



World Christian Fellowship

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Adultery Matthew 5:27-30

Matthew 5:27-30, *““You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*

One of the greatest heroes of the Bible is King David. The Scriptures present him to us as a man after God's own heart.

1 Samuel 13:14, *But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”*

But sadly, we can never think of David without also remembering that he was one of the most tragic examples in the Bible of the destructive power of sin. It all came about because of what he chose to do with his eyes.

At the height of his reign as king over Israel - when it seemed as if he had everything going for him, he fell.

2 Samuel 11:1-5, *It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child"*

It may have been that David's first glance upon Bathsheba was an accidental one.

Perhaps she was partly culpable, because she was putting herself in a situation in which the king might be able to see her.

After all, if he could see her bathing, she could clearly see him looking. But whatever the nature of that initial glance might have been, the Bible describes David's action as a lingering gaze.

She was beautiful to "behold". Clearly, David's first glance at this bathing woman became a lingering gaze and eventually, an expression of an immoral desire for her.

David lust for her became expressed in action.

He inquired about her, called for her, and then slept with her.

The Bible doesn't shy away from telling us the truth about David's sin, neither does it shy away from telling us the truth about that sin's consequences.

She became pregnant.

What followed was a series of lies and cover-ups that eventuated in David - the man after God's own heart - arranging for the murder of the woman's husband.

When finally confronted, David repented but the whole rest of his life, from that point on, was the story of a man suffering the terrible, unwanted consequences of this sin.

Now, many of us have heard or read that story several times. Many of us have looked upon that story as a great illustration of the seriousness of the seventh commandment.

Exodus 20:14, *"You shall not commit adultery"*

As well as of the commandment against murder. And what's more, many of us have (with perhaps a measure of pride) responded to David's sin with a sense of repulsion, and said to ourselves, "That would never happen to me. I have done many things that were not right. I admit. I even acknowledge that my eyes have wandered to places they shouldn't go at times. But I would certainly never commit such a horrible act of adultery!"

But consider carefully the words of Jesus!

With respect to our own hearts, before a holy and omniscient God who sees completely what goes on in those hearts, doesn't Jesus' words declare us to be guilty of David's sin many times over?

What Jesus is doing in this passage is a part of that portion of His Sermon on The Mount in which he contrasts the true intention of God's law - the true 'spirit' of the law. The interpretation of it that had been taught by the scribes and Pharisees.

The teachers of the law had been giving the people a strict "letter of the law" interpretation of the commandments. If you had done what the law said in a strictly literal sense, they said, then you had 'kept' the law. Yet, they had missed entirely the true 'spirit' of the law that had been intended by the God who first gave it.

The Jewish leaders had caught a woman in the act of adultery.

John 8:4-5, they said to Him, *“Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act.⁵ Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?”*

I don't know what happened to the man. That'll give you a little indication of their double standard. But they dragged this woman out of the very act of adultery.

They had Moses on their side, they felt.

Jesus had told His disciples that, *"unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (**Matthew 5:20**).

Then, He proceeds to explain the true intention of the law that the scribes and Pharisees had thought that they had kept.

He began by stating that the scribes and Pharisees thought they had kept the commandment against murder simply because they hadn't taken anyone's physical life.

But He demonstrates that they broke the true spirit of that commandment each time they held on to their anger against someone, or insulted someone, or held someone in contempt.

Matthew 5:21-22, *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire"*

Jesus asserted that the scribes and Pharisees had essentially committed murder - a 'murder in the heart' - each time they did such things.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, Jesus demonstrates the contrast between a true righteousness based on the "spirit" of the law, and a superficial righteousness based on the mere "letter" of the law.

Jesus calls His disciples to a higher standard of righteousness than can be obtained by merely conforming to the outward "letter" of the law.

The same distinction between the true "spirit" of the law and the mere "letter" of the law is what Jesus is talking about in our passage this morning.

If we think we have kept God's commandment against adultery simply because we have never physically cheated on our spouses, or because we haven't had sex with the spouse of another, then we are badly mistaken. The spirit of the commandment "You shall not commit adultery" is one that reaches down to our very hearts.

It involves not only what we do with our bodies, but also what we look at with our eyes, or dream about in our fantasies, or lust after in our wills.

1. Immorality begins in the Heart.

V 27-28, *““You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Taking those words at face value, strictly in terms of the letter of the law, the scribes and Pharisees were able to say, "I have never committed 'adultery' therefore, I am innocent."

People need to count the cost before they are invited to follow. And so, I shared with this woman that following Jesus means that He will call her away from the habits and behaviours that characterized her old life of sin, and to lead her to a new walk-in holiness. And she expressed that she understood that and prayed to receive Him as her Lord.

