

Who Is an Adulterer? Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 5:27–30

Code: 2216

REVIEW

As Jesus gives a message on the divine definition of sin, the truth of Numbers 32:23, ("...be sure your sin will find you out,") is experienced by the Jewish leaders and the rest of the people listening to Christ. Jesus unmaskes their hypocrisy, revealing the truth about the sinful heart of man. They had done what man has always done: invented a self-righteous system of human achievement that is based on their own standards and thereby enables them to justify themselves. The Judaism of Jesus' day had substituted their own external rules for the divine standard that took into account the motive of the heart. For this reason, Jesus faces them with a standard they can't keep because of the problem of sin for which they have no remedy. He says, "Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect" (Mt. 5:48), demanding a righteousness for His Kingdom that they could never attain on their own. In this way, He is forcing them to see their need of a Savior, knowing full well He will offer Himself as that Savior. He begins to accomplish this by contrasting their definition of sin with God's definition of sin, and their standard of righteousness with the divine standard. Revealing that God has always been primarily concerned about the heart and a relationship of love, Jesus shows that the commandment of God was a lot broader than they thought--they had narrowed it down only to the external, and our Lord drives it in to the internal.

INTRODUCTION

In this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus began with a message about blessedness in 5:3-12. However, in order for His listeners to know that blessedness, He realized that they also needed to understand the proper definition of sin, because sin stands in the way of blessing, and therefore has to be dealt with and removed. And so from blessedness to a doctrine of sin the Lord makes a transition.

Now, let me just say in general before we look at the passage itself that it's essential to deal with sin. You cannot preach Christ and present the gospel unless you deal with sin and give its proper definition, because sin is the barrier between God and man. If we do not properly understand sin, we will not understand anything else that God does. It is important to see...

A. The Relationship of Sin to Salvation

Unless one understands the truth about sin, he can never understand the truth about salvation. The Pharisees and the scribes had such a superficial view of sin that they were able to accommodate it with a superficial view of salvation. They saw sin as simply a matter of what one did, therefore salvation also became a matter of what one did. So, in their minimal definition of sin, they were left with a minimal requirement for salvation, which they then assumed they could accomplish. Had they seen sin as a problem deep down in the heart, they would have known that it was far beyond their ability to change.

And so it is that the more we comprehend the heinousness of sin, the more we understand the necessity of salvation--the deeper the disease, the greater the remedy. As long as people think of sin superficially, then salvation is a minor thing, too. But when you understand, as our Lord is saying, that sin is something heinous that penetrates into the warp and woof of a man's being so deeply that it is absolutely unchangeable except by a miracle, then you'll understand that only God can bring salvation. Sin is so powerful and so deeply entrenched in man, that only Jesus Christ can change it.

That is the message of Romans 3-6.

B. The Relationship of Sin to Sharing

Second, unless you understand the truth about sin, you will never understand the right approach to the proclamation of the gospel.

1. Superficial Approaches to Evangelism

What we have in our Christian culture today are very superficial gospel presentations with emphases upon methodology and obtaining pie-in-the-sky happiness. Some call it "easy believism," others call it "cheap grace." There are people running around with self-centered, emotional appeals. I really feel that behind this is a failure to grapple with the reality of the heinousness of sin, because if we understand the power of sin, then we know it isn't enough to tell somebody, "Why don't you just accept Jesus and He'll make your life happy? Would you like to go to heaven and be happy and have peace and joy and everything? Just sign on the dotted line and say you believe in Jesus and pray a little prayer."

2. The Scriptural Application of Evangelism

a. The Summary If we really understood how deeply stained with sin men's hearts are and how powerful the hold of sin is so that it casts men into an eternal hell, then our evangelism would be more directed at the damning character of sin before it comes to the point of inviting them to make a decision. Those with whom we share Christ must understand the problem, which is why, biblically speaking, evangelism always begins by presenting the law before grace. You must present the reality of judgment and condemnation for sin so that people understand the need for salvation. b. The Specifics 1) The Pattern of Paul We should follow the pattern of Romans, which begins this way: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..." (Rom. 1:18a). Paul starts out by condemning in chapter 1, and condemns again in chapters 2 and 3 so that "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19b). Then comes the good news about the righteousness of Christ that is available to us. There must be a preaching of the divine standard of the holy law, before there can be the message of how we come to know the relationship with Christ that makes that possible. Consequently, I believe our evangelism must confront people with the holiness of God. It must reveal His demands for a heart righteousness, focusing on man's inability to meet God's standard. We must make men desperate like Jesus wanted to make the Pharisees, the scribes, and the multitude so that they stand in fear of the doom of judgment, crying out for a Savior who can deliver them from a problem too deep for them to handle. 2) The Preaching of Jesus Now that was Jesus' approach: It was basically designed to drive men to desperation. More than anybody else in the whole Bible, Jesus preached about hell. People don't like to even talk about it, but He preached that sin sends people to an eternal hell, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mk. 9:44), and where "...there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 13:42b). Jesus preached about hell, because that's where the understanding of the gospel had to begin. Evangelism and proclamation must start with the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. Only then will the demands of that holy God show hopeless and helpless man, who can't fulfill them, the inevitability of punishment and the ultimate reality of hell. Then, when a sinner understands that the only escape is for someone else to come along and change his vile heart, Jesus Christ can move in and offer the deliverance that He alone is able to give.

