

The Inward Battle with Lust

Galatians 5:22-23; Matthew 5:27-30

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King David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). He was the human agent used by the Holy Spirit to give unto us an inspired Psalter from which we sing every Lord's Day. He was also a man of faith and courage in leading the armies of Israel to victory over the Philistines when as a teenager he stood fearlessly before the giant, Goliath, and ran toward the giant with a sling shot smiting him in the forehead and striking off his head with the giant's own sword. What a glorious day that was for David through the power of God.

However, there was another day—a day of great shame—when David fell into the sin of adultery, which then led to the murder of Bathsheba's husband in seeking to cover his adultery with her. And it all started with a lustful gaze in desiring the woman he saw bathing (whether he saw her through a window in her home or on her own roof, it would appear she was culpable to some extent in putting herself in a situation in which she might be seen by the king, and she did in fact become a willing participant in this act of adultery—she was not raped).

Rather than running away from the temptation, David lingered in his gaze, for “the woman was very beautiful to look upon” (2 Samuel 11:2). David's initial glance that caught his eye became a lingering gaze of lust to have her. And though David did repent and confess his grievous sin to the Lord and did come to rejoice in the forgiveness of a loving God (as can we all), he did find the consequences of his sin followed him throughout his life in the death of children, in the incestuous rape of his son against his daughter, and in the betrayal of his son in seeking to take the throne by force.

Dear ones, when the wall of self-control falls and lust breaks through, there is no end to the possible misery that lust will bring into your life and family and to your testimony for Jesus Christ. Who would have guessed that such a man of faith and a man after God's own heart would fall into such a sin? But dear ones, that is the lure and deception of lust—it promises pleasure and fulfillment, but delivers pain and heartache. Our pride even tells us that it won't happen to us (1 Corinthians 10:12).

The main points of the sermon this Lord's Day are: (1) Outward Immorality Begins in the Heart with Lust (Matthew 5:27-28); (2) Defending Yourself against Lust Requires Extreme Measures (Matthew 5:29-30).

I. Outward Immorality Begins in the Heart with Lust (Matthew 5:27-28).

A. As we consider the words of the Lord spoken here in the Sermon on the Mount, let us understand the thrust of Christ's sermon more generally before considering the words of the Lord concerning lust more particularly.

1. The Lord's Sermon on the Mount is a sermon about sin and righteousness. For the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus Christ is a gospel of grace that is received by those who are convinced that they have transgressed God's Law and are sinners, who are convinced that they cannot save themselves, who are convinced that they are under God's holy wrath, and who are convinced that there is only salvation through trusting alone in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. This is what the Lord Jesus labors to convey in the Sermon on the Mount.

2. The scribes and the Pharisees believed they were righteous before God on the basis of their own law-keeping, and they defined law-keeping to mean obedience to "the letter of the law" (don't

murder, commit adultery, etc.). For that reason Christ makes it clear that transgressing the Law of God is not merely murder, but is the anger within the heart that leads to murder (Matthew 5:21-22), and that sinning against God is not merely committing adultery, but is the lust within the heart that leads to adultery (Matthew 5:27-28). Dear ones, one does not have to murder or commit adultery to be found guilty and worthy of eternal damnation—even the anger or lust within makes one guilty and worthy of eternal damnation. Most people consider themselves good and worthy of heaven because they have not committed these outward sins, but Jesus pierces to the innermost part of our being (that no one can see but God Himself) and declares that our hearts by nature are desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9).

3. The Lord Jesus declares that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees (who believed they were righteous before God on the basis of their own obedience to God's Law), "ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). It is not that we are to disregard God's Law and God's commandments (even after we have trusted in Christ and His righteousness alone for our eternal salvation), Christ makes that clear in Matthew 5:17-19. However, it is to say that all our righteousness (both outward and inward) is as filthy rags in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6) apart from the work of Jesus Christ, because we cannot perfectly keep God's Law, and yet we are called to be perfect as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

4. The blessedness of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) is for all you who forsake making yourselves acceptable to God on the basis of your own righteousness and rather accept by faith alone the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ alone as your only ground of acceptance before an absolutely holy God. The religious leaders of Christ's time are accurately portrayed in the parable found in **Luke 18:9**. Thus, the words concerning lust in Matthew 5:27-30 are intended to tear away from us all hope that we are good enough to enter the glory of heaven. We are not,

and that is why Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and not the righteous (i.e. those who think they are righteous).

B. The Lord Jesus begins in Matthew 5:27 with the words, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery....”

1. There is an intended contrast here between “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time” and between “But I say unto you”. The contrast is not at all between the Ten Commandments and the Commandments of the Lord Jesus as if the Ten Commandments and the Commandments of Jesus were at odds with one another. Christ is not redefining the Ten Commandments or giving a new Law to replace the Ten Commandments. That is not the intended contrast at all (Matthew 5:17-19).

2. Christ is rather demonstrating on the one hand how the religious leaders of the Jews merely looked at the strict “letter of the law” (“Thou shalt not commit adultery”) as binding, but on the other hand failed to understand or acknowledge that the true meaning of the Seventh Commandment also pierced to the innermost part of the heart and likewise forbade inward lusts of the heart that lead to adultery.

