

“Disciples Have Pure Lives”

Matthew 5:27-30

A person’s imagination is a powerful thing. Webster’s dictionary defines imagination as the ability to imagine things that are not real, the ability to form a picture in your mind of something that you have not seen or experienced.

Albert Einstein - *“Your imagination is your preview of life's coming attractions.”*

Way back in the 1950s, author Napoleon Hill wrote, “The imagination is literally the workshop wherein are fashioned all plans created by man.” He also said that anything that the mind of a man can conceive it can achieve.

The second of six illustrations in which Jesus describes the nature of greater righteousness is found in these verses. Jesus has already shown how murder is an inward attitude of the heart long before it is an outward act of the hand. Much in the same way, He deals with the subject of adultery and lust.

In the first illustration of greater righteousness, Jesus deals with the sixth commandment and the subject of murder. In this second illustration, he deals with the seventh commandment and the subject of adultery. The sixth commandment protects the sanctity of human life; the seventh commandment protects the sanctity of marriage.

Jesus says that before adultery is ever an act that one commits OUTWARDLY, it is an attitude of lust that one has INWARDLY.

Without inward purity from God, outward compliance to God makes no difference.

It comes as no surprise to us that this standard being set forth in the Sermon on the Mount is opposed to the widely accepted standards of our current day.

Scarcely a day goes by without some front-page story highlighting a scandal, rape, or abuse of someone. The current time in which we live is one that is defined by the obscene and morally reprehensible:

- Politicians disgrace the office to which they have been elected with such frequency that it no longer takes us by surprise
- Hollywood and the entertainment industry promote less than biblical ideas
- Pastors and religious leaders have been found guilty of living double lives

- Pornography is a multibillion dollar industry in the United States; more money is spent on pornography every year than professional baseball, basketball, and football combined

In many ways, the western world has become known for its lewdness and sensuality.

Daniel Heimbach - *“The nation’s first Museum of Sex opened in New York on Saturday, September 27, 2002, for the purpose of celebrating how New Yorkers have led the nation in introducing prostitution, strip shows, pornography, and open approval of homosexual behavior.”*

What was once a matter of shame is now openly celebrated in today’s culture. And nothing is more controversial in today’s culture than upholding a biblical sexual ethic.

Dare to speak out against sexual sin and immoral lifestyles nowadays and you are sure to be labeled as intolerant or dismissed as being “puritan” or “legalistic.” So as controversial as this subject is, I can think of nothing that is any more relevant and speaks to where we are living. Despite the controversy and pushback, there is a silver lining because if there ever was a need for biblical instruction on sexual behavior, that need is **NOW**.

In this section of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sets forth God’s kingdom agenda for sex and marriage and shows us how it is an issue of the heart.

1. The DEFINITION of adultery

“You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery.”

Jesus quotes directly here from Exodus 20:14 and the seventh commandment. The commandment forbid any sexual relationship outside the bounds of marriage.

The Barna Research Group once did a study that was entitled, “A New Generation of Adults Bends Moral and Sexual Rules to Their Liking.” The report stated that attitudes of Christian believers born between 1965 and 1983 were virtually identical to the attitudes of nonbelievers regarding eight of the sixteen moral behaviors that were measured. These included gambling, pornography, abortion, sex outside of marriage, same-sex marriage, and use of illegal drugs.

David Kinnaman - *“This research paints a compelling picture that moral values are shifting very quickly and significantly within the Christian community as well as outside of it.”*

Of course, the majority of people do not look to the Bible for their moral compass. Yet even within the church this is sadly becoming the case. In many ways, the phrase, “If it feels good, do it,” has become the watchword and guiding principle of our age.

Doug Webster - *“Contemporary ethics is shaped more by the ethos of a culture than the moral order revealed in God’s Word.”*

Rather than submitting to the authority of Scripture, many who claim to be Christians are bending the moral and sexual rules to their own liking. In so doing, they are elevating their own personal desires above God’s, thereby setting themselves up as authority. This is idolatry of the worst sort! Idolatry takes God’s gifts and worships them in God’s place, gifts such as talents, possessions, relationships, and especially sex and sexuality.

Daniel Heimbach - *“Something enormous affecting sex has been changing American culture... shivers in the moral ground on which Americans stand signal the approach of something enormous. Like tremors rising from deep underground, something seismic is affecting the foundations of our culture. Since we became a nation, nothing so divisive has threatened common life in America, and never have the stakes been so high. In just one generation, we have witnessed a total revolution in the way most people think of sex, and this in turn is creating a demand for monumental revisions affecting every social institution at almost every level.”*

Our culture has undergone a moral revolution that can trace its origins back to the 1960’s during what became known as “The Sexual Revolution.”

R.C. Sproul - *“Gael Greene, in her book ‘Sex and the College Girl,’ stated that she had discovered a radical shift in the mores or the behavioral patterns of the coeds. Her findings indicated a change in conscience among college girls. In the 1950’s, Greene noted, if a single girl was known to be active sexually, it destroyed her reputation, but when the sexual revolution of the 1960’s came along, everything reversed so that a woman feared that her reputation would be destroyed as a result of not being sexually active. Virginity had become the great shame of the unmarried young woman.”*

Here in verse 27, Jesus upholds God’s view of the gift of sex and the sanctity of marriage, a view which totally goes against the spirit of the age in which we live.

We had better be prepared in the church today, because we are going to deal with things that no generation before us in America has ever had to deal with. Our is the day when up is down, right is wrong, and immorality is the ‘new morality’ and biblical morality is now ‘immorality.’

J. Allen Peterson - *“A call for fidelity is like a solitary voice crying in today’s sexual wilderness. What was once labeled adultery and carried a stigma of guilt and embarrassment now is an affair—a nice sounding, almost inviting word wrapped in mystery, fascination, and excitement. A relationship, not sin...”*

As our society moves away from the seventh commandment in one direction, Jesus moves in another.

Author and pastor Chuck Swindoll gives a simple yet incomplete list of what you have in store after your sexual immorality is found out:

- Your spouse will experience the anguish of betrayal, shame, rejection, heartache, and loneliness
- Your spouse can never say again that you are a model of fidelity; suspicion will rob him or her of trust
- Your escapades will introduce to your life as well as your spouse's the very real probability of a sexually transmitted disease
- The total devastation your sinful actions will bring to your children is immeasurable
- The heartache you will cause your parents, your family, and your friends is indescribable
- The embarrassment of facing other Christians, who once appreciated you, respected you, and trusted you, will be overwhelming
- If you are in ministry, you will suffer the immediate loss of your job and the support of those with whom you worked; the dark shadow will accompany you everywhere even though you are forgiven
- Your fall will give others a license to do the same
- Your sin will rob you of inner peace and joy
- The name of Jesus Christ, whom you once honored, will be tarnished, giving the enemies of the faith further reason to sneer and jeer

Proverbs 6:27-33 - "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...He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away."

Adultery is a violation of a covenant relationship. God likened Israel to an adulterous wife in the Old Testament because of their constant unfaithfulness to Him. It is character that is unlike Him in every conceivable way.

2. The DESIRE of the heart

“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

I think that it is helpful at this point to clear up some misconceptions:

- Sexual desire is NOT the same thing as sexual lust
- Sexual temptation is NOT the same thing as sexual lust

Martin Luther - *“I can’t keep the birds from flying over my head, but I can keep them from building a nest in my hair.”*

“Lustful Intent” - *refers to a continuous process of looking*

Jesus is speaking of an intentional gaze with the purpose of imagining and satisfying evil desire. Such a lustful look does not cause a man to commit adultery; he has already committed adultery in his heart. It is not lustful intent that causes sin in the heart; it is sin in the heart that causes lustful intent.

