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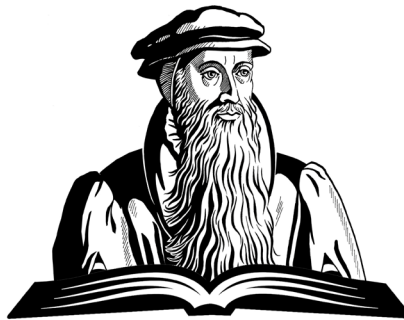
by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #39

The Ten Commandments:

Love for Purity

Catechism Questions 70 thru 72



The John Knox Institute
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Lecture #39

The Ten Commandments: Love for Purity

Question 70: *Which is the seventh commandment?*

Answer: *The seventh commandment is, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”*

Question 71: *What is required in the seventh commandment?*

Answer: *The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbour’s chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour.”*

Question 72: *What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?*

Answer: *The seventh commandment forbiddeth all unchaste thoughts, words,*

Each of the commandments instructs us in the way of loving God. The 5th through 10th commandments clarify how we are to love God by loving our neighbor. As we look at the seventh commandment in this lesson, we consider a topic that is very sensitive, and must be treated with care and respect. But while it demands care and respect, it does demand that we deal with it. We cannot ignore the topic before us. While the commandment itself addresses adultery, it opens our mind to the fact of sexual sin. Specifically, adultery is when a man has sexual relations with someone other than his wife, or a woman with someone other than her husband.

It may be that you do not yet have much knowledge about sex. It may be that you have a lot. Either way, we have to realize that, at its basic level, sexual relations—or simply, sex—is a way that God intends for a husband and wife to love, enjoy, and serve one another to his glory. By it, a husband and wife are to give themselves physically and emotionally to one another’s good, in a way that only a husband and wife are meant to do. If and when you have questions about this topic, don’t turn to the foolish of this world, don’t search the internet. Instead, turn to the Lord, and make use of the help he provides you in his Word, and by the assistance of godly and wise adults.

And because sex is much abused by our world, it’s easy to think of it as less than good. However, as we’ll see, sex is a provision of the Lord, to be enjoyed in its proper place—in marriage, between one man and one woman—husband and wife. When it’s not enjoyed in this relationship, it is destructive to relationships, to society, and to souls.

While it may be difficult to discuss these things, a consideration of this topic is needed for at

least two reasons. First, God has addressed it clearly and repeatedly throughout his Word. And second, the abuse of sex is so common today that, if we avoid true and faithful instruction, we're left only with the false instruction of the world, or the imagination of our own minds.

So let us look at our Questions today from the *Shorter Catechism*, beginning with Question #70: "What is the seventh commandment?"—"The seventh commandment is, Thou shalt not commit adultery." Well, technically, "adultery" refers to sexual relations between a married man or a married woman, with someone other than his or her spouse. But related to this particular sin of adultery are many other sexual sins. One, for instance, is fornication. And this is when an unmarried person has sexual relations with someone else who is not married. So this one commandment is talking about sexual sin.

So Question #71 asks, "What is required in the seventh commandment?"—"The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity, in heart, speech, and behavior." Now the word "chastity" comes from a word meaning "pure." The explanation here is emphasizing that the commandment is not only interested in external or physical, purity from sexual corruption, but that we are commanded throughout the Bible, and by this commandment itself, to be pure in all aspects of our lives: our desires, our words, and actions.

Question #72, "What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?"—"The seventh commandment forbiddeth all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions." "Unchaste" is the opposite of "chastity" or "chaste," and "purity" or "pure." As we'll see, it is not only the activity of sexual impurity that is forbidden, but even our desires and thoughts, as well as words, ought to be free from impurity.

Well, let's look at three points for our lesson today. Firstly, *Purity in Relationships*; secondly, *Preserving Purity*; and thirdly, *Corrupting Purity*.

So first, *Purity in Relationships*. The commandment does not forbid sexual activity or enjoyment. Instead, it is commanding that all sexual activity and enjoyment be experienced in the only right and safe and appropriate relationship—namely, lawful marriage. Marriage was ordained and provided by God. In Genesis chapter 2, the only thing that God noticed in all his creation before the fall that was not good, was that man was alone. So he then created a woman. He didn't create another man. He created of the man a woman, both humans, of course; both bearing God's image. And though essentially the same, and yet uniquely different, as a man and a woman.

