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# VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: TEN COMMANDMENTS

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## LECTURE 14: THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

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**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

**John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

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# *Module*

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## **TEN COMMANDMENTS**

**18 LECTURES**

***REV. A.T. VERGUNST***

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## *Lecture 14*

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# THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Solomon wrote that it is better to live in the corner of a housetop than with a brawling partner in big palace. The reason for this is simple. Nothing is so satisfying as a harmonious relationship. A beautiful house is no compensation for a broken and betrayed heart. For the most beautiful relationship God designed is between a married man and woman. To protect this from being harmed, God legislated the 7th. Many forces seek to destroy the gift of marriage. Either by wounding person before they are married or by breaking into the relationship once married. That's why the 7th commandment needs our attention.

### TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 14

Welcome, dear friends. I have given this topic the title *Purity in Sexual Passions*, and it is of course based on the Scripture from Exodus chapter 20 where God commands us, "thou shall not commit adultery." When we began the commandments [with] the first one, you noticed that the first commandment demands exclusiveness in our relationship to God. We are not to go after other gods or other lovers, and the Scripture defines, often, this idolatry that leads to apostasy as spiritual adultery. It was for our good that God gave us that command to prevent us from hurting in losing this precious relationship He established with His people. Now, this seventh commandment is in some way closely related to the first. Our lawgiver draws a protective boundary around our most precious human relationship, and that is the marriage between a man and a woman.

So today, we will look at what the details are of the seventh commandment. But before, let us consider a seventh principle that we can derive from the Scriptures in James 2:10. James writes there, "for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." That's an important principle, and let me first illustrated it with a picture, so we understand what James is teaching. Let's consider the law of God as a circle. Inside the circle is obedience, the honoring of the law. Outside the circle, wherever outside the circle, is disobedience or the breaking of the law. What James is saying in this verse in James 2, [is] that wherever we cross the circumference of this circle, it doesn't matter where we step out of it, when we step out of it, we are guilty, we step outside of the circle in the area of disobedience.

So no matter where or how we step out, it could be in a very evil act or it could be as little as a wicked wish, both of them are steps outside of the circle. And therefore James [writes], "for whosoever shall keep the law and yet offend in one point he is guilty." I'll bring it into this example. Let's take a man who has stolen a horse. He is guilty of theft, even though the rest of his entire life he's never stolen a penny. He is guilty. All other acts of obedience to the law don't cancel the one act of disobedience to the law. So, what is the principle out of James's verse? The man who sins once is guilty before the law of God even if all the rest of his life he is perfect.

And that principle makes, therefore, every sin worthy of death. We considered, as we looked in the last commandment that murdering your neighbor is a major transgression of the [sixth] commandment, while belittling him is not so major. And yet, God teaches us that though there is a difference in degree of sin, both make us guilty as we step outside the circle of God's law. So, [it's an] important principle to keep in mind, also when we now look at the seventh commandment which we have called *Purity in Sexual Passions*.

Now friends, I have to do some groundwork to understand this commandment well. And therefore, my first thought that we will together discuss [is] what is the function of sexual passion? And the second, what are the boundaries God has established for expressing our sexual passion? And thirdly, what is the intention of these boundaries? So, let's begin first thinking together what is the function of our sexual passions? God as a Creator has created us people with sexual needs and desires. To have sexual passions, needs, desires, urges, is as much a matter of our creation as having physical hunger and thirst for food and drink. There is no sin in having hunger for food. There is also no sin in having sexual desires and needs. There is also no sin in having sexual relationships and doing sexual activities as long as we are within the boundaries of God's will.

