

TEACHING CHILDREN THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

It may seem like an uphill battle to protect the innocence of modern young people. Some parents may give up too soon, thinking it an impossible task, or that it doesn't really matter in today's world. But purity and innocence are very important in our spiritual development. Jesus tells us in his Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* This Beatitude means that our understanding of God requires a purity of thought and motive.

The pleasures of the senses would adulterate, or muddy, our clear sense of God and His universe. We would continue to walk blindly through the mists of earth if we did not attempt to rise above the clouds of sin. We must strive to teach our children how to avoid the temptation of adultery if we want them to be happy and successful in life.

Although many parents and Sunday School teachers see the need for teaching the Seventh Commandment to young children, some may feel uncomfortable talking about this subject, and are looking for a way to approach this Commandment without bringing up the subject of sex. They may simply choose to skip this one!

However, there is a way to teach young children the Seventh Commandment that is age appropriate. It is not just about sex! It is not too early to teach children the motives and discipline necessary to avoid adultery in their adult life, as well as to make sense of things if their lives are touched by this issue. Here are a few ideas that can be taught at home or in Sunday School class:

For Young Children:

When children are old enough to understand what it means to “keep a promise” – that when we agree with someone to do something, we must do it – they can be taught that this is part of what the Seventh Commandment means. That would be a good start. They can practice this Commandment by being loyal and obedient to their parents and family members, as well as being taught how to be loyal and obedient to God. Little children can also be taught how to keep out the impure thoughts that would make them rebel against their parents. They can be told that it is natural for them to love to do good and be good. You can play a game with them by pretending to speak as a “devil” or “angel,” and asking which thoughts to let in, and what to obey.

To help get you started with introducing the Seventh Commandment in more detail when the time is right, you might use the passages below as a guide:

“‘Thou shalt not commit adultery’ means that we should not bring impure thoughts and behavior to our marriage. When a man and woman marry, they make a promise to love and honor each other. If one of them breaks that promise, by going to someone else for the kind of love and

affection they should be getting only from their marriage partner, then it might be said that they are 'committing adultery.' In the same way, we also do not let impure thoughts muddy the understanding of ourselves as the 'image and likeness' of God."

"The Seventh Commandment, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' helps us to keep our families together and to draw us closer to God. Adultery poisons the marriage relationship. Everyone suffers in some way. But think how happy a family would be if everyone was trusted to be loyal to the family. In the same way, we must be true and loyal to ourselves and to God. We must not look for happiness outside of our relationship with God, good. Learning to turn away from wrong behavior while young, helps us gain the self-discipline which will protect us from committing adultery. This will keep our lives pure and in obedience to God." ("First Lessons in Christian Science, Volume One: The Ten Commandments")

To help children grasp some of the concepts involved, you can try to illustrate the problems that occur when things that need to remain pure are made impure. For instance, show how adding something such as dirt to a pure glass of water will cause the liquid to look or taste different. The impurity can spoil the drink. The drink of water becomes useless to humans who need pure water for nourishment or cleansing. Some children may understand a discussion on environmental pollution, and how that affects the quality of life on earth.

When the children see this cause and effect of mixing pollutants with pure water, discuss how God's children, who were created pure and innocent, need to keep their thoughts and their hearts pure, as well, so that they can fulfill their purpose in life. Ask what kinds of thoughts or activities could poison their purity. Relate this to the Seventh Commandment, which tells us not to adulterate our relationships, or to break our promises. Ask your children or students why it is important to keep our relationship with God pure. What would try to interfere with our unity with God? Can we hear or see God in our prayers if our thoughts are clouded with wicked or impure suggestions?

For Older Children:

In addition to the above, you can discuss the importance of loyalty in our relationships with our friends. Older kids are learning what it means to be a true and loyal friend. They certainly know when others have betrayed them, even if they do not yet see how they could be guilty themselves! Ask for examples of loyalty or disloyalty in action. Perhaps they have felt let down or abandoned by others, or they have been the victim of gossip, teasing, or being ousted by a new clique. Ask how they feel when this happens. Do they feel sorry when they have broken their own promises to a friend? How can they make it up? How often should they forgive another for a seemingly disloyal act? Discuss the Golden Rule and its relation to the Seventh Commandment.

