

The Deadly Lure of Lust

Matthew 5:27-30

Introduction: 1) In Psalm 24:3, King David asks, “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place?” The answer is found in the next verse, “The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not set his mind on what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully” (v. 4). These words can only be applied perfectly to Jesus. These words, however, describe the proper pursuit of everyone who calls Jesus, Lord. These words also find a New Testament echo in the Sermon on the Mount and our Master’s teaching on the deadly lure of lust, a sin that has its origin in the heart but often expresses itself with the eyes and hands. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us, “The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable – who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). In Matthew 5:27-30 Jesus shows us just how true this is in very specific and concrete terms. How often it is that we reduce sin simply to what we do. Jesus makes it clear that ultimately sin is a reality rooted in who we are. Oh, it is true we can sin and often do with our eyes (v. 29) and our hands (v. 30). Jesus will teach us these are only instruments that do the biddings of an evil, lustful heart.

2) These verses are the 2nd of 6 antitheses that conclude Matthew 5. The bottom-line will be something like this: “we are to deal drastically with sin. We must not pamper it, flirt with it, enjoy nibbling a little of it around the edges. We are to hate

it, crush it, dig it out...sin leads to hell. And that is the ultimate reason why sin must be taken seriously” (Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, 44-45).

3) Our verses have three components. We will examine them noting three specific warnings we must hear and obey if lust is to not have its deadly way with us.

I. Guard your heart

5:27-28

Jesus again begins with the phrase, “You have heard that it was said.” He then quotes the 7th commandment found both in Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18. It was a well-known command, “Do not commit adultery.” The admonition is plain and simple. A married man or woman is not to have sexual relationships with any other person than their spouse. The scriptures take this command so seriously that the act of adultery was punishable by death (Deut. 22:22; Lev. 20:10). The story of the woman caught in adultery in John’s gospel (John 7:53-8:11) makes it clear that the Jews of Jesus’ day continued to view adultery as a very serious offense. The fact is any culture with a moral conscience will take the sin and marital betrayal of adultery very seriously.

In a fine article entitled, “Six Reasons Why Adultery Is Very Serious,” Tim Challies reminds us, “Adultery is a serious matter. At least, it is a serious matter in the mind and heart of the God who created sex and marriage and who put wise

boundaries on them both. But why? Why is adultery such a serious matter?

Christopher Ash provides six reasons in his book *Married for God*:

- 1) Adultery is a turning away from a promise. It is a turning away from one to whom promises were made in the presence of witnesses. Most importantly, it is a forsaking of promises made in the presence of God and, in that way, a turning away from God himself.
- 2) Adultery leads the adulterer from security to chaos. Because the adulterer has turned away, he or she enters into a life of torn loyalties. Even when the adulterer remains loyal to that new partner, there is still the divided life, the divided family, the divided memories.
- 3) Adultery is secretive and dishonest. It has to be because no one wants to trumpet that they are breaking a promise. Adultery loves the darkness and flees the light and for as long as it can it tries to remain a secret. “Whereas news of a marriage is broadcast by joyful announcement and invitations, news of adultery leaks out by rumor and under pressure.”
- 4) Adultery destroys the adulterer. Adultery does no favors to the adulterer. To the contrary, it undermines and erodes character and integrity. “Like all secret sin, it eats away like some noxious chemical at the integrity of the one who commits it.”

- 5) Adultery damages society. “Each act of adultery is like a wrecking ball taking a swing at the secure walls of the social fabric of society. It stirs up hatred and enmity. It encourages a culture which reckons marriage boundaries needn’t really be quite so rigid.” We love to think our sins are our own, that they concern only us. But no, our sin goes far beyond ourselves and impacts others.
- 6) Adultery hurts children. Adultery does grievous harm to an innocent party – children. Children are harmed when adultery brings chaos and conflict and disunity. No wonder, then, that the Bible contains such serious, repeated warnings against it: “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; none who touches her will go unpunished” (Proverbs 6:27-29). “He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself” (Proverbs 6:32). “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” (Hebrews 13:4)” [Challis, 9-10-16].

So, the argument is pretty irrefutable: the act of adultery is a bad thing. But, this is where Jesus drops a spiritual bomb on us that is devastating in its impact. Setting his words again in contrast to the ancients who stuck doggedly to the letter of the law, Jesus says, “But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman to lust for

her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Jesus carries us to a place we never saw coming but was intended by God all along. Once more we are confronted with an unavoidable and undeniable truth: the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. You conceal lust in your heart but count yourself righteous because you have never followed through with the act? Jesus says, “Not on your life!” Adultery is not limited to just the act. It includes the gazing and lingering look (“looks” is a present participle and could be translated “keeps on looking”) that objectifies another person to whom you are not married in a covenant relationship. This is a gaze not a glance. The gaze excites sexual imaginations in the heart and you mentally engage in an act reserved for your mate and the marriage bed. David Dockery and David Garland are blunt but accurate in their assessment, “the man “lusts her” and “adulterates her...”The woman is made into an object. Lust is completely self-centered, interested only in sexual gratification. It treats other persons as things to be exploited. It adulterates them. When the lust is sated, the object of the lust is discarded (see 2 Sam. 13:1-22) and another object is sought out” (*Seeking The Kingdom*, 55). How desperately we need men today like Job of old who said, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl” (Job 31:1). So, beware and be on guard against a lingering look of sexual gratification. It could lead to marital disaster. It could lead, as we are about to see, to eternal destruction.