Matthew 15:19 - **“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”**

In many ways, the outward actions of adultery and immorality are symptoms of a greater problem. Sins are the symptoms of a disease called sin. It is the disease that kills, not the symptoms.

Sin is DECEPTIVE—it fools us into thinking that so long as we have not committed the act we are okay

Sin is DEGENERATIVE—it has corrupted all of our faculties and desires

Sin is DESTRUCTIVE—lust gives birth to sin, and when full grown, brings forth death

Illustration of David and Bathsheba, Amnon and Tamar

Kyle Idleman - *“When something good becomes a god, the pleasure it brings dies in the process. Pleasure has this unique trait: the more intensely you chase it, the less likely you are to catch it.”*

Instead of satisfaction, sexual idolatry brings emptiness.

Proverbs 5:3-4 - “For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.”

Proverbs 9:17-18 - “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there.”

Someone has well said, “Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”

Lust in the heart is not something to toy around with. Back in 1989, the notorious serial killer Ted Bundy sat down with Dr. James Dobson for an interview just weeks before he was executed by the state of Florida for his crimes. Bundy confessed to the cameras that his actions began with an addiction to pornography.

3. The DILIGENCE that purity demands

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”

Jesus says that radical steps are necessary to maintain purity in our hearts and lives. He is saying that it is so very important that we need to do whatever it takes to accomplish it.

Jesus says that radical steps need to be taken in dealing with lust—so radical that it involves the gouging out of an eye or the cutting off of a hand!

At first glance, this may not seem to make sense. If the problem is from within the heart, what good will it do to gouge out your right eye or to cut off your right hand?

Jesus is speaking figuratively. The point that He is making here is that we should be diligent to do whatever is necessary to protect ourselves from evil. We should be willing to give up even the most cherished things in our lives if it keeps us from evil.

“Causes You to Sin” - *basically means to cause one to fall or stumble; was used to refer to the bait stick that springs a trap when an animal comes near*

The idea is that anything that causes us to be entrapped should be removed from our lives. This truth is developed all throughout the New Testament:

Romans 6:12-14 - “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

Romans 8:12-14 - “So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

Galatians 5:24 - “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Colossians 3:5 - “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

This is known as “mortification” or the putting to death of both sinful actions as well as sinful attitudes from there those actions spring. This is not a once-for-all action, but an ongoing process in the Christian life.

John Owen - *“You must always be at it while you live; do not take a day off from this work; always be killing sin or it will be killing you.”*

How do I put to death sinful attitudes and actions? Here are some steps:

- Yield yourself to the Holy Spirit’s control
- Understand that the battle is a daily battle that never ends
- Make no provision for your flesh
- Put on the armor of God
- Guard your heart
- Starve your flesh and feed your spirit
- Live in accountability and close community with other believers
- Preach the gospel to yourself every day

Job 31:1 - “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?”

We need to realize that what we do with our eyes and what we do with our limbs can affect the eternal destiny of our souls.

1 Corinthians 6:9 - “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

In light of this, Paul says a few verses later, “Flee sexual immorality!”

Think of the weight of what Jesus is saying in these verses here in the Sermon on the Mount! My soul, your soul, is so valuable and important that if even something as precious as your eye or your hand causes you to stumble, it is better for you to part with it than to lose your soul.

A tragedy of tragedies it is that many people will lift up their eyes in hell one day all because some forbidden relationship, a pornography addiction, or an unbiblical lifestyle was more precious to them than life in Christ.

Luke 14:26 - “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

This means that it doesn't matter who or what it is that comes between me and Jesus, if it is harmful to my soul, I must do away with it!

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones - *“Our Lord here shows us that the importance of the soul and its destiny is such that everything must be subservient to it...Do we all realize that the most important thing we have to do in this world is to prepare ourselves for eternity?”*

I'd be better off being blind in one eye HERE if it means that I stand before Christ complete one day THERE. I would be better off losing everything in this life HERE if it meant that I gain life eternal THERE.