Show how our friendships give us opportunities to practice the qualities that will prevent us from breaking the Seventh Commandment when we are older. We should be true and loyal friends -- unselfish, humble, gracious, and self-controlled -- so that we can be the same with any future marriage partner, and with God. Learning to obey *all* of the Ten Commandments, not just the Seventh, will be a shield and armor in life.

Older children can also benefit from the following areas of discussion:

1. **Choosing friends.** We need to make wise choices in friends, so that we are not tempted to spend our time in activities which would harm our purity, our morals, our intelligence, and integrity.
2. **Marriage.** Depending upon their maturity, older students can perhaps handle a discussion of the moral demands made on those who marry, so they have a good idea of what is expected of them when they become married. They also need to know that seeking a relationship with others who are already married is considered adultery. To take it even further, if warranted, sex outside of marriage, even if it is between two single individuals, could be considered adultery. This is a question they will have to consider in their own hearts if they wish to maintain their sense of purity.
3. **Divorce and sexual affairs of parents.** Some children and teens are forced to deal with this up close and personal in their own families. Each situation needs to be handled according to the need, and with God's guidance. Mercy and forgiveness are usually called for. Point out how Jesus handled the woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8). Teach kids how to turn to their Father-Mother God in prayer for stability and comfort.
4. **Influence of the media.** While premarital sex and adultery certainly existed before the advent of books, movies, television, and the Internet, the onslaught of sexual images in today's media cannot help but overwhelm young minds with ideas they are not prepared to handle. Since parents cannot always be around to monitor what their children watch, it is wise to at least try to teach children and teens the reasons why they should want to avoid explicit images of sex and violence on their own. Teach them to value innocence and purity, and to protect these qualities as aggressively as they would protect their lives or their treasured possessions from thieves.
5. **Happiness.** Explain that those who search for sex or love outside of marriage, are not usually bad people, but are often simply victims of ignorance or temptation. They are "looking for love in all the wrong places." Our happiness is not found in sex, or from the adulation of other people, but in the gifts and blessings of God and acts of good deeds and unselfish love.

There appears to be so much immorality and sensuality abroad in the world, that getting through to our children with these lessons on the Ten Commandments may seem like trying to fill a leaky bucket with water. However, if we can recognize the innate innocence and purity of God's child that is the true identity of each and every one of us, and claim this sincerely in our daily prayers for our children, we can take heart that God will protect them.

For Mature Teenagers:

If you have a Sunday School class with more mature teenagers who can handle discussions on adultery and who also might be interested in how adultery was viewed in Bible times, here is some background material to share where appropriate:

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

There was already a moral code against adultery in ancient civilization before God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. For example, in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (see Genesis 39), Joseph knew that it would be a "*sin against God*" to have sex with another man's wife.

This was hundreds of years before Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt, and received the Ten Commandments. However, not everyone considered adultery a sin against God – it was more of a crime against property rights!

In those ancient times, a woman was considered to be the property of her father, and later of her husband. A loss of affection had little to do with the crime of adultery. Property rights were involved, especially when it came to the legitimacy of children. Husbands had to be very careful to make sure that the children his wife bore were his, since his possessions were to be passed along to them. This was serious business! This is explained well in Stephanie Coontz's book, "Marriage, a History":

Because women could bear a child with an 'impure' bloodline, introducing a 'foreign interest' into a family, their sexual behavior tended to be more strictly supervised, and females were subject to severe penalties for adultery or premarital sex. The laws and moral codes of ancient states exhorted men to watch carefully over their wives 'lest the seed of others be sown on your soil.' (Coontz, Stephanie: "Marriage, a History," 2005; pg. 46)

"By the time we have written records of the civilizations that arose in the ancient world, marriage had become the way most wealth and land changed hands. Marriage was also the main vehicle by which leading families expanded their social network and political influence. It even sealed military alliances and peace treaties." (ibid)

That is why the early Jewish definition of adultery is very specific. Jewish law states that adultery is the intercourse of a married woman with any man other than her husband. It was not considered adultery if a married man had sex with an unmarried woman, such as a concubine. An example is the relationship Abraham had with Hagar, who gave birth to Ishmael, Abraham's first child. (see Genesis 16).

