



Matt 5:27-30

Adultery Begins in the Heart

Summary: God is concerned with our desires, not just our deeds, and encourages a radical response to causes of sin.

I need to begin with a warning. We're going to be dealing with a sensitive topic today: the issue of lust and adultery – things we see at the top of our news feeds and headlines each day. And, we're going to see what God has to say about this kind of behavior. We're going to do our best to address things directly, bluntly, but tactfully and tastefully in a way that exposes and explores the issue so that those who need to change can, and the rest can be equipped to help those in need.

I also want to warn you, that if you came in here this morning thinking this just applies to a bunch of lustful, spiritually-immature, pig-men and doesn't have anything do with you and the desires of your heart, the lust you have for things other than sexual encounters, you're wrong. Yes, Jesus is speaking about the specific issue of physical lust and adultery, but He's only chosen it as one way to expose the many desires of our hearts which are all so hungry for things other than God and His ways.

The Bible also speaks of lusting over silver and gold and clothing (Acts 20:33). So ladies, you need to guard your hearts from lusting over a bag, or boots, a car or house, or a man. And youth, don't think it's OK to lust over toys or games, or phones or tablets or whatever else is on your 'wish list' this Christmas.

We're going to speak about sexual lust – it's problems, and how to fight it, but for those who have ears to hear, you'll find conviction and correction for all sorts of misplaced affections as we listen to our Lord this morning. Read me, if you will:

Matthew 5:27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, '*You shall not commit adultery.*' [That's the Seventh Commandment] **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.

Pretty shocking stuff, huh? Well, I trust that most of us are here this morning because we want to know more about God and His Word, and I assume many of us want, by His grace, to obey what God has to say. So, how do we deal with this? What do we do? Should some honest soul among us go get the knives and bandages?

No. Of course not. The first thing we need to do is remember the greater context. Right before saying this, Jesus spoke about anger and how we should interact with other people. If you were here last week you remember He said calling someone names is the same thing as murdering them in cold blood. Now, we think name calling is petty and murder is monstrous, but Jesus points out: they both start with being angry at other people, the only difference is how far you let the anger go. So God is saying, don't just worry about the parts of the weed you can see growing above ground, rip that thing out by the root or it's just going to keep coming back and growing bigger.

And now He's saying the same thing about lust and adultery. It's not just what you do, or don't do, it's what do you DESIRE? What do you want? What would you *like* to do? What does the root of an adulterous affair look like deep down below the surface, how and where did it begin, and what will it take to pluck that thing out entirely? As one pastor (Challies) noted: "Affairs do not begin with sex. Falling into bed with a man who is not your husband or a woman who is not your wife is simply one step in a long chain of events, one decision in a long series of poor decisions."

But, we need to really pay attention here, because there is an absolutely essential distinction involved. The *fact* that you desire is not wrong, it's all about what you desire.

The word we see translated as lust is the Greek word *epithumeo*. It's also translated as desire, covet, to set the heart upon, or to long for and it can be a *good* thing!

It's the same word Jesus used to describe a man who was so hungry he would eat the very food he was setting out for the pigs he was tending (Luke 15:16); and, for a man so hungry he would eat the crumbs falling from a rich man's table (Luke 16:21). Jesus said "with fervent desire I have *desired* to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). And He said many prophets and righteous men *desired* to see what the disciples and others saw in His ministry (Matt 13:17). Paul says if a man *desires* the position of a bishop – a pastor, elder, overseer in the church, he desires a good thing (1 Tim 3:1).

So, obviously, there is nothing wrong with desire. The question is: *are you pointing your affection in the right direction?* Are you desiring the right things? And that is why this is a terrible sermon to hear in the weeks leading up to Christmas. And it helps us see how this statement by Jesus applies to much, much, more than just a man's physical desire for a woman.

But, it does talk about a man's desire for a woman, so let's deal with that. We've already noticed that the problem is not with the desire. But you need to know that there's also no problem with desiring sexual intimacy. There is nothing wrong with a Christian man having a strong desire for his wife, or vice versa, that's good, that's healthy, that's righteous and holy.

When you hear Jesus say this, you need to know, you really must know: God is not anti-sex or attraction. I mean, as Tim Keller once pointed out: the Bible opens with a naked man singing joyfully about a naked woman in the presence of God.