It was a little while after that, though, that it came to my attention that she had been living with her boyfriend; and that she was still doing so after having prayed to receive Christ. I reminded her of what I said about the cost of following Jesus; and I then showed her the seventh commandment; "You shall not commit adultery." But clearly, she had already thought about this, and had an immediate answer. She smiled and confidently asserted, "Yes but you see, I'm not breaking that commandment. I am not committing adultery because neither of us are married."

"Adultery" is the violation of a marriage covenant; and that neither she nor her boyfriend had done that. You might say she was correct - so far as the strict "letter" of the commandment was concerned.

But I then explained that what she was doing was, nevertheless, a violation of the true spirit of that commandment.

I explained that she was committing what the Bible called "fornication".

Then, I showed her what it says in

Hebrews 13:4, "*Marriage is to be held in honour among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*"

She was shocked and she very quickly thereafter broke off with her boyfriend and moved to another apartment.

The scribes and Pharisees limited this commandment to a strict, "letter of the law" sense and interpreted it to mean that, so long as adultery isn't involved, then the commandment isn't broken.

Adultery is an heinous crime to commit. It is a vile, evil, wretched manifestation of a vile heart.

The Bible is very clear that the penalty for adultery is punishable by death.

Leviticus 18 and 20.

A very serious crime ending in death for the one who committed it.

The word "*adultery*."

The root means this, "unlawful intercourse with the spouse of someone else." That's basically the technical meaning, a physical, sexual relationship with somebody else's spouse.

But most Bible scholars see it not only as a command not to engage in sexual activity with somebody else's spouse but see it in a general sense because the word is also used in a general way in some other sources. For example, in some places the word means "to seduce or violate a woman."

That's very general, a married or unmarried woman.

Other places it is translated "to commit harlotry." So that generally, the word has been used to speak of any kind of illicit intercourse at all, and anything is illicit outside the bond of marriage. So, primarily it refers to a sexual relationship that violates a marriage.

The New Testament reiterates with finality and firmness this prohibition.

1 Corinthians chapter 6 condemns it.

2 Peter chapter 2 condemns it.

Revelation chapter 2 condemns it.

The end of the Book of Revelation says that fornicators and adulterers won't even enter God's kingdom. It is a serious, "You see," they might have said, "I'm not committing adultery! I haven't touched anyone!" But apparently, they hadn't considered the seventh commandment in the light of the tenth. The tenth commandment the one that forbids "coveting".

Exodus 20:17, *"You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's."*

Even if a man doesn't actually touch his neighbour's wife, if he gazes at her and wishes he could or fantasizes what it would be like to do so, he is not only breaking one commandment. He's breaking two, one in letter and one in spirit!

And clearly, no one can excuse themselves by saying, "I am not guilty though because I am not married, and the person I am lusting after isn't married either."

Jesus says that "adultery in the heart" is as serious a sin before God as "adultery in act".

So, we should understand that "fornication in the heart" is also as serious a sin in God's sight as "fornication in act".

Whatever else we may think, the true intention of that commandment is that the condition of our inner man before God be holy and pure.

Consider how Jesus expresses this to us. Each phrase really deserves our careful attention.

First, with these words, He corrects what the people had been taught by the teachers.

"But I say to you . . ."

Literally, His words are emphatic. He is exercising His divine authority to correct the erroneous interpretation that those teachers of the law had passed on to the people.

"But I say to you that whoever . . ."

The word "whoever", in the original language, is in the masculine gender.

This would naturally suggest that He is speaking to men. This would make sense because men are most inclined to sin with

the eyes in this way and are very often the instigators in acts of sexual impurity.

But I believe it would be wrong for women to ignore the implications of His words. The implication of verse 32 is that He's obviously concerned to instruct both women and men in His teaching.

Matthew 5:32, *"But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."*

This passage isn't thinking only of sin in the hearts of men, but also of women as well.

The man of God must guard his heart from the sin of hidden lust but so also must the woman of God.

It is immoral for a man to "look" with lust in his heart - just as David had done but it is just as wrong for a woman to seek to "draw" that look - just as it appears that Bathsheba had done.

It's a violation of the spirit of the commandment against adultery for a woman to deliberately and knowingly dress (or not dress) in a provocative manner, or to engage in what our culture often calls "flirtation".

I know that this isn't said very often in church but sadly, living as we do in a sex-crazed culture, it needs to be said in church.

The Bible speaks in a few places of the sinfulness of women dressing in such a manner, or behaving in such a manner, as to attract sexual interest toward themselves.

Isaiah 3:16, *"Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and wanton [that is, seductive] eyes, walking and mincing as they go, making a jingling with their feet . . ."*

Solomon warns the young man of God to carefully follow God's instructions.

Proverbs 6:23-25, *"to keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids."*

Solomon describes the downfall of a young man who ends up in the arms of another man's wife.

Proverbs 7:21, *"With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, with her flattering lips she seduced him"* (Prov. 7:21).