Chastity before marriage was also important in early Hebrew history. In his book, *The Ten Commandments*, William Barclay writes:

"The supreme importance that the Jewish mind attached to chastity can be seen from the passage in Deuteronomy which provides for the trial of a bride whom her husband suspects of not being a virgin at the time of her marriage, and for her death by stoning if the charge is proved."(Barclay, William: "The Ten Commandments," pg. 88)

The early penalty for adultery was also stoning. We read in Leviticus 20:10:

"The man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."

So, why, if the penalty was so severe, would any two people risk death to have sex? It's a question still being asked today. As Barclay puts it:

"It is the paradox of human nature that there was no sin regarded in Judaism with greater horror than adultery, and there was no sin which, to judge by the rebukes of the sages and prophets, was more common." (Barclay, William: "The Ten Commandments," pg. 84)

Barclay explains the influences in the regions surrounding the Hebrews. Ancient people worshipped the power of reproduction, because it was so strong. Men visited cult or temple prostitutes. Sex with them was *"regarded as an act of worship of the reproductive force."* Barclay goes on to write:

"To the modern mind the connection of prostitution with religion is shocking; but it was extremely widespread in those days; and it is perfectly understandable when it is understood as the worship of the life and reproductive force. Human nature being such as it is, it is easy to see the attraction of this form of so-called worship; and the basic purity of Jewish worship is in such an environment all the more wonderful, and we shall see later that the Christian ethic was faced with exactly the same problem. The wonder was not that sometimes the Jews drifted into sexual irregularity; the miracle is that in such an environment the ideal of disciplined chastity ever came into being at all, and that in the end the ideal of purity won the day." (ibid, pg. 89)

Betrothals and Adultery

Before moving to the teachings of Jesus, there is some interesting commentary on the subject of "betrothals" at that time, which sheds some light on the situation faced by Mary and Joseph. The Hebrew custom was to have three steps: first, an engagement; then a betrothal, lasting about a year; then the wedding ceremony. William Barclay's book on the Ten Commandments provides details of what these three steps entailed, but here is a brief segment on the betrothal:

"Betrothal was as binding as marriage. A betrothed girl who was unfaithful was treated in the same way as an adulterous wife. Betrothal could only be ended by divorce. During the time the couple were known and regarded as man and wife. Should the man die, the girl was known as a widow, and in the law we find that curious phrase, 'a virgin who is a widow.' This explains the relationship of Joseph and Mary as we find in the first chapter of Matthew. In verse 18 they are betrothed; in verse 19 Joseph is called Mary's husband, and he is said to wish to divorce her." (Barclay, William: "The Ten Commandments," 1973, pg. 100)

Thankfully, Joseph listened to the angel message sent to him, and took Mary as his wife rather than divorcing her; or worse, having her stoned. Joseph willingly obeyed God's commands, proving that his allegiance to his covenant with God was more important than Jewish tradition. His purity of thought allowed the angel message to be heard.

JESUS AND THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

As we have learned in our study of the other Ten Commandments, Jesus usually raised the bar with regard to the meaning or standards required of each Commandment. It is not enough

to abide by (or ignore!) the literal interpretation only, we must be willing to see the moral and spiritual principle behind the Commandment. We find our first message from Jesus on adultery in the Sermon on the Mount:

“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. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-30)

Jesus has set the new standard: it is not enough just to avoid the legal definition of adultery; we must avoid indulging in *lust*. He tells us that this is so important we should go so far as to “pluck out an eye” that is being used for lustful gazing. Barclay explains the meaning:

“Of course, the words of Jesus are not to be taken with a crude literalism. What they mean is that anything which helps to seduce us to sin is to be ruthlessly rooted out of life.” (Barclay, William: “The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1,” pg. 148)

Barclay also comments on the use of the term “lust” by Jesus:

“It is necessary that we should understand what Jesus is saying here. He is not speaking of the natural, normal desire, which is part of human instinct and human nature. According to the literal meaning of the Greek the man who is condemned is the man who looks at a woman with the deliberate intention of lusting after her. The man who is condemned is the man who deliberately uses his eyes to awaken his lust, the man who looks in such a way that passion is awakened and desire deliberately stimulated. . . . In a tempting world there are many things which are deliberately designed to excite desire: books, pictures, plays, even advertisements.

