

# **Jesus and Desire**

**Matthew 5:27-30**

**A sermon by Dr. Calvin Warpula  
preached at the West University Church of Christ,  
Houston, Texas, on June 19, 2011**

This week, my wife, Judy, who is visiting her mother in IL, about 100 miles north of St. Louis, MO, heard a nephew tell the sad story what happened in a Church of Christ in a St. Louis suburb over Memorial Day holiday this year. A 49-year-old elder in the church abandoned his wife and family to take up with a work associate. He unexpectedly moved his things out of the house while his wife was visiting a daughter out of town. He left a note saying that he was unhappy in their 27-yr marriage and that he was leaving. The wife was devastated, as well as their two daughters, one who graduated this year from Freed-Hardeman University and the other who is a master's degree student at Lipscomb University. Sensuality has not only invaded the church of Jesus Christ, it has penetrated the highest levels of leadership.

## **Our Society Is Openly and Blatantly Sensualistic**

Our society is openly and blatantly sensualistic. Powerful voices are advocating the end of restraint and constants in moral questions and relationships. According to them, relationships should last only as long as they are mutually fulfilling. Access to regular sexual satisfaction is a basic human right. The popular media supports these views. Much of our advertising is based on sexual stimulation. Popular songs romanticize infidelity. Movies treat fornication and adultery as adventuresome fun and God's standards as jokes. Cable television brings a river of filth into our homes. Everyone over the age of 18 is assumed to be sexually active. The answer to STDs and AIDS is "safe sex" and condom distribution. Never in the history of the western world, since the time of Greek and Roman paganism, has the state of marriage and sexual morality been so low. The problem is immense. It's all around us, even in the church. Every year I hear of gospel preachers who have left their wives to take up with another woman.

## Jesus Teaches on Adultery and Fornication

Today, in our studies in the Sermon on the Mount, we have come to some very strong teaching of Jesus about sexual desire. In this section of the sermon, Jesus is contrasting kingdom ethics with the commonly interpreted teaching of the laws of God in the OT. Here in six contrasting statements, antitheses, Jesus quotes the commonly accepted emphasis of the scribes and Pharisees and shows us what real righteousness is. In last week's study, we saw that God does not just forbid the physical act of murder, but he also forbids the anger and the hatred that produce it. God wants our hearts to be pure since all evil comes from within. No one has ever committed an evil unless first he or she has thought about it. It is then to the desires and imaginations of our hearts that Jesus turns for righteousness that exceeds mere physicality.

In the teaching on murder, Jesus quotes the sixth commandment, "You shall do no murder." In our message today, the Lord quotes the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery."

Adultery, *moicheia* in the Greek text, in the OT was sexual relations with a woman who is married to someone else. Adultery is a grievous sexual sin because it betrays the promise of a lifelong, exclusive loyalty. In the OT, men could not commit adultery unless the woman was someone else's wife. Sex between unmarried persons was wrong in OT times, and a penalty must be paid for it, but the fine or punishment was not as severe as it was for adultery. The punishment for adultery was death for both parties involved. Adultery was worse than other sexual relations, except homosexuality or bestiality, because it was a sin against marriage and against what belonged to another man, his wife. That's why the OT law said in the Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, your neighbor's wife, your neighbor's donkey, or anything else that is your neighbor's."

When Jesus was speaking here in first century Palestine, adultery was far more common than other fornication. The Greek word *porneia* is translated "sexual immorality" or "fornication." Fornication is a broad umbrella-type word that includes all forms of illicit sexual behavior. Adultery, the Greek *moicheia*, is a specific type of fornication. The reason that adultery was more prevalent than other forms of fornication is that young people married in their middle teenage years and were having children at those ages. Their sexual desires could thus be satisfied within marriage.

Today, we have a different set of problems. Boys and girls are reaching puberty at much younger ages, some as early as ten or eleven years old, and yet the average age to marry is now 27 or 28 years old. That means that for seventeen or eighteen years, if a young person is to be true to God, he or she must control their hormones and passions till they are consummated in marriage. Many, many are not doing that. Today, youth are beginning to have sexual relations at very early ages, have a number of sexual partners throughout high school and college and in their young professional years cohabit in bed and bath with a person or persons that they are not married to.

Jesus particularly here refers to adultery but he also in other places speaks about fornication. Hear the Lord in Matthew 15:19: [read it]. Note that here the Lord condemns both adultery, *moicheia*, and fornication, *porneia*. So just because Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount speaks against adultery does not mean that he does not oppose the sexual practices common today. In fact, the apostle Paul names eight lists of sins, and five times *porneia* heads the list. For example, Galatians 5:19-21 says [read it]. Another example is Romans 13:8-14.

We all then should be adequately reminded that sexual immorality of all types, married or unmarried, is condemned by the word of God. The biblical teaching is no sex before marriage, no sex outside marriage, and total, mutually-satisfying sex within heterosexual marriage.

### **God Designed Sex and Says It Is Very Good**

We should be careful to note that God designed sex and that God everything that God made is good and very good (Genesis 1:26-28). The Bible is a book about sex. The Bible upholds marital enjoyment, satisfaction and fulfillment. The creation story brings this out clearly: [read Genesis 2:20-24]. Here the Bible teaches three things:

1. **Exclusive loyalty.** Father, mother and dearest friends take second place.
2. **Lifelong loyalty.** Husband and wife are united to one another.
3. **Bodily loyalty.** Husband and wife become one flesh. They express and seal the union of their hearts and minds with the union of their bodies.

The wisest natural man who ever lived, Solomon, wrote a love poem that graphically speaks of marital love in the Song of Solomon. No plainer, more direct passage in the Bible speaks to the pure and holy desires of a husband wife for each other than I Cor. 7:1-6 [read]. This means that the best sex in the entire world should be between a loving husband and wife in their own bedroom. What God was not ashamed to create, we must not be ashamed to talk about.

### **“Casual Sex” Is a Thieving Lie**

Fornication and adultery are counterfeit sex of what God made holy and sacred between two heterosexual, loving married partners. There is no such thing as “casual sex.” Sex is no mere bodily function. Our bodies are us. Our souls, our totality, are involved (I Corinthians 6:13b-20). In his book, Sex for Christians, Lewis Smedes says that in sexual intimacy there is “such explosive self-giving, such personal exposure, that few people can feel the same toward each other afterward.” He says, “When two bodies are united, two persons are united. Nobody can go to bed with someone and leave his soul parked outside. The soul is in the act.”

(Lewis Smedes, Sex for Christians: The Limits and Liberties of Sexual Living, rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994, pp. 105-6, 110-11).

Therefore, the trouble with extramarital sex is that it is “a life-uniting act committed without life-uniting intent.” It is not just adultery. It is a thieving lie. Intimacy is a sign and a seal of the union of two lives. But outside of marriage, the act and the intent clash. Intimacy of body and intimacy of soul go together. This is why adultery—as well as other sexual relations outside of marriage—is wrong.

(Daniel M. Doriani, The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2006, pp. 63-64).

### **Jesus Probes into the Imaginations and Fantasies of Our Hearts**

Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes much deeper than just physical adultery. Some men have the idea that because they have not literally touched another woman or women think that though they have not touched another man, that they are not condemned. Jesus says that if we

look at a woman “with lustful intent” (ESV) that we have committed adultery with her in our hearts. Of course, the same applies to women looking at men as well. Jesus enters into our thought processes. He probes inside our imaginations and says that the lustful leering and imaginative fantasies of our hearts are the same before God as it we had committed the physical acts.

According to this definition, I do not know of any man that has not committed adultery. And I’m sure that many women have also. Please do not feel smug or self-righteous because you have not committed the act of adultery. According to Jesus, I would say that almost all of us have sinned against God in our hearts.

According to Greek scholars, the Greek grammar here indicates that this man looks at a woman for the purpose of lust. The English Revised Version says “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent.” This means that the desires of sex are already there. Those desires are God-given, just as much as any other physical, social or spiritual needs or desires that God gives. It is not wrong then to think sexual thoughts or to be sexual. It is part of being human, alive and healthy. Men and women are naturally attracted to each other because of the God-given natures of their bodies. There is nothing wrong, unholy, or impure about those desires. Do not then feel guilty because you have sexual thoughts.

But the problem is when those desires, imaginations or thoughts are used in an unholy way. Jesus does not say that men should not look at women. In Jesus’ time, there was a group called “the blind and bleeding Pharisees” who every time they saw a woman closed their eyes and thus they walked into posts, walls, and pillars and bloodied and bruised themselves. There is nothing wrong with admiring a beautiful woman, or for a woman to dress attractively. The problem comes when a woman dresses seductively or when a man’s eyes begin to wonder up and down a woman’s body and he begins to imagine sexual fantasies with her. The man-made lust is the problem, not the God-given desire.

It is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, and yet never sinned. If temptation was a sin, then Jesus was a sinner. So do not beat yourself up with guilt because you have desires or because you are tempted. Sin comes when we yield to those temptations and allow desires to grow into lust. The Bible says our desires can grow into lusts [read James 1:13-15]. It is when the desire is lured and enticed, that is, when natural desire grows into sexual imaginations and fantasies where we imagine ourselves sexually enjoying someone else’s body that we have no right to, that sin occurs.

## Jesus Tell Us How to Avoid Lusts

Jesus does not just tell us that sexual desires are wrong, but he positively tells us what we can do to keep ourselves from going over the cliff and falling into sin. Verses 28-29 are some of the strongest, most direct, most compelling words in Scripture. Listen to Jesus [read 5:29-30).

Now this is obviously hyperbole (an exaggeration) to emphasize a point. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and God does not want us mutilating our bodies. You know this is hyperbole because Jesus only mentions the right eye and the right hand. If the problem is literally in the eye and the hand, then what about the left eye and the left hand? They would be just as liable to sin. And, if a person were to literally gouge out both his eyes, and cut off both his hands, he could still feel the touch of a woman with other parts of his body. He could still hear a woman's voice with his ears. Is he to cut off his ears? No matter how many limbs or body parts he amputates or gouges out, he could still have vivid imaginations in his mind. What Jesus says here is not to be taken literally, but it is to be taken seriously.

Our eyes and our hands are precious parts of our bodies and to think of amputating them or gouging them out is a horrible thought. Yet, Jesus says that it is better to do that than to have your entire life destroyed in hell. The word "hell" is the Greek *gehenna*, a word derived from the Valley of Hinnon southeast of Jerusalem where in olden times garbage, dead bodies of animals, and other waste and filth were thrown. Fires were burning there all the time. Maggots and worms were always eating on the decaying flesh. Jesus speaks of *gehenna* (hell) ten times in the Scriptures. If we believe in Jesus, we must believe in hell because he did and he warned us about it. What Jesus is saying is that any price a person has to pay to not go to hell is worth it.

If sin is entering through the eye gate, then gouge out your eye. If sin is entering through the hand, then cut off your hand. In other words, get rid of anything that is causing you to sin. It is better to get rid of it and be free from sin, then to enjoy it, pleasure in it and to end up in eternal torment, lost and separated from God forever. Any thing you have to give up or any price you pay to be free from sin, is worth it. Sin will take you straight to hell, and anything you have to do to stay away from sin or avoid it, do it, and do it now.

## **Each Person Is to Avoid Anything That Causes Lusts**

So this means that every person needs to look at his or her life and ask, “What is it that causes me to lust? What is it that causes me to commit mental adultery?”

The answer varies for different people. Whatever it is for you, or for me, we need to get it out of our lives lest it take us totally and wholly to hell.

It may be that we need to not have cable television, or the internet, or access to chat rooms, or pass by the magazine rack in the store, or read racy, stimulating novels, or go to movies that show sexual acts, or go to the beach or swimming pool where men and women are scantily clothed. It may be that we will need to train our eyes to look at a woman’s eyes and keep eye contact with her and not look her up and down. It may be that we may not be able to hug a person of the opposite sex, or touch their arms. We may have to not walk behind a woman. We may have to close our eyes or turn our heads when a woman with a plunging neckline bends over. It may be that we cannot go to dances where we handle the opposite sex. It may be that we cannot read the Victoria Secrets’ catalogs or even thumb through a department store catalog featuring women’s lingerie.

I do not know what it is for you. I am not here today to give you a list of what you can and cannot do except as it is specifically given by the Lord or his apostles. I know what stimulates me. You know what stimulates you. So each of us must cut off our right hand or gouge out our right eye. I am not here to gouge out your eye or cut off your hand. You are to do that for yourself. Any price you have to pay to stay out of hell is worth it. No pleasure, no sex, no lust is worth going to hell forever for.

## **Jesus Died and Rose Again to Save All Sinners**

Does this mean that sexual sin will send a person to hell? Yes. Does this mean that if you have sinned sexually, either mentally or physically, that you will go to hell? Not necessarily. The good news of the gospel is that no matter what you have done, how many times you have lusted or committed sexual sin, or wanted to, that God loves you and that Jesus Christ died on the cross so that your sins can be forgiven (I Timothy 1:15; I Corinthians 15:3). God can and will and does forgive every sin we repent of when we turn to Jesus for forgiveness (Acts 2:38). If God can save the Corinthians in all their sexual messes, then he can surely save, purify and sanctify you, too (I

Corinthians 6:9-11). No sin, from adultery to fornication to homosexuality, is unforgivable except the sin you will not repent of.

The sins that send us to hell are the sins that we habitually practice and deliberately refuse to repent of and that we die in that condition, without God, without Christ, and without hope. But no person need go to hell. Jesus died on the cross to keep you and me out of hell. The good news today is that no matter who you are, what you have done, where you have been, how much you have sinned, you can be forgiven and made as clean and pure before God as the day you were born. You can be spiritually born again and become a new creature in Jesus Christ (John 3:3-5; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:3-4).

As long as we live we will struggle with the flesh. Our spirit wars against the sinful nature (Galatians 5:16-26). They will always be in conflict throughout our lives. But, thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 8:1-4).

Turn to Jesus. There is help for you. There are also support groups for sexual anonymous, like there are for overeaters anonymous, alcoholic anonymous, and gamblers anonymous. You can get help. There are good, Christian, moral counseling services that can help you. Help is available for whatever you are struggling with. You do not need to suffer alone. Sometimes sexual addictions need professional help and there is nothing to be ashamed of for getting help any more than there is for going to a doctor for a physical problem, illness or addiction.

Today, Jesus stands before us all and says, "Whosoever will. . ." That means you, me, all of us. "Whosoever will" may come. Come now, while we stand and sing.

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