



## Thoughts from the Bible and Books Devotions from The Heidelberg Catechism

University Reformed Church

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- 108 Q. *What is God's will for you in the seventh commandment?*  
A. God condemns all unchastity. We should therefore thoroughly detest it and, married or single, live decent and chaste lives.
- 109 Q. Does God, in this commandment, forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?  
A. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. That is why he forbids everything which incites unchastity, whether it be actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires.

Is there any command more ridiculed in our culture than the seventh commandment? Adultery is a joke; homosexuality is a right; sex before marriage is the norm; no-fault divorce and remarriage is assumed, bestiality is increasingly considered cutting edge - this is the world we live in. Sex has always been a leading vote-getter in the most popular sin contest, but never before in this country has so much sexual deviance been made to look so normal and God's standards made to look so obscene.

Our lives are awash in sexuality. Sex is on the television, in the movies and in our music, on the side of buses, during halftime shows, in our books and in glossy close-ups at the supermarket check-out. Sex is all around us in the mall, dripping off every beer commercial, and two stories high on our billboards. Sexual sin is walking around our high schools, flaunted across our universities, and hiding in our churches.

And of course, sex is on the internet. Pornography and sex related sites make up 60% of daily web traffic. Of internet users in the U.S., 40 percent visit porn sites at least once a month, and that number increases to 70 percent when the audience is 18-34 year old males. Half of hotel room patrons purchase pornography from their

rooms. 90 percent of 8-16 year olds with internet access have viewed pornography online, and the average age of exposure is eleven. The seventh commandment is not just broken in this country; it's being smashed to pieces.

But let's be clear, sexual sin is not just an "out there" problem. Every year, it seems, we hear of high profile pastor-sex scandals or churches ripped apart by illicit affairs. Sadly, churches often turn a blind eye to illegitimate divorce and remarriage and shy away from talking candidly about lust and pornography. We don't want to face the fact that most Christian college males will struggle with pornography and masturbation. We don't want to talk about sexual addiction - be it heterosexual or homosexual, from movies or magazines or internet - and how it is a silent killer in the church.

None of us are immune from the dangers of sexual immorality. In a 2000 Christianity Today study, 40 percent of clergy acknowledged visiting pornographic websites. Another survey in 2002 found that 21 percent visit regularly. Yet another survey at Pastors.com found that 50 percent of pastors reported to

viewing pornography in the previous year. And then there's the underlying issue of the heart. The seventh commandment doesn't just forbid adultery and pornography. It forbids every action, look, conversation, thought or desire that incites lust and uncleanness (Q/A 109). To paraphrase one author I read: sexual immorality is grasping with your eyes, heart, imagination or body what God has said no to.

But it's so easy to say "yes." How in the world, in this world we live in, and with our sex-saturated hearts, can we obey the seventh commandment at the heart level presented to us in the Heidelberg Catechism? Well, there's no easy answer to that question, but here are 15 passages of Scripture that can help us fight lust and the temptation to sexual immorality (you can check the sermon archive online for Exodus 20:14 to hear me preach through these fifteen passages in much more detail).

(1) Proverbs 5:18-19 *"Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love."* This may seem a strange text for fighting sexual temptation, but married couples need to know they have delight at their lawful disposal. We need to know that sex is good, intimacy is good, bodies together in marriage are good. Good, glorious sex is spiritual warfare for the married couple.

(2) Lamentations 3:25-27 *"The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."* This verse is for singles (especially women). Granted, this passage isn't talking about waiting for a spouse. It's about waiting on the Lord. But that's the point. The Lord is good to those who wait for him. He knows what you need. The preceding verses tell us "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in him." Don't think "How can I live without sex for another year or decade or two decades." Think about today. The Lord has given you grace for this day and he will give you grace for the next sexless, spouseless day.

(3) 1 Peter 3:15 *"In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."* Before you take that second look or put on the low cut blouse, ask yourself, "will this make me more ready to talk to someone about Jesus." Sensuality deadens the spiritual senses and makes us less courageous and effective witnesses for Christ. (4)

2 Peter 3:10-14 *"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief...Therefore...be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace."* Do you want to be cheating on your husband, masturbating, or watching Baywatch reruns when Jesus returns?

(5) James 1:13-14 *"But each person is tempted when he lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."* This passage helps us understand how temptation works and reminds us that feeling tempted is not the same as sinning. Temptation is an enticement or allurement. That's not sin. When the desire is nurtured it conceives and gives birth to sin (sin in the flesh or sin in the mind). Sin then grows and matures and leads to death. It is not lust to be attracted to someone or notice he or she is good looking. It is not lust to have a strong desire for sex. It is not lust to be excited about sex in marriage. It is not lust to be experience sexual temptation. It is not lust to notice a woman bathing on the roof. It is sin to take another look and mull over the thought for awhile. Stoke the fires of this lustful passion and it will bring forth death. Just ask King David.

