

## THE KEY TO MORAL PURITY

**Matthew 5:27-30** - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [29] If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Again, in these verses we see Jesus expanding on the theme of kingdom righteousness. Just as the commandment against *murder* extends to *hatred and anger*, the commandment against *adultery* extends to *impure thoughts and lust*. As Jesus "*fulfills*" the law He traces all sinful actions back to their roots.

- 1) **JESUS EXPECTED HIS FOLLOWERS TO BE DISCIPLINED IN THEIR SEXUAL DESIRES** - 27-28 - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

True, the command is demanding, but it is also full of hope. Jesus places sexual desires within the realm of personal responsibility and control. Regardless of what our society may teach, Jesus says *there's another answer to sexual licence beside distributing condoms or the pill*. Sexual desires can be *governed*, be they heterosexual or homosexual.

We see again the despair of a world that has lost all hope of keeping people chaste. The best we can do is hope our technology will keep our promiscuity from destroying our society and our souls. *The disciple is to model another possibility*. He or she is to demonstrate a power that can keep people in touch with God, morally sane, and spirituality responsible.

- 2) **NOTICE THE HIGH VALUE JESUS PUTS ON THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE** - 27-28 - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Jesus is not just concerned about *individuals* staying clean (though He certainly is concerned about that). His primary concern in these verses is about *marriage*. The sin He names is *adultery*. He is *putting a watchdog at the gate of every marriage*. I must preserve the integrity of my marriage more than I value my right hand or eye. Also, my marriage isn't properly protected from sexual disintegration until I honor God in the private realm of my thoughts and desires.

- 3) **SIN IS OUTWARD IN MANIFESTATION, BUT CONCEIVED IN THE THOUGHT LIFE** - 28-29 - "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [29] If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell."

My thoughts are not my private territory if my heart belongs to Jesus. Thoughts *gather momentum as they are entertained*. They are the incubator of all action - good or bad. Thoughts *turn into actions*. The thoughts you hold on to will one day push past the mind and work their way into the outward actions of your life. *Your own will won't be able to stop their assault*. Your own resolve is only useful in dealing with the *first* stages of temptation in the mind.

**James 1:14-16** - "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. [16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers."

The central point of James and Jesus is *it's too late to try to stop the birth process after the sin has already been mentally conceived*. True, there are some sins we simply "*stumble*" into. But far more often our sins are more high-handed. The reason most Christians commit outward sin is they enjoy the luxury of sin in the secret recesses of the mind. And they do this too long before they try to put on the brakes. They plan to back out of the birth process of sin at some later point, just before the outward act of sin.

This approach will never work. The mind must be set up in such a way that I keep the sinful act from ever being entertained mentally. Jesus and James both warn against the deception that says I can enjoy the luxury of sin in secret and then stop the process before I actually commit the sinful act externally.

For most of us the battle isn't in finding the desire to be pure of the outward act of sin. The real battle lies in *wanting to be pure right away - in the secret life of our thoughts*. If I don't take the steps to be clean in my mind I never will be clean in the outward act.

- 4) **THERE IS NO GRADUAL WAY TO RID MY LIFE OF SIN** - 29-30 - "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

It's foolish for Christians to be looking for band-aids when Jesus is commanding amputation. Let's be real clear on this point. Jesus tells us

the vast majority of the time the first step to moral purity isn't prayer, counseling, fasting or the casting out of evil spirits. ***It's mortification - surgery - the immediate cutting out and cutting off of the sinful thought, before it's allowed to germinate in the outward act.***

Notice how this comes up over and over again in Jesus' teaching. In last week's lesson we saw Jesus dealing with ***hatred and anger***, telling us ***quickness is everything*** in battling sin ("**settle matters quickly**" 5:25). The lesson is the same in today's passage. In striving for moral purity ***decisiveness*** is key ("**gouge out the eye**", "**cut off the right hand**"). Always remember, in dealing with sin (inward or outward) ***to make a small decision is to make no decision at all.*** Some changes have to be ***big*** changes if they are to be effective at all.

Jesus prescribes such abrupt and drastic measures because He knows my tendency to excuse slowness of action - ***especially in wrong relationships***. Fascinations and attractions develop. We always see extenuating circumstances in our case. If there's a third party we tell ourselves that they have feelings too. We don't want to hurt them, etc. All such soft and gradual approaches to the problem are unjustified in the clear teaching of our Lord. It may require painful obedience. But it's better to go limping into heaven than go dancing into hell.

- 5) **LEARN TO SEE ALL DECISIONS IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY - 29-30 - "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."**

The right eye and the right hand are specifically mentioned because, as most people are right-handed, they were considered the most precious and valuable. Jesus is strikingly realistic. He does not say that getting away from the destructive force of temptation is easy. After all, ***you only have two eyes and two hands***. A would-be disciple will have to be ***prepared to pay the high price*** of a clean life and conscience.

But as great as the sacrifice may be, it is to be measured against the ***disintegration of a whole life eternally***. We will never pay the ***price for holiness*** until we vividly set before our minds the reality of the ***price of impurity***. Jesus says that one of the keys to victory is a constant remembrance of what is truly at stake. The person who lives for the moment is acutely shortsighted. In the mind of Jesus, there was a hell to be avoided. And what we do with our bodies can take us there. ***Still, He reminds us that purity of heart is possible*** - 5:8 - ***"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."*** But remember, it isn't the result of simply reading your Bible and chanting "serenity now." Purity of heart will never be the possession of the one who toys with sin in the mind.