The man whom Jesus here condemns is the man who deliberately uses his eyes to stimulate his desires; the man who finds a strange delight in things which waken the desire for the forbidden thing. To the pure all things are pure. But the man whose heart is defiled can look at any scene and find something in it to titillate and excite the wrong desire.” (ibid, pg. 147)

Clearly, we can see how the use of pornography is lust. Jesus tells us this is adultery of the heart. If we are Christian, we will want to avoid pornography, explicit books, movies, and so on as much as possible. We must “pluck out that eye,” so that we are not cast into “hell.”

Another important part of Jesus’ teachings was his explanation of *motives*. We learn that adultery and lust stem from sinful motives. Jesus told his followers:

“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” (Matthew 15:18, 19)

There is one well-known story, found only in the Gospel of John, that shows Jesus dealing with a woman caught in the act of adultery (notice that the *man* was not brought before him!). Actually, the main point of the episode is to show how Jesus handled the Pharisees' attempt to catch him being disobedient to the Jewish law, but it also says a lot about how Christians are to show Christly love in such situations with possible adulterers. We read:

"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:3-11)

While Jesus showed mercy to the adulterous woman, as we all should, notice an important point. She was told to "*sin no more.*" We must learn that we are not to abuse God's mercy, by continuing to sin and hoping for forgiveness, but we are to set ourselves on a path of redemption as soon as we recognize the sin for what it is.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)

EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

The early Christians embraced Jesus' teachings on purity and adultery. While those who had come to Christianity as Jews understood the importance of chastity and the family bond, not everyone lived up to the ideals. And, remember, Palestine was under the control of the Roman Empire, with its particular cultural ideas on marriage and fidelity.

"In the time of Jesus marriage in Palestine had nearly broken down and the treatment of women was shameful indeed. It is never to be forgotten that it was against that background that Jesus made his demands for chastity. . . . It is genuinely doubtful if there ever was such a cataract of immorality in any age as in the years when Christianity first came into the world. . . . Christianity confronted that situation with an uncompromising demand for purity. Immorality and all impurity are not even to be named among Christians." (Barclay, William: "The Ten Command-ments," 1973; pg. 105)

The Greeks were notoriously indifferent to the marriage bond with regard to sex, which was considered to be acceptable and normal outside of marriage. The Romans took marriage more seriously, but after they had conquered and assimilated the Greeks, they unfortunately assimilated their moral laxity. It was said: "*Rome had conquered Greece, but Greek morals had conquered Rome.*" Against this backdrop, the early Christians took their stand.

“Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and the adulterous.” (Hebrews 13:4- RSV)

There are two concepts to be considered with regard to the early Christian community: 1) their sense of the body; and 2) their ideas about marriage, and whether or not it was appropriate for a Christian to marry at all. William Barclay offers this commentary on the body:

“We must begin with the simple, and yet far-reaching, fact that the Christian respected the body. To the Greek the body was no more than the prison-house of the soul, and from it came all the ills of life. The world at that time was deeply infected with Gnostic thought, which believed that only spirit is good and that all matter is incurably and irremediably evil. . . . The inevitable conclusion of this is that the body is evil. If the body is evil, two courses of action are possible. First a man can adopt a complete asceticism in which he denies every desire and deed of the body. Second, he can say that, because the body is evil, it does not matter what we do with it, and that therefore we can sate and glut it and it does not matter, because it is evil anyway.”

“But the Christian came with a new conception of the body. For the Christian the body is designed to be nothing less than the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16). ‘Do you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?’ The Christian must, therefore, glorify God in his body (I Cor. 6:19, 20). It is not only possible, it is an obligation, to present the body as a sacrifice and an offering to God (Rom 12:1). Christianity came with a view of the body which was bound to revolutionize the ethics of sex for the Hellenistic world.” (Barclay, William: “The Ten Commandments,” pg. 125)

The great Apostle Paul gave advice to both singles and married couples in his letter to the Corinthians:

“Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. . . . For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.” (I Cor. 7:1-3;7-9)

We find some explanation for Paul's stance in “Marriage, a History,” where we read:

“What distinguished early Christianity from Judaism in its approach to marriage and family was the belief that the kingdom of God was close at hand, and people must therefore break with worldly ties to prepare for the imminent arrival of God’s kingdom. In subsequent centuries this aspect was played down, but early Christianity was hostile to marital and kinship obligations to a degree unimaginable to any previous reformers aside from Plato.