C. The Relationship of Sin to Sanctification

1. The Superficial Perspective

Unless we understand the meaning of sin, we don't know what it is to be made holy in Christ. We don't fully appreciate the tremendous change God has accomplished in us through Christ unless we know what we once were. We can't be thanking and praising Him for that glorious transformation unless we know what an incredible price God paid. Usually, we think we're holy because of the things we do or don't do. So we don't go to certain places, we don't say certain things, and we don't

do the things the world does, believing, therefore, that we are all right. But that is nothing more than the ugly head of self-righteousness, because God is concerned not so much with what we do and say and where we go, as He is with what is behind our words and actions--what we think in our minds and hearts. There are the pious and the self-satisfied who smugly think that because they don't do certain things and do do other things that they are justified, without ever really examining the evil of their hearts.

2. The Scriptural Perspective

As He preaches this great sermon, the Lord Jesus is forcing men to examine their hearts, because holiness is always a matter of the heart.

a. Proverbs 23:7 -- "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...." That's where the divine evaluation takes place. b. Matthew 15:16-19 -- "And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the stomach, and is cast out into the draught [the process of elimination]? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Where do those all originate? In the heart. Before you ever murder, commit adultery, fornicate, or steal, you think it in your heart. It is the heart that spews out the garbage that defiles man because... c. Jeremiah 17:9 -- "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

So our Lord bares the heart, ripping off the facade of the superreligious who would glorify themselves as if they stood absolved and showing them that the primary thing He is concerned with is the heart. His message is the same as that found in the Old Testament: Man is a sinner and that sin is deep down in his heart. Powerless to change that, man is dependent upon God to change his heart, who said through the prophet Ezekiel, "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh" (11:19). A new heart is what a man needs, and that's what Jesus wants those who are listening to understand. Let's examine how He illustrates this truth with the issue of adultery, first considering...

I. THE DEED (v. 27)

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not commit adultery"

A. Its Condemnation

1. In Scriptural Teaching

Exodus 20:14 stated this prohibition, and Deuteronomy 5:18 repeated it: "Neither shalt thou commit adultery." It's very clear--the Bible leaves absolutely no question about this particular sin. The deed is condemned as a wicked manifestation of an evil heart for which the penalty of death was given (Lev. 20:10). So, the Bible clearly teaches that the deed is condemned by God.

2. In Scribal Tradition

You will notice that in our passage in Matthew, it was the rabbinic tradition that had taught "thou shalt not commit adultery." Even they were right. I am not implying that they were wrong, I am only saying that they never went far enough. They admitted that it was a serious crime that God forbade.

B. Its Clarification

Let me define the word adultery for a better understanding. The root means "unlawful intercourse with the spouse of someone else." Many Bible scholars understand this to be not only a command not to engage in sexual activity with somebody else's spouse but also as a general command against any type of illicit sexual activity, because the word is also used in a general way in some other places. For example, in some ancient sources, the word means "to seduce or violate a woman, whether married or unmarried." Other places it is translated "to commit harlotry." In a general sense, the word has been used to speak of any kind of illicit intercourse at all outside the bond of marriage. Though primarily it refers to a sexual relationship that violates a marriage, I believe the spirit of it extends further to include any kind of illicit sexual behavior.

I think the broader definition is indicated in verse 28 when our Lord says that anybody who looks on any woman "to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." And the woman He speaks of here isn't identified as being married or not. The context is broad enough to imply that anybody who lusts after any woman has committed adultery in his heart.