And that's an important truth to bring to your attention, especially to those of you who are perhaps still struggling with a sense of wrong or guilt about sexual activity even within the marriage relationship. This basic principle that sexual actions are [good] within marriage is clearly established in the Scripture in many, many places. Let me just highlight a few to liberate our thinking sometime from all the wrong impressions and teachings perhaps that we have gleaned over the years of growing up. If you consult Proverbs 5:15–21, and you look at what there God is teaching us through Solomon's writing, and God makes a statement: we are to be ravished always with the sexual love of our spouse. That's a very strong word *ravished*, filled with joy of that gift. When we turn to the next book of Solomon, the Song of Solomon, and I'm skipping Ecclesiastes although he spoke there also about the positiveness of living joyfully with the wife of your youth, Song of Solomon 4 and 5 speak most beautifully and honorably about the privacy and intimacy of the sexual relationship between a husband and a wife.

And if we turn in the New Testament to Hebrews 13:4, the apostle writes, "marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers," those are people that visit prostitutes, "and adulterers," those who break the marriage vow, "God will judge." Now for your interest, the word *bed*, "the bed is undefiled," in the Greek word is literally the word *koite*. That is the word *intercourse*. So, God says that activity within the marriage life is undefiled. It is His gift and not only His gift. As I will show you, it is His will for us to live like that. Nowhere, nowhere is Scripture anywhere teaching that the sexual passion between a husband and a wife is some excusable evil that needs to be tolerated for the multiplying of the human race. That is a blatant opposite teaching of the holy Scriptures.

Now that sexual actions are not taboo in God's view can also be concluded, friends, from considering how our Creator designed our bodies. The sexual activity within His boundaries was created to be an intensely pleasurable and satisfying experience. God designed our bodies with hormones. That was no accident. That was a forethought that all played into this experience. He even designed our sexual organs to provide a physical delight. Again, not without its purpose. He wanted His creatures to enjoy the physical intimacy within the marriage life between a man and woman, husband and wife, for it would deepen the joy of their relationship. So, God not only designed it. God also commands it.

If you examine [for] yourself I Corinthians 7, you note that Paul writes something about sexual activity within marriage. [It is] not only allowed, but it is commanded. I am to render as a husband due benevolence to my wife, and my wife [is to] render due benevolence to the husband. And, Paul is not talking in *due benevolence* about kindness. He is speaking there about sexual activity. In other words, he says it is my duty as a husband to fulfill the sexual needs and desires of my wife in marriage. And why? That we will not give Satan opportunity to tempt us.

So therefore, take note from Paul's teaching that our primary goal and focus in sexual activities in marriage is to satisfy the needs of my spouse, not self-directed first, not to have my needs met, but to have her or his needs met. Your spouse's needs come first. And again, friends, that reveals that devotional love that speaks to all these commandments which God wants to be reflected in how we live together. Sadly, through the deep fall in Paradise, this pleasure experience of sexual activity has now become a massively destructive force in our hearts and in the life in which we live. And now, to curb this sin that is destroying people personally, [from] a young age to

old age [both] inside and outside marriage life, to curb that evil, God has placed the seventh commandment as a fence around these sexual passions to keep them pure.

So, let's sum up this very first point by a picture. I compare sexual passion to a fire. We all know that fire has a tremendous potential to provide joy. In the appropriate fireplace, a fire warms the house. It makes a house cozy, but that same fire outside the fireplace can burn the house down. One spark can start a house fire or a forest fire and destruct it. That's what God is after. He knows how destructive the sexual passion can be when it is taken outside the fireplace He has designed: marriage life. Take it outside there, and we burn ourselves, wound ourselves for life. That's what He wants to prevent by "thou shalt not commit adultery."

So, that leads us now naturally to ask, 'what are the biblical boundaries then for the expression of sexual passion?' Now, the first boundary is clear from Genesis 2. That's marriage life. You can read there beautifully how God instituted marriage life and made Adam discover that being alone is not good. Then, He created him a helpmeet to fit him. What a joy it must have been when the Creator introduced the woman to Adam and officiated the first marriage when He gave the words, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh." God's permanent, permanent institution of the marriage life [is that] in which the one flesh relationship alone is permissible. And [how] I know that's the permanent one is that God spoke "every man shall leave his father and his mother." Well, Adam and Eve didn't have a father and a mother, so God is here speaking to theirs and all subsequent marriages forever.

