

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, March 27, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

MATTHEW 5:27-30

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD’S KINGDOM #13
REVOLUTIONARY PURITY

I will never forget the day that he came into my office. A prominent doctor serving in a prestigious practice, he was an elder at a church a couple towns away. He phoned the church that I was serving and asked if there was a pastor who was available to talk with him about his marriage. I was the only pastor that was available that day. As he walked into my office I immediately noticed that the man looked disheveled. If he hadn’t have told me what his job was, I would have assumed that the man was an unemployed alcoholic. It was clear that he had quite a few drinks before coming into my office that day.

He said, “Pastor, I’m here to save my marriage. My wife wants me to talk with a minister because she is upset about my mistress. I want to make my wife happy, but I can’t be happy with her if I can’t keep my mistress.”

Not a good place to start.

He then explained that his wife was his second wife, and she had been his mistress when he was married to his first wife. For the next two hours I listened as this man shared the incredible pain that he had brought upon the women in his life. I listened to one excuse after the other as he told me why his cheating was justified. I listened to a man who believed that he could make atonement for his marital infidelity by providing free medical care to patients in Africa. He then told me that his mission trips to Africa had provided him with other mistresses. He had even fathered a child by one of the women that he was unfaithful to his wife with in Africa.

At the end of a frustrating couple of hours, the man agreed that maybe he had a problem. He agreed to seek marital counseling. It lasted all of one session. And, to the best of my knowledge, his indiscretions continue to this day.

It is not difficult in an extreme case like this man to say, “He has broken the seventh commandment found in Exodus 20:14, ‘14 “You shall not commit adultery.’” And, if our standard of right and wrong is based upon how other people act, most of us could say,

“At least I’m not like that guy. I’ve never cheated on my spouse. I’ve never committed adultery.”

The traditional interpretation of Jewish law in Jesus’ day held that adultery was sin. And, unlike many sins, the penalty for adultery was death. Leviticus 20:10 says, “10 “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.” Talk about a deterrent! But it was a deterrent to the Jewish people, not the prevailing Roman culture of Christ’s day. In fact, adultery had become commonplace, and was even expected among Roman men and secular Jews.

In his sermon, *Tacking Temptation*, Pastor Aaron Burgess writes, “Adultery was a huge problem even in Jesus’ day. Roman men were especially notorious for having mistresses. Demosthenes a Roman wrote about the widespread sin of adultery in those times. He wrote, ‘Men kept prostitutes for pleasure; men kept mistresses for the day to day needs of the body; men kept wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of their homes. So long as a man supports his wife and family there is no shame whatsoever in extra-marital affairs.’ That was the prevailing sentiment in those days about cheating on your wife. Adultery was no big deal.”¹

According to Denn Guptill, “Recent studies indicate that 50% of married men and women living in the United States of America will have at least one extramarital affair during their marriage.” He then quotes Hilda Houlding, coordinator of the Calgary Family Service Bureau who says, “An affair is often an attempt to find a little bit of paradise on the side, pursuing the belief that if one just finds the right sexual partner there will be instant happiness and everything will fall into place. An affair is often able to fulfill this myth, until (the affair) itself becomes a relationship that has to be worked at and looked at in a long term light. Seen in this way ‘paradise’ soon becomes a prison”²

God’s standards are true for all people at all times. What a tragedy that 1 out of every 2 marriages will deal with the pain of infidelity. In the Sermon on the Mount, immediately after talking about what a disciple’s relationship with other people should look like, Jesus addressed this issue of adultery. In Matthew 5:27, he quotes the seventh commandment. 27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’

You know what’s coming next, don’t you? When Jesus begins, “You have heard that it was said,” He is about to spring a new teaching on His listeners. The old law, while followed by most righteous Jews, was not understood in its proper context. Remember last week when we talked about the command not to murder? Most people would say, “Hey, I’m a good person. When you put me next to a murderer, I am a really good person.” And, what does Jesus teach? That if we treat others as if they are a nothing, that if we elevate ourselves, everybody else and everything else above a person created in the image of God, then we are in danger of the fire of hell. How we treat others matters! And,

¹ http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=42369

² http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=30824

how we look upon others matters too. We might not be adulterers in the physical sense, but many of us in keeping the seventh commandment have ignored the tenth commandment, which says, 17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

In other words, it’s not okay to be content with not committing adultery with your body, if you are lusting after your neighbor’s wife in your mind.

