

Sermon Title: Are You An Adulterer?

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:27-30 (Sermon on the Mount #14)

Date: 10-25-20

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It is our joy to continue in our studies through the Sermon on the Mount. We are in a section here where we're proceeding paragraph-by-paragraph through a series of examples that Jesus uses. I think by the time we get to the end of this chapter, you will thoroughly know the point that He is emphasizing over and over again.

In case you haven't noticed, we live in a society that is awash in sensuality; there's stuff around us all the time that we wish we didn't have to deal with. The whole advertising industry is built upon a combination of sensuality and covetousness; and it is very successful, because we buy in—we "get it." Today, we come to the issue of sexual sin. And like all sin, we need to understand that it begins in your heart (Jas. 1:14; cf. Mk. 7:21-22); so, victory over temptation is going to be yours only when you fight the battle in the right place (Gal. 5:16-17, 24; cf. Ps. 51:6; 101:2).

"Surpassing righteousness" that Jesus demands requires no less of us than to fight the battle the right way. After the Beatitudes, in the summary to the introduction of this Sermon on the Mount—Jesus's little pericope in 5:17-20 about not allowing any part of the Law to be unfulfilled—He says this, in Matthew 5:20, and it amounts to the theme-verse of this entire sermon: "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." (NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

There were scribes and Pharisees right around when He spoke this. There were *hordes* of people around who were under the influence of the teaching and the theology of the scribes and Pharisees, which came to every synagogue every Sabbath day. And so that was a *frontal assault* on their whole system. The Pharisees and the scribes willingly set themselves up as *the* examples of righteousness (Lk. 18:9-12); and Jesus said, "You see them? You see how 'righteous' they are? You'd have to get *way past* them to even get on the front porch of Heaven!" That's a big, big deal.

And now He follows it up in Verses 21 through 48, and we've seen the first of these; this is a series of examples that each illustrate what He means in Verse 20. He's making the point: You can obey rules and regulations *externally* while maintaining a heart-attitude of rebellion (Matt. 23:25), and He wants you to get past it.

These illustrations all have the same formula: Jesus begins each one with, "You have heard that the ancients were told..." In other words: This has been taught to you. You would read some of these things, if you had the great privilege to read texts of the Old Testament—which most Jews didn't; they "heard" it taught in the synagogue; they were taught by their parents and by their rabbis. So He would say, "You have *heard* that the ancients were told..." and then He would refer to a statement in God's Law, which had become some well-known excerpt of it. Sometimes He would add in a little bit of explanation that the scribes or Pharisees had added. Then, He would go on to show that true righteousness—or, "surpassing righteousness"—involves more than mere outward observance, such as what was being practiced and taught by their religious leaders. He emphasized the true *inner* spirit of each one of these principles, to offset the shallowness and the abuses that were the rule of the day.

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---

So today, we look at the subject of sexual sin. And as we did last Sunday when I asked, "Are you a murderer?" today, I'm going to ask, "Are you an adulterer?" Matthew 5:27-30. The Letter Of The Law—Verses 27 and 28. And then, The Implications Of That Law in Verses 29 and 30.

We start with The Letter Of The Law: Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 27—"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' " That's the Seventh Commandment (Ex. 20:14). The word "adultery" is the word that describes any sexual activity outside of marriage that is committed by a married person. Now, you might wonder: "Why did He *only* speak of married people here? This one is the word *moicheuō*, and there's the other word—*porneia*, and every word that we have which has "p-o-r-n" in it comes from that Greek root. That word *porneia* is the more general one; it describes sexual sin by *anyone*, married *or* single (cf. Heb. 13:4b). We can't say for sure why Jesus chose this word *moicheuō*, but the fact is, the two words are synonyms when it comes to describing the activity that makes them sinful. Any sexual activity other than between a husband and a wife is wrong; and clearly, everything taught in this passage applies to all, regardless of marital status.

And by the way, I should also explain in advance: We've gotten into the silly situation in which the time-honored customs of language are deemed to no longer apply. Everything that Jesus says here about a man doing wrong—it's also wrong for a woman, so don't get hung up on a pronoun and think that you are excused.

So He says: "You shall not commit adultery"—the Seventh Commandment. You've heard that, and you've heard rightly; it's true—there's nothing wrong with the commandment. Jesus was *not* "correcting" or "updating" any of the Ten Commandments. It was the rabbinical *expression* and *application* of it that Jesus was dealing with; and you'll see how He does it in this text.