And let it be clear, therefore, to us that [a] sexual relationship between a man and a woman, no matter what age, is never considered a private activity by consenting adults or youth. Sexual activity is by God's law only permitted within the covenant relationship of marriage. And indeed, though Solomon in some way hardly qualifies to be an authority on marriage life, yet as God's inspired spokesman, we do well to consider his teachings in Proverbs 5-7. And look at this picture in your mind, as it were, when he says, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and not get burned? Can someone go on hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" And with that, picture again, [if we] take the sexual activity outside of the marriage situation and relationship, we will burn.

This seems highly unnecessary, but within our modern society today, it is necessary that we keep reminding ourselves of the obvious: a marriage is a covenantal relationship between one man and one woman. God commands a man to cleave and to be one with his wife. Genesis 1:28 commands us to be fruitful and to multiply. This act involves the union of a man and a woman as any basic biology book will teach us. For a lightbulb, I need a bulb and a socket. For a marriage, we need a man and a woman. That be obvious to all of us as we face these winds of doctrinal and practical error. Now from this point, let us look through the Scripture at the boundaries that our lawgiver has more specifically drawn around our sexual passions.

I'll review the main ones with you. Any sexual activity between unmarried people is forbidden. Sometimes that's called fornication. Let me give you one example. In I Thessalonians 4:3-7, God warns and exhorts that we are to possess our bodies in sanctification and honor, abstaining from fornication. He warns against taking the sexual activity outside of the relationship of marriage, and God warns against the sin of sexual passion as lived out in unrestrained sexual activity. And then, He adds to this, this very note of warning. He says, "That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter." And in this context, that matter is sexual matters. Why? "Because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we have forewarned you and testified." And how does God avenge? Well friends, sometimes just through the memories, which disturb and which harm the beauty of a future marriage. Protect this precious gift by staying within the boundaries of God when you are unmarried and single.

Now secondly, any sexual activity between married people with others that are not married or married, other than your spouse, is forbidden, and the Scripture calls that *adultery*. This sin of infidelity to the man or woman to whom you committed yourself in marriage is one of the most destructive acts to the beauty of the marriage relationship. Over the years of my pastoral ministry, I've dealt with many cases like this, and I've hardly seen ever that the marriages broken by adultery can be restored to what it used to be or what it ought to be. It is therefore that God allows the spouse against whom adultery is committed to divorce from her spouse that committed adultery. He allows it. He doesn't command it, but He knows how disastrous this act of adultery is to the health and well-being of the marriage. And marrying an adulterer or adulteress who has been unbiblically divorced from his or her spouse is clearly forbidden by the Lord as well. You can study that from Matthew 5:31-32

and Matthew 19:9. And all these commandments of the Savior underline again and again the seriousness of the sin of adultery.

And thirdly, any sexual activity between family members is forbidden. You take open the book of Leviticus 18, you will notice clear examples of these relationships of family members. This is called the sin of incest. God's will is clearly declared when repeatedly throughout the chapter He says, "none of you shall approach unto that is near to kin to him," family member, "to uncover their nakedness" (Leviticus 18:6). *To uncover their nakedness* is a phrase that catches all sexual activity between family members. It is from the slightest physical sexual touch to the fullest act of sexual intercourse. God forbids. If this sexual activity happens between adults, children or teens, it's called sex child abuse. And in most countries that is considered a criminal offense and for right reasons, for nothing is so disruptive to the child or the young person than to be sexually abused by an adult in their youth. And, God wants to protect this flower, this beautiful gift of our sexuality. He places this boundary around it. And let all of us do all to honor these boundaries.

Now when we come again to the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:27–28 in the Sermon on the Mount, we notice that the sin against the seventh commandment goes much farther than the actions I have outlined so far. Let us listen to Jesus's words. He says, "But I say unto you," regarding the seventh commandment, "That whosoever looked on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." Again, Jesus addresses here the heart sin that lies before the act of adultery. On the basis of this teaching of Jesus, the Heidelberg Catechism's instruction in Question 109 again is a beautiful summary. Let me read it to you. It answers the question about whether the seventh commandment only forbids adultery and such like gross sins with these words. "Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, God commands us to preserve them pure and holy; and therefore He forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, or whatever can entice men thereto."

And may I then speak for a moment to us men as well as to the women in our audience? Let all hear this last statement, "and whatever can entice men or women to any such act of sexual passion in a wrong context." Women, we entice sexual thoughts and desires in a man in how we dress. We can be as Satan's agent to lead other men, normal, healthy men created by God, astray by the way that we dress. Now, I suspect that many girls and women do this out of ignorance, but they ought not to be ignorant. By the way we dress, or rather undress or alluringly dress, we become a source of temptation to any normal, healthy man. No, that doesn't mean at all that we men have no responsibility about what we do with our thoughts. That's between God and us, but it certainly also directs you to act and dress responsibly. And though we usually limit Jesus's teaching to the men, it is of course also wrong for a wife to lust for the emotional and the physical love of someone else that is not her husband.

But there are also many men who are guilty of leading women astray in the seventh commandment. And how do we do that, men? By giving inappropriate emotional and physical attention to a woman that is not our wife. In I Corinthians 7:1, the apostle writes, "It is good for a man [not] to touch a woman." And the word in the Greek *touch* has the literal picture of kindling a fire. It is not good for a man to kindle a fire in a woman. Now, we men know what kindles a fire in us men. That goes to our eye gate. But what kindles a fire in the woman? That goes to her feeling gate. And therefore, we men are to be extremely careful in how we deal with the women around us. We kindle inappropriate fires that may lead to adultery by giving a woman other than our wife attentive listening or emotional support or personal, social time or financial gifts or even the slightest physical touch. So, let us be guarding ourselves also in that regard not to stir sexual passion in women that are not our wife.

This instruction of the Lord Jesus, friends, also covers the sins of pornography in movies and pictures, the lusting and the masturbation that takes place in connection with pornography is a horribly destructive sin to yourself and to the relationship with your present spouse or even your future spouse. Oh, God is sharing His concern about this fragile sexual person within us by wanting to protect us against the evils of pornography. Pornography not only defiles the mind and the body, but it also sexually abuses and exploits girls and women as if they're toys and not persons. And besides, it will complicate your future marriage as it leaves a destructive wake in a person's mind with vile memories and unrealistic expectations that will ruin the beauty of a future marriage intimacy. Of course, it will also destroy your present marriage. Women who discover their husbands in pornography feel the exact same betrayal as they feel when they catch their men, their spouse, their husband, with another woman.

So, let me conclude. What is now God's intention in this so clear boundary around sexual passions to remain pure and holy? Friends, it is to protect something that is so beautiful and so tender. As a child grows up, he's like a flower bud that will begin to develop his sexuality into a beautiful flower. Anyone who begins to poke at this little flower bud is destroying the future of this flower, and it will never be restored when we open up this flower bud too early. So those who sexually abuse children and young people will forever mark them and harm them in their sexuality. God knows the destructive force of such action. God knows how many people are driven in prostitution or are driven into homosexual relationships only to escape the pain and the indignity that has been brought upon them through sexual abuse. God knows the biological footprint that pornography causes in a person's mind. He wants to protect us. God knows that when a marriage relationship is invaded by a third person, it will never be the same.

God also knows how strong the power of sexuality is that He created in us, and therefore repeatedly warns us in the book of the Song of Solomon, "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem," the unmarried ones, "...that you stir not up, nor awake [my love], till he please," or till it is the right time to awaken this fire of the sexual passion. Proverbs 7:24, "Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she has cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way [to] hell, going down to the chambers of death." Do you again feel, see, experience God's caring love that places this rigid fence around that which is so personal and so fragile and so beautiful? And, that is our gift of the sexuality lived and experienced out in the marriage life.

And again and again, friends, I want to remind you the lawgiver is a God of devotional love to seek to make your and my life the most beautiful and the most holy. And that only will be so when we abide in the pathway that leads to safety and happiness. May God bless these instructions on the seventh commandment to us all. Thank you.