



## ***The Seventh Commandment, Introduction - How Shall We Teach About This Commandment?***

Ex. 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery."

We come now to the Seventh Commandment and as we do, I'm mindful that discussions of this commandment can make parents in particular very uncomfortable. So while I was going to launch into a discussion of the importance of marriage today, I have decided instead that before we talk about the commandment itself, we should briefly touch on how it will be discussed, and why this discussion is so necessary in the first place. I hope you will indulge me in this matter.

Before coming to this commandment, I did a brief review of how Presbyterian and Reformed expositors have preached on this commandment, and what I found was for me at least, very interesting. While their preaching never descended to the level of being prurient, lewd, or unsavory by and large the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritans pulled no punches when preaching on this commandment. They clearly felt that Adultery was a sin that particularly afflicted Britain and then later America and so they preached quite a bit on it. They had no problems identifying particular kinds of adultery, explaining why they were sinful and they explaining exactly what God's word had to say about them. Remember also that this was in an age when children's church did not exist, and each of these sermons had children of all ages listening to them. Their attitude on this was that these children were undoubtedly observing the sins of the society they lived and therefore it was their duty to point them to the remedy for them at an early age. They also clearly felt they had a vested interest in exhorting their children from the earliest age to avoid not only the sins of adultery, but the practitioners of adultery.

In this they were following the biblical example. As the people entered into the land of Canaan, they were entering into a land that was filled with unbelievers who practiced many different abominations in the service of their false gods. Not only did they sacrifice their young children to gods such as Molech, causing them to "pass through the fire" but they also routinely practiced ritual prostitution as a form of worship which they believed would cause the gods themselves to procreate and make their land and harvest fruitful. This practice of ritual prostitution became a snare to Israel when they entered the land, so that Balaak the king of Moab on the advice of Balaam, who knew only too well the weaknesses of Israel, while he was not able to defeat them in the field of battle was able to lead the nation of Israel into sin by it, for instance we read the following account:

***NKJ Numbers 25:1 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.***

***2 They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.***

***3 So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.***

***4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel."***

**5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."**

**6 And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.**

**7 Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand;**

**8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel.**

Keep in mind that all these things, both the sins of Israel and the remedy for them, were committed in the midst of the camp of the people, before the eyes of the young ones.

So thinking on these things and knowing what he did about their sinful tendencies it is hardly surprising that you hear Moses saying:

**In Deut 18:9 "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations."**

What would be the safeguard against falling into these abominations, which were so commonplace in the surrounding culture? The answer is sound teaching of the word of the Lord with all of its warnings and examples:

**Deut. 11:16 "Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them,**

**17 "lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.**

**18 " Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.**

**19 "You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.**

**20 "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,**

**21 "that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.**

**22 " For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do -- to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him --**

**23 "then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves.**

All of these things that they had passed through and experienced must be taught:

**Deut. 4:9 " Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren,**

**10 "especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'**

And so, the biblical practice was to warn the young children of the covenant of falling into these sins from the earliest age, so we hear the following words of the wise father giving counsel to his young son:

*NKJ Proverbs 5:1 My son, pay attention to my wisdom; Lend your ear to my understanding,  
 2 That you may preserve discretion, And your lips may keep knowledge.  
 3 For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, And her mouth is smoother than oil;  
 4 But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword.  
 5 Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of hell.  
 6 Lest you ponder her path of life -- Her ways are unstable; You do not know them.  
 7 Therefore hear me now, my children, And do not depart from the words of my mouth.  
 8 Remove your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house,  
 9 Lest you give your honor to others, And your years to the cruel one;  
 10 Lest aliens be filled with your wealth, And your labors go to the house of a foreigner;  
 11 And you mourn at last, When your flesh and your body are consumed,*

The Reformers, Puritans, and Scots Divines followed a similar practice, like Israel they taught their children these things from their youth, so that they might grow up knowing their right hand from their left and right from wrong. And most importantly being able to distinguish the right practices of the people of God from the abominable practices of the cultures that they were in the midst of. The children of the world might go up to their feasts and witness fertility rituals from a young age, but not the sons and daughters of Israel and they were to know why, and what would surely happen if they did. In the same way, the children of our age might be allowed to witness abominable things, and adopt filthy modes of speech and action, so that as they grow they do not depart from the way in which they have been raised. But God forbid that the same should be said of the children of believers – this must not happen, and we must teach them why.

