioned this before that when my brother and sister and their high school Latin classes got to go to Italy, in high school and they went to Pompeii and they reported to me because I never got to go, they reported to me that in the walls, on the walls of the houses in Pompeii were such graphic sexual activities painted in murals that to be able to have a family-friendly tour, many of these murals had to be whitewashed.

Sexuality outside the context of marriage is a very prevalent theme in the Bible and here Jeremiah 5:9 it says, "'Shall I not punish these people,' declares the LORD, 'And on a nation such as this Shall I not avenge Myself?'" I'm told that actually the most profitable business in America is not actually Apple Computers, it's the pornography industry, and I don't know that it's currently true so I hate to say this because I don't want to bear false witness, but I remember listening to a lecture and the pastor was naming companies that have in their business have actually nothing to do with pornography that were big financial backers of pornography, and I won't say which auto company, it doesn't really matter because it may not be true anymore so I don't want to bear false witness, but one of these so-called Big Three had major investments in the pornography business and it's everywhere and it's not uniquely American, it's not uniquely now, it's not just among the young.

According to the commentator, Keil & Delitzsch, one reason why the seventh commandment says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," as opposed to "fornication," it says because in Israel there were very few unmarried women. Marriage happened at a pretty young age, in part to try to fight sexual immorality. I've seen data that would suggest that, for example, Mary may have been just a 14 or 15 year old girl when she gave birth to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I'm not sure our society putting off marriage to late 20s, 30s or even beyond, is necessarily a wise thing, though I'm not passing any comment on whether we should or shouldn't on these things, but it's just the longer you are in a society that is oversexed and overstimulated, it just makes it harder and harder to be morally pure, but we are warned repeatedly that adultery and sexual sin is an abomination to the Lord, as we are told in the book of Proverbs and elsewhere. For example, Ezekiel 22:11 says, "One has committed abomination with his neighbor's wife and another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law. And another in you has humbled his

sister, his father's daughter." They have committed an abomination. Sexual sin is an abomination to the Lord and it's certainly something which we all have struggled with in one form or another.

Now when we talk about the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," we must understand that the word "adultery" is a word that is used in, and this is what the point of the Keil & Delitzsch statement, is really a subset of a broader term. Porneia in terms of sexual sin, immorality, the command is against all sexual immorality outside of marriage of which adultery is a subset. So in language, sometimes you speak as the part as the whole, and sometimes you can speak of a small part as the whole, or you can speak as the whole that would include all the individual parts, but the seventh commandment is not just limiting adultery or if I'm single and I'm with somebody who's single, well, we're not married so it's not adultery, no, it is because it's immorality that is there. The writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 13:4 reminds us that, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." It's very matter-of-fact.

Now, when we talk about the seventh commandment, therefore, we need to think of it not just in terms of sexual sin in the context of marriage but in the context of the human condition and our Catechism points out in Question 76, "What is required of the seventh commandment? The seventh commandment require the preservation of our own and our neighbor's chastity in heart, speech and behavior." Our heart, speech and behavior. Now, let me make a couple of comments from the book of Proverbs, and I don't know how to say this because I want to address both men and women and so I don't really know how to do this in a way that addresses both in a way that makes sense, and I really can't speak from the female side of things for obvious reasons, but I understand the male side, I'm pretty experienced at the male side of things, I've been doing that for 62 years.

In Proverbs 6, we're reminded that – well, let me just say this before I make that comment. I have this great little book. This is one of the best books in my library. This is one of those books you're not allowed to borrow in my library. You can come into my library and I might let you touch it, but I don't know if you still get it, "Wisdom for Today's Topics: A topical arrangement of the book of Proverbs," so each chapter the author has just taken, you know, like abominations, adultery, alcohol, anger, it goes through the alphabet and it pulls together all of the passages on that topic. And as I was kind of looking through this, I was looking up adultery, I was looking up the heart, I was looking up a lot of different things, and what struck me is when you get to adultery in here and it really struck me, I know you really can't see this from where you are but let me show you. Do you see this page? Do you see all these verses? This happens to be on the fool. Look at all the individual verses. Can you even just see that? I know you can't read it, but can you just see it? A lot of individual verses. You go over here to adultery and it's like almost entire chapters. In Proverbs, he's got entire chapters or large portions of chapters just to the topic of adultery. I mean, Proverbs talks a lot about the fool and the sluggard, but it gives a lot more space and time of development to adultery.