C. Its Consequences

Adultery is a sin that really waves the banner today. It's as if we've just completely turned our backs on the seriousness of the sin. People ought to read Proverbs 5-7 before they ever engage in it, because that passage speaks so pointedly to the devastation caused by the sin of adultery or fornication. It is a sin for fools. Witness David and the results in his life; or Shechem, who defiled Dinah and was later slaughtered; or Absalom, who defiled others with sexual sin and wound up being hanged in a tree. The Bible says that when you commit this sin you take fire into your bosom (Prov. 6:27).

Furthermore, it says that "fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4b). The New Testament reiterates with finality and firmness this condemnation of adultery in such passages as 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 2 Peter 2:14, and Revelation 2:21-23; and Revelation 22:15 says that fornicators and adulterers won't even enter into God's Kingdom. And sexual immorality today is just as vile, heinous, and evil as it was then. I don't care if you're engaged and you believe you love each other...whenever sexual union occurs apart from the bond of monogamous heterosexual marriage, it is a heinous crime against God and man. This really needs to be said in our day because people don't believe it.

So the deed is first identified by Jesus, and then He turns to...

II. THE DESIRE (v. 28)

"But I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Now this is a fascinating verse, and there's much I want you to see in it. The Lord forces the self-righteous to realize the fact that they're not really holy. The Pharisees were saying, "We don't commit that sin." But Jesus drives right down into their hearts to reveal the truth of Psalm 66:18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." God is always examining the sin of the heart, which breaks the relationship between Him and man. And so it is that Jesus is concerned about what's on the inside.

A. The Passage Examined

Let's look at some of the terms in this verse.

1. "But I..."

This is emphatic in the Greek with the use of the pronoun ego. Jesus is saying in contrast, "I am the new authority; you have had your authority in the rabbinic tradition. Sometimes it was true to Moses, though sometimes it was not." In fact, He was speaking in such a manner, that when He was finished with the sermon, they were shocked because He spoke with such authority (Mt. 7:28-29).

2. "...whosoever looketh..."

The present participle *blepon* conveys the idea of a continuing process of looking. It isn't the inadvertent, accidental glance...that's not what our Lord is talking about. The purposeful, repeated, lustful looking is what is in view here.

3. "...hath already..."

There is an interesting thing I want you to notice about this verse. Jesus doesn't say that the one who lusts after a woman commits adultery at that point. Rather, He says that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart, because it is the vile, adulterous heart that results in the wanton look. The sin has already happened in the heart...the adultery is conceived and thus the look is prompted.

You may find that someone passes into your gaze involuntarily as a possible temptation from Satan

trying to entice you to sin. But whereas an involuntary glance means you just resist it and turn away, a lustful stare takes place when you cultivate and pursue the sinful desire. Lust is the manifestation of an adulterous heart that is seeking an object to fulfill its fantasy.

4. "...to lust..."

In the Greek, "to lust" appears as *pros to* with the infinitive, which indicates purpose. In other words, this isn't an involuntary glance; it is a purposeful one. The heart is filled with adultery wanting to find an object to attach the fantasy to. For example, you would be looking for a woman to lust after if you go to see an X-rated movie or when you go around the dial on the television to find the thing that panders your lust, because you would be viewing with the purpose of filling the adulterous desire in your heart.

The verse, then, could be paraphrased this way: "Emphatically I say to you that whoever continues looking on a woman for the purpose of lusting gives evidence of already committing adultery in his heart." The continued look is the manifestation of the vile heart.

So, Jesus is saying that the heart is the problem, because when a man purposefully looks on a woman to lust after her, he gives evidence of having a vile, lusting, and adulterous attitude.

Therefore, it is the heart that has to be transformed from one that would look upon a woman as an object to gratify its adulterous bent.

B. The Process Explained

1. Succumbing to Temptation

Temptation to illicit sexual desire or fantasy is not sin in itself. Satan may tempt you, but the sin only comes in relation to what you do with the temptation. If you entertain the temptation, pandering those evil thoughts, then it becomes sin. Stier says, "He who experiences at a first glance this desire and then instead of turning away and withdrawing from sin, continues to look in order to retain and increase that impulse, commits the sin." A biblical example of temptation giving birth to sin is found in 2 Samuel 11, where David is walking on his roof. Looking over the side, he sees Bathsheba bathing, who may have never dreamed that she could be seen from the king's palace toward evening. But instead of turning away and going back inside, David continues to look until his adulterous heart brings forth an adulterous lust, ultimately ending in the act of adultery and the murder of her husband.

