

## Sermon 16, Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery, Matthew 5:27-30

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### Manuscript

We continue this morning to talk about the necessity of our righteousness exceeding the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus described this as His thesis, and He gives six examples of it in Matthew 5. We looked last week at the first example — anger is against the law just as murder is against the law. Today we come to the second example, and we will see that lustful thoughts are just as damning as adulterous actions. Thinking lustfully and looking lustfully is as much a sin as actually consummating an adulterous deed. What the law requires is a pure heart, and any kind of radical action necessary to get there. We'll see the law, Jesus' "yes, and" to the law, and then some of the implications of the radical purity that God's law commands.

#### **I. The Law: Don't Commit Adultery, v. 27**

This is the law: Thou shalt not commit adultery. Pretty straightforward, right? In Hebrew, it's only two words. "No adultery." But implied in the way Jesus quotes it, by analogy with the Pharisees' interpretation of the command about murder, is that the Pharisees effectively said "But anything else is okay!" Go ahead and lust; go ahead and fornicate; go ahead and engage in heavy petting and erotic literature and dancing. Those aren't adultery! Adultery, of course, is literally

the act of consummating a sexual relationship with someone who is married. Either one of the parties to the adultery can be married to someone else, or both can be. Regardless, technically, this is the only thing that's adultery. So if you're single, the idea is, do whatever you want! Just leave married people alone. If you're married, the rule is "no going all the way," but otherwise, you can do as you please. Again, this interpretation of the law is not quite "If it feels good, do it," but it tends rapidly in that direction!

So here's the law, as expounded by the scribes and Pharisees: if you're married, don't mess around. If you're single, don't mess with married people.

**II. Jesus' "Yes, And:" Don't Lust; Take Radical Action Against Lust!, vv. 28-30**  
Jesus says, effectively, "Yes. Don't commit adultery. *And*, don't even lust in your heart. In fact, you must take radical action against lust if you want to be in conformity to what the law requires!"

### **A. Lust Is Heart Adultery, v. 28**

Thus, Jesus adds that any lustful look is heart adultery. Anytime you look at another person as a sex object, and not a person; anytime you titillate your fancy with some sort of sexual thought, desire, image, or urge, you are breaking the law against adultery. You see, the commandment doesn't just forbid the consummation of a sexual act between two people at least one of whom is married to someone else. No; it forbids any motion of the heart toward that kind of sin. It's not only a sin to do it; it's a sin to want to do it. It's a sin to think about doing it in any way that finds it attractive or desirable or fun.

I don't have to define lust further than this. You all know what it is. Everyone over a certain age has done it, read about it, seen it on TV.

We all know that adultery is wicked. To betray your spouse, to devastate your children, to break your most solemn promise to the person you said you loved better than anyone in the whole world — this is a very wicked thing to do.

But taking a second glance at that poster, that ad at the bottom of the article you just read online, that girl in Walmart, that item in your mother's shopping history on Amazon — how could that be wrong? Well, Jesus says it is. Jesus, interpreting God's law with authority, says that it is morally wrong to look with lust. He says that it must never be done. He says that it is wrong just like full-blown adultery is wrong.

Why is this? Because Christianity focuses on the heart. God looks at the heart. The source of sin is the heart. Sin is logically prior to sins; you are wicked before you do wicked things. In fact, you do wicked things because you're wicked. Heart adultery is a sin committed with the most sinful thing in your body — not your genitals, but your heart.

Now, you may be thinking, "I might as well be hung for a sheep as hung for a lamb. If I'm guilty of heart adultery because I enjoyed that dirty picture, I guess I might as well do it more; I might as well have an affair; I might as well buy the first five seasons of *Game of Thrones* on DVD." That's totally wrong. Jesus is not saying that all sins are equally wicked; He's saying that they are all sin, and that any sin is infinitely bad because it's a sin against an infinitely

good God. He's saying that you must stop classifying sins according to minor and major, and then thinking, "Well, I stayed away from all the majors, so I'm good to go." No! Jesus is saying that minor sins can damn you too. If you're really a Christian, you must be concerned to avoid every sin, no matter how small, because your life is dedicated to Jesus Christ.

You see, Pharisaical righteousness proceeds by avoiding major sins. (Yes, Jesus said they neglected the weightier matters of the law. That's because they stuck to the letter and avoided the Spirit — a tactic which also allowed them to neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness. But the OT doesn't say, in so many words, "Be just, merciful, and faithful.") For purposes of the 10 commandments, they didn't actually kill people (other than Jesus and Stephen). They didn't actually sleep around. They didn't actually steal camels and commit title fraud on houses. They avoided major sins, and they thought that was enough. But Jesus comes and says, "No, the morality of the Kingdom of Heaven requires that you avoid little sins too! In fact, it requires that you avoid the smallest sins because your heart is completely pure." Jesus requires that we take radical action against even the smallest sin of lust. That's why He goes on to say that any sacrifice is better than breaking God's law.

### **B. Any Sacrifice Is Better than Breaking God's Law, vv. 29-30**

Some of the commentators tie themselves in knots over these verses. The right eye must mean a friend, or a counselor, they say. But the meaning is really quite clear: even the tiniest sin is so bad that you ought to give up anything rather than continue to commit that sin.

#### **1. You Should Poke Out Your Eye Rather than Lust, v. 29**

So here's Jesus' instructions in a particular hypothetical case. Your right eye offends you. That is, it causes you to stumble. It scandalizes you, to use the English derivative from the Greek root here. What do you do? When your eye is the occasion of you committing the sin of lusting after someone, Jesus says you ought to pop it out with your thumb, just like this, and then throw it away. Toss it out the window. Flush it down the toilet.

Now, this is where He gets practical. Has anyone in this room ever been led into the sin of lust by his right eye? If you say no, you're lying. And yet everyone in this room has two eyes. Why is that? Are we all a bunch of disobedient hypocrites? In a word, yes. We are disobedient saints. But I don't think we're hypocrites, and I don't think Jesus is really telling us to pop out our eyeballs and throw them away. Why not? Because the eye is not the problem. Where does sin come from? The heart. What commits the sin? You do. The whole person does. Sin is not something that can be localized in a particular body part. No. Christ is saying hypothetically, if it were possible that sin could be localized, that part needs to go. But sin is the act of a person, not of a body part. Hands don't kill people; people kill people. And people commit every other sin too. The part that sins needs to die, Jesus says.

#### **a) Losing an Eye Is Comparatively Good, v. 29b**

In fact, it is profitable for you, or better for you, for one of your members to perish. Does anyone here want to lose an eye? Of course not. Yet compared to the alternative, losing an eye is a good

thing. Jesus is using the eye here to talk about what's precious to you, what you love, what you really really don't want to give up. That thing, whatever it is, has to go if it causes you to sin.

**b) Failure to Control Your Eyes Will Send You to Hell, v. 29c**

Why? Because even a single lustful look can send you to hell. You are better off one-eyed and lust-free than you are to have both eyes to go into hell with. The point, once again, is that any sin is a sin worthy of damnation. As long as you're classifying sins by "major" and "minor" rather than as simply "sin," you're falling into Pharisaical thinking. Your righteousness will never exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees if you think in those terms.

Do you know what Hell is? It is a place of eternal torment. It is a place where you scream in overpowering agony for centuries, for millennia, forever and ever and ever. It is a place where you are totally hopeless and you know it, totally in pain and you know it, totally consumed with pain and anger and hatred and isolation forever and ever, collapsing in on yourself like a black hole. That's what Hell is like. And even a single lustful look, undealt with, will take you there. That's why it's better to get rid of your eye than to lust.

**2. You Should Cut off Your Hand Rather than Lust, v. 30**

You all might remember the case of Aron Ralston, trapped by a falling boulder while hiking alone in Utah back in 2003. After five days lying pinned by the boulder, unable to free himself, he realized that he could cut off his hand and escape. He had used his knife the day before to carve his name and death date into the stone, and it was really dull — but with it he managed to cut off his hand, rappel down a 65-foot cliff, and find a Dutch family who happened to be hiking nearby. They gave him Oreos and water and alerted authorities, who quickly rescued him.

Well, Ralston cut off his hand rather than losing his life in the hot desert sun. He figured it was better to live with one hand than to die with both. For the sake of a few years of life on this earth, he gave up a hand. But Jesus says that for the sake of eternal life with God, losing a hand is worth it.

**a) Losing a Hand Is Comparatively Good, v. 30b**

It hurt, I imagine, for Ralston to sever his hand with a dull knife. It was painful. But it was less painful than dying pinned under a boulder. Losing a hand, in Ralston's case, was comparatively good.

**b) Failure to Control Your Hand Will Send You to Hell, v. 30c**

But Jesus adds that a single wicked deed with your hand makes you liable to Hellfire. You can hit someone, sign a fake check, type a sleazy word into your computer, and so on. These are all sins of the hand. And they make you deserving of Hell. Remember, Hell is a place of conscious eternal torment. Hell is place from which the smoke of your burning will go up forever and ever. Hell is a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. And Hell is the place you will go if you let your hand do something wrong. Much better to cut it off than to go to hell. Much better to sever it than to die with it.

### **III. Implications**

Why do I repeat myself like this? Because Jesus repeated Himself. He did so because this is a deadly serious. Don't classify sins into big and little and then figure that you're safe if you've avoided the big. That's not enough! Jesus says you must avoid all sin. You must cut off anything that allows you to sin.

#### **A. Better Kill Sin than Go to Hell (This presupposes Justification)**

Now, as I said a moment ago, ultimately what allows you to sin is your personhood. A sin is the deed of a person. A rock can't sin. A star can't sin (with apologies to Ramandu). The number 13 can't sin. But you can. Cutting off body parts won't prevent you from sinning.. They aren't the source of sin. No, the heart is the source of sin. And so what you need, more than anything, is a heart transplant. Only a new heart will make you a person who obeys Jesus' commands here. Only in this way can you kill sin. Your heart must be renewed. You must be united to Jesus in His death and resurrection. That's how you kill sin. You kill it by being united to Him by faith and spending time with Him. You kill sin by changing yourself, changing your personhood — not into another person, but into a new person. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. It is that new creation that cuts off sin and delivers you from hell. Nothing else will do it. No techniques. No willpower. No chemical helps. No strategic amputations. None of them will change the heart from which sin comes. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

#### **B. Better Cut Off TV and Movies than Go to Hell**

Nonetheless, if you have a new heart and yet find yourself (as I do) violating this command of Jesus, what do you do? Well, Jesus is not only saying that you must cut off all of yourself that implicates you in sinning. He's saying that you must cut off anything outside yourself that leads you into sin. If your TV offends you, cut it off. If you are tempted to watch shows that allow or entice you to lust, cut off that TV. Unplug it. Give it away. Same with movies. You probably know that a PG-13 rating allows filmmakers to show a topless woman. Do you watch movies that entice you or could entice you to lust? Cut them off. Jesus says the choice is literally between Heaven and Hell. If you don't believe that, then you're not disagreeing with me. You're disagreeing with Him. An awful lot of movies trade on prurient interest. An awful lot of TV shows contain an awful lot of immodest clothing and are designed to titillate you. Watching those shows is a sin, Jesus says. Anything that tempts you to lust is a sin.

#### **C. Better Cut Off Internet than Go to Hell**

Here's a biggie: Internet. Supposedly the YouPorn website gets more traffic than YouTube. We all know that umpteen bazillion sexual images, titillating articles, romantic fantasies, and suggestive costumes are available on the Internet. If that tempts you, then get rid of your Internet. "But I need it for work! I need it for school! I need it for this and that!" Yeah, well, I suppose you do. I suppose Jesus didn't know what He was talking about. I guess that was just hyperbole. You're right; better to keep your Internet connection and go to Hell.

Brothers and sisters, I don't want to be sarcastic here. The truth is that the Internet poses a gigantic problem for hundreds of millions of people. It is place riddled with sexual immorality.

This is too obvious for me to mention. But I can tell you that if you're sure you have a new heart in Christ, and yet you don't seem to be getting the better of your lust problem, then you will have to eliminate or significantly filter your Internet, probably for years, before you have a realistic hope of conquering this sin. As long as sin is easy, you will sin. You have to go on an Internet fast to give the Holy Spirit room to change your heart. I'm not making this up. I've experienced it firsthand. I've been there and I know. Let school go. Let work go. Cut off that Internet, and let the consequences be what they may. Your soul is more valuable than any degree or any job.

#### **D. Better Cut Off Money than Go to Hell**

The same is true for those who use their access to money to make lust available to them. Some people are suckers for pay-per-view stuff on TV or online. They don't just like the free porn; they want the pricey stuff. They like to go to nightclubs or strip shows. If this is you, then you have to erect walls to cut off your access to the money that makes these things possible for you. I'm not going to get into the specifics, but freezing your credit cards in a jar of mud is a start. Not carrying any cash or checks is another option. But know this: if you use money to provide for the lusts of your flesh, then you are going to Hell. Jesus is serious. He really means it. Lust will take you the bottom. Lust will submerge you in the pit forever.

If, then, there is some stumbling block scandalizing you and tripping you into sin, do whatever it takes to eliminate it. If you have to shut down your phone's web-browsing capability, do it. If you have to go without Internet entirely, do it. If you have to read books instead of watching TV, do it.

#### **E. Better Repent than Go to Hell**

But the problem is that when this teaching comes to us, it comes to all of us as sinners. We have already lusted. We have already done things that will in and of themselves be sufficient to send us to Hell. All the tips in the world, all the ways to avoid on-ramps to sin, will not be adequate to save us. Only thing will work. Literally cutting off your hand and poking out your eye won't save you. Only repentance toward God and faith in Christ can save you. Only turning away from every sin, and embracing God's gift of righteousness in Christ, will allow you to find that forgiveness and peace that you so desperately need.

You see, when you repent, you turn around. You stop driving toward Hell, and you start heading toward God and Heaven. Where do you want to end up? Are you willing to give up that sin that seems more precious to you than your right eye? Are you willing to turn away from everything that makes provision for your flesh? If not, Jesus says, then get ready for Hell.

But if you are willing, if you want righteousness and don't want sin, then embrace God's forgiveness in Jesus. Ask for that new heart. Continue to beg the Spirit to put to death in you the deeds of the flesh. And by so doing, you will live; you will enter Heaven whole in body and spirit. Amen.