The rabbis of His day among the Pharisees stopped with the Letter Of The Law, the externals of the Law; they did not deal with the heart-issues (Matt. 23:25-28). Their interpretation was super-simple: If you don't have sexual intercourse with anyone other than your husband or wife, you're fine. But if that is your definition of *righteousness*, if that's your definition of holiness—that it's only a matter of *avoiding* something—then you're missing the point. The rabbis stopped short of giving the *full* exposition of what that means. To be pure is not merely a matter of *not* doing things that are specified as wrong; to be pure is the *active* presence of holy thinking and righteous behavior.

The rabbis should have understood the obvious connection between the Seventh Commandment—"You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14)—and a broader, more general commandment which we know of as the Tenth Commandment, in Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 17—"You shall not *covet* your neighbor's house..." You see how that goes beyond the idea of not burning down your neighbor's house, not robbing your neighbor's house—don't even *covet* it. "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

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---

Purity is more than avoiding certain acts; it's cultivating "a pure heart" (Ps. 24:2; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22). It is resisting impure thoughts that bubble up "from" your "heart" (Mk. 7:21), and that's where the problem originates (Jer. 17:9; cf. Gen. 6:5; 8:21).

Now, when it suited their purpose, the rabbis could be *really severe* about the Seventh Commandment. You know the story that's recorded in John Chapter 8, Verses 1 through 11, when the Pharisees caught a woman in adultery; it's really interesting how that's explained. I have a feeling they also caught a man—but they were rather selective in how they applied that.

And I also know some of you are going to throw a yellow hanky and call a foul: "John 8:1-11 isn't in the better manuscripts!" Yes, it's not in the better manuscripts; and yes, it appears in several different places in other manuscripts; and in the version that the King James translators used, there's a conflation that adds it between the end of John 7 and John Chapter 8, Verse 12. But it *does* seem to be a very old—and probably legitimate—description of an event during the ministry of Jesus. It certainly fits, or no one would have quoted it and passed it down. What we have in our text today is the explanation of *why* Jesus would have handled that situation in John 8 the way that He did. Jesus teaches us that evil lust is the heart of adultery, just as He taught us that "anger" is the heart of "murder" (Matt. 5:22).

The command is absolute: Never commit sexual sin; that's not hard to see. In Verse 27, He says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery' "—and in Verse 28, He says, "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."

Now, before I explain what that means, let me poke a hole in some misconceptions about it. It is *not* describing when you just happen to see a person of the opposite sex; that's not a sin. Nor is it describing a person who notices beauty in a member of the opposite sex; that's okay, too. Nor is it talking about a natural sense of attraction to a member of the opposite sex. All of those fall into the realm of "normal."

I had a friend years ago who told his wife what a problem men have with lust, and so he trained her: "If we are ever out in public, and you notice a woman—especially a pretty one, and especially one of those who is apparently unable to afford enough to buy a sufficient amount of clothing—you tell me to look the other way!" That is *perfect Phariseeism!* "If I look and I commit lust, it's *your fault* for not warning me!" That *completely upends* exactly what Jesus was saying here! Now, *I don't mind* if somebody says, "You might not want to look at three o'clock"—or, to your right—when you're at the beach, and there's somebody [immodest] there. I don't mind looking out for each other, but you understand: Telling somebody else, "You're responsible to keep me holy"—that doesn't work! Not at all.

Jesus is talking about looking at a person "with lust." We have the phrase translated here "with lust for her," or your translation might say: "to lust for her" (NKJV, HCSB). That translates an interesting phrase for which we don't have an exact English equivalent, so

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Date: 10-25-20

---

that's the best translation we have. The Greek, for you three of four who might know it, is: *pros to epiththymēsai*. That literally would be: "toward the to-lusting," so that's why they say it's with the *purpose* of lusting (see Prov. 6:25)—it's *intentionally* looking at someone in order to fan the flames of lust, or evil desire (Job 31:1; Jer. 5:8; 2 Pet. 2:14).