Dear men and women of Christ, we all need to be holy in this area.

Job 31:9-12, *“If my heart has been enticed by a woman, Or if I have lurked at my neighbour’s door, ¹⁰Then let my wife grind for another, And let others bow down over her. ¹¹For that would be wickedness; Yes, it would be iniquity deserving of judgment. ¹²For that would be a fire that consumes to destruction, And would root out all my increase.*

We shouldn't think that it doesn't happen in church. The words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4 need to be applied to both genders in the household of God; so that we keep from causing one another to stumble.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour, ⁵not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. ⁷For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.*

Let the love of Christ who has called us together in holiness - that the women of God in the church will do what the men of God clearly cannot do.

Dear women of God, graciously come alongside others of your gender who show up to church dressed in such a way, or behaving in such a way, as to provoke the look of lust, lovingly drape a sweater over them and graciously exhort them to protect the holiness of the men in the church.

I leave it up to the Holy Spirit to lead you in how to do that.

"Whoever looks at a woman "

The Greek word used is one that is a present tense participle. This suggests that Jesus isn't speaking merely of a passing, accidental glance. Rather, He is speaking of a lingering habit of "gazing". The intention is shown in the phrase, "to lust for her." Jesus is describing someone who looks at a woman specifically in order to lust for her sexually.

Now obviously, we shouldn't take this further than Jesus meant it to be taken. To have our eyes fall upon an attractive person, and to innocently find them "attractive", is just a natural aspect of the drive that we were given at Creation. That's a time to turn our heads away and say, "Thank you for making attractive people, God. Please help me to honour that

particular person's attractiveness by preserving it in holiness for their own spouse."

But to keep on looking and in fact, to even - stare' and 'gaze' with desire and lust, that's a sinful drive we acquired in the Fall.

That kind of gaze is designed by God only to be enjoyed between a husband and a wife. Jesus isn't speaking of the accidental look. Nor is He speaking of the marital gaze of love.

Jesus is speaking of the accidental look that becomes the gaze of immoral lust. This would include all forms of visual "gazing" - whether it be across a room, or on a bus or even on a television or movie screen, or a magazine page or an ad or a centrefold, or a site on the internet.

Finally, notice that He says that whoever so looks at a woman to lust for her "*has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*"

The wording in the original language suggests that, by the time the gaze had begun, the adultery in the heart was already going on.

The "look" is simply an outward expression of the sin that is already present in the heart.

Temptation to illicit sexual desire is not sin.

Temptation, Satan may tempt you. Satan may draw something in to tempt you. The sin comes in what you do with it. If you entertain the temptation, if you maintain the temptation, if you pander those evil thoughts, then it becomes the sin.

Matthew 15:19, *"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."*

King David's lust in the heart was allowed to turn into a gaze with the eyes; and it eventuated in adultery in the bed!

All of this underscores the point that sexual immorality begins in the heart and that it is always a displeasing thing to God and a dangerous thing to us.

How desperately evil our hearts are!

How much in need of God's grace we are!

Now, we may be prone to disregard the importance of adultery of the heart. We may be inclined to suppose that having 'affairs' in our hearts is no big deal, just so long as we don't have them in actual experience.

But clearly, Jesus is teaching us otherwise. He stresses this in the next two verses.

V 29-30, *"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell"*

Jesus here teaches us how drastically we are to treat this sin. But before we look at what He urges us to do, notice what else these two verses teach us.

2. Persistence in immorality damns the Soul.

Twice in these verses, He tells us that the drastic action He calls us to take is far better than the consequence of allowing that sin to remain in our hearts. He tells us that it would be better to gouge out our eye or cut off our hand than to go with all hands and all eyes to hell.

I remember another young person I spoke with. He was regularly sleeping with his girlfriend; and kept insisting that there was nothing wrong with it. He became very offended when I told him that this was a sin and that he needed to turn to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness that God was willing to grant him. I will never forget what he said to me. He became very angry with me and said, "You really mean to tell me that God is

going to send me to hell just because I sleep with my girlfriend?"

That's where a lot of people who are outside of Christ misunderstand their situation. They have a picture in their minds of God as a cruel 'killjoy' - ready to send anyone to hell who might be having a little fun.

Sought lovingly to explain the truth that it wasn't that God was going to send him to hell because he sleeps with his girlfriend. Rather, the truth was that he was living apart from Christ and was already on his way to hell. The fact that he sleeps regularly with his girlfriend was simply a manifestation of the lostness that was already true of him. Now God was offering to save him from his destiny if he would only accept the offer.

To my knowledge, he still refuses God's offer of salvation and still lives in sin.

But my point in telling you this is not to show that the sin of adultery in the heart will make someone lose their salvation and will send them to hell.

God is able to forgive our sins and cleans us of all of our guilt, if we will turn to Him and seek true repentance before Him.

