

Are You An Adulterer?

Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 14

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Matthew 5:27-30

The summary of the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount and the theme of the whole thing is:

Matthew 5:20: *For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

What follows, from 5:21-48 is a series of examples which each illustrate what He means in verse 20. These illustrations all have the same formula. Jesus introduces them with **You have heard the ancients were told** . . . In each case, then, He refers back to statements in God's law which had become well-known quotations from the Law.

Jesus then shows that true righteousness involves more than mere outward observance such as what was practiced by the religious leaders of His day. He emphasized the true inner spirit of each precept to offset the shallowness and abuses that were the rule of the day. Today we look at the subject of sexual sin. **Are you and adulterer?**

I. The Letter of the Law

Matthew 5:27: *You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';*

Adultery is the word for any sexual activity outside of marriage by a married person. We might wonder why Jesus chose this word rather than the more general one which describes sexual sin by anyone, married or single. We can't say for sure, but the fact is the two words are **synonyms** insofar as they both describe any sexual activity other than that between a husband and wife. Clearly, everything taught in this passage applies to all, **regardless of marital status**.

You shall not commit adultery is the 7th Commandment. The rabbis of Jesus' day among the Pharisees stopped with the letter of the law. Their interpretation was ultra-simple: If you don't have sexual intercourse with anyone other than your wife or husband, you are fine. But there is more to the issue than merely **avoiding** something. To be pure is not merely a matter of not doing certain wrong things. Being **pure** is the active presence of righteous behavior and holy thinking.

Sexual purity is far more than avoiding forbidden acts; it is cultivating a pure heart and resisting impure thoughts and desires **in the heart**. Jesus teaches us that **evil lust is the heart of adultery**, just as He taught us that **anger is the heart of murder**.

The command is absolute: **Never commit sexual sin**.

Matthew 5:28: . . . *but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

This verse is **not** describing someone who just happens to **see** a person of the opposite sex. Nor is it describing a person who **notices beauty** in a member of the

opposite sex, nor is it talking about a natural **sense of attraction** to a member of the opposite sex. All that is in the realm of normal.

Jesus is talking about *looking at a person with lust*. **To lust for her** translates a phrase (*pros to epithumésai*) that includes the concept of purpose—looking **with the purpose** of lusting. It's *looking at a woman to lust for her*.

The word **lust** itself means **strong desire**. It is used sometimes in the Bible in a positive sense of a passionate desire for good things. But most of the time—including this use—it describes an **evil desire to possess the forbidden**. Specifically in the sexual context it means to **desire a forbidden relationship**.

In the proper setting of marriage, sex is a wonderful and fulfilling gift of God. But **anywhere else**, sex is selfish and fleeting gratification that is **always** destructive. It is **SIN**, and it's wrong outside of marriage, regardless of whether you are married or not.

Jesus is not talking about what you see around you. He's not even talking about noticing beauty. It's the second and third look and the resulting desire for the wrong thing that is where the sin begins.

Has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Just as the consequences of feeling angry aren't as serious as the consequences of mouthing off or punching someone or committing murder, the consequences of adultery in your heart aren't as serious as the consequences of going to bed. **But the essence of the sin is the same**. Listen to what Jesus said on another occasion:

Matthew 15:18-20: But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man . . .

II. The Seriousness of Sin

Matthew 5:29-30: If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

Makes you stumble is from a word that describes the stick that was used to spring a trap when it was disturbed. In the New Testament it's used to describe the **things** and the **people** who get you into sin. Both of these verses are the literary device we call **hyperbole**. It is obvious overstatement for the purpose of making a strong point.

In this case, the literal meaning is obvious, but it doesn't make a lot of sense. Even if you did pluck out your right eye, you could still sin with the left. Even if you cut off your right hand, you could still steal with the left. Jesus said much the same thing when He mentioned the inevitability of things that cause people to stumble, but He warns us to make sure we aren't the stumbling blocks:

Matthew 18:7-9 Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block

comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell.

Are you an adulterer? YES! You should take drastic action to get rid of anything in your life that continues to tempt you to sin.

Here are some lessons you should learn:

1. The present is not your only life. You are destined for eternity, so live your life now in light of the realities of eternity . . . lest your whole body be thrown into hell.
2. Nothing, no matter how precious it may seem to you at the moment, should be allowed to doom your glorious destiny.
3. Sin is so destructive, it must not be pampered or tolerated in your life. You need to put it to death every time it rears its head.

Colossians 3:5: Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Temptation should be flung aside immediately and decisively. Don't toy with it. Don't pretend you can handle something God says not to play with.

Proverbs 6:23–29:

For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light;

And reproofs for discipline are the way of life

To keep you from the evil woman,

From the smooth tongue of the adulteress.

Do not desire her beauty in your heart,

Nor let her capture you with her eyelids.

For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread,

And an adulteress hunts for the precious life.

Can a man take fire in his bosom

And his clothes not be burned?

Or can a man walk on hot coals

And his feet not be scorched?

So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife;

Whoever touches her will not go unpunished.

By introducing the grotesque idea of losing members of your body, Jesus shows how incomparably better it is to prepare for eternity than to try to get away with enjoying the fleeting but un-fulfilling sinful pleasures of this life.

In every case I have seen of a believer falling to sexual sin, it has never been an instant, one-time, sudden whimsical event. It is always the result of heart failure—failure to guard the heart over the long haul. It is always a **series of events and decisions**, none of which seem very big until they snowball into a disaster.

Three strong reasons to run from sex outside marriage:

1. ***Physical consequences.*** Syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, herpes, pregnancy and AIDS. They range from short imprisonment and shame to a life sentence to a death sentence. In every case the term is fixed and there are no appeals.
2. ***Emotional consequences.*** Sex is addictive. God designed it that way for marital pleasure and for procreation. But outside its intended realm, the addictive nature of sex is devastating.
3. ***Relational consequences.*** Sex before marriage or outside of marriage is an engraved invitation for ghosts to visit your marriage bed. Even when the ghosts aren't haunting your bed, they'll attack you mind when you least expect it. Every partner you have beyond *one* complicates and dilutes the joy of sex as God intends it.

Those are strong reasons for sexual purity. Now here's the only one that really matters: ***It is God's will***, and God's will is always the way of blessing.

1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7-8: *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; . . . For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. **Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.***

In the Sermon on the Mount, we're learning the general principle: ***If the act is sinful, then the desire for the act is also sinful.***