The word "lust" itself isn't actually an evil word. The Greek word that is translated "lust" there just means "strong desire." It's occasionally used in the Bible in a *positive* sense of a really strong desire for a good thing. Paul uses this very word in Philippians Chapter 1 when he says he has "the *desire* to depart and be with Christ" (vs. 23); well, that's a *holy* desire—a powerful desire—for a good thing. But *most* of the time when this word is used, it is used in a connection and a context that makes it an "evil desire" to possess something that is forbidden (Ps. 52:7; cf. 1 Kings 21:4). Specifically in the sexual context, it means: to desire a forbidden relationship.

Understand: He is not saying that sex is bad, that sexual desire is bad; it's a wonderful and fulfilling gift from God, *in a marriage*—but anywhere else, it is selfish; it leads to fleeting gratification; and it's *always* destructive, *without exception*. Now, somebody *participating* in the wrong thing might not tell you that, but it *is* wrong, and it *does* always destroy. It *is* sin, and it is wrong outside of marriage, regardless of whether you're married or not.

Jesus is *not* talking about the things you happen to see around you. And as I said, He is not even talking about noticing beauty. It's the *second* or the *third* look (Jb. 31:1), and the resulting desire for the wrong thing—that's where the sin begins (Rom. 13:14). And Jesus described this quite vividly: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman for the purpose of lusting for her has *already* committed adultery with her *in his heart*."

Understand what He's saying there; it's exactly parallel to what we said last week about anger and murder: Just as the consequences of feeling angry, or the desire to "get even"—whatever it is on the inside—are not as serious as they are when you let that thought spill over into mouthing off or punching someone or, ultimately, committing murder, it's the same thing here: The consequences of adultery *in your heart* are not as serious as the consequences of committing a sexual act with someone that you're not married to, but the *essence* of the sin is the same.

I have heard this verse many times used to say that, "Therefore, if someone views something pornographic, that's the same as committing adultery—and therefore, you have broken the covenant of your marriage, and you can be divorced!" Well, *it doesn't say that*, and it doesn't mean that. That *is* a sin; that *is* a problem; and as a habit, that is a *particularly* destructive problem.

But, understand: He is saying, not that you receive the consequences for the *act* if you just think about it; He's saying, "Understand: it's a continuum." It *begins in your heart*, and it flows through several stages of development, and it *can* be expressed in the physical act. The *essence* of the sin is the same.

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---

Listen to what Jesus said on another occasion. In Matthew 15, Verses 18 through 20, He said this: "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"—and by the way, there are the two words side by side: "adultery" and "fornication," the one for a married person and the one for everybody else (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9; Heb. 13:4)—"thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man."

Now, I wouldn't blame you if you were thinking, at this point, "Wow! I'm sure glad I came today! I woke up this morning and I knew I was a sinner, and now this guy is just *piling it on!*" Well...yeah! But I've got a pretty good source that I'm quoting here: Jesus! And trust me—*it gets worse...*and then it gets much, much better. But you have to realize the *problem* before you want the *solution!* We wouldn't call the Gospel "good news" if we didn't understand that there is *bad news* that the good news is the answer to.

So this leads to a more general point that Jesus makes. And if you thought feeling rotten about your sin wasn't bad enough, let's look at this: the seriousness of dealing with sin. In Verses 29 and 30, Jesus says: "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."

I think you get the point: This is hyperbole, *but* it's a very important point. "Makes you stumble" comes from a word that describes the stick that was used to spring the trap that would capture the varmint that was eating your stuff in your garden, or the dangerous animal—whatever it was. Think of a box: You would tilt the box up, prop it up with a stick, put some bait under the box, and then you would hide; you'd have a string attached to the stick; the varmint comes in, and as soon as he grabs the bait, you pull the stick, and he's trapped. Well, that's what "makes you stumble" means: to be trapped into taking the bait. That's the idea of "stumbling." In the New Testament, this is used metaphorically to describe the *things* and the *people* who get you into sin (Matt. 18:6; Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 8:13; Jas. 2:10; 3:2).

Now, obviously, this is hyperbole; it's obvious overstatement for the purpose of making a strong point. We have no problem understanding what these two verses *literally* mean—but it doesn't make a lot of sense if you apply them strictly literally (cf. Matt. 16:5-12). Even if you *did* pluck out your right eye, *trust me*, you could look at forbidden fruit with your left eye! Even if you cut off your right hand, you could still steal with your left.