Now as I said, as I reviewed the preaching, I did notice that sermons dealing with adultery in a direct manner began to dry up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Now this wasn't the case with all the preachers, many still taught as biblically and as vigorously as ever, but by and large there is an unmistakable strain of prudery that begins to creep into their preaching. Sins aren't mentioned, certain words, biblical words, begin to be evacuated from the preaching language, and eventually you are at a place where for fear of offending delicate sensibilities an entire commandment has been essentially whitewashed. Now I initially thought I was perhaps being hypersensitive, maybe it was just that the sound sermons that harkened back to the strong preaching of the puritan era, weren't being published as much as others, maybe it was the publishers who had become unbiblically prudish. But then I began to find that Reformed expositors in that age had begun to notice the absence as well, for instance the great Southern Presbyterian Pastor and Chaplain of Stonewall Jackson, R.L. Dabney wrote in his Systematic Theology published in 1871:

**"A supposed obligation of propriety and delicacy has usually kept our pulpits silent concerning the sins of unchastity, and hence, no doubt, in large part, the shocking callousness and unsoundness of public opinion concerning the sins of its breach. It is my opinion that this omission should be corrected by the pastors. When I say this, I would not by any means be understood as encouraging ministers to disregard any sentiment of delicacy or propriety which may exist. On the contrary, all such sentiments, where not positively false, are to be honored by him, and he should be, in all his conversation, the model of delicacy. But there is a guarded and holy way of discussing such subjects, which clearly reveals chastity and not pruriency as its**

**temper, and purity as its object. This is the style in which the pastor should speak on these difficult subjects."**

Now Dabney was a man of intense holiness and decorum, and a true Christian gentlemen, and if he felt the absence of sound preaching on this matter, then I do not doubt it existed.

What then is the problem with avoiding the subject of adultery or teaching in a manner that amounts to tip-toeing around it? Let me give you three main problems :

- 1) ***It's counterproductive:*** As Dabney points out, the absence of preaching on a matter simply encourages the multiplication of the sins not being preached against. No sin goes away by ignoring it, and please believe me, breaches of the Seventh Commandment are probably the most common of all sins that afflict Christian congregations and officers of the church. Balaak knew that he couldn't beat Israel on the battlefield, but he knew that he could weaken or even perhaps destroy Israel using sexual sin as his weapon. In the same way today, the World and the Devil know that many evangelicals who will fight to the death over subjects like the inerrancy of the Bible and the Virgin birth can be bested or even destroyed using sexual immorality as a weapon.

I have yet to be in a Presbytery in the PCA, and I have already been in three, where I have not been present at a meeting where a minister of the Gospel, often theologically sound men, has been deposed from his office for violations of the seventh commandment. Believe it or not, I have never seen a man deposed for a violation of any other commandment. This is the point at which the Devil knows he can most effectively strike the shepherd and scatter the sheep.

The absence of preaching that Dabney correctly identified, took a toll not only in his own age, but in the following ones. As biblical teaching on these sins evaporated, in favor of a whitewash, Western culture did begin to gradually coarsen while the evangelical Christian community simply became naïve in many instances. As a result, many an upstanding young Christian lad exposed to the sins of the city for the first time, was bowled over by them. The experience of thousands of American youth raised in strong Christian families but exposed to decadent French culture and all its temptations in the First World War was summed up in the popular saying of the time: "How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm, now that they've seen gay Par-ee?"

The sins and debauchery of the roaring twenties are more than partially attributable to the mealy mouthed weak preaching of late 19<sup>th</sup> century early 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal Christianity.

- 2) ***It isn't biblical:*** The Bible is very strong in its condemnation of these sins even in the lives of the great patriarchs, it exposes and condemns the drunkenness of Noah, the concubinage of Abraham, the adultery of David, the rape of Tamar, the homosexuality of Sodom and later the tribe of Benjamin and so on. Sin hasn't changed in the intervening time, the sins of that time are still very much the sins of this time, and we too need to expose, in **a guarded and holy way, these sins and the biblical remedy for them.**

- 3) ***It makes preaching the gospel harder:*** The Bible frames the relationship between Christ and his people in terms of marriage, it has always been so. God's people have always been his bride, and he has always been their faithful husband. Therefore going after other gods is condemned as spiritual harlotry, it is spiritual adultery. If we do not understand how terrible Adultery is, and keep in mind

this was a sin punishable by death under the OT Judicial Law, we will never be able to understand how awful spiritual adultery is.

Adultery and all its related sexual immoralities no longer shocks our society, evidence indicates it doesn't even shock Christians – evangelicals have a higher rate of adultery and divorce than *atheists*.

But it should shock us, we should be shocked by this sin as a abomination of the surrounding people.

How will I discuss this? Just as when I spoke of murder I didn't get graphic, talking of all the ways you can kill someone in gruesome detail I will not speak of the sins of adultery in similar manner...

I will not go further than the bible, but I do not want to fall short either.

The sins will be given their biblical names, the content and the dynamics will be kept where they are supposed to be explained. But fathers, I would encourage you to remember your duties in this respect... [explain]

***23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.***

***24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.***

***25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,***

***26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,***

***27 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.***