

## **The Citizen's Pure Heart**

**Matthew 5:27-30**

### **Introduction**

The theme of Christ's Sermon On The Mount is true righteousness. True righteousness is that standard of behavior that God finds acceptable and is demonstrated in the heart and the words and the works of Jesus. Since true righteousness is pictured in Jesus it must be practiced by the Citizen's in Christ's Kingdom. Remember righteousness is inward. But so is sin. The Citizen in Christ's Kingdom is not simply interested in keeping the rules but is interested in being kept in his heart or her heart by the power of purity. You will remember that the pure in heart will see God (v.8). Remember righteousness is first inward and then outward. The Lord Jesus began by looking at anger (vv.21-26) and now turns his attention to the subject of lust (vv.27-32). Later Jesus will speak about deception (vv.33-37) and retaliation (vv.38-48).

The law said, "Do not commit adultery". Just like the seeds of murder is anger in the heart; the seeds of adultery is lust in the heart. What do anger and lust have in common? Both are powerful motivators. Murder traces its roots to anger; moral seduction traces its roots to wandering eyes. What was Jesus' solution to murder? We must deal with our anger. What is Jesus' solution to adultery? We must deal with lust.

**Lust like anger will seek to consume and control our lives. Lust and anger degrade and devalue people—by seeing them as objects for consumption or personal satisfaction rather than beings made in the image of God.**

Thou shalt not kill is the sixth commandment. Thou shalt not commit adultery is the seventh commandment. Our family provides the basis and guarantee for all organized society and civil life. There is a reason why God prohibits adultery! In God's Kingdom activities that weaken and pervert and distort and destroy the family is forbidden. Marriage is sacred in God's eyes. God ordains marriage. God invented marriage. Marriage is not simply a social or cultural construct invented by man and accepted by God.

The late Pauline Phillips (1918-2013) wrote under the pen name Abigail Van Buren; in her famous column she posted this; "Dear Abby, I'm in love and I'm having an affair with two different women. I can't marry them both. Please tell me what to do, but don't give me any of that morality stuff." Abby replied; "Dear Sir, the only difference between humans and animals is morality. Please write to a veterinarian." C.S. Lewis wrote that "Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues."

And so it is. We live in a sexualized society where even Christians are beginning to believe that sexual freedom trumps all other freedoms. But what does Jesus have to say?

### **The Act Of Adultery (v.27)**

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*Matthew 5:27 (NKJV) 27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'*

Moses received the law about 1400 B.C.(Ex.20:14). Jesus told his audience that anger without cause is murder. Now he says that longing for sexual relations with someone other than husband or wife is the same as adultery. When you do either—you despise God's Law and God's name.

Adultery means "marriage breaker". It has to do with breaking vows. We Christians must keep our promises and make a commitment to purity of heart. Marriage is a covenant for life. Remaining pure in both thoughts and deeds is the standard that God expects.

We see a number of Old Testament characters who experienced on going battles with lust; the Judge Sampson, the King David and the King's Son Absalom. The New Testament character King Herod Antipas allowed lust to carry him to the extreme measure of murdering John the Baptist (Matt. 14:6).

Even some of the ancient philosophers opposed lust on moral grounds; because they thought virtue rather than lust should dominate one's thinking and feelings and actions. Others thought lust was healthy and human.

In the ancient world of Greek mythology Ares the god of war is Aphrodite's lover. Aphrodite was the goddess of sexual expression. She was the goddess of lust.

But Jesus is not simply content to argue mythology or morality or ethics—he will speak to the issue of purity of heart. In our culture, we still worship at the altars of violence and lust through the Media of the internet, television, videos, theaters. We don't have to go to a pagan temple. We have cable.

### **The Attitude Of Adultery (v.28)**

*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.*

The Lord Jesus dismisses the idea that adultery is limited to the physical act of infidelity. He goes further and reveals the truth that inner desire for immoral experiences of sin is a violation of the marriage covenant! The goal of the commandment was not simply to prohibit sexual immorality but to affirm sexual purity!

The Greek word that translated *lust* is *epithumeo* and simply means a strong desire. The Bible uses the same word to describe strong desires for either good things or bad things. In Luke's gospel (17:22) Jesus predicted the time would come where his disciples "will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man". We might think of this as the time would come when his disciples would long for just one more day with Jesus here on the earth in his earthly ministry.

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But it can also be used to describe a craving, a longing, for something unhealthy, evil, wicked. Paul uses the word in 1 Corinthians 10:6-7; in warning the Corinthians against idolatry and evil things; “We should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them.”

The problem of lust begins with the lingering look. When Jesus says, “that whoever looks at a woman”—translates the Greek verb blepo—it means to look—and then to keep looking.

