

The Ten Commandments Sermons from the Heidelberg Catechism

Rev. G. Van Reenen

“Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946. Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof. Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake.” Psalm 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden).

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“THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT”

Psalter No. 93 1,2,3,4.

Read I Cor. 7.

Psalter No.64 st. 1,2,3.

Psalter No.143 st. 3,4.

Psalter No.170 st. 1,2.

XLI. LORD'S DAY.

“Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, thus, my dear hearers, the chief priests and scribes spoke of our holy Lord Jesus. But it was vile slander, adder's poison, to say that He, the Holy of holies, Who knew nor committed sin was a friend of people who cheat others, who indulge in all manner of iniquity, who drink too much wine, who were harlots and who associated with harlots. No, a thousand times no! Our holy Jesus is an enemy of all sin and of all those depraved creatures who commit such abominations.

Yet the Lord Jesus truly is a friend of harlots and publicans, but of such who by the grace of God turn away from their sins to God and learn to implore Him for the forgiveness of their sin and peace for their soul. Yea, for such the scoffing words of the Pharisees and scribes are words full of blessed comfort, especially when in their own heart they may experience the truth of those words.

What a comfort it was to Rahab, who even today is still known by the epithet that reminds us of her former life of sin, but is now an honorary title for her!

Jesus, a friend of harlots and publicans, is a comfort to the weeping Mary Magdalenes, who shed hot tears at Jesus feet for their sin.

In their blindness and enmity the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes also spoke comfort to the woman taken in adultery. "Hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee," spoke the Lord after the accusers had left one by one, being accused by their own conscience.

That Jesus is a friend of sinners, of harlots and of publicans is also a comfort for us, for you and for me. Or do you not know yourself as such a sinner?

We must now deal with the seventh commandment. May the Lord use this sermon as a light to uncover us. May it be a rod to drive us to Christ.

Then this sermon would also be a signpost to salvation.

Our text you will find in Exodus 20:14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Upon these words our catechetical instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q.108. What doth the seventh commandment teach us?

A. That all uncleanness is accursed of God: and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same, and live chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock, or in single life.

Q.109. Doth God forbid in this commandment, only adultery, and such like gross sins?

A. Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, he commands us to preserve them pure and holy: therefore he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires and whatever can entice men thereto.

Dear hearers,

The preceding Lord's Day we considered the sixth commandment, in which the Lord showed His loving care for our life, our most precious possession.

We heard that it is the Lord Who gave us that life; that it is He Who joined our soul and body, and that therefore it is also He Who, at His appointed time, as a result of sin, can and may separate soul and body,

We showed you the lawful and the unlawful murder: the lawful murder which is committed at God's command, in a lawful war, in defense of one's life or committed accidentally; the unlawful murder which is committed inwardly by evil thoughts, and outwardly by angry words, by an angry look, by dishonoring, insulting, or wounding someone, by bringing one into danger, by unjust condemnation, by taking a life, either doing it or having it done, and by bringing one's self into danger, or taking one's own life.

Therefore we also showed you how God punishes the transgression of the sixth commandment: internally in the conscience and externally by delivering the wilful murderer to the law, with the command to do unto him as he has done, and finally by delivering him eternally to the tormenters, in hell, unless he comes to conversion and seeks and finds forgiveness in the blood of Him Who because of the merits of His atonement can say also to murderers, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

After we have thus shown you the horror of murder in all its wickedness, we showed you the neighborly love which God commands, and which must be found in us and must be practiced by us, shall it be well with us for eternity. Without neighborly love we are still dead in sins and trespasses and strangers to that life of God which the Lord gives to His people in the regeneration.

We heard how pleasant it is to experience neighborly love shown to us by others but we have also said how difficult it is to practice it ourselves and show it to others.

Finally we spoke of the only One who had and practiced neighborly love to perfection as He gave His life and blood for slayers and murderers, and thus is and opened a fountain of comfort to those who have learned to know themselves and accuse themselves as murderers before God, and seek and find grace in and through Him Who is the end of the law, also of the sixth commandment.