Do you know, the Bible actually tells men to

Proverbs 5:18 Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice with the wife of your youth.

19 *As a loving deer and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
And always be enraptured with her love.*

Friends, I'm reading Scripture here. And there's even more stuff we could turn to, but we won't. There are things written in the Scriptures that would make you blush; passages people weren't allowed to read until they were adults.

So again, let us be very clear: there is nothing wrong with desire itself, and there is nothing wrong with a Christian desiring physical intimacy with their spouse. The problem comes when we desire the wrong person, place, or thing – when the direction of our affection is off course.

Jesus says it's wrong to look at a woman *who is not your wife* in order to lust for her. You're looking to an inappropriate source to satisfy your desire. That's the sin.

And notice that your intention is involved here. There is a difference between noticing something or someone is attractive, and looking back again to dwell and linger and satisfy your carnal curiosity. This is not about the first look, you can't avoid seeing all things; but you can avoid the second and the third when you know what you're doing, you know why you're looking.

Which brings me to the next thing we need to see here in this passage. And that is, Jesus is telling us: God sees and knows, and God judges our intentions, not just our deeds. He sees the things below the surface. He knows what's in your heart and mind. God knows the things you think you're hiding from everyone else. Jesus is warning us here: God knows the very desires of our hearts. So don't just be afraid of getting caught doing something by your parents, peers, or spouse – be aware that God knows and sees all – even the things you never get caught for.

And God warns us clearly in the Bible, He says, be sure of this: your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23). Think about a passage like:

Heb 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

Friends, you can't leave here this morning without knowing: God knows your heart and mind, He knows your desires and wants, there is nothing you can hide from Him. And that can be terrifying, that can be nerve-wracking, that can seem unfair – but it's also really, really good news. Because even though God knows everything about you, He's still

reaching out to you. God knows you better than you know yourself. The things you're just discovering are things He has known all along. There is NOTHING hidden from God, and yet, knowing everything, He still says:

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together,"
Says the LORD,
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.

We serve a merciful God! A generous God. A forgiving and patient God. But He is also a perfect and holy God and He wants us to respond radically to things in our life that lead us away from Him. Which is why Jesus says something like:

Matt 5:29 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.

OK, now what does that mean? Well, it's hyperbole, it's a deliberate overstatement. And one way we know that is by simply asking what happens if you literally do what Jesus says? If you pluck out your eyeball, rip that thing right out of the socket and sever your optical nerve, and wear a patch for the rest of your life, can you ever lust again? Of course. And if you chop off your hand, does it really change your heart? Of course not.

This is intended to get our attention; it's intended to provoke a visceral response. It's intended to make us feel a sense of repulsion even stronger than the sense of attraction leads which us into lust. God wants us to know how seriously He takes the thoughts and desires and dreams and fantasies we allow to live inside our head. One of the major themes of the Sermon on the Mount is: God makes a big deal out of things we try to say are nothing.

The radical response to sin being suggested here helps us see that God is forcing us to choose – do we believe what He says or not? Are lustful thoughts and imagination – whether they be for a person, place, or thing, are they this big of a deal, or not?

Right now there's a probably a voice in your head saying, "This is stupid. The pastor has no idea what he's talking about, this is crazy and he's making too much of it." That's the voice of your flesh and your selfish tendencies going into overdrive to defend your interests. You've got an inner lust lobbyist arguing to save his or her own life.

But if you're truly willing to listen, you also hear the Holy Spirit pricking and convicting you and pointing out where and how all this happens in your life. Because God is forcing you to decide – is it sin? Does it need a radical response? Or is it no big deal? Does the root really

need to go, even if you don't see the actual fruit of adultery in your life? Is there such a thing as secret sin?

God says there is. He says there are two ways you can live this life – you can live it for yourself, a life He describes as walking according to the flesh, or you can live it for Him, a life He calls walking according to the Spirit. Turn with me to the book of Galatians where we find a lengthy contrast between these two lives:

Galatians 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

You need to be aware of these two ways to live, and to consider: which am I gravitating toward? Which am I pursuing? Am I seeing the roots and tendrils of adultery, hatred, selfish ambition, and jealousy in my life, or am I experiencing love, joy, peace, and things like self-control?

If God is convicting you of a need to change, you need to know that the power to do that comes from growing in your relationship with Him – self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, it's something that He produces in you and then you apply to your daily life. You work together to grow into the person He wants you to be.