II. Protect your eyes

5:29

You can have lust in your heart without your eyes, but your eyes sure make sinful lust easier. Thus Jesus moves to address in stark and shocking terms the intimate relationship between the lust, the heart and the eyes. We must resist the temptation to water down what Jesus says and thereby miss the impact He intends to make.

Jesus uses two powerful and vivid illustrations in verses 29-30. He ends both with a warning about hell. The bottom-line: sinful lust will lead you down a dead end road. It will not deliver what it promises. You think it will make you happy. Jesus says it will lead you to hell. So, if necessary, and it may be necessary, take whatever necessary steps you must to deal with sinful lust. As Sinclair Ferguson says, “Act decisively, immediately, even if it is painful...the drastic nature of the remedy is simply the index of the radical danger of the sin. It is not a situation for negotiation” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 90).

So, “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.” The phrase causes you to sin is literally “causes you to stumble.” It is the Greek word *skandalon*. It is in the present tense. The idea is if your eye keeps on causing you to stumble into lustful sin which can lead you to hell you would be wise and better off to “tear it out and throw it away.” It is far better to throw an eye away than it is to have your whole body thrown into hell.

This famous text, along with Matthew 19:12, moved the church father Origen (c. A.D. 185-254) to roll naked over sharp briars. However, when this failed to cure him of sexual lust, he took the drastic step of castrating himself. He would later regret this decision and conclude he may have misinterpreted what Jesus actually meant (Quarles, 119-120).

He did misunderstand the text. The real problem lay not with his eye (or male genitals). The real problem was with his heart. Oh, the eyes can certainly entice the heart. But, you can have lust in your heart without your eyes, though again, it is readily acknowledged that the eyes can surely make it easier. The key to spiritual victory over lust is not a mutilated eye. The key to spiritual victory is a circumcised heart (Deut. 10:16; 30:6). It is a new covenant heart that has God's law written on it (Jere. 31:31-34; Ezk. 26:24-27).

III. Watch your hands

5:30

Verse 30 reinforces verse 29. As Dockery and Garland note, “sin is serious business. We are to perform radical surgery on anything that would cause us to be cut off from eternal life” (*Seeking the Kingdom*, 55). Jesus moves his warning from the right eye to the right hand. The warning parallels the one of verse 29. If your right hand becomes a *skandalon*, a spiritual stumbling block, better to take the drastic and radical measure and “cut it off and throw it away.” Why? The reasoning is the same, “For it is better that you lose one of your members than that

your whole body go into *gehenna*, go into hell.” Better to lose a physical part than a spiritual whole. Better to experience a temporal lose than an eternal lose. The stakes are high! So much is on the line!

It is interesting to note how all of what Jesus is saying is a package deal with the heart as the key. The eyes can certainly entice the heart but it is the heart, enticed by the eyes, that directs the hands. The hand acts in response to the attitude and direction of the heart. That is why Jesus said in Matthew 5:8 that we need to gain and pursue a pure heart, a heart we can only receive as a grace gift by faith from Him.

The path to purity requires a pure heart and a mortification of the flesh, illustrated in our text by the eye and the hand. The words of John Owen return to my mind, “You must be killing sin or sin will be killing you.” Jesus would add, “Sin will be killing you and sending you to hell.” What then are some wise and practical steps we can take to walk the path of purity and the halls of holiness? Sinclair Ferguson gives us four:

- 1) Realize where yielding to sinful lust will lead you. Hell! Plant that in your mind and recall it again and again.
- 2) Deal with the real cause of your sin. It is an impure heart that settles for God substitutes. This is simply idolatry. What is there in your life that you

are putting in the place of God? That you desire and long for more than anything?

- 3) Act decisively, immediately, even if it must be painful. And remember, “Obedience cannot be negotiated, nor can heaven and hell.” Now is always the right time to do the right thing.
- 4) Realize your lust is not the whole of your life, even the main or most important part of your life. Think and understand what you gain by abandoning it. You get Christ and heaven thrown in! Sin is a cruel taskmaster and lust is one of its favorite instruments to keep you enslaved and in bondage. Jesus came to rescue you, to set you free from this never satisfied tyrant. Treasure Him above all else. What you gain will put to shame what you give up. You will wonder why you stayed so long at Vanity Fair in the first place (Ferguson, 89-90).

Conclusion:

In Christ we “fence our hearts.” Drawn to Him like two lovers totally devoted to each other, the attractions fueled by lust lose their luster, they find no room in our hearts. Now, in our hearts, in that innermost sanctuary, there is a place reserved only for Christ. Jesus certainly wants to lead and guide our behavior. But first and most importantly, He wants our heart. He bought it (1 Cor. 6:19). He owns it. What He bought, we should gladly and freely give to Him. Treasure

Christ above all in your heart. The eye, the hand, the rest of the body, will happily follow its lead.