And now we must consider the seventh commandment, in accordance with Questions 108, and 109.

Praying to the Lord, and with the help of the Holy Spirit we wish to speak about:

1. the blessing of matrimony
2. the corruption of man
3. the beneficial purpose of the seventh commandment.

Dear hearers, it is with much constraint that we prepare ourselves to handle such a delicate subject, for our heart is so very corrupt. It is like a powder magazine, only one spark is needed to set on fire the course of nature.

And yet the Instructor could not omit the discussion of the seventh commandment. And in our explanation we must use caution and discretion every moment, but we must also mention the sins and warn ourselves and you against them

The Lord wills that His covenant people shall be pure and holy in all their walk and conversation, and that like God, Who is a pure and holy Being. He calls to them, "Be ye holy, for I the Lord am holy." That is evident from the divine laws in which the Lord prescribed that all who were unclean had to be separated from the fellowship of His people, and in which He strictly forbids His people to eat anything that is unclean, and to have communion with anything unclean.

And because lasciviousness is a sworn enemy of purity of life, in the seventh commandment God commands that we keep a pure soul in a pure body and shun all that which conflicts with it.

Thou shalt not commit adultery. These words once heard from Mt. Sinai which Jehovah himself engraved in stone, bring to our memory a sweet story, it is the story recorded in Gen. 2.

In Genesis 2 we read of the first marriage, the marriage of our first parents, hence of that marriage of which we all are the fruit. Dear hearers, how thankful we should be that the Lord by His servant Moses, has recorded this marriage! Others may believe and say that we are descendants of apes. We know that we have descended from a pure and holy marriage, the only marriage performed immediately by God Himself.

In Genesis 2, Moses narrates the occasion for that marriage. When the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, He brought them all to Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. When Adam had showed his great innate knowledge by giving them names in accordance with their nature, a sad lack was revealed: all the animals were paired, but he, our father stood alone: there was not found a helpmeet for him.

Certainly it was not God's intention to leave man alone. For was it not God's plan to make of one blood all nations of men? And behold Adam standing there, see his form, and hear his speech. Could it be God's plan to leave him without a partner for life? Why then did He give his speech? No, the Lord wanted to make a helpmeet for him. And Moses also records how the Lord did it. In Gen. 2:21 and 22 we read of the creation of the woman.

The Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. And while He slept, God took out one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the Lord God made the rib which He had taken from Adam into a woman. Wonderworking God! While we sleep, God often prepares for us the greatest blessing.

But all was not yet done. The woman was there, but what must still follow is the marriage itself.

As the father who gives his daughter to the bridegroom, so God brings the woman to Adam. What a sweet awakening that must have been, what a blessed surprise: his God is bringing him a sweet partner for life!

Notice again Adam's great wisdom (verse 23):

a. in his explanation. He fathoms the origin of that woman: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."

b. in the name he gave her: "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man."

c. in declaring the obligation which flows from the divine alliance. (verse 24) : "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh."

And now also note the divine qualifying for marital life. The Lord gave to the man and to the woman the desire, the delight and the ability to bring forth children in union and communion with each other, to love, care for, raise and protect them, all this with the blessing and the help of their God.

And the Lord still does so. Read what the form for the confirmation of marriage before the church says that when God confirmed the marriage of our first parents, He witnesses "that He doth yet as with His hand bring unto every man his wife."

And what a blessing it is when it pleases the Lord to give to the man a good wife, as He did to Adam. Solomon says, and he could know it, that a prudent wife is from the Lord. He says (Prov. 18:22) "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord. "Yea, he says (Prov. 5), "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving kind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love." And truly, who is able to receive all the blessing and to describe all the enjoyment of the marriage state.

How very sad that sin has entered that state. For has not sin also corrupted married life? Through sin man's helpmeet is often a stumbling block and the silken cord, soft as velvet, which binds husband and wife together is for many an iron chain which they would like to break and cast off.

Through sin the lust and desire for union of the man with the woman has become unbridled, the marriage bed is often defiled, and the lusts extend to various abominable objects.

This induces us to speak in the second place about the corruption of man.