3. The Greek verb for committing adultery (*moicheuo*) literally refers to having sexual relations with one who is married to another (whether it be you that is lawfully married to another, or whether it be the other person who is lawfully married to another, or whether it be both of you who are lawfully married to others). It was such a serious sin in breaking the marriage covenant that it was also judged by God to be worthy of death—that was the full extent of the law (Leviticus 20:10; Hebrews 13:4). Where unrestrained adultery is permitted within a country, the marriage covenant becomes mere words on a piece of paper that can be ignored and disregarded for whatever reason or for no reason in order to satisfy one’s inward lusts. And without

the sacredness of the marriage covenant the rest of society is cast down into utter corruption, for if that sacred covenant can be willfully broken by adultery, then what covenant in church, state, or business will there be that is sacred? None!

4. But when the Lord God gave the Seventh Commandment, He did not intend to merely prohibit adultery as strictly defined above, but also intended to prohibit all sexual sins that corrupt the body, the eyes, the ears, the lips, the hands, and the heart of a person (whether all forms of fornication between singles, whether homosexuality, whether incest, whether adultery, whether polygamy, whether bestiality, whether masturbation, whether looking at pornography, whether listening to immoral lyrics in a song or uttering that which is sexually immoral) . All forms of sexual impurity are covered under the divine prohibition of the Seventh Commandment. And this is the point that Jesus is making by revealing lust to be a violation of the Seventh Commandment.

a. Dear ones, let us not be like the Pharisees who sought to justify themselves because they had not strictly committed adultery. If we are to overcome our sin it will not happen by generalizing it as did the Pharisees, but by particularizing it as Jesus here speaks.

b. Our sanctification in the Christian life, our growth in producing the fruit of the Spirit must proceed from a sincere hungering and thirsting to call sin in our lives sin, to not blame others for it, to forsake it by God's grace and power, and to withdraw the immeasurable resources of our inheritance in Christ by faith in order to overcome those sexual sins. Dear ones, there is hope for you and victory for you through Jesus Christ who was crucified and was raised from the dead in order to deliver you from not only the guilt and condemnation of sin, but also from the power of sin in your life (lust).

C. Now the Lord proceeds in Matthew 5:28 to authoritatively declare as God's Son that we are all guilty of breaking the Seventh

Commandment when we sexually desire in our hearts one to whom we are not lawfully bound in marriage (how much more aggravated then is the actual fulfilling of the lusts of the heart in our sinful behavior): “But I say unto you...” “The Pharisees say that, but I say this.”

1. The Greek word translated here as lust (*epithumeo*) literally means desire. This word is even used in a good sense at times for a godly desire (Luke 22:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:17). However, most of the time in the New Testament, this Greek word is used in an immoral sense (as it is used here in Matthew 5:28 by Jesus).

2. The nature of this lusting is made clear by the phrase, “looking at a woman to lust after her”. The word “looking” does not convey a mere glance, a mere look, an awareness that she is there, but rather this “looking” is that of a continuous, long, stare and gaze (it is a participial phrase that is in the present tense) and one with a purposeful view to desiring to be with her, to please yourself immorally with her.

a. To simply look and be aware of someone near you or to look at someone in a photo or someone on the internet or someone in a film is not to lust after that person. Likewise, to observe and acknowledge that someone is attractive is not in its self to lust after that person. If the Holy Spirit notes that certain people were attractive in Scripture (which it does), then we cannot condemn that same observation (Genesis 12:14—**Sarah**; Genesis 24:16—**Rebekah**; 1 Samuel 17:42—**David**; 2 Samuel 14:25—**Absalom**).

b. Jesus seems to be focusing on the long look and gaze, wherein another person is eyed with lust up and down, front and back, desiring to be with that person, longing for that person in one’s heart, with a view to one’s own pleasure (whether the person is on the other side of the room, or in a magazine, or in a film, or on the internet). Here are three examples that violate the words of Christ.

(1) Psychologists and therapists have promoted mental fantasizing that one is with his/her sexual hunk/babe in order to

supposedly spice up intimacy in a marriage, but this is exactly what Christ here condemns as lust (sadly even Christians practice this under the supervision of “Christian therapists”).

(2) Likewise in the Roman Catholic Church (and in certain Protestant Churches) it is not considered immoral to have sexual desires for those of the same gender (in such a case lust is given a different name—sexual orientation).

(3) How many times has it wickedly been said, “Look but don’t touch”, as if the mere looking, gazing, and lusting in the heart is fine—it is only when the looking becomes touching that it becomes sinful, wrong, and immoral.

3. And finally, notice that Jesus says that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her "hath committed adultery with her **already** in his heart." The wording in the Greek language implies that, by the time the long gaze had begun, the adultery in the heart was already going on. In fact, the gaze is simply expressing outwardly the sin that is going on inwardly (Matthew 15:19). In other words, because there is already lust running rampant in the heart, that lust will go seeking its prey to sexually feast upon with the eyes.