Notice, in Genesis 2, verses 23 through 25: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

It's instructive that, for marriage, it is that one man and one woman would be joined together. And so, from this first marriage, God has provided a foundation for all other marriages. This is the guide for all else that follows. God made one man, one woman, brought them together, and they were married. And so it is to be so today.

But notice that in this passage, we see no embarrassment, we see no regret. Nor do we see merely permitting something that is otherwise less than good. Instead, we see that God provided marriage as a great blessing to man. Sexual activity between a husband and wife is to be the good, and enjoyable, and beneficial expression of the most forms of human love. But you see, herein lies the temptation. As it is the expression of the most intimate human love, it is counterfeited, misrepresented, cheapened, and abused by the world. This is why we must understand and give attention to what purity in this way is. So let's quickly note that there are several reasons that God instituted marriage. We find them all clearly stated regularly in the Bible.

One is for the mutual help of the man and woman. Notice, in Genesis 2:18, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help *meet* for him.” That is, literally, a help that is *suitable* for him.

Another reason for marriage is the right relationship to express and enjoy sexual intimacy. Notice Hebrews 13, and verse 4: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” So the sexual relationship within marriage is honorable and undefiled. But the abuse of it is a sin that God will judge. Notice as well, in 1 Corinthians 7, verse 2, Paul writes, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.” So again, you see one man and one woman to be joined together for the enjoyment of that sexual intimacy.

Well, another reason for marriage is for the right way to populate the earth—“procreation”. Indeed, by sexual interaction between husband and wife, this takes place. Notice in Genesis 1, verses 27 and 28, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.” And yet this is not only, in isolation, stated here. It’s repeated again and again in the Scriptures.

And yet, within this, there’s a further reason that God identifies for marriage, that by all of what’s going on in marriage, God would then seek from children which come from that marital union of husband and wife, a godly seed. So, Malachi 2, verse 15, speaking of God, “And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.” In other words, there is one man, one woman, and as they come together and have children, and in a godly home are raised, it’s thereby that God is seeking a godly seed.

So what we see is that God established marriage to be *the* place, *the* relationship, with the greatest intimacy and support, including right and pure sexual desires and enjoyment. It is to be the unique and blessed way to fill the earth, and provide, by God’s blessing, a godly seed for the church.

But let us not overstate the matter. Marriage is not for everyone, and that’s by God’s appointment. While it is good and lawful, it is not mandatory. It’s not mandatory to be married in order to be a satisfied human being. It’s not mandatory to be married in order to be God-glorifying as a Christian. Whereas we can see that it may be the normal and ordinary way and a calling that God provides, it is not exclusive. Christ himself, of course, was a single man. We see Paul testifying that though he had the right to have a wife as other apostles did, yet it was not the case that he had a wife, and he devoted himself, in his singleness, to the service of Christ. And even in 1 Corinthians exhorts others who are single to use their singleness for service to the Lord. So we see the Bible commends singleness in several ways. We must always remember that it is trusting, knowing, and loving God in Jesus Christ that is the fullest way of satisfying what we are. Because man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

And yet, with that notice we acknowledge that, as far as human relationships are considered, there’s no greater intimacy experienced than that which is between a husband and a wife. If we fail to understand this, we will fail to make sense of this commandment. We’ll fail to see why sexual sin is a great evil and corruption. Why is it that we should be concerned about purity in our lives and relationships? It’s because the nature of sexual intimacy is extremely precious. If it is ignored, abused, or lightly treated, it ends up spoiling, and ruining, and injuring men and women, boys and girls, in ways so deep that it is hard even for the most well-trained professional, and the most

skillful of pastors to understand. Marriage, and sexual relations between husband and wife are fundamental to family, to the church, and to society.

It's an ancient tactic of Satan to lure people to commit sexual sins by the apparent attraction of pleasure. However, as soon as they engage, he turns the tables upon them and shames them for their sin. Because he's led them on to something that is not theirs for the moment, and which is precious, and once they've engaged in it, they're left, as it were, in their shame.

And let's be clear that purity is not just about actions. As with all things, our actions flow out of thoughts and desires, and are often cultivated by our speech. This means that true purity is not one of mere action or inaction. It is a matter of the mind and heart, which then leads and governs our speech and actions. Well, all of this helps us to see what purity or chastity is. It is the commitment of our whole person, body and soul; thoughts, desires, and actions; to the maintaining of sexual intimacy within the loving relationship of marriage. This means that impurity is anything that takes what ought to be peculiar and special to marriage, and desires or makes use of it outside of marriage.

So second, let's look at *Preserving Purity*. How do we preserve it? Well, we start by remembering what purity is, and that it is good. Purity is the commitment of our whole person to honoring God and others in our relationships with others. It is preserving what is special for marriage, and ensuring that it is both kept in that estate and enjoyed in that estate. Remember that this is not only right, it's good. Purity is good in and of itself. It is good for us. This is the very thing that the world seeks to overthrow. It is something that our own sinfulness denies. Sexual purity is good. It is good for us. This is true for single persons—their purity will be cultivating personal godliness and God-honoring relationships with others. This is true of married persons, who will also be cultivating personal godliness and God-honoring relationships with others, while giving themselves in that special way provided in marriage to their spouse. To do anything that fails to preserve this is to bring pain and hurt to our bodies, souls, and relationships.

Well, how then do we preserve this? Well simply, we do so by watching over three areas: our heart, our speech, and behavior regarding ourselves and others. Notice the *Catechism*, “The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour.” Our heart relates to our desires. If we are to preserve purity, this is where the main focus must be—the desires and inclinations of our hearts. It's not just activity that must be blameless. Our desires must be pure toward others. We're to remember that God sees into our hearts, and he knows how we think of others and other things. And so, if we're to preserve purity, we must watch our hearts.

This is true with reference to any sin. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” We must guard and watch over our hearts, to be mindful of what we let into them, and what we think about and dwell on. Our desires will, of course, lead to thoughts, and words, which often will lead then to action. A person who is loose in their speech will be led to be loose in their behavior. But that looseness, that impurity is because they failed first and foremost to guard their hearts. We should think and speak about marriage as that which is a privileged and honorable state, while we guard our hearts to ensure that they are seeking God above all else.

Well, third, *Corrupting Purity*. What are some common ways that we see purity corrupted? There is the obvious way of engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage. Sexual activity before, or in any way outside of marriage between one man and one woman, is sinful and impure. It is a corruption of the good thing that God has given to husbands and wives. And as it is impure, it is

also harmful. So think for a moment of pure water. If you put poison in the water, it's not just that it's wrong, but now it's harmful. And so it is with sexual relationships, thoughts, and other things. But if it is something engaged in outside of marriage, it's not just wrong, it's harmful.

There are many ways to corrupt this privilege. In today's visual culture, we see this in the images that are often paraded before us. With access to the internet, it is all too easy to come across, even to stumble across the most wicked abuses of sexual behavior. Indeed, many have stumbled in this regard, not even purposely seeking it out, but finding themselves off guard, and then lured to the temptation. The visual portrayal of sexual behavior is known as pornography. But it's not only explicit pornography. Advertisements, as well as suggestive dress by men and women promote the corruption of this purity as well. And to engage in those things is to corrupt purity.

Additionally, today's world is full of crude, inappropriate, and crass discussion about sex, and about others. Some come by way of jokes; others by way of provocative talk. All of this is forbidden, because all of it attacks the purity of what God has given. The commandment, remember, forbids *all* unchaste thoughts, words, and actions. All of this must be cast out.

Any way of cultivating or satisfying sexual desires outside of marriage with one spouse is to corrupt its purity. This may be by engaging in sexual activities by oneself, or with someone other than your spouse. It may be by viewing illicit material, or by lusting after someone in no other way but in your own thoughts. Notice Christ's words, in Matthew 5, verses 27 through 28: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." So notice, it's not that the person did anything outwardly. He looked, and then lusted. The word "lust" means "to desire." And here, in this sense, it is the desire for the experience or the benefit of sex with someone who is not one's spouse.