After those two happy people in Paradise had broken the covenant with their God, after they had fallen away from God and from each other, God still did not want to abolish marriage. Rather He would hedge it about to keep it undefiled. Therefore He spoke, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

If we listen to what our Instructor says in his answer to Question 108, we hear that adultery is committed when two people who are married to others associate with each other. It may be that both are married, as with David and Bathsheba, which is called double adultery; or a married person with an unmarried person, as with Abraham and Hagar, which is called single adultery. It is also done by those who are engaged, as we read in Hosea 4:13, "Your brides (Am. Rev.) commit adultery."

Adultery is also committed by having more than one wife at a time. This was first undertaken by the wicked Lamech. Alas his example was soon followed by the patriarchs and the kings of Israel, under the tolerance of the Lord. However, polygamy conflicts against the first institution of marriage. There were but two who became one flesh. The Lord punishes polygamy as a grievous sin. See Mal. 2:13-15. There the Lord says that He does not regard the offering any more, nor receives it with good will from His people. And why not? Because they had forsaken the wife of their covenant and had taken more wives, where as the Lord had made but one, although He had the residue of the spirit.

Adultery is also committed by unlawful divorce. For every minor matter, for every small difference, the one leaves the other and seeks divorce. But what God hath joined together, man may not put asunder, except in the one case the Lord Jesus mentions in Matth. 5:32, namely, fornication.

The Lord also forbids marriage within one's family. Leviticus 18 defines the relationship within which marriage is not permissible.

If this closed the register of sins, many unmarried people would be blameless. But now the Catechism speaks not only of unchastity in holy wedlock, but also of unchastity in single life, whoredom, which is committed, when unmarried persons, outside of legal marriage mingle with each other, either by having or being concubine, or by filthy prostitution of harlots who offer themselves to any one for money, for food, or for clothing. By such abominations the land is defiled. (Lev. 19 :27) Such shall not be saved. (1 Cor. 6:9).

God's Word also speaks of sins committed against marriage, as when men commit

lewdness with men, and women with women, or even with animals. How deeply man has fallen, that God had to write in His law a commandment as given in Lev. 18:23 “Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion.” How corrupt man created after God's image has become, so that God must give such a commandment, and even a threat of punishment with it Ex. 22:19: “Whoso ever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death.”

And our instructor goes even farther when in Question and Answer 109 he shows that God forbids not only the outward sins of adultery and similar crimes, but also all that which “can entice men thereto.” And then he mentions:

(1) all unchaste actions, those are the unfruitful works of darkness, against which the Apostle warns us in Eph. 5:11.

(2) unchaste gestures, such as winking with the eyes, dancing with the feet, and indecent use of the hands. God's Word speaks of eyes full of adultery. (2 Peter 2:14). The Lord says of the daughters of Zion that they are haughty and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet.”

(3) unchaste words. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth,” says Paul (Eph. 4:29.) And what wicked proposals, plans, expressions, offerings and agreements come over our lips. The Apostle admonishes, “But fornication, and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient.” (Eph. 5:3, 4).

(4) Unchaste thoughts. Thoughts are not free. Oh, I know that God's most sanctified people are tormented by unclean thoughts and by the filthy lusts of the flesh. But when we wilfully awaken and feed those thoughts and desires and incite them into action when the opportunity is there, then the Lord Jesus says, “But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” (Matth. 5:28).

(5) whatever can entice men thereto. There are things that especially entice fallen man to the lust of the flesh. And with those things the world is filled as perhaps never before, so that I sometimes look down in pity upon the children. Oh, sometimes I say in my heart, poor children, how will you come through a world so full of temptation. Oh, then it is no wonder to me that so many drown before they have seen water. One needs not be a prophet in order to see that we have entered the “hour of temptation” of which we read in Rev. 3:10.

Which are “the things that entice thereto?”

See the unbecoming dress of mothers and their daughters. Is it a wonder that the

children have no respect for a mother who dares to appear in their midst in improper apparel, and who sets her children an example in shamelessness?