“The founders of Christianity agreed with Jewish scholars that it was better to marry than to be preoccupied with lust. But their acceptance of marriage was much less enthusiastic. ‘It is better,’

Paul grudgingly conceded, 'to marry than to burn' (I Cor. 7:9)." (Coontz, Stephanie: "Marriage, a History," pg. 85-86)

William Barclay believes that we find in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, written nine years after his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul's true view of marriage, in which he appears to validate it. Paul writes:

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." (Ephesians 5:31)

The Apostle Peter also gave marriage advice in one of his letters. He urged the expression of those lovely qualities which could keep married Christians happy and away from the temptation of adultery. This translation is from "The Message," by Eugene H. Peterson:

"The same goes for you wives: Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their needs. There are husbands who, indifferent as they are to any words about God, will be captivated by your life of holy beauty. What matters is not your outer appearance – the styling of your hair, the jewelry you wear, the cut of your clothes – but your inner disposition.

"Cultivate inner beauty; the gentle, gracious kind that God delights in. The holy women of old were beautiful before God that way, and were good, loyal wives to their husbands. Sarah, for instance, taking care of Abraham, would address him as "my dear husband." You'll be true daughters of Sarah if you do the same, unanxious and unintimidated.

"The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground." (I Peter 3:1-7) (Translation: Peterson, Eugene H.: "The Message")

To the early Christians, chastity was just as important as marital fidelity:

"Freedom from unchastity was one of four minimum entrance requirements for aspiring candidates to Christian groups, as stated in a letter sent from the elders and apostles at Jerusalem to Antioch Christians via Judas Barsabas and Silas." (Harper's Bible Dictionary, pg 206)

We read about those four minimum entrance requirements in Acts:

"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well." (Acts 15:28, 29)

The choice of these four minimum requirements was reached after fierce debates by the elders regarding what they would require of the new non-Jewish converts to Christianity. Should the Gentiles be required to be circumcised, was one question, for instance. In the end, only a few rules regarding food remained, plus the one moral rule: no fornication. This is sex outside of a

marriage relationship. The elders had taken Jesus' teaching to heart, that to indulge in lust, inside or outside of marriage, was as sinful as the act of adultery.

TEACHING THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT TO CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PUPILS

For those parents or Sunday School teachers interested in lessons on the Seventh Commandment based upon the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science, and author of the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, below are links to brief lessons in my book *First Lessons in Christian Science, Volume One: The Ten Commandments*. Feel free to customize the material to suit the age and understanding of your children or pupils.

[The Seventh Commandment - For Young Children](#)

[What does "adultery" mean?](#)

[What is "purity" and why is it important to our spiritual progress?](#)

[Why should you, as a child, be concerned with the purity of marriage? Isn't that something only grown-ups should deal with?](#)

[What are "morals," and what do they have to do with the Seventh Commandment?](#)

[Why is it important to protect marriage anyway, when so many people seem to be divorced these days?](#)

[What does "wedded to God" mean?](#)

[If God made us "male *and* female," why do we need to marry in order to feel complete?](#)

[If someone is unhappy in their marriage, and they do not want to get a divorce because they have children, would it be okay for them to look for happiness with someone else, even if that means they are committing adultery?](#)

Related topics in Volume Two: The Beatitudes:

[Blessed are the pure in heart - For Young Children](#)

[Who are the "pure in heart"?](#)

[What does "pure" mean?](#)

[What should we do to make our hearts pure?](#)

[How do we know whether or not our hearts are becoming pure?](#)

[How would having a pure heart affect our motives?](#)

[Did Jesus need to work at being "pure in heart"? After all, he was the Son of God.](#)

Related topics in Volume Three: The Lord's Prayer:

[And lead us not into temptation - For Young Children](#)

[What is "temptation"?](#)

[How can God deliver us, if we cannot see Him to follow Him?](#)

[If God does not lead us into temptation, who does?](#)

[What should we do when faced with temptation of evil?](#)

[Is it possible to stop evil from tempting us?](#)

[What is animal magnetism, and how does it tempt us into evil?](#)

[What is sin?](#)

How does God deliver us from sin?

Did Jesus have to deal with temptation?

How does Christian Science help to deliver us from evil?

What is "Love," and how does it help deliver us from evil?