4. Dear ones, if it is immoral for you to "look" with lust in your heart (as Jesus herein declares), then is it not also immoral for you to dress immodestly way so as to intentionally attract the lustful stares of others or to flirt with others by the way in which you dress? It is true that one may lust after another who is modestly dressed, but that does not mean that we should dress so as to incite and add fuel to the raging fire of lust within others (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). The world may think that having an affair in the heart is fine, even healthy, but the Lord Jesus condemns it and implies that it is the inward desire that leads to outward adultery. Lust in the heart may not be as aggravated of a sin as is physical adultery (just as anger is not as aggravated of a sin as murder), but if we do not take the serious steps Christ mentions in the next two verses, we

will find ourselves falling into outward sexual behavior that is far more aggravated than mere inward lust.

II. Defending Yourself against Lust Requires Extreme Measures (Matthew 5:29-30).

A. There have been those historically who have taken these words of the Lord Jesus literally to mean that one should blind oneself and maim oneself in order to overcome lust in one's life. But even the blind man and the maimed man can and will likely continue to lust within the heart, because it is not the eye (in its self) or the hand (in its self) from which lust proceeds. It is rather from the heart. The eye and the hand may indeed become servants of unrighteousness and servants of our lusts, but the way to deal with lust is ultimately to deal with the heart. In other words, the words of our Lord (in Matthew 5:29-30) are not to be taken literally but rather figuratively.

B. What did Jesus mean by His words in Matthew 5:29-30?

1. The Lord Jesus says that if our "**right eye**" or our "**right hand**" offends us (and becomes a stumbling block or occasion of sin), we should remove it, cut it off. In scriptural terms the "right eye" or "right hand" would generally be that eye or that hand that was most precious and important to a person—the right eye and right hand was the eye and hand of strength and of honor (Zechariah 11:17; Exodus 15:6; Romans 8:34). In other words, Christ is teaching us that lust is so dangerous that we must take whatever extreme measures are necessary to subdue it—even if it means losing that which is very precious and important to us in this world.

2. For example, if our lust is excited by certain websites, we must cut those websites off (as if removing our right eye). If our lust is stimulated by certain magazines, books, films, programs, places we might

frequent like the beach, or certain friends that lead us into lust, we must cut those tempting situations and persons off (as if cutting off our right hand). For it is better, says the Lord, that we consider heaven more important than any of these worldly things or people that lead us into sin and rather enter heaven without these worldly things than that we keep these worldly things and people and suffer for all eternity in hell. We must count it far better to be deprived of a few temporal comforts, benefits, and friendships than to suffer the loss of eternal life! This is evidence that we have eternal life and love it more than the world.

3. In the words of the Apostle Paul this is simply to put to death our lusts or is the outlet for our lusts (Romans 8:12-14). It is to account ourselves as dead corpses to our lusts, and alive to the power and new life of Jesus Christ. Where your treasure is there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:21). Where is your heart? You can tell by where your treasure is and that which you act as though you cannot live without.

C. Let me leave you with some practical steps to fortify the wall of godly self-control against the enemy of lust.

1. Commune with Christ daily. Live in the presence of Christ throughout the day. Pray without ceasing. Read and memorize Scripture. Call upon the Lord with all earnestness and haste to help you, realizing that it is through the resurrection power of Christ alone that you can overcome the lusts within your heart. Pray for Christ to give you a holy hatred for lust and all temptation to lust.

2. Be ready for this battle with lust every day. Know that the battle is already won through the death and resurrection of Christ and that the resources to overcome the enemy are already deposited into your spiritual account in heaven. By faith withdraw the fruit of the Spirit that is needed to overcome lust.

3. When a lustful desire comes, learn to be aware of it, and seek to replace it with a holy desire, or a holy word, or a holy deed (to be

thankful for all the blessings of God, to pray for those who need Christ, to pray for the ministry of the Church, to write a letter or make a phone call to encourage a brother or sister, to apply your mind to your study or your work, to exercise your body with vigor). In other words, do something good by God's grace. Don't be idle.

4. Avoid known occasions of temptation if at all possible (whether magazine stands, strip joints, internet sights, seductive movies, songs, and books, or staring at seductive, flirtatious people, put filters on your computer, and remove the TV if it is a stumbling block).

5. Ask someone you trust to pray with you and to help you be accountable in avoiding all known occasions to lust.

6. Make a covenant with your eyes before the Lord (Job 31:1).

7. If you are married, do not allow disagreements to continue lest you begin to think the grass is greener elsewhere. Don't do in secret what you would not do if your wife/husband were looking over your shoulder, or if Christ were visibly in the same room with you.

8. If you are unmarried, realize that how you presently conduct your lusts is preparation for being faithful or unfaithful in your heart and life to your future wife/husband. Do you seek to treat those of the opposite gender as brothers and sisters or as lustful toys for your imaginations and desires?

9. Never forget that Christ is your righteousness and He is interceding in heaven for you at that very moment that your faith would not fail in spite of you are failure. Be more preoccupied with Christ than with your lust. Daily remember and take up these twin truths: Without Christ I can do nothing (John 15:5), but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). All of the previous fruit of the Spirit are given to you to fortify this final fruit of the Spirit of temperance/self-control.

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