And then see the shameless conduct of boys and girls, yea, of children, having barely or not yet left the schools. And if they dare to show themselves thus and dare to conduct themselves thus in the open, what then happens under the cover of darkness and in secret?

And then see the piles of corrupt books and pictures.

So also the movies and theaters, the joy riding and speeding, those drinking parties.

My hearers, I do not wish to go into more details. Paul once said, "It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret, "but now it is also a shame to speak of those things which are done of them in public. And now we are still living in a land in which the government still seeks to control sin. But when we hear and read what happens in other countries with the approval of the laws, it is most terrible. Consider Russia. And it shall also be thus in this country when irreligion shall attain the mastery over religion.

And now I must also speak of the virtues commanded. As with all God's commandments, the commanded virtues are the opposite of the forbidden vices. The Instructor also mentions this. He speaks of living "chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock or in single life."

A chaste and modest temperate life is called a pure and clean life in Scripture. It is that fruit of the Spirit by which the child of God seeks to keep his soul and body clean and unspotted from all carnal lusts. Thus there is a chastity of the soul which shuns rash, vain, and unchaste thoughts. Chastity of the soul abhors the lust of concupiscence (Thess 4:5). There is likewise a chastity of the body, consisting in possessing one's vessel in sanctification and honor.

Certainly, the body must be kept pure, for not only the soul, but also the body is God's. Therefore we must yield our members as instruments of righteousness unto God. Then we pray, "Turn Thou mine eyes from beholding vanity." Then we close our ears to unclean words, and no corrupt communication proceeds out of our mouth; then we shall be chaste in all our walk and conversation, in all our motions and actions, and we shun all that in any way could entice to unchastity.

To induce us to live thus temperately and chastely the Instructor adds a strong, persuasive reason, adapted from 1 Cor. 6:18, 19. "Flee fornication. Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God."

If, then, we are with body and soul the temple of the Holy Ghost, the Lawgiver demands that we keep it chaste and holy in the married state or in single life.

Now I must still speak of the results of this sin. The Lord calls to us: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." He forbids us to live in that sin of unchastity. If we do so nevertheless, the punishment is severe and sure.

Take, for example, the results of the sin of polygamy among the patriarchs. What discord there was in their families, and what jealousies there were among the four wives of Jacob and their children. And how can it be otherwise?

Consider also the results of David's sin with the wife of Uriah. After he had committed that sin David was not the same as before. God did remain true to His covenant, and He did reassure David of the forgiveness of his sin, but the sword would not depart from his house, and did not depart from his house.

My hearers, God punishes the sin against the seventh commandment terribly. Loss of honor, loss of health, loss of peace, loss of life and loss of salvation are the results of the sin of fornication, of adultery, of an unchaste and undisciplined life.

And now we admit that it is not elevating, but rather a humbling thought that none of us are blameless in this matter. We all are unchaste persons, adulterers, fornicators, etc. Although perhaps people do not know it of us, God, Whose eyes see also what happens in the darkness and in hidden corners, knows what we thought, what we desired and what we did. Thus He knows many to be harlots and adulterers, though they appear to be most innocent. And although God's restraining grace withheld you from the act, God knows the thoughts of your heart are impure. For if the great apostle Paul, who was advanced so far in sanctification, who was full of the Holy Spirit, who had received the gift of continence from God: if he must testify, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing," if from the pen of such a man flows the complaint of Romans 7: "O wretched man that I am," then let us, poor sinners, not do as Adam did, cover our transgressions, by hiding our iniquity in our bosom. May we do as the man after God's own heart did. Let us put on the garment of penitence and go to Him Who is so plenteous in mercy and sing beseechingly and prayerfully.

Psalter No.143 st. 3 and 4.

Let us finally consider the beneficial purpose of this commandment. That beneficial purpose will be evident as we consider the blessing that lies in a pure and chaste life. The godly poet says, "And in the keeping of His word there is a great reward." Thus it is also with the keeping of the seventh commandment.

It leaves a blessing upon our personal life. If either in the married or in the single state we lead a pure and chaste life, how much misery and trouble we are spared. One rash moment can cause years of sorrow. On the other hand, the Lord rewards purity of life with a calm and undisturbed conscience and with an open door to the throne of grace, with peace in our heart and home and between God and our soul.