(6) Hebrews 2:17-18 *"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."* Jesus was tempted. He recognized that women are attractive. He felt enticed with desire. I know that sounds almost blasphemous, but that's because we don't think of Christ as fully human. And thus we underestimate the real nature of his temptations, and undercut his sympathy and his ability to help. Jesus was hungry in the wilderness. He had a desire, a want. He was enticed to make the stones bread so he could enjoy the pleasure of food. But he told the devil, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Matt. 4:1-3). In our moments of sexual temptation, we need to think, "Flesh does not sustain me."

(7) Romans 14:21 *"It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble."* As Christians, we want to help each other avoid sin, not lead one another into it with flirting, coarse joking, and immodest dress.

(8) Matthew 5:27-30 *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."* We are not good fighters. We don't "thoroughly detest" sin (Q/A 108). We make excuses. We don't get radical. We pray a few prayers, feel bad all the time, tell a friend

to ask how we're doing once in awhile and that's it. We need more decisive action than that. Avoid the movies, get rid of your internet connection, don't kiss before marriage, throw out your t.v., tear out your eye - whatever it takes to battle lust.

(9) Galatians 6:7 *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."* There are often temporal consequences for disobedience. It could be STDs, baggage in marriage, guilty conscience, getting mired in a deeper addiction, disrupting your ability to work, a pornography fetish you pass on to your children, destroying your family, your marriage, or your ministry. There are also eternal consequences if you give yourself over to this sin. Galatians 6:8 *"For the one who sows to his own flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."*

(10) 1 Cor 6:15-20 *"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ... Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."* We need a theology of the body: the body is good, but it's not yours. Jesus didn't just die to ransom our souls. He also died for your body. It belongs to God. It is a member of Christ's body now. Surely, we don't want to employ Christ's body in some sexual escapade or his eyes in viewing pornography or his mind in sensual fantasy.

(11) 2 Corinthians 5:17 *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* Cultural liberalism says, "Just be yourself." Self-help doctrine says, "You can find a better you if you just dig deep enough." Moralism says, "Be a better person." The

Bible says, "You are a new person by God's grace, now live like it." "Be who you are" is the gospel motivation for holiness.

(12) Hebrews 10:24-25 *"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching."* No one fights a war by himself, and no one will get victory over sexual sin on his own. You need to talk to others about your struggles and listen just as well. Be honest. Ask good questions. Don't just confess and feel better. Repent and change. Don't just sympathize; admonish. Follow up with your brothers and sisters. Pray and remind each other of the gospel.

(13) James 4:6 *"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* God always gives more grace. So keep coming to him with your sin and all your commandment violations. Confess like David in Psalm 51 that you have sinned against God. Confess that God is the most offended party as a result of your sin. And then believe like David in Psalm 32: "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity."

(14) Matthew 5:8 *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."* This has been the most helpful verse for me in fighting lust and the temptation to sexual immorality. We need to fight desire with desire. Satan tempts us by holding out something that will be pleasurable to us. We aren't tempted to gorge ourselves on brussels sprouts, because for most of that doesn't hold out the promise of great pleasure. But sex does. Pornography does. A second look does. The Bible gives us many weapons to fight temptation. We can tell ourselves it is wrong, it is sinful, it will lead to bad things, it isn't what I should do as

a Christian. All of those are helpful. But the one weapon we rarely use is more pleasure. We need to fight the fleeting pleasure of sexual sin with the far greater, more abiding pleasure of knowing God. The fight for sexual purity is the fight of faith. It may sound like nothing but hard work and gritting your teeth, the very opposite of faith. But faith is at the heart of this struggle. Do we believe that a glimpse of God is better than a glimpse of skin? Do we believe that God's steadfast love is better than life (Psalm 63:3)? We'd probably sin less if we spent less time thinking about our sins, sexual or otherwise, and more time meditating on the love and holiness of God.

(15) Ephesians 1:19-21 *"...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."* The great power that created the world, and saved us, and raised Jesus from the dead - that same power is now at work in you. We must believe that God is stronger than sexual temptation, sin and addiction. If you believe that God brought a dead man back to life, you should believe that you can change (not over night probably, but from one degree of glory to the next). Work out your salvation from sexual sin with fear and trembling, for God's power is already at work within you.

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