Well, in today's world, all manner of degenerate and wicked activity is being promoted. This is true specifically with reference to the seventh commandment. Sex before marriage is commonplace in the world. Promiscuity is rampant in the world. Homosexuality—that is, sexual relationships between people of the same sex—is openly promoted and celebrated. Even laws are passed in various nations to support it. Unbiblical divorce, and the consequential adultery that follows is tolerated even in churches. Entertainment, which portrays all forms of sexual deviancy is common, and we are surrounded by all manner of impurity.

All of this means then that we must be vigilant, as the corruption surrounds us. But we should remember, these things are not the causes of impurity. These are the display of it. The truth is, if we have impure thoughts, words, or behavior, it is because we have distorted and corrupted desires within us. Our hearts are influenced by sin. We have hearts in need of Christ and grace. Notice Christ's words, in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." It's true that those who promote sexual immorality will answer for their wickedness. However, our sinful thoughts, words, and actions are fundamentally our fault—our sin. And so, we must take responsibility for our thoughts, words, and actions. Impurity is not the world's problem. Impurity is our problem.

When it comes to relating to others not our spouse, it's important that we both avoid and seek out. So as we close with this application, think of this. This is true both for single people and married people. We must avoid those circumstances that would promote the desires and opportunities, not only for the activity of sexual sin, but even the cultivation of desires for it. We should not isolate ourselves with the means to seek out opportunities for impurity. So in this world, we have smart phones, and laptops, and other devices that have an instant access to the internet. We should make

use of those things in public, not in secret. Because it's a means by which we might be lured away. We shouldn't isolate ourselves with others, especially those of the opposite sex. We should be careful to avoid even the appearance of evil. So there are things that we ought to avoid.

But there are also things that we should seek out. We should seek out wholesome relationships. One practical way to do this, when single, is to avoid being one-on-one with someone to whom we may be attracted, or those of the opposite sex. Instead, be in groups together. Avoid the music and entertainment that is careless about these relationships, and portrays them with all manner of laughing, while all manner of sin is taking place. Instead, participate in those things which promote wholesome engagement with others. And do so in the public eye, and in groups, and if young, with the care and oversight of wise and godly adults.

Before I close, let me say that, if you're not married, and someone, anyone other than your spouse, as we've seen, has sought to engage, or has engaged in sexual activity or discussion with you, you need to seek out a trusted adult for help. It is grievous, but even close relatives and otherwise respected people can and have abused others. And if this has happened to you, your great need is to seek out the Lord first by prayer, but also to seek out someone who is worthy to be trusted. It's a difficult thing for people who have been so abused, but it's the right thing. It's the way to find help for what has happened.

But finally, how is it that we overcome sexual sin? In one sense, sexual sin is like any other sin. It's rebellion against God and his good order for men. It comes from a disordered and corrupt heart. Well this means that the ultimate way of overcoming it is by God's grace. We need him to send us help, and he does this by Jesus Christ. Remember, Jesus is the Savior of sinners. It may be that you have been guilty of sexual sin, in any sort, or even in its more heinous form. Our hope is the grace of God. Paul addressed this in 1 Corinthians. Among other heinous sins, notice chapter 6, verse 9 and following: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Here is the good news: even regarding our sexual sin, God is able to forgive. He's able to sanctify, to purify us, to take us who were impure and make us pure. He's able to change us, that we would love him and love others. God is able to do this, even to the end that, by his grace, we may live lives going forward that display our love to him, and our love to our neighbors in right, God-honoring, and truly satisfying ways. And all of this is done by his grace, which is given us by and in Christ.

So what is there that is more practical than this, that if you and I are either to be restored from impurity to purity, or to cultivate greater purity and maintain it, we must be much with Christ, casting all of our desires upon him, seeking him for his grace, pouring over his Word, meditating upon him, believing his promises, and asking for his Spirit to guide us, that we might walk in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. If you would fulfill this commandment, you will only be able to do so as you dwell in, and that by faith, Jesus Christ.