So, let's talk about some practical ways to move toward that change – what does radical removal of the root look like?

And the first thing we need to say is: sever the supply chain. It has been said that tactics win battles but logistics win wars. One of the reasons the United States has enjoyed such peace and prosperity throughout her history is because we have two major oceans for borders. It would be incredibly difficult and expensive for an army from Europe or Asia to attempt to invade us. And even once they got here, they would have to keep shipping or flying supplies from their countries to ours and defending those shipments all the way. It's a risky move.

And, it's one of the reasons German submarines and U-boats played such a big role in WWII, they were trying to cut off British and American forces from the battlefield. It's easier to sink a whole ship full of soldiers at sea than to have to fight them on the ground once they arrive.

So, when it comes to lust, ask yourself – how are these things getting into your head and heart? And then attack the supply line. Identify the source of the desire or temptation and ask: how can I shut it down, avoid it, or remove it?

Now, I'm going to be blunt with you: this is going to make you weird in the eyes of some people. If you are a Christian man, woman, or youth: there should be songs you haven't heard, movies you haven't seen, links you haven't clicked, things you haven't read. It should feel awkward and alienating and out of touch at times, because this world is handling things you don't want to be touching. Instead of cutting off your hand, or plucking out your eye, why not just off the things that are leading you astray? Why not amputate the culture and it's influence in your life?

There is a very real connection between the eyes and the heart. So get your eyes off the wrong things, and onto the right things. Fill your eyes with what God has made. Get away from your screen or catalog, get out of your room, and go look at something from nature – the night sky, the clouds and trees, or even a plant or pet and tell it: testify to me of the glory of God, remind me of my Creator and eternity, remind me that there is a bigger world than the things I think or feel or want right now.

Maybe you can benefit from a practical like the one Francis Chan used. The pastor once shared how he fought lust as young single man. He said if he fell into lust he would spend the next day fasting, asking God for more strength and self-control. He said, "I've found that when you refrain from eating, it makes refraining from sin easier. While it didn't work perfectly, it was helpful." The apostle Paul said:

1 Cor 9:27 I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

What do you need to do to bring your body, and it's desires under control?

Here's another practical strategy: keep no secrets. If you find my phone laying around here, you can pick it up, swipe right, and you're in. I lose security but gain accountability. It's the same with my laptop. My wife and kids use it all the time. I don't have accounts that my wife can't access.

These are all things that you can do. But you also need to recognize that lust is a strong enemy, that's why Jesus suggests such a radical response and the best way to defeat a strong desire, is with one even stronger.

Ask God to give you a greater desire for Himself than for the things you're lusting over – again, whether it's a game or gaming system, or a phone, or a new pair of boots, or sexual

fantasies – ask God to give you a greater desire for Him. It’s good to ask God to keep you from temptation, but that’s just establishing a defense, go on the offense and ask God to give you a greater desire for Him. And parents, and spouses, pray this for the people in your life.

God said:

Col 3:1-5 Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above. . . . Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality . . .

Proverbs 5, 6, 7 and 8 play out this comparison between lust on one hand and wisdom on the other telling us to treasure Gods commands, bind them to yourself, keep Gods word before your eyes. Listen to God speak and receive His instruction. Don’t just put off the temptation, put on a greater relationship with God.

The Psalmist tells God

Psalm 73:23 ... You hold *me* by my right hand.
24 You will guide me with Your counsel,
And afterward receive me *to* glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven *but* You?
And *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire besides You.

26 My flesh and my heart fail;
But God *is* the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Friend, if you’re satisfied in your heart, you won’t be on the prowl. And the only way to truly be satisfied in your heart is to surrender it to God because if you have an appetite for Him, He WILL satisfy you.

If you would like to talk about the things you’re looking at and find some help, I encourage you – contact one of the pastors – our emails are in the bulletin. Or, ladies, contact our wives. There are Biblical Counselors here in the church who will meet with you free of charge, free from paperwork and co-pays, and help you work through things. We can’t give you a diagnosis or a prescription, but we can point you to the one who offered up His body, and shed His blood so you don’t have to gouge out that eye or cut off that hand – let His blood cover you and you won’t need to spill your own. Jesus Christ is your only hope, but He can and He will fight your flesh and save your soul. He is the one who promised:

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

Let’s pray.