

# Matthew: The Life & Teaching of Jesus the Messiah

Lakewood Presbyterian Church

**Key Idea:** *Adultery, like all sin, begins in the heart and leads to eternal destruction. This sin is so serious that we must be willing to eliminate all those places and situations in our lives which lead toward or into sexual sin.*

## Lesson 23 Matt. 5:27-30 If Looks Could Kill (4-19-26)

Why are American evangelicals so seemingly ineffective in transforming the culture round about them? Do we lack the right message, the right spokesmen, the right analysis, the right solutions, or perhaps something yet deeper--the right sort of integrity? For if the numbers mean anything, the example of pro-abortion activists and homosexual agitators show that vocal, intensely focused minorities can redirect and overturn the morés of entire nations in short order--and at that for such detestable evils--whereas the church of today, those who claim the name of Christ and ostensibly his lordship, are all too often pale reflections of the divorce rates, adulteries, and cultural trends of the society around them. Yet being Salt and Light demands more than saying we believe the Bible or eschewing pluralism as unbiblical nonsense. It means living by the standards of all God's Word. It means living with a consistent biblical integrity. And that means being radically countercultural in the area of our culture most given to lawlessness and selfdestructive behavior.

But while adultery and divorce are but the most recognizable symptoms of a decaying, sin-sick society, God's people cannot expect to transform this situation nor preserve their own families by their own efforts alone. We are not self-sanctified. A life of integrity and obedience begins with confession and reliance upon the Holy Spirit through prayer; and discipleship, sexual purity, and stable marriages must begin on our knees every day, for it is He "who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13).

### I. Adultery

This week we continue to look at the *normative* aspect of Christian ethics, the standard by which Jesus' disciples are known as salt and light is shown to be light. As we unpacked their relationship last week, the Six Antitheses are Jesus' authoritative correction and reconfirmation of several examples of the Mosaic Law over against how this same ethical instruction had been distorted or externalized by the scribes, Pharisees, and rabbis who came before them. As Jesus makes it clear, the ethical and legal material of all the Old Testament continues to be authoritative today, down to even the least commandment, jot, or tittle (5:18) unless he tells us otherwise. So we should not be surprised that after dealing with the 6th and 7th commandments---murder and adultery, respectively--he moves on to address a particular **case law application** of the 7th commandment, the Old Testament view on divorce, and so recovers its teaching in opposition to the scribes and Pharisees who had sought to relax or loosen the same Old Testament stipulations.

<sup>27</sup>You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." <sup>28</sup>But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus' quote of how the 7th commandment (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:17) was understood is remarkable for its brevity, for what it *does not* say. The key word here is **commit**, for apparently the rabbis were attempting to limit the scope of the commandment to the \_\_\_\_\_ act of adultery alone, or as Stott puts it, they gave "a conveniently narrow definition of sexual sin and a conveniently broad definition of sexual purity" (p. 87). Jesus, however, will not allow this sort of casuistry.

#### A. Jesus restores the full intent and measure of Old Testament law:

When Jesus speaks of not looking at a woman--or man, for that matter--lustfully, he is not speaking of sexual relations within the proper confines of marriage. Clearly both the Song of Solomon and Paul's counsel to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 7) affirm the holiness of natural marital relations. In fact, he does not even forbid *looking* at a woman. What he does forbid is *all forms* of sexual desire outside of marriage, what the Old Testament had already taught.

How is the Old Testament concerned with inner as well as outer holiness?

Exodus 20:17 \_\_\_\_\_

Job 31:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Proverbs 6:25 (cf. I Corinthians 6:18) \_\_\_\_\_

In both the world of the Old Testament and Jesus' own day, this emphasis upon inner holiness was quite radical. It also forbid a double standard of ethics between the two sexes. Leon Morris describes the ancient world's deprecation of women as sexual property:

In the ancient world generally it was held that a married man could have sexual adventures as long as they did not involve a married woman (which would mean violating the rights of her husband). A woman, however, was expected to have no such relations; she should be chaste before marriage and faithful after it. The command Jesus cites makes no distinction; people of both sexes were to remain faithful.

*The Gospel According to Matthew*, pp. 117-118.

How is this double standard perpetuated today? Among our leaders? In the church? By radical feminists? \_\_\_\_\_

#### B. Jesus' emphasis is upon the heart:

Like murder which begins with hate, so adultery begins in one's imagination, in one's innermost places. Why? Because the heart is the center of one's being, the place from which everything about us comes. For in contrast to the pure in heart (5:8), the natural tendency of our hearts is to be a place of \_\_\_\_\_. This is why Jesus says, "What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean . . . thoughts of sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly" (Mark 7:20-22).

What is the relation between the eyes and the heart? \_\_\_\_\_

If sin begins in the heart, then it must be dealt with at the source. As Stott puts it, "fantasies of shame precede deeds of shame" (p. 88). In what way, then, did both David and Solomon, two prominent Old Testament men of God, fail to guard their hearts?

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How as Christians are we susceptible to the same failures?

<sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>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.

**C. Jesus' prescription for sin: Remove the sources of temptation:**

Even blind men can lust, so it is quite unlikely that Jesus' hyperbolic language encourages self-mutilation. However, it does encourage *mortification*, denying the flesh opportunities to break forth into lust. For different people this will require different approaches since many of us will be stronger or weaker than others in dealing with sexual temptation or the sort of stimuli which leads to lust. There will also probably be a significant difference between the two sexes as well, since men and women are made somewhat differently, respond differently, and are made to complement one another. Both, however, need to be aware of the other's tendencies.

How seriously must one go about removing the sources of temptation (Hint: Why the warning about hell)? \_\_\_\_\_

What does it mean to remove a hand? A foot? Or an eye?

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Stott commends setting up sentries about one's heart. What practical applications might he have in mind? \_\_\_\_\_

**One last word: The best defense is a good offense!**

1. Cultivating a loving relationship with one's spouse.
2. The necessity of an accountability partner of the same sex.
3. The power of prayer--the powerlessness of a prayerless life.

**Next Week:**

**Fidelity in Singleness & Marriage--Divorce: Matthew 5:31-32**