Jesus said the same thing when He was describing the inevitability of things that cause people to stumble, but He warns us to make sure that we aren't the stumbling blocks—the ones who cause stumbling. That one is over in Matthew 18, Verses 7 through 9, where He says: "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks!" "Woe" is a word that implies damnation (e.g., Is. 6:5); those who cause others to commit sin are going to be judged extra-severely. "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

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Date: 10-25-20

---

stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and 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 to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell."

*This is piling on!* I don't think I have to convince any one of you that you're a sinner. But this is here to help us understand how to *deal* with that problem. This shows you that your sin is *deeper* than you tend to believe. *You* are at the root of your sin-problem (see Rom. 7:21-22). So I'll ask the question that is the sermon title: Are you an adulterer? I'll give you the same answer that I gave you last week when I asked if you are a murderer: Yes!

So, what does that mean? Go out and start cutting off parts of your body? No. That means: *You need a Savior!* *That's why this is here*—to help you understand that you need a Savior (Gal. 3:24); and as you realize the depth of sin, you begin to realize the breadth of the grace of God. This is a *big deal!*

Understand, my friends: The present is *not* your only life—you are destined for *eternity!* You're going to spend eternity *somewhere*, so live your life *now* in light of the realities of eternity (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1-4; Heb. 12:28). You are *going to be resurrected*, either to life or to damnation (Jn. 5:28-29; Rev. 20:15). Choose how you live *now* in light of what you want your eternity to be like. Hate sin as much as God hates it, and you're on the track toward genuine holiness (Ps. 97:10; Prov. 8:13; Am. 5:15).

Secondly, understand: Nothing, no matter how precious it may seem to you at the moment, should be allowed to *doom* your glorious eternity! Like Job said: "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look at a virgin?" (Job 31:1). Be careful what you *choose* to look at (Ps. 101:3); be careful what you *choose* to hear (Prov. 17:4); because it doesn't take much of a breeze to fan the flames of the stuff that is in your heart (Prov. 7:13-22).

And this is here to also help us understand that sin is *so destructive*, you shouldn't pamper it. You shouldn't tolerate it. You need to put it to death every time it rears its head (Rom. 8:13). Look at what Paul wrote in Colossians Chapter 3, Verse 5—"Therefore consider the members of your earthly body..." Now, remember, Jesus talked about cutting off members of your body? Okay, here's how you *apply* that: "Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."

What does it mean to "consider" something "as dead"? How do dead people respond? Not very well; there's *no* response. That's how we say, "She's dead! No response." So, He's telling you that when it comes to you living in this world—what you see, what you hear, what you think, what you feel, what motivates you—consider yourself as dead to all of those ugly things. In other words: Refuse to respond to them! And you say, "Well, *I did!* I did pretty well on Tuesday, for 45 minutes...And the thoughts came back!" Yeah! You know what? You have to keep filing out that death certificate over and over and over.

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Date: 10-25-20

---

Temptation needs to be *flung aside* as immediately and decisively as you know how (Prov. 4:14-15). Don't toy with it. Don't pretend that you can handle something that God says not to play with (Prov. 14:16).

Let's look over at Proverbs. I had a *ton* of proverbs initially written into this sermon; I cut out a whole bunch of it, but let me just read a couple of passages to you. Proverbs 6:23-29—"For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light"—God tells you what is right, as in: "You shall not commit adultery"—"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"—how many very successful men do you know who have been *ruined* and reduced to poverty because of their *refusal* to deal with temptation? (see Prov. 7:26; cf. Neh. 13:26)—"and an adulteress hunts for the precious life." Consider not just, "Oooh—*that's attractive*," but consider it as, "That mountain lion just might eat me!" Understand that! And then here's this famous Proverbs 6 excerpt: "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."

Throughout all of my ministry, one of my favorite Bible commentators, who is now with the Lord, had a wonderful way with turning words and putting things together. He wrote this about dealing with sin—and you can tell that this is from a different generation: "Dilly-dallying is deadly. Halfway measures wreak havoc! The surgery must be *radical!* In the struggle against sin, the believer must fight hard—shadow-boxing will never do!" (see 1 Cor. 9:26-27) Get *radical* about it! I have the illustration here, with this hole in my head; I'm going to get the bandage off tomorrow, and it'll be well. But do you know why I have that? Because there was something *evil* there, and it would have—if left unchecked—invaded my brain...which doesn't need any foreign invasion; it's already pretty messed up. So, what did they do? They *cut it out!* *Radical!* I mean, I'm a golfer—that guy took a *divot* out of my head, and then thought he was doing me a favor by stitching it back up! Well, he actually *was*.