“The most common stimulator of this sin is the eyes, and from the gaze of the eyes comes the passion of the heart” (Spiros Zodhiates; Exegetical Commentary on Matthew; p.44). The heart is the center of our thought life; our will; our emotions.

The act of adultery begins in the mind. The inward thought becomes consent in the mind.

Jesus condemns coveting people sexually!

What's the harm in looking? Ask King David.

We now know that the lingering look changes our brain chemistry and neural pathways. We know that prolonged exposure to pornographic images rewire our brains.

Will all people who are exposed to explicit sexual images act out?

Remember the context. Jesus is speaking about righteousness in a future kingdom.

### **The Avoidance Of Adultery (vv.29-30)**

*29If 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.*

What the eye sees the heart often desires.

What is the simple solution to the persistent problem of lust? Stop looking. The way to avoid adultery is to shut your eyes to the images that stimulate and embolden the impure thoughts.

*30And 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.*

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What advice would you give for the person who is in bondage to lust? Advice is what we ask for when we already know the answer but wish we didn't.

Does Jesus actually advocate the removing of one's eye or one's limb in our battle against sin? Some have tragically literally interpreted the text to mean exactly that. Does removing an eye or handicapping a limb have the net effect of prompting purity in mind and body?

Not really.

Jesus is exaggerating a point to make a point. It's called hyperbole.

What are we to do with this figure of speech? Jesus does expect a rigorous resistance to temptation and sin! Jesus knows that sin is in the mind and in the heart. It is the heart and the mind that tells you to keep looking. It is the heart and the mind that you tell you to keep touching.

"The body is simply the instrument that the mind uses to carry out its sinful choices. Many a blind person has adulterous thoughts" (Zodhiates; p. 45).

Jesus repeats the comment twice; "for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

Is this hyperbole as well? Or are there serious consequences for unchecked lust?

Pastor Skip Heitzig in his helpful booklet; *Lust: How To Conquer It*—calls Matthew 5:29-30—damage control! I like that. He writes;

"Get rid of something before it does greater damage later. Look at the comparison between the greater damage and the lesser damage: "If your right eye causes you to sin" (sin being the greater damage because it could result in hell) compared with the lesser damage of plucking out your own eye. It sounds extreme, but the analogy is a good one. Lust is as consequential as cancer that must be cut out before it causes greater damage. . .damage that can lead to death" (see p. 11).

Skip then lists four things:

**Spiritual Damage**  
**Physical Damage**  
**Emotional Damage**  
**Relational Damage**

### **The Spiritual Damage**

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My friend Skip Heitzig points out that lust breaks fellowship with God—he rightly points out the loss of peace; and if the life-style continues without repentance—it provides proof—that you are not a child of God. He quotes 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God”.

He's right. But I would like to add a thought and link that thought to the earlier statement; twice repeated by Jesus about the body being cast into hell.

Remember in the Jewish culture and under the Law of Moses when a person was found guilty of adultery they offender could be stoned.

And what about our world? Is sexual sin a problem? In a survey conducted by Psychology Today one third of married men and women who were questioned about marital fidelity admitted to at least one extramarital affair. And of those in their 40's half of the husbands and wives admitted to sexual contact with someone other than their spouse. On another subject, 44 % of women and 29% of men said they disapproved of having sex with someone they didn't love. Love seems to be the justification for disobeying God!

The church has not escaped the devastation of personal impurity and lust. Forbidden sexual activities haunt the leadership of churches across the country. Leadership Magazine commissioned a poll of 1000 pastors. 12% admitted to adultery while in the ministry—one in eight pastors! 23% admitted to some kind of inappropriate sexual conduct. Christianity Today surveyed 1000 of its subscribers who were not pastors and found the figure nearly double—with 23% of Christians admitting to extra-marital intercourse and 45% admitting to some kind of inappropriate sexual conduct. One in four Christian men were unfaithful, and nearly one-half admitted to some inappropriate behavior. These are shocking statistics when you consider the average reader of Christianity Today is college educated, church leaders, deacons, elders, worship leaders, Sunday School teachers. If these are the statistics for church leaders—what about the congregation at large—and the our culture at large?

This leads to an inescapable conclusion: The Church is Corinthian to the core.

Once again Jesus invites the Citizen of His Kingdom to a radical purity.

In this world lust can cripple us physically. Sexually transmitted diseases include chlamydia, syphilis, gonorrhea, human papillomavirus, HIV Aids.

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Skip offers three ways to radically deal with sin:

1. Burn the Bridges of Temptation.
2. Build Bridges of Accountability.
3. Strengthen Bridges of Affection with your mate.

The Apostle Paul wrote (Colossians 3:5); “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry”.

The character of lust is evil. The character of love is divine. Divine in source; “God is love” (1 John 4:8,16). Love is not only divine in source but definite in its giving; “for God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

### **Conclusion**

Do you want a pure heart?

What does love have to offer?