2. Sowing the Temptation

This process of a temptation becoming a sin is well illustrated in the saying, "Sow a thought and reap an act, sow an act and reap a habit, sow a habit and reap a character, sow a character and reap a destiny." It all starts when you sow a thought. The Bible says, "Unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure..." (Tit. 1:15). A person can take something beautiful and make it something ugly because his heart is defiled. We can see this in the abuse of divinely designed sexual relations. For instance, pornography has in this way permeated every facet of the media and communication: books, magazines, movies, music, television shows, jokes, stories, and so on. Those things become proponents of the abuse of sex, because the heart of man is so evil that it finds ways to pander its adulterous desires.

A.W. Pink has said, "...if lustful looking be so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with desires to be looked at and lusted after--as Jezebel, who painted her face, tired her head, and looked out of the window (2 Kgs. 9:30)--are not less, but even more guilty. In this matter it is only too often the case that men sin, but women tempt them so to do. How great, then, must be the guilt of the great majority of the modern misses who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of our young men. And how much greater still is the guilt of most of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses." Though our Lord is talking about a man lusting after a woman in His illustration, the assumption is accurate that women also can be as guilty as men by creating the temptation in the way that they dress.

3. Shunning the Temptation

I actually fear sometimes when summer comes, because of the impropriety of some people in the way they dress. I don't think it assists the worship of the Lord, and therefore, I am always concerned about that, hoping that other believers are prayerful about their appearance as well. It is no wonder Job said, "I made a covenant with mine eyes. Why then should I think upon a maid?...If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to mine hands, then let me sow, and let another eat..." (31:1, 7-8a). In other words, "If I break the covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully upon a woman, then let me starve." Job recognized that the thought is father to the deed, and that if he allowed his eyes the privilege, they would pander his adulterous heart. His prayer is like that in Psalm 119:37: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity...." So our Lord is saying that the heart has to be dealt with, because the heart is the root of sin. But He doesn't leave us in a hopeless situation; He goes a step further to answer the question, "How do you get out of this situation?"

III. THE DELIVERANCE (vv. 29-30)

"And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

A. Removing the Offense to Sin

Now when you first read that you say, "Well, that's absolutely incongruous. If He has just said that the issue is the heart, why is He now saying, 'Pluck out the eye'? Wouldn't a person who had lost their eyesight still be able to lust?" You better believe it! If you plucked out your right eye and got rid of your right hand, your heart would still be able to lust. Jesus is not saying that there is a physical remedy for a heart problem...that would undermine the whole point. Because the right eye, arm, and leg were symbols of the best facilities that a man had, Jesus is simply saying that there is nothing too precious to eliminate from your life if it is going to cause your heart to be pandered in its adulterous desires. If it means getting rid of your most precious possession, then get rid of it, even if it's your right eye or your right arm.

A similar passage appears in Matthew 18:7-9: "Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh! Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire." Jesus is teaching that anything which causes a man to remain in his sin and to pander an adulterous and evil heart should be eliminated, even if it is something you wouldn't dream of giving up.

People come along and say, "I'm leaving my wife, because I've found another woman. We're in love...oh, she means everything to me!" I say, "Dump her! Get rid of her! You're pandering your lust and condemning your soul." Our Lord is saying that nothing is precious if it affects your eternal destiny. Sin must be dealt with radically. This is why Paul says, "...I keep under [beat] my body, and bring it into subjection..." (1 Cor. 9:27a). Similarly, Jesus calls for immediate action and effective action against sin. He diagnoses the problem and says, "Pluck it out, cut it off, eliminate it--whatever it is in your life that feeds that heart of lust--get rid of it!" If you go to a theater and you watch something that nurtures adulterous thoughts, then get out. If you have that problem with your television, get rid of it. If you read things that incite sinful thoughts, throw them in the trash. Jesus is not really talking about the physical...we know that. He knows that cutting off your right hand or plucking out your right eye isn't going to change an adulterous heart. But what He is saying is that you should take the most precious thing you have--your right arm, your right eye, if need be--and get rid of it if it stands in the way of purity and brings you to sin.

Notice the word "offend" (Gk. skandalon) in verses 29 and 30. In the Greek, that word is used literally of a bait stick in a trap, where an animal would come and grab the bait on the bait stick and the trap would close. In this context, it is as though Jesus is saying, "If your right eye is the bait stick that catches you in the trap where your adulterous lust is fulfilled, then pluck it out. If your right hand causes you to be trapped, then cut it off. Whatever it is in your life that causes these vile, evil thoughts, get rid of it."