Rather my point is that a persistence in the sin of adultery as a lifestyle habit whether in act or in the heart is manifest proof that such a person is not even saved in the first place. If someone wishes to be saved from the destiny of hell, they must release their grip on that sin and turn to Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 13:4 the promise that "*fornicators and adulterers God will judge*"

Clearly, from Jesus' words, we see that this is true even of fornication and adultery of the heart.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10, *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor ^[c]sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revellers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*

How serious it is to hold on to such sins!

Persistence in doing so damns us to eternal lostness!

But praise God that there's also hope for anyone who ceases to hold on to those sins and turns to Christ.

Even after describing such a horrible list of sins, Paul goes on to say.

1 Corinthians 6:11, *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

When Jesus first spoke the words that are contained in our passage this morning, they had a tremendous shock value.

He was telling people to gouge out their eyes and cut off their hands, if that's what it took to set themselves free from this sin.

3. Repentance from immorality requires drastic measures.

V 29-30, *"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell"*

Jesus is clearly speaking figuratively. He isn't commanding us to literally gouge out our eyes and cut off our hands.

I have thought of what would happen if someone tried to deal with their lust in this way.

First, one eye would go!

Then off would come a hand.

But since the other eye can still look, the guy would have to then use his one good hand to gouge out the other eye.

But what's he going to do to get rid of the other hand?

Ask for help?

Obviously, a man could keep chipping away at himself until he was all gone, and he would still not solve the real problem.

Our eyes don't cause us to sin. Our hands do cause us to sin. The real problem is the lust in our hearts.

We need to understand the figurative nature of Jesus' words.

He speaks of our "right eye" as our most precious eye.

He speaks of our "right hand" as our most precious hand.

He doesn't speak of our left eye or our left hand but only of the eye and hand that, traditionally, people consider most valuable. And the reason is because He's giving us a principle. The sin of lust is so dangerous to our soul that we must take whatever drastic measures are necessary to rid ourselves of it - even if it means losing something very precious to us.

For example, if we struggle with lust from images that we find on the internet, we must cancel our internet service, or get rid of our computer. Yes, it would be hard to get by without a computer, but hell is even harder than life without a computer.

Better to enter life without the use of a computer, than to have the convenience of a computer and end up in hell.

Likewise, if certain television shows keep causing us to stumble in sexual sin, we must cancel our satellite or cable subscription or get rid of our set. It's hard to get by without a television but again, it's not as hard as hell is. Better to enter life without having the entertainment of a television, than to have the entertainment and end up in hell.

If certain friendships cause us to stumble even precious friendships - we need to sever them. If certain places cause us to stumble in lust, we need to keep away from them. We must sever anything from our lives - absolutely anything, no matter how precious or convenient - that causes us to stumble in sexual sin.

We must count it far better to be deprived of a few temporal comforts and benefits, than to deprive ourselves of eternal life!

As we reach out to accept God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, we must progressively sever ourselves from whatever holds us bound to our sin - and we must be prepared to be "severe" in that severing.

In other words, we must "put to death" whatever causes us to sin.

Paul wrote about this.

Romans 8:12-13, *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Colossians 3:5-7, *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*

Ephesians 5:3-4, *But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; ⁴neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*

1 Corinthians 6:18, *Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*

Conclusion:

I began this morning by telling you about one Old Testament hero of the faith.

Let me close by telling you of another - Joseph - as his story is told to us in Genesis 39.

Joseph had been sold by his jealous brothers into slavery. He was taken to Egypt and purchased by a man named Potiphar, an officer of the Pharaoh and a captain of his guard. He had found favour in Potiphar's eyes as a man of integrity.

Joseph was given the task of managing all of Potiphar's household. But he had also become the object of immoral desire in the eyes of Potiphar's adulterous wife. The Bible tells us that she "cast longing eyes on" him. Day after day, she kept speaking to him and saying, "Lie with me".

But Joseph - in his integrity before God and his master - refused her.

Genesis 39:7-9, *And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie*

with me.”⁸ But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.⁹ There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

He steadfastly refused to heed her offers. Nor would he even allow himself to be with her.

One day, while Potiphar was away on a trip, she arranged for all the house to be empty of all the other household servants. Then, as he worked, she caught him by his garment and said, "Lie with me." But he left the coat and ran out of the house. He fled immorality.

You know the rest of the story.

Potiphar's humiliated wife concocted a lie about Joseph and as a result of his refusal to sin, Joseph spent two years in prison. He was also released after those two years to suddenly become promoted to the position of prime minister of the land of Egypt. God rewarded his faithfulness!

Job 31:1, *“I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?”*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ may God help us also to take drastic measures to keep ourselves from the soul-damning sin of adultery - whether it be adultery in action, or adultery in the heart.

May we, instead, walk in the sort of holiness - from the heart - that reflects the true spirit of God's commandment.