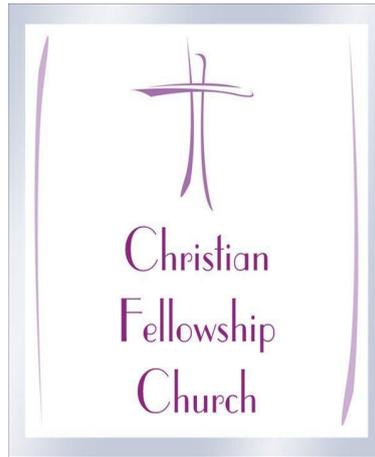


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Ministry of the Word

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by Vincent Gannon

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:27-30

**Subject:** Part 27 – The King's Law: Adultery

*27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*

The citizens of Christ's Kingdom are not just interested in outwardly keeping the rules, but they are interested in keeping their hearts right before God. Remember verse 8, Jesus said that the pure in heart will see God. The reason why the pure of heart see God is because their main focus is Him.

In the previous verses we looked at the King's law concerning murder. Now in these verses, Jesus covers the affairs of the heart in relation to lust, adultery and divorce. The ten commandments are more than God's laws, they are boundaries placed there for our protection. The sixth commandments protects the sanctity of life, and here Jesus brings before us the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment as found in Exodus 20:14 which says '**Do not commit adultery**'. This commandment protects the sanctity of marriage and ultimately family.

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Just like the seed of murder is anger in the heart, Jesus in these verse tells us that the seed of adultery is lust in the heart. What do anger and lust have in common? Both are powerful motivations to sin. Jesus' solution to both, is to deal with the heart, the root cause of the problem. Lust and anger also have this in common, they'll both consume your life, they'll both ruin your life, they'll both seek to control your life. Lust and anger degrades and devalues people by seeing them as objects for consumption or personal satisfaction rather than human beings who are made in the image and the likeness of God. Anger and sexual lust are the two most powerful influences on mankind. Anyone who gives them reign in their lives will very quickly find that they are more controlled than in control. Every person has experienced temptation to anger and to sexual sin, and all to some degree or other, give in to them. On account of that fact we are all guilty before God. God sees the heart, and divine evaluation takes place there. In other words, God judges the source and origin of sin, not just its manifestation or lack thereof.

Proverbs 23:7 *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. “Eat and drink!” he says to you, But his heart is not with you.”*

We've previously looked at 1 Samuel 16v7, which tells us that the Lord doesn't see as man sees because man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

In our text, we see Jesus dealing with the **act** of Adultery or desire behind it in verse 27, then the **attitude** of adultery in verse 28 and the **avoidance** of adultery or the deliverance from it in verses 29 and 30.

When we read the commandment in Exodus 20:14 it is very clear what God desires. We read in Leviticus 20:10 that adultery was considered so serious that it had very serious consequences. It carried the death penalty for both who were involved. This commandment's punishment was reviewed in Deuteronomy 5:18 and maintained. If the punishment was still kept today, then there would be fewer people walking around.

Throughout the New Testament, prohibitions against sexual immorality are every bit as clear as those of the Old. *“Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals”* will inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 2:22). *“Fornicators and adulterers, God will judge”* (Hebrews 13:4). Regardless of how much a couple may care for each other and be deeply in love, sexual relations

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outside of marriage are forbidden. In every case, without exception, it is a heinous sin against God. Marriage is sacred in God's eyes and He ordained it. No matter what this culture says, no matter what this society says, God invented marriage. It is His institution. Marriage isn't simply a social or a cultural construct invented by human beings and adopted by God.

Marriage, sexual fidelity and moral purity are often scorned, ridiculed and laughed at. Those who hold to such values are considered “weird”, strange and judgmental. Sexual hedonism is not a modern thing, it was common in New Testament times and even before that. While some ancient philosophers opposed lust on moral grounds because they thought that virtue rather than lust should dominate one's thinking and feeling and action; others most notably the Greek culture, thought that lust was healthy and human. Jesus isn't simply content to argue mythology or morality or ethics, he goes straight to the point of the controversy and deals with the problem of the purity of heart. In the ancient world, they had pagan temples and pornography on demand. We don't have to go back 2,000 years, we have the internet with all the opportunities that were allowed in an ancient world. It is propagated, promoted and exploited through the most powerful and pervasive media ever known to man.

Paul had to confront this in the early church, particularly in the church in Corinth. In fact, the church was so contaminated by the hedonists lifestyle that surrounded them, that he had to correct them in what pure love actually is, which is why he wrote 1 Corinthians 13. While it's read at weddings, and may seem poetic to the multitude, it is in fact a chapter of correction. Previous to chapter 13, in chapter 6:18 to 20, Paul tells them:

*“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body”. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

This same philosophy that corrupted Corinth is today destroying most western society in a sea of sexual excess and perversion. A survey conducted by Psychology Today a few years ago found that one-third of married men and women who were questioned about marital fidelity admitted to at least one extramarital affair. Those in their 40s, half of the husbands

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and wives admitted to sexual contact with someone other than their spouse. 44% of the women and 29% of the men said that they disapproved of having sex with someone that they didn't really love.