Kent Hughes writes, “(However), for all practical purposes, Moses and the scribes did not emphasize the inward aspect of adultery as much as they did the outward manifestation. For many, this became a conveniently narrow definition of sexual sin. It was all so clear: You were either an adulterer or you were not. And if you were a ‘caught’ adulterer, you were dead. That really made it simple. How convenient! And how deadly! It is very natural for those of us who are non-adulterers to feel smug and conceited. ‘I haven’t committed that sin! Jesus is speaking to the rest of you sinners, not to me! Listen up, you reprobates!’ But Jesus knows our hearts, and he is not buying it. Instead, he communicates a radically new standard of sexual purity. It is in continuity with the Old Testament, but it supersedes and completes it.”³

And it’s found in verse 28.

28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Whoa! This one is tough to swallow. If this is the standard, then there are very few men or women, who are followers of Jesus Christ, who have not been guilty of adultery by God’s standard.

A. B. Bruce writes what the Greek language teaches us about the word lust. He writes, “The look is not casual but persistent, the desire not involuntary or momentary, but cherished.”⁴

In other words, lust isn’t the first glance. It isn’t what happens when a person sees someone that he or she thinks is attractive. It is acting upon that attraction, even in the mind. It is allowing ourselves to dwell on that person. One of Satan’s primary tools in our generation for making people ineffective in the Christian life and for destroying the relationship that ought to be sacred between husbands and wives is media and the Internet.

³ Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway books, 2001), p. 106.

⁴ Alexander Balmain Bruce, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol. 1, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.), p. 107.

Access to pornography is just a click away on almost any portable device. Children through adults have access to any number of pornographic web sites, applications, games and films on their iPods, Computers, Cell Phones and game systems. People thought that the Internet would destroy pornographic empires; instead, it has created even more empires, with more money spent on pornography every single year. Sex trafficking across the world has increased at a dramatic pace in recent years, with customers from the United States and Europe accounting for the majority of the money spent on human beings. Internet chat rooms provide opportunities for people to take on an entirely different life, and have become a hotbed for emotional affairs, many of which turn into sexual affairs. Entire companies have been formed to cater to married people who are looking to cheat on their spouse. The advent of online video streaming has made it so much easier for people to bring things into their home that they would have never rented at a store for fear of embarrassment. The sad thing is that the statistics of those who are involved in all of these activities who are regular church goers isn't dramatically different from those who have no spiritual beliefs. We are playing with fire! And, it is destroying home after home, marriage after marriage, family after family!

Jesus spoke so harshly about lust, because He knew the impact that lust had on a person's heart. Lust is something that begins in our mind, and impacts our actions. Sooner or later, lust will destroy. I'll say it again. Sooner or later, lust will destroy.

Burgess writes, "A lustful wicked heart is the real sin, Jesus says, not just the physical act of adultery itself. The word lustful here simply means 'deep desire.' And throughout the Bible lust not only refers to sexual desire but to any insatiable hunger for pleasure, profit, power, or prestige. Lust is a desire for anything God forbids."⁵

Kent Hughes writes, "No sensual sin was ever committed that was not first imagined. Scripture says this, and our experience confirms it. Our imagination (one of the faculties that distinguish us from animals) is one of God's wondrous gifts. Through it we dream great dreams. Without it there would be no great works of art or great achievements in science. But as with any of God's gifts, it must be used responsibly. When abused, the imagination spawns great evil.

How marvelous our Lord's words are! In one single sentence he elevated our entire concept of sexual purity beyond the mere physical to a matter of the soul and heart. And in doing so, he has shown us our hearts and has uncovered the source of our trouble. His words cut. They are surgical. They expose us to our sin, and they show us his radical righteousness. The question now is, how can we live a life of purity in this age of sensuality?"⁶

Part of the solution is found in the verse we just read. If we want to win the battle with temptation, don't even entertain sin. Burgess writes, "The whole ordeal starts with a look. By choosing to look you are entertaining sin. You are inviting it in and allowing it to take

⁵ http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=42369

⁶ Hughes, pp. 107-108.

root. You are investigating. And pretty soon a not so innocent glance turns into a stare and uh oh. You are doing exactly what you don't want to do. But it all started because you chose first of all to entertain the thought of sin."⁷

I like what Sue Johanson has said, "You can't say, 'I didn't know what would happen.' That's a crock. You knew with the sweaty palms and sweaty pits. You knew with the long gazes. You made the decision not to decide and you let it just happen."⁸

Listen, if you are sending secret e-mails, if you have a hiding place for files or pictures, if you are taking lunches alone with someone of the opposite sex to whom you are not married, if you are enjoying talking to someone of the opposite sex more than you are enjoying talking to your spouse, it's time to stop.

Jesus gave us some revolutionary demands for godly living in verses 29-30.

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Ouch! If Jesus was serious about these words, and wanted us to take this literally, we'd have a lot of blind, limbless people around here. Does Christ want us to literally cut off our hands and gouge out our eyes? No. He is using a metaphor to teach a greater lesson. Essentially, Christ is telling us to cut whatever is causing us temptation off at its source. Remember, Jesus is more concerned with our character than He is with our comfort. He is more concerned with our holiness than He is with our temporary happiness. When we are dealing with intense temptation, it requires extreme action.

Aaron Burgess writes, "There is a word used here in verse 29 which meant in the Greek language, 'bait stick.' A bait stick was a stick that was fixed to trap an animal. The animal would smell the bait on the stick and not be able to resist it and eventually it would lead to his destruction. If the animal could just resist the bait and run away from it, he would not die. And Jesus is saying here, if you have a sin that is baiting you, that is luring you, you need not stand around and let it bring you in. Do whatever it takes to get away from it. Run if you have to."⁹

That's what Joseph did when Potiphar's wife made advances on him in the book of Genesis. When she made advances, he hightailed out of her presence.

1 Corinthians 6:18 says, "18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body."

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Those words were written to a church that was located in the middle of an incredibly vile community. Prostitution was part of the temple rituals to pagan gods. And, those who converted to Christianity took some of the practices with them. Paul spent great portions of 1 Corinthians dealing with sexual immorality. The solution, at its core, was to flee.

2 Timothy 2:22 echoes the thought, “22 Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

To try and escape temptation island without having something to replace it with is futile. That’s why spiritual mortification involves replacing evil thoughts with pure ones. In Philippians 4:8, Paul wrote, “8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

There are a number of great resources available for those who struggle with lustful thoughts. The books “Every Man’s Battle,” and “Every Woman’s Battle,” are some great books to start with. There is a ministry here in the Twin Cities called, “Lust Free Living.” It’s for those who are ready to take the radical step of cutting temptation at the source. Remember, extreme temptation requires extreme action. You may need to get yourself into a support group that will help you deal with the temptation. At a minimum, make sure you tell another Christian that you trust about the struggle that you are having.

I want to close our time here today with a word to those of you who are married or those of you who plan on someday being married. In his sermon on this passage, Denn Guptill gave eight practical steps for affair proofing your marriage. If you have a pen, jot these down. I’m going to condense Guptill’s words for each point.

1) Don’t Start Anything. He writes, “Don’t start up the ladder of affection with anyone other than your spouse. . . Listen to what Solomon reminded us of three thousand years ago, Proverbs 6:27-29, ‘27 Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? 28 Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? 29 So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.’ . . . If you are involved at any stage of affectionate expression with anyone other than your mate then you are playing with fire. Stop. Turn around and turn back.”

2) Listen To Your Spouse’s Advice. Guptill writes, “Don’t write off spousal comments as jealousy, and even if at this point it is innocent, it may not appear that way to your spouse . . . If your spouse questions your relationship with someone of the opposite sex, pay attention, they may notice a come-on before you do.”