Purity of life also leaves a blessing for the whole church of God. Where purity of life is

practiced in the fear of the Lord, all things are done in order in God's house and we are spared the judgments which the Lord brought upon the church of Corinth because of the sin of adultery. Thereby we are also spared from causing God's Name to be blasphemed, God's people to be despised and taunted, the doctrine of free grace to be disdained, and the Word of God is not hindered, but by the godly conversation of the church others also may be gained to Christ.

Purity of life also leaves a blessing for the entire community. Oh, it is so true that righteousness exalteth a nation, but also that sin is a reproach to any people. For what is the cancer that is gnawing on our civil life? Is it not the sin of adultery and unchastity? But wherever also in civil life God's laws are honored and obeyed, there God commands His blessing and removes His judgments. We see that in the history of Israel and also of our country.

Therefore we would cry out with the prophet of old, O, earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord and be instructed, lest the Lord come and set thee as Sodom and Gomorrah because of thine iniquity.

But we must always remember that every national conversion must begin in our own heart and life. A government can make sin punishable and reward and encourage virtue. But the purity of heart and life cannot be commanded, it originates in regeneration. Thus David also understood it, and therefore he prayed:

**“Gracious Lord, my heart renew,
Make my spirit right and true.”**

If, then, you still lack this blessing, let it be your constant prayer that God by His Spirit might renew your heart. For, remember, even if you can say as did the rich young man, “All these things have I kept from my youth up,” it would not avail you for eternity. Heaven remains closed for the unregenerate; he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of heaven.

Oh, it is a very comforting truth that the Lord is a friend of harlots and publicans, who by the grace of God come to Him repenting of their sins. If there is among us a sinner who is guilty of transgressing, perhaps in a special manner, the seventh commandment, then we in Christ's stead, may call to you, “The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God cleanses from all sins, hence also the sins of adultery, fornication and all uncleanness.

But then we must also strive for a chaste and pure life that is pleasing to God and Christ.

For that purpose it would be beneficial, with the blessing of God, to have lively impressions of God's omniscience and omnipresence. God hears all we say. He sees all we do. He is always with us. In Him we live and move and have our being.

Beware of the first beginnings of this evil, although it seems ever so innocent. Dinah,

the daughter of Jacob, went to see the daughters of the land at Shechem. Surely, we would say, there was no harm in that? My hearers, that was the first step on an evil way, for how did she return? What a bloody massacre was the result? See Gen. 34. And David walked in idleness on the roof of his house. And he experienced that idleness is the parent of vice. See 2 Sam. 11.

Shun evil companions. If you choose a friend, let it be a godfearing one. Beware of false shame. Dare to say “no” to a flatterer or “tempter.” Shake him off as if he were an adder. Think of Joseph. He left his garment in her hand and fled from Potiphar's wife with the words, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

But never trust your own powers. Distrusting our own powers is learned in the school of Jesus, often by very painful lessons.

And be ever watchful. I have heard that the temple watchmen wore a white garment. When the controller found one sleeping, he would give him a rap — on that white garment — with the torch he was carrying! Such a spot could never be removed. Therefore, “watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Remember the word of the Apostle, “It is better to marry than to burn.” And think not that the unmarried state is holier than the married state. Marriage is honorable. No, it is not a sacrament as Rome teaches, but still marriage pleases the Lord and the Lord Jesus honored it with His presence and miracles.

Be careful in choosing a mate. Let there be no great difference in age, state or position between yourself and him or her to whom you give your hand and heart. Usually such marriages do not turn out well.

Dear hearers, let Jesus be the Bridegroom of your soul. Give Him the first place in your heart and home and life. If Jesus is your Bridegroom then His Father is your Father and His house your house. But beware then, that you commit no spiritual adultery, nor spiritual fornication.

People of God, the Lord grant us grace to walk in sanctification and fear, and one day the redeemed shall sit at the marriage feast of the Lamb, and be as the angels.

The very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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