You have to deal with sin! Jesus introduced the grotesque idea of losing members of your body to show you how *incomparably better* it is if you prepare for eternity the right way, rather than to try to get away with enjoying fleeting and unfulfilling and sinful and destructive pleasures in this life (1 Jn. 2:17).

One more thing I want to say: Make no mistake about it, being a Christian *does not* make you immune to sexual sin. I've been in the ministry for close to a half-century. I have seen lives ruined by sexual sin, and some of them that I have witnessed have been believers. And I want to tell you: When a believer falls into this kind of sin, at least in my observation, it has never been an instant, sudden, whimsical event. It is *always* the result of "heart failure"—it's *always* a failure to guard the heart over the long haul (Prov. 4:23). It's always the culmination of a series of events and decisions that have worn down resistance and fanned the flames of the wrong things. None of them along the way, by themselves, might seem very big—until they snowball into a *disaster!*

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Date: 10-25-20

---

I want to read you a little illustration of how this happens. There's a kind of interesting sidebar behind it: I was once very good friends with a guy who was a ghostwriter. He wrote a whole bunch of bestselling books for other people, and he was writing one on behalf of a guy who had great insights; he said, "This guy has great one-liners, he has great outlines—and his writing is *awful!*" And he had this idea that my friend then wrote into what turned out to be about three pages in the guy's book; and he showed it to the guy and said, "What do you think?" And he said, "Wow! Did I say that? That's *good!*"

This is a picturesque way of putting it. I'm just going to read it to you, and then there's more if you look up the book; the subtitle is: "How To Affair-Proof Your Marriage," and the book is "His Needs, Her Needs" by Willard F. Harley, Jr. I don't endorse everything he says and everything he's done, but this is brilliant. Do you know you have a "love bank"? Here's what he writes:

"Figuratively speaking, I believe each of us has a 'love bank.' It contains many different accounts—one for each person we know. Each person either makes deposits or withdrawals whenever we interact with him or her. Pleasurable interactions cause deposits, and painful interactions cause withdrawals. In my love bank, every deposit or withdrawal is worth a certain number of 'love-units.'

"If I meet a friend—we'll call him Jim—and the encounter leaves me feeling comfortable, well, one love-unit will be deposited into his account in my love bank. If the interchange makes me feel *good*, Jim's deposit in my bank is two love-units. *Very good* gets three. *Four* units goes to him when he makes me feel *exceptionally good* in an encounter I can rate among the best experiences of my life. Suppose, however, that I find myself feeling *uncomfortable* when I'm with someone. We'll call her 'Betty.' One love-unit is withdrawn from Betty's account. If she makes me feel *bad*, two units are withdrawn. *Very bad* merits a three-unit withdrawal. If my encounter with Betty is among the worst experiences of my life, it costs her a four-unit withdrawal.

"As life goes on, the accounts in my love bank fluctuate. Some of my acquaintances build sizeable deposits. Others remain in the black, but have small balances—perhaps because of fewer interactions with me. A third group builds up still smaller balances because my experiences with them are mixed—sometimes pleasant, sometimes painful. For these people, deposits almost equal withdrawals. Other people go into the red with me; that means they cause me more pain than pleasure; I never feel good when I think of them, and I do not want to see them or be with them; in short, their accounts at my love bank are overdrawn."

He goes on to explain the implications of that. When you find somebody and you wind up getting married, what happens is: You've had so many interactions, that account just greatly exceeds all the rest of them. Then he makes this point: "Affairs happen when you allow someone's account to rival or exceed your spouse's account balance." ("His Needs, Her Needs: Building A Marriage That Lasts," © 1986, 1994, 2001 by Willard F. Harley, Jr. Published by Fleming H. Revell, a division of Baker Book House)



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Speaker: Jim Harris

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Date: 10-25-20

---

I can practically guarantee: Something like that is in the process of developing in the life of *someone* here today. You can't put this many people together—even people who love the Lord—and not have that be happening. And I want to warn you: If that's going on, what should you do about it? Well, I don't recommend dismembering yourself, or the other person. But I can tell you this: *Close that account! End that relationship!*

And then there are always the "Well...what if's"—"I *work* with this person!" Ask for a transfer! "I can't do that." Get another job! *End that relationship! Close that account!* That's *why* Verses 29 and 30 are *so grotesque!* "Consider the members of your earthly body as *dead*" to those things!

Draw the lines of safe boundaries, and stay in them. There's the "Billy Graham Rule," which has now been renamed the "Mike Pence Rule." Both of them, as Christian men, have said, "I choose not to be alone with a member of the opposite sex." He got pilloried for that! People said, "That's *awful!*"

Well, *at least* don't be alone with a member of the opposite sex *outside the view* of somebody else, and without your spouse knowing about it! In other words: Be *diligent* about it. Don't try to see how close to the edge you can come, and still feel safe. Don't think that you are the exception, who can *toy* with that kind of feeling and not be susceptible to a shipwreck!

And by the way: That doesn't just apply to unmarried people—that applies to the married as well. There's a passage in Proverbs *specifically* addressed to married folks: Proverbs Chapter 5, Verses 15 through 19. And again, it's addressed to a man, but it applies to both directions. Understand this: "Drink water from your own cistern..." Now, it might not be the most romantic thing to call her, but your wife is *your* cistern. "Drink water from your own cistern and fresh water from your own well. Should your springs be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth."

If I might translate that: Make sure her account is always *miles* beyond everybody else's! Make sure your husband's account is always *miles* beyond everybody else's! "Rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love."

Now, as we head in for a landing here, let me suggest three strong reasons to run from sex outside of marriage; and after I give you these three very strong reasons, then I'm going to give you the *real* one...not that these are bad.

Reason Number 1—There are physical consequences. Look, there *is* physical pleasure in fornication; make no mistake about it (cf. 2 Thess. 2:12b; 2 Tim. 3:4b; Heb. 11:25b). And your body can't tell whether you're married or not, so don't fool yourself. But understand: There *are* little things like sexually transmitted diseases; some of which are fleeting, embarrassing, disgusting consequences; some of them are life sentences (e.g., Rom. 1:27)—and there is no appeal, by the way, when that happens.

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Date: 10-25-20

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Reason Number 2—There are also emotional consequences. Sex is addictive; God *designed* it that way, so there would be marital pleasure and procreation to keep the human race alive. But outside of its intended realm, the addictive nature of sex is *devastating!* It's *never* good.

Reason Number 3—There are relational consequences. Sex before marriage, or sex outside of marriage, is an engraved invitation for ghosts to visit your head! Don't invite them! Even when the ghosts aren't haunting you in your physical relationship, they'll attack your mind when you least expect it. Every partner that any person has, beyond one, complicates and dilutes the joy of sex as God intendeds it. Now, we're not talking about remarriage after the death of a spouse (1 Cor. 7:39), or remarriage after the disaster of a divorce (1 Cor. 7:15), when God puts things back together.

Understand: Those are *strong* reasons for sexual purity! Now, let me give you the one that *really* matters. This is the test. This is the between-the-eyes one. The reason that really matters is: It's God's will, and God's will is *always* the way of blessing!

First Thessalonians Chapter 4, Verse 3. Obviously, there was a problem in the church in Thessalonica among believers, and Paul loved that church; it was a healthy place, but there was this problem of temptation. And Paul says this, in First Thessalonians 4:3—"For this is the will of God"—now, you don't need to *debate* about that; you don't need to *pray* about that; you don't need to *finesse* that. When it says: "This is the will of God," read what comes next—it *is* God's will. "This is the will of God, your sanctification"—that means "holiness"—"that is"—means *specifically* what he's talking about—"that you abstain from sexual immorality." And for "sexual immorality," he used the word *porneia*—the one that applies to man, woman, young, old, heterosexual, homosexual...*any* sexual activity, other than between a husband and a wife in a marriage (1 Cor. 6:9; 7:2).

Skip down to Verse 7, where he says this: "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification." And now, if you want a verse to memorize—and I suggest you do it, and I suggest that you pray that God would bring this up to you at *any* moment that you're toying with an improper lustful desire—take this one: Verse 8—"So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you." Did you catch that? That's addressed to a Christian! He can't say "who gives His Holy Spirit to you" to anybody who isn't a believer and who, as such, has the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

That's the *real* reason! You have to be able to say, "God, thank You for loving me in Jesus—and I am going to *rebel* openly, *specifically* against what I *know to be Your will!*" That's what you're saying when you go down that path! (see Rom. 6:15; cf. Deut. 29:19; Jer. 7:8-10) Whether you're at the point of committing a physical act, or whether you're at the point of just toying with an idea—*it's the same sin!* It's only a matter of how loudly the volume is turned up.

So far, we've seen two illustrations. I asked you, "Are you a murderer?" and the answer is, "Well...yes," if you've ever dealt with anger. "Are you an adulterer?" "Well...yes," if you've ever entertained an impure thought. So I want you to get the general principle

Sermon Title: Are You An Adulterer?

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:27-30 (Sermon on the Mount #14)

Date: 10-25-20

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that is being taught here. And this is important, because this is under direct assault in our world. It goes like this: If the *act* is sinful, then the *desire* for the act is *also* sinful. (see Pr. 21:10; 24:9; Jn. 8:44a; Acts 8:22) That's the point Jesus is making! Anger is the same sin as murder! Lust is the same sin as adultery!

Now, there are lies abounding about this today, concerning what is sinful and what is not sinful. There are a lot of people in our world who just want to reject the idea of "sinful." And now, the boundary is: Does it specifically harm someone else? And if it doesn't, *it's good!* We can blow holes in that, but that's just the wrong way of thinking.

But understand now: We have people who are saying, "Well, *my* particular bent for behavior, my 'orientation'—I was born with it; therefore, I would be *rebelling against the will of God* if I don't express going down the road of the path that I was born to go down!" That's just *rotten theology!* It's *great* rationalization. In a sense, it's really brilliant, in a twisted kind of a way, to say it that way; because now, I'm not *responsible!*

And you have people—even well-meaning Christian people—who are willing to say, "Well, okay, maybe you *were* 'born that way,' maybe you *do* have a propensity that way...That's okay, as long as you don't commit the act." Does that match what Jesus said? No! If an act is sinful, desiring that act is also sinful. But you won't get to the solution to that problem until you get to the core of your heart (Heb. 4:12); and when you get to the core of your heart, you're going to get to the issue of sin at its root (Jer. 17:9; cf. Gen. 6:5)—and *then* you're going to understand the *marvelous grace of God* in Christ Jesus, that He "died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Jn. 1:9).

And you can't stand up and say, "I haven't broken any of the Big Ten this week, Lord—look how perfectly righteous I am!" (see Mk. 10:19-20; cf. Rom. 10:3) He's going to say, "Well, what about your rotten heart? What about your *pride* in saying that you don't have a rotten heart?"

Do you understand—Christ "died for sins" (1 Pet. 3:18). "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf"—He took upon Himself all of "the wrath of God" for all of those sins (Rom. 5:9; 8:32), even the ones I haven't gotten around to committing yet; He took them all on Himself, took the penalty for all of it—"so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Is. 53:5-8; Phil. 3:9). That's the "surpassing righteousness" that I *need!* Not spit-shining a little bit better than the guy down the street, but realizing I come to Him as *beggarly poor*, and I cry out to Him in humble grace, broken by my sin—knowing He hates it (Lk. 18:13)—and knowing that He loves me so much that He took the penalty for me (Gal. 2:20).

Maybe you *were* born with a propensity for a certain sin. At a young age, I got really good at that "anger" one! Stealing has never been all that big of a deal for me; I might think of it in a fleeting thought. But I was *convinced* I had the gift of arguing, even when I was a young Christian! Look—whatever your sin is, the real problem is *in your heart*. Call on the Lord to deal with it *there* (see Acts 15:9; Heb. 10:22).

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And if this is the day that you have first recognized the *totality* of your sin problem, then this is the day to talk to one of us about what you can do about it—what God has *already* done for it, in sending His Son (Gal. 4:4-5; 1 Jn. 4:9-10).

Are you an adulterer? Yeah. That means you need a Savior. And thank the Lord, He sent us one!

Let's pray:

*Father, how we thank You for the riches of Your grace. We stand in Your grace! And Father, I keep marveling every time I realize that I need Your grace just as desperately today as I did the day that I asked You to forgive my sins and become my Lord and my Savior. Thank You for that spectacular grace. Please, don't let anyone go from this place not standing in Your grace. And Father, if one of our friends here needs encouragement, needs help to figure out how to apply these things, or maybe just to come to the Savior and to receive the free gift of eternal life—please, open the heart and provide the opportunity for that life-changing conversation. Have Your way with each of us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*