3) Tell On The Other Person. “If someone begins to quietly come on to you, then tell on them. Tell your partner that very day. Don’t wait until tomorrow to see if it happens again. Tell your spouse before you go to bed. . . Sometimes it’s an ego problem. It’s been so long since anyone flirted with you, you had forgotten how good it felt, and besides it’s not

like it's hurting anyone, and you wouldn't think of taking it any further. Stop it . . . you are both in this marriage together and both of you need to learn to protect your relationship with each other and with God. Do it and do it fast.

4) Don't Spent Time Alone With The Opposite Sex. "Don't place yourself in a situation where there is temptation or where temptation can be acted on. It's surprising how many marital indiscretions and outright adultery has sprung out of relationships established on the premise of 'giving spiritual help' or 'sharing our problems together.' . . . 'The person who meets with someone of the opposite sex who is not their spouse alone in private, hath no brains.'"

5) Drink From Your Own Spring. "Proverbs 5:15 says, '15 Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.' It has been said that the best defense is a good offense. Though it's not a guarantee, 'keeping the fires hot at home,' is a good defense against temptation. That has always been the case." Guptill then quotes 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, "2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

6) Be Aware of Emotional Adultery. "This is one of the first steps up the ladder of affection. Beware of getting emotionally attached to someone of the opposite sex who is not your spouse. . . Emotional attachments can lead to explosive situations where temptations come crashing in with unexpected force (and) often develop into something more and end up in disaster. . . If you are bonding emotionally with someone other than your mate then walk away before it ruins you."

7) Get Control of Your Thought Life. "Long before an affair happens physically it happens mentally. Listen to the words of a Minister who ended up with a ruined marriage and a ruined ministry after a one night stand 'adultery isn't something that happens with the act - it happens months beforehand. It's an attitude. You disconnect yourself from the person you've said you're spending the rest of your life with.' Those thoughts may differ whether you're a man or a woman. With men they are more apt to be sexual fantasies, with a woman, romantic fantasies; but if they involve someone other than your spouse they are wrong, wrong, wrong."

8) Recognize That You Will Get Caught. "Sinners have always believed that they could get away with sin. From day one they believe that. Adam and Eve believed it and they got caught. Cain thought he got away with murder and he got caught. Rebecca and Jacob had deceived everyone but they got caught. Joseph's brothers thought they had committed the perfect crime, but they got caught. Moses thought he'd buried his sin in the

sand, but he got caught. Achan got caught, Saul got caught, David got caught, Jonah got caught, Ananias and Sapphira got caught . . . It's simple, sinners get caught. Do you really think that you can get away with a little sin? What makes you think that you will do what others haven't? Do you think you can break God's universal laws of life and get away with it? Do you think that you will be the first person who gets away with sin? Friend you will be like every other sinner throughout history, you will get caught. . .The devil promises you all the kingdoms of the world, if you will simply bow down and worship at his altar of impure desires. But you can't have it all. God says that your sin will find you out."¹⁰

If this is an area of struggle for you, recognize that Christ brings healing. We don't have to live our lives as slaves to sin. Maybe God has been speaking to you this morning about some habits that you need to break. Maybe you need to take a radical step and get rid of a television, some movies, put an internet filter on, leave your job so that you won't be in contact with that person who has been delighting you where your spouse should. Maybe you need to come clean. You need to tell a friend, a spouse, a pastor, an accountability partner. Maybe you need to change an e-mail address. Maybe you need to ask your parents to put a password on your iPod so you can't access the Internet. Maybe you need to downgrade your smart phone to a cell phone that can't access the Internet. Maybe you need to downgrade your hotel to one that doesn't include a television and free wi-fi. Maybe you need to institute weekly dates back into your marriage, and conversation back into your daily life. God will give you the strength to do the right thing. I'm praying for you. If statistics are true, many of you in this room have felt the sting of betrayal, or are in the midst of betraying your vows. Don't continue to play with fire. Talk to someone. Bring the secret things out into the light, and find freedom, for It is better for you to lose one sinful part of your life than for your whole body to go into hell.

¹⁰ http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=30824