B. Recognizing the Offering of the Savior

Now there's a subtlety in the solution Jesus gives, because the immediate solution points up the need for a permanent solution. Could these scribes and Pharisees get rid of their sinful hearts? The fact of the matter is, they couldn't. Jesus again is giving them an impossible standard, a frustration that is going to make them say, "We tried and we couldn't. We hear you say it's better to have one eye and one arm and have life, than to go into hell. But we don't know how to get this deliverance. We are desperate...we must have somebody show us how to obtain a new heart and a new life." And that is precisely what the Lord offers: "A heart in every thought renewed and filled with love divine, perfect and right and pure and good, a copy, Lord, of Thine." The Lord forces them to see that they need a new nature.

Beloved, if Jesus Christ has come into your life, you have that new nature...you have that new heart. You don't need to fall prey to the sins of lust and adultery--you can know victory over them. I thank God for that. Like Job, you can make a covenant with your eyes, and as Colossians 3:5 says, you can kill the members of your body in this world. You can know victory over those sins that constantly victimize men and women who do not know Jesus Christ. Oh, how grateful we should be that what the Lord has given us is a resource for victory. I thank God that He's given us who know Him new hearts so that we are not left defenseless in the constant battle against sin. We never need to lose if we appropriate the resources that are there.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What had the Jews of Jesus' day substituted for the divine standard?
2. In demanding a righteousness the people could never attain, what was Jesus forcing them to realize?
3. What is it that stands in the way of blessing that must be dealt with and removed?
4. What are three things we will never fully understand unless we first understand sin?
5. The Jews' minimal definition of sin resulted in a minimal requirement for _____.
6. In sharing the gospel with others, why must we present the reality of judgment and condemnation for sin?
7. What did Jesus preach about that was designed to drive men to desperation?
8. Where do unrighteous actions originate, according to Matthew 15:16- 19?
9. Because man is powerless to change his sinful heart, whom is he dependent upon to change it?
10. What was the penalty for committing adultery in the Old Testament?
11. Compare the technical and the general definitions of adultery.
12. When is a sexual union a heinous crime against God?
13. What results from sin in the heart, as indicated by Psalm 66:18?
14. Because verse 28 indicates a continuing process of looking, what type of look is not being condemned by Jesus?
15. According to verse 28, when did the one in view commit adultery? before, during, or after the looking?
16. What is one manifestation of an adulterous heart that is seeking an object to fulfill its fantasy?
17. Is temptation sin? If not, when does it become sin?
18. What was David's mistake in facing the temptation of Bathsheba?
19. Though a woman may not lust in the same way as a man does, how can she participate in its

guilt?

20. What did Job recognize about the process of lusting? What preventative measures did he take, according to Job 31:1?

21. In verses 29-30, is Jesus saying there is a physical remedy for a heart problem? Paraphrase these verses in your own words.

Pondering the Principles

1. Has your approach to evangelism been superficial? Have you included a proper and necessary understanding of how sin separates all men from a holy God? Have you included the consequences of eternal death in hell for all sinners who reject the merciful salvation Christ offers? Which do you think would be a better result of your sharing of the gospel: someone who fully understands what he is rejecting; or someone who thinks they are a Christian merely because you shared the gospel with him? Which one would have the best possibility of reaching out to Jesus at a future date? Which one would probably see no need for reevaluating their spiritual life again? Why? If it has been a while since you have actively shared the gift of Christ with someone, pray that God would open opportunities in your sphere of influence to do so. Take a few minutes to brainstorm on two or three phrases you might use to direct a conversation toward spiritual things and ultimately the gospel as the perfect solution to man's problems. (You might even want to enroll in an evangelism seminar or read some books on the subject to give you confidence in knowing what to share and how to say it.)
2. Take a moment and praise God that when you trusted in Him, He gave you a new heart, just as He promised He would give Israel one day (Ezk. 11:19).
3. Read Proverbs 2:1-22; 5:1-23; 6:20-35; and 7:1-27. Why do you think Solomon spent so much time on the issue of adultery? Describe some of the consequences that are given for committing adultery. Identify some preventative measures for avoiding the sin. Knowing that there is absolutely no redeeming value in committing adultery but only devastating consequences, what are some of the verses from these passages that you could share with those you personally know who are involved in adulterous situations?
4. Are there things in your life that are nurturing adulterous thoughts? What immediate and drastic action should you take now as a preventative measure to avoid falling into sin when the temptation strikes full force? Meditate now upon Matthew 5:29-30 as you ask yourself if you are taking sin seriously enough. Make a point of doing this at least on a monthly basis.

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