The church hasn't escaped the devastation of personal impurity. Lust and forbidden sexual activities haunt the leadership of churches across the world. An American leadership magazine commissioned a poll of a thousand pastors. 12% admitted to adultery while in the ministry. 23% admitted to some kind of inappropriate sexual contact. Christianity today also a few years ago surveyed a thousand of its subscribers who weren't pastors and found 23% of Christians admitting to extramarital intercourse, 45% admitting to some kind of inappropriate sexual contact. 1 in 4 Christian men were unfaithful. Nearly one half admitted to some kind of inappropriate behaviour. These are shocking statistics when you consider that the average reader of Christianity today is college educated, a church leader, a deacon, an elder, a worship leader or a Sunday-school teacher. If these are the statistics for the church leaders, what do you think is going on in the congregations? And this leads to an inescapable conclusion, there's a gigantic problem.

The solution to sexual impurity cannot be external because the cause is not external. Job proclaimed in Job 31:9 to 11, *"If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or I have lurked at my neighbour's doorway, may my wife grind for another, and let others kneel down over her. For that would be a lustful crime; moreover, it would be an iniquity punishable by judges"*. That ancient saint knew that physical infidelity is first of all a matter of the heart, and that lusting is just as sinful in God's eyes as the act of adultery.

In its most technical sense, committing adultery, from the Greek word "moichao" (mo-cue-a) refers to sex between a married man and married woman. In both the Old and New Testaments, the word relates to sexual intercourse with anyone other than one's marriage partner. Jesus here is talking about the principle of sexual purity in a wider sense than adultery, it includes everyone even those who are unmarried.

CS Lewis wrote that chastity is the most unpopular of all the Christian virtues and so it is. We live in a sexualized society where even Christians are beginning to believe that sexual freedom trumps all other freedoms but what does Jesus have to say?

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Now we come to verse 28, and Jesus deals with the “desire” which springs from the heart. The scribes and Pharisees and old rabbis had taught one thing but note what Jesus says, “*I say unto you.*” We have noted the right of Jesus to use the personal pronoun. He is God manifested in the flesh and it does us good to remember that always.

Jesus said “*That everyone who looks on a woman to lust*” that works the other way round as well. The word “*look*” comes from a Greek word that is “blepo” and it carries with it the meaning not of an incidental or involuntary glance but of an intentional and repeated gazing. Jesus is speaking of intentionally looking with the purpose of lusting. It has to do with evil desire. It's more than just a glance. It isn't the look in the magazine or the look in the billboard or the look in the real world in which we live. We live in a world where you cannot necessarily avert your eyes quick enough to get away from the image. It isn't the first look that gets you into trouble, it's the second look, it's the lingering look, it's the longing look. The act of adultery begins in the mind, the inward thought becomes consent in the mind.

For the person who says ‘*what is the harm in looking?*’ it depends on who you ask. Let's ask King David. *What's the harm in looking?* When Kings were supposed to be at war, he finds himself on a rooftop and as he's gazing out over the city of Jerusalem he sees this young lady and she's taking a bath. David was not at fault for seeing Bathsheba bathing. He could not have helped noticing her, because she was in plain view as he walked on the palace roof. And it wasn't the first look that got him into trouble, it was the second one, it was the longing one, it was the lingering one. The more he looked, the more he wanted and the more he wanted, the more he had to have. His sin was in dwelling on the sight and willingly succumbing to the temptation. But imagine if someone would have whispered in his ear and said ‘*guess what David, what's going to happen?, I want you to begin to think about all of the pain and all of the sorrow and all of the heartache that you're about to create, I want you to think about a dead man and a dead child.*’

He could have looked away and put the experience out of his mind. The fact that he had her brought to his chambers and committed adultery with her expressed the immoral desire that already existed in his heart (see 2 Samuel 11:1-4).

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A popular proverb goes, ***“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.”***

The look is but an expression of the heart that is already immoral and adulterous. Jesus is not speaking of unexpected and unavoidable exposure to sexual temptation. When a man happens to see a woman provocatively dressed, Satan will surely try to tempt that man with lustful thoughts. There is no sin if the temptation is resisted and the gaze is turned elsewhere. It is continuing to look in order to satisfy lustful desires that Jesus condemns, because it evidences a vile, immoral heart. No matter where it ends, sin always begins when an evil thought is sown in the mind and heart.

Although Jesus here uses a man as the example, His condemnation of lustful thoughts applies equally to women. Women are equally susceptible to lustful looking, and even to inciting men to lust. As Arthur Pink observes,

***If lustful looking is so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with the desire to be looked at and lusted after are not less but perhaps more guilty. In this matter it is not only too often the case that men sin but women tempt them to do so. How great then must be the guilt of the great majority of modern misses who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of young men. And how much greater still is the guilt of most of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses.*** (Pink A (1974) An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. *Grand Rapids. Baker: p. 83*)

Job said in chapter 31 verses 1 and 7 and 8, ***“I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin. ... If my step has turned from the way, or my heart followed my eyes, or if any spot has stuck to my hands, let me sow and another eat, and let my crops be uprooted”***.

Job knew that sin begins in the heart and that he was just as deserving of God’s punishment for looking at a woman lustfully as for committing adultery with her. He therefore determined in advance to guard himself by making a pact with his eyes not to gaze at a woman who might tempt him.

Just as the adulterous heart plans to expose itself to lust-satisfying situations, the godly heart plans to avoid them whenever possible and to flee from them when unavoidable. Just

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as the adulterous heart panders to itself in advance, so the godly heart protects itself in advance, praying with the psalmist in Psalm 119:37-38:

*“Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, and revive me in Thy ways. Establish Thy word to Thy servant, as that which produces reverence for Thee” .*

This brings us to verses 29 and 30 to the avoidance and the deliverance.

If we were to take Jesus literally, then we have a huge problem? Take a look at those verses again. There would be a lot of people in history maybe more than today with missing limbs and eyes. But thankfully, we know that Jesus is figuratively speaking because He is dealing with the affairs of the heart. If the problem is in the heart then what good is there of plucking out an eye? Or cutting off a hand? If the right eye were lost, the left would continue to look lustfully, and if the right hand were cut off, the left would still remain to carry on sinful acts.

In the Jewish culture, the right eye and right hand represent a person’s best and most precious faculties. The right eye represented one’s best vision, and the right hand one’s best skills. Jesus’ point is that we should be willing to give up whatever is necessary, even the most cherished things we possess, if that will help to protect us from evil. Nothing is so valuable as to be worth preserving at the expense of righteousness. This strong message is obviously not to be interpreted in a wooden, literal way so that the Lord appears to be advocating mutilation. Mutilation will not cleanse the heart. The intent of these words is simply to call for dramatic severing of sinful impulses in us which push us to evil action (Matthew 18:8-9).

That little phrase *“make you to stumble”* has a very different meaning in the Greek than we have. It can basically mean ‘to cause a fall’, but in its practical form, it was used of the bait stick that a trapper would use so when the animal would touch the stick with the food on it, it would spring the trap and catch the animal. Anything that morally or spiritually traps us, that causes us to fall into sin or to stay in sin, should be eliminated quickly and totally. For example, a married person falling in love with someone besides his or her spouse is wrong. The relationship may be mutually enjoyable and considered to be rewarding, fulfilling, and beautiful, but, it is totally sinful and should be immediately severed.

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The message of this hyperbolic statement of our Lord is clear. Sin must be dealt with radically. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, *“I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified”*.

If we do not consciously and purposefully control what is around us, where we go, what we do, what we watch and read, the company we keep, and the conversations we have, then those things will control us. And what we cannot control we should discard without hesitation. Lust is as consequential as cancer that must be cut out before it causes greater damage. Damage that leads to death.

Unchecked lust causes spiritual damage. As well as physical damage, there is emotional damage and even relational damage. If you begin with spiritual damage, you understand that lust breaks fellowship with God just like murder. Murder breaks fellowship with God, anger in the heart breaks fellowship with God, lust breaks fellowship with God and with the loss of fellowship with God comes a loss of peace, and guess what? If you continue in a lifestyle without repentance, it provides the necessary proof that you're not a child of God.

Remember in the Jewish culture and under the law of Moses when a person was found guilty of adultery, technically the offender could be stoned but invariably in that culture and that society it rarely, if ever happened. Do you realize that divorce became a merciful alternative to killing your spouse? I know what some of you are thinking! I believe marriage is for life and that's why I'm going to kill her!

Jesus invites the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven to look at the whole thing differently, to ask and answer the question - what will it take for me to experience a radical purity in the world in which we live? Lust can cripple us mentally and emotionally. Physically you could list the sexually transmitted diseases coupled with the emotional toll of infidelity, Then add in the anxiety, over constant deception, guilt, rationalization often that accompanies it. In the end infidelity breaks the marriage covenant and promotes suspicion, fear and lack of trust, lack of respect and lack of affection. Once the trust is gone, it's almost impossible to retrieve it. Lust damages your testimony in the church and outside of the church but ultimately, in the end lust displeases the heart of God. When David finally admitted and

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confessed his sin concerning Bathsheba, he said *against you and you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight* in Psalm 51:4.

It wasn't the King's feeble attempt to diminish the hardship and harm that he had caused because a man was dead and a child was dead. What he was doing was putting it in proportion and the proportion of course as this lust hurts the heart of God. William Barclay wrote "*sin becomes a crime not against the law but against love*"

Obviously getting rid of harmful influences will not change a corrupt heart into a pure heart. Outward acts cannot produce inner benefits. But just as the outward act of adultery reflects a heart that is already adulterous, the outward act of forsaking whatever is harmful reflects a heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness. That outward act is effective protection, because it comes from a heart that seeks to do God's will instead of its own.

Jesus again sets forth the standards of His kingdom righteousness. All people are murderers and adulterers. Many do not realize that they are because of the subtlety of sin and its blinding effect on the mind. The Lord's remedy for a wicked heart is a new heart, and His answer for our helplessness is His sufficiency.

There is a story told that during the American Civil War a beautