

The Uncomfortable Truth: Jesus Wants Your Heart, Not Just Your Compliance

There's a version of Jesus that makes us comfortable. He's gentle with children, compassionate with the hurting, and gracious beyond measure. But there's another side to Jesus that we often try to ignore—the side that flips tables, wields whips, and says things that make us squirm in our seats.

C.S. Lewis captured this tension perfectly in *The Chronicles of Narnia* when describing Aslan the lion: "He's good, but he's not tame." The same is true of Jesus. He's undeniably good, but he refuses to be contained by our preferences, our comfort zones, or our carefully constructed religious boxes.

We all try to tame Jesus in our own ways. Like growing a pumpkin in a jar, we attempt to shape him into a version we can better understand and control. The Japanese create square watermelons by growing them in containers—impressive, but ultimately limiting the fruit's natural form. Similarly, we sometimes confine Christ to fit our expectations rather than allowing him to transform us according to his design.

The Heart of the Matter

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus delivered teaching that challenged everything his audience thought they knew about faithful living. The religious leaders of his day had created an elaborate system of external behaviors—authorized versions of how to obey God's law. Do these acceptable actions, they taught, and you'll be right with God.

Jesus called them hypocrites—a word that originally referred to actors wearing masks in ancient Greek and Roman dramas. These religious influencers were performing righteousness on the outside while their hearts remained far from God. Their theology emphasized external compliance: just do the right things outwardly, and God will accept you.

But Jesus raised the bar significantly higher.

When he said, "You have heard it said, but I say to you," he wasn't lowering the standard—he was revealing that true obedience must start in the heart and then flow outward into God-honoring actions. External compliance without internal transformation is merely performance art.

The Radical Teaching on Lust

Consider one of Jesus's most confrontational teachings from Matthew 5:27-30. Addressing adultery, Jesus said that anyone who looks at someone with lust has already committed adultery in their heart. Then came the shocking directive: if your eye causes you to lust,

gouge it out. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Better to lose a body part than to have your whole body thrown into hell.

This is hyperbole—exaggeration with a purpose. Jesus isn't advocating self-mutilation. He's seizing our attention to communicate something crucial: the heart is a battlefield, and what happens internally is as important—if not more so—than what happens externally.

The conventional understanding in Jesus's day was simple: don't steal someone else's spouse, and you've fulfilled the seventh commandment. But Jesus revealed how vulnerable we all are to failing this command at the heart level. The word "looks" in this passage is a present active tense verb, indicating not a passing glance but an ongoing fixation—a repeated, imaginative longing that goes unchecked.

Here's the uncomfortable truth: sin begins in the heart before it ever manifests in action.

Beyond Sexual Lust

While sexual temptation is certainly real—and more accessible than ever in our digital age—Jesus's teaching goes deeper than pornography or adultery. At its core, lust is about wanting anything except what God has given us. It's a heart that struggles to find contentment in God's design and provision.

We see someone's social media post and wish we had their life. We compare our gifts, our finances, our friendships, our circumstances to others and feel dissatisfied. We wish God were doing something different in our lives. This is spiritual lust—a rejection of God's plans in favor of our own imagined alternatives.

In Ezekiel 6:9, God expresses his grief over his people's "unfaithful hearts and lustful eyes that long for their idols." This reveals the true offense created by lust: we reject what God has planned and provided, longing instead for something else.

Guarding Your Heart

Proverbs 4:23 warns: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." This isn't optional for followers of Christ—it's essential. But how do we practice good heart health in a world saturated with temptation?

Feed your heart wisely. What you consume spiritually will fill your life. The Holy Spirit lives within every believer, serving as an advocate, guide, and helper. He will prompt you about what to feed or deny your heart. His voice is still and small—a gentle whisper—but he will lead you if you learn to listen.

Training your spiritual ear requires intentional practice: reading scripture, listening for God's voice, learning to recognize his presence and direction. The more you tune in, the easier it becomes to discern his guidance.

Be willing to do whatever it takes. Romans 13:14 instructs us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires." This might require radical action—removing temptation from your environment, changing your habits, or making sacrifices that others might not understand.

Billy Graham, who shared Jesus with more people than perhaps any other person in history, would call hotels in advance of his crusades and ask them to remove the television from his room. If they hadn't, he would physically unplug it and place it in the hallway. No provision for the flesh.

Practice holy restraint. Sometimes you simply need to tell yourself: "Stop it." Your heart is a battlefield, and you must actively engage in the fight for purity.

The Promise of Transformation

If you're reading this and thinking, "My heart is defiled. I've allowed things in that aren't good," there's hope. Repentance is the place where we recognize God is right and we're wrong. Scripture promises that God is faithful and just to forgive us and—here's the key—to *cleanse* us of all unrighteousness.

Jesus doesn't just want your external compliance. He wants your heart. He wants to transform you from the inside out, making you different and empowering you to be a difference maker in the world.

It's a hard teaching. It's uncomfortable. It challenges us at our core. But it's also liberating because it offers something far greater than religious performance—it offers genuine transformation and intimate relationship with the God who loves us enough to tell us the truth.

The heart is where the battle is won or lost. Guard it fiercely. Feed it wisely. Surrender it completely.

Scripture References from the Sermon

Directly Cited or Referenced:

1. **Matthew 5:27-30** - The main passage about lust and cutting off what causes you to sin
2. **Matthew 15** - Jesus calling religious teachers' hypocrites (Isaiah prophecy about honoring with lips but hearts far from God)
3. **Proverbs 4:23** - "Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it"
4. **Ezekiel 6:9** - God expressing hurt over unfaithful hearts and lustful eyes longing for idols
5. **Romans 13:14** - "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh"

Alluded To or Thematically Referenced:

6. **Exodus 20:14** - The seventh commandment: "You shall not commit adultery"
7. **Matthew 15:8** - "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (quoting Isaiah 29:13)
8. **Mark 12:41-44** / **Luke 21:1-4** - The widow's offering (giving everything she had)
9. **Matthew 23:23** - Tithing on herbs while neglecting weightier matters
10. **Matthew 15:19** / **Mark 7:21-22** - Evil thoughts coming from the heart
11. **1 John 1:9** - "He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"
12. **1 Corinthians 3:16** / **1 Corinthians 6:19** - Believers as temples of the Holy Spirit
13. **John 14-16** - Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit as advocate/helper
14. **1 Kings 19:12** - The still, small voice of God

- **The Sermon on the Mount** (Matthew 5-7)
- **The antitheses** - "You have heard it said, but I say to you" (Matthew 5:21-48)
- **Jesus as the Lion of Judah** - Referenced through C.S. Lewis's Aslan (Revelation 5:5)
- **Repentance and heart transformation** (Multiple passages throughout Scripture)