In Proverbs 6:24 he's writing to reprove them and give them discipline as a way of life, verse 24, "To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you with her eyelids. For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, And an adulteress hunts for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals And his feet not be scorched? 29 So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished." But the whole issue on the female side, notice what a woman can do to a man and I think, I think many women understand this. I'm not sure all women understand this but notice just the evil woman with the smoothness of her tongue and the beauty and how she speaks and how she dresses can prepare a man to be nothing but a loaf of bread. In chapter 7, verse 22, he becomes like, "As an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool, Until an arrow pierces through his liver; As a bird hastens to the snare, So he does not know," being with the adulteress, "that it will cost him his life."

The power of a woman to reduce a man to a loaf of bread or an ox being led to slaughter is something that must not be misunderstood, underappreciated, because how a woman speaks and how a woman dresses and how a woman looks at somebody, a man, can take an otherwise relatively virtuous man and reduce him to nothing. That's just the way it is and I'm not blaming women. Don't hear me blaming things, I'm simply saying at this point, women, understand what you can do. The power of a woman to reduce a man to a loaf of bread or an ox being led to destruction, a woman has power that she can use either to promote godliness in her brothers or destroy them, and as our Catechism says, "What does the seventh commandment require? That we not just preserve our own but our neighbor's chastity in heart, speech and behavior."

So learning to guard how you relate to men, learn how you dress. Some women can dress in such a way as, "I'm yours if you want me." A woman can speak in such a way as to say, "I'm yours if you want me." A woman in her tone of voice or the words that she chooses to say or not say. And she may or may not be aware of it, I don't know, I've not been on that side of things, but understand the power that a woman has and that can be used for good in the context of marriage. It can be used wonderfully in the context of a mutually committed marital relationship. What a woman can do to a man should be to the glory of God, not to the defilement of his heart and speech and behavior.

But conversely, the man must be on guard as well. The man must not be a well-fed horse, neighing after his neighbor's wife. A man must keep his eyes pure. How often Proverbs will talk to the man, Proverbs 6:25, "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you with her eyelids." Men, you need to be very careful about how you respond to women because you may end up defiling a woman and never touch her. You may defile a woman and never actually engage in any kind of contact with her simply by allowing her beauty to capture you and, therefore, maybe intentionally, maybe unintentionally, drawing her into a lifestyle where she says, "Well, that's kind of fun. I have power of a man."

Paul will tell us in 1 Thessalonians 4 that each one of us must "know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." You need to learn how to possess your vessel in moral purity, not just for your own moral purity but for the moral purity of other people. Every time we come up on this subject, I remind people of a book that I had to read in seminary entitled "The Problem That Pastors Don't Talk About." Every chapter was a different pastor's story and each pastor was telling a story of how he fell in immorality and every one of the stories has its own unique twist but many of them would say very clearly that it was not about what was going on at home or what was not going on at home, it was the wrong person, the wrong time, the wrong place, and hearts were captured, thoughts were encouraged, and sin was conceived.

In the Jeremiah passage, I was struck in preparing this that just the other power of verse 8 and 9, that these are well-fed lusty horses, each one neighing after his neighbor's wife. I'm not much of an equestrian. I have ridden horses. I've enjoyed horses. I think they're beautiful, they're powerful, but in my life it's been much more than with dogs than horses. I know I've told you this story, although I think it's been quite a while, but when I was a boy, we had a dog named Gus. I was a youth pastor and I had a whole series on topics about, "Don't be a Gus," and Gus was a male dog and Gus, you know, got his thing in his head that there was a dog in heat and he needed to go and visit the dog, and he would run to the dog. We would be working in the yard, we'd always have Gus put on a tether and he would run to the end of his tether and you've probably all seen dogs that are running full-speed and then their legs pop up and, you know, Gus would do this quite often. One day we were working and here comes a dog down the street and Gus decided that this was a young dog lady that he wanted to get to know better, and so he ran to the end of his tether and we were all watching and we're waiting for that pop and his legs to go up, but when he got to the end of his tether, he just popped the chain this time and didn't even stop and he's across the street and through the traffic and he was doing what dogs do. What's the point? Not to tell you a funny story about Gus, but if you were a man, you are Gus. That's the point of the book, "The Problem That Pastors Don't Talk About." You are Gus.

I said the wrong person, the wrong place, the wrong time, maybe I need to turn it around and say the right person, at the right time, in the right place. It doesn't matter what's going on at home, men can be nothing more than lusty horses neighing after neighbor's wives. Be careful how you look upon women. Become satisfied with your wife. Do not look at pornography. Pornography, I can imagine, in our church is much more prevalent than I can even begin imagining. It is evil. It will cause you to want to watch more, look at more. It creates unrealistic imaginations and expectations and it will lead you down a path that you are not able to survive through and there is the promised judgment of God, verse 9, "Shall I not punish these people?"

The punishment of God may or may not even be the final judgment because certainly adultery is a sin that's covered by the blood of Christ, but sexual immorality can destroy a family and destroy lives, destroy a man's ministry, destroy a man's business, destroy a man's reputation. A pastor at the church that Linda and I were at in California, a pastor or two or three before we arrived, he fell in immorality and it was discovered and the impact

that that had on his children lasted for a very long time, and we were 10 years downstream when we were there and the church was still struggling with the fallout of that. I think that's part of the judgment of God, the consequences that come.

Hosea 4:11 says, "Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the understanding." That's the man becoming the loaf of bread. When a man begins to think and the blood begins to flow to certain regions of his physiology, his IQ takes a serious dip and he does not understand and he does things that are foolish. "Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the understanding."

Proverbs 5:11 reminds us that you will "groan at your final end, When your flesh and your body are consumed." I don't really like to think about these things a whole lot, but you know, there is even being made popular in the last couple of years in certain movies, "Fifty Shades of Gray," and others which I have not watched and I don't intend to watch, although maybe the men ought to get together and watch them. No, that would not be good, get together and watch it and discuss it. No, we will not do that, but I know at least from the reviews the basic gist of the movie and it chronicles sexual perversions and the need for more and more perverted ways of having sex and that sort of thing. And I have pondered that and I cannot prove what I'm about to say but I do think given an understanding of Scripture and the fall of man, I think that this is at least within the realm of probably correctness, although it might need to be refined. When we begin in our mind and our heart and with our bodies to engage in sexual sin outside the context of marriage, eventually that becomes very dissatisfying, what some people might call the diminishing returns of sexual satisfaction. So in order to find sex exciting or fun or meaningful, we must now do something dangerous or something that's not actually sexual to make this sexual experience fun or whatever, and it's all because it's not in the context of a relationship that's mutually committed to one another. It's biological. It's purely animalistic. It's like Gus. The marriage where the sex is good is going to be a marriage where there is real intimacy and love and mutual commitment. That's what makes it exciting because it's not about the sex, it's about the relationship.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We must consider the fact that we must be actively putting to death the deeds of the flesh. As John Owen is often quoted, you are either putting to death the deeds of the flesh or the flesh is killing you.

Paul writes in Colossians 3:5, which I think goes along with what I was saying earlier about the linkage between sexual immorality and idolatry, in Colossians 3:5 he says, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry." Hear the linkage between bad theology and immorality. Not to suggest that if you got really good theology, you will not be immoral, I'm simply saying really bad theology does lead to immorality.

So we're called by the seventh commandment to forbid unchaste thoughts, unchaste words, unchaste actions, and we need to guard one another. It's not just about your own

personal holiness, it's about the holiness of the people around you, the people who casually meet you, or your neighbor, or your friend, your friend's spouse. We have a responsibility to keep them pure. Again, as the Catechism says, "the preservation of our own and our neighbor's chastity, heart, speech and behavior." That's our responsibility.

So on the female side, women, understand how you and just very innocently can open a door to a man thinking things that he ought not to be thinking and guys are just idiots, they do it very quickly, they do it very honestly. There's a reason why girlie magazines are so successful. You know, when I was in college, they started what was called Playgirl Magazine. It was the female side or response to Playboy Magazine. Playgirl Magazine did not survive. Playboy Magazine has survived. Why? Because guys are just hard-wired to want to look and to think and to respond. Women, you need to understand that. It's not about being prudish, it's about being wise. It's about being godly. It's about protecting yourself and others.

Men, you need to be the spiritual leaders not only of yourselves and your family but in the church, and as men, we need to guard the flock and preserve the purity of our people, and hold one another accountable, and to be honest with one another, and encouraging one another because one of the things I think is very important for us to come to grips with about this or any other sin, there's no sin as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, there is no temptation that you have that isn't common to man. There is no sin that you have committed or might commit or might be tempted, that everyone else in this room hasn't either done or been tempted to do. There's not a whole lot of difference between us. There are some things that maybe you're more tempted towards than another person, but the bottom line is we are all sinners, right? We all have a fallen nature. We all have fallen lusts and so rather than acting surprised and shocked and condescending, understand that when we become aware of these things, what we're looking at is ourselves and why we need to be vigilant for one another and with one another to encourage one another not to fall into the patterns and the traps of sin. So women need to understand what they can do to either lead a man astray or promote his holiness. Men, you need to be aware of what you can do in leading a woman astray or promoting and protecting her holiness and it's not just once you get married.

I'll close with this and you can agree or disagree with this, I don't really care. I thought this was an interesting thing I did with some high school kids at one time and it all started with a pierced ear. Some kid in my youth group had one of these magnetic pierced ears so there really isn't a piercing, it just looks like it's pierced. I said, "Hey, that's cool. Let me put that on." So this was time for a Wednesday night Bible study, so I put this little magnetic pierced ear thing in my ear and I'm standing there and the kids would come into the youth house for the Bible study and they'd be talking to me and then they would see the pierced ear. "Oh!" They'd run out and they were shocked. So that eventually became the study, whatever we were going to study, that became the study, and we talked about that for a while. "Why are you so shocked that I have this pierced ear," which isn't really a pierced ear? They said, "Oh, because you're a pastor!" I said, "Well, there is a different standard of holiness for me as a pastor than there is for you as a Christian?" And they struggled with that and they wanted to say, "Yes, there is," and maybe in some ways you

might say it was a qualification for an elder, but at the end of the day, the holiness that's required of a pastor is the holiness that's required for all non-clergy. We're all called to be holy as God is holy. That's not just the clergy.

Then that led to the discussion of sexual activity and I asked them, "Well, what would happen if you caught me," I was married and I said, "What would happen if you caught me making out with somebody who's not my wife?" "Oh, that would be terrible!" I said, "No, no, no, I'm not talking about having sex with somebody, I'm just talking about making out with them." "Oh, no, no, no, you can't do that!" "Well, why can't I do that?" "Well, because that's sin." I said, "Well, why is it sin?" "Because she's not your wife." "Okay, I get that. So now, you're making out with this girl over here, is she your wife?" "No." "Could she end up being somebody else's wife?" "Yes." "So don't you have a moral problem, the same moral problem you put on me?"

Now I'm not saying, please don't hear me say you can or cannot kiss before marriage or whatever, but to stop and to think about sexual purity, if we're going to take that seriously, then my life, my thoughts, my heart, my body, is reserved only for my wife and her's for me, and that's true once I'm married, it's also true before I'm married. In God's providence, God we believe has appointed our days and that there's someone that God will bring to you if you're single. Humanly we can say you can marry whoever you want in the Lord, but you ought to be saving yourself and also actively helping save other people for their future spouses and we need, whether you're a female or whether you're a male and the categories that are appropriate for who we are, see us trying to preserve the purity of the marriages and for our future spouses, our present spouses, for our children and their future spouses, in thoughts, words and deeds. The way we speak, the way we dress, the way we interact, what we're willing to entertain ourselves with, what we're willing to look at, how we're willing to look at things, all of those things are ultimately required of the commandment.

Now, the commandment was given in order to show us that we can't keep it. Well, doesn't that sound contradictory? The pastor is saying we're supposed to do this but you're saying the law says we can't. Yes, because we are sinful people. But by men and women of faith, we can fulfill the commandment by faith. By faith we learn to trust that God's way is the right way even the world says another way is better. By faith and trust in God we say, "No, Lord, I want to do that which is right. Yes, in my body, in my mind, there's a war but by faith I trust that you will guide me and protect me and help me guide and protect others to walk in the way of wisdom and holiness."

I lied, I said I was going to close with that thing, let me close with this. I know I've told you this also but this is true. It's a true story. It happened right here in this town. I'm with a group of pastors, it doesn't matter who they were or what church they were pastors of, that's irrelevant. But I'm with a group of pastors and we're talking about marriage and wanting to make some videos to help promote biblical marriages, and one of the pastors says of one of the larger churches, 6 out of 10 people coming to him for premarital counseling were already living together and they were shocked when he told them he wouldn't do the wedding if they continued to live together. I was shocked. I was not

shocked that 6 out of 10 couples were already living together. Maybe if I was shocked about that, I was shocked it wasn't higher. What I was shocked is that in his preaching ministry, kind of like what we talked about this morning and the pastor never talked about sin from the pulpit, what I was shocked is that when these people showed up in his office, that was the first time they found out that this was a problem. That's what shocked me and I responded with that. I said, "I know in my church there's a whole lot sinning going on because my church is full of sinners and the main preaching pastor is the biggest of them all. I know there's sin going on in the life of my church because we are sinners, but I bet you can't find a single person in the church that would be shocked to find out that living together is not approved, living together prior to marriage is not approved."

How can the church say they're preaching the word of God if 6 out of 10 couples don't even know that's a problem? The seventh commandment requires us to understand this is a problem and we need to take it very seriously because we are fleshly and we must not assume that we will not fall. As Paul warns, "He who thinks he will stand, beware lest he falls."

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we confess that we are sinful men and we live in a society that has taken very little concern about sexual purity, and we live in a society where even in the mainstream press and mainstream news outlets on the internet, pictures and comments and articles that promote a promiscuous life or exalt it are all around us and it's even in the church. Lord, we pray that you would grant us wisdom, the kind of wisdom that fears you and keeps and treasures your commandments that we might use the law of God now that we have been converted as a roadmap for us to understand the way of wisdom and the way of righteousness. Grant to us the grace to love one another in our congregation and in our families and in all of our relationships not just to protect ourselves from immorality but to protect one another, to encourage godliness in thoughts, words and deeds, and when one of us stumbles and one of us fails, may we not look down, may we not belittle, may we not judge, but may we see ourselves and may we look to find ways to restore and to encourage and to pick up and to go back to the cross and to find the great blood of Christ as a sufficient covering for all of our sin, and may we begin again to walk in the way of wisdom and righteousness. Help us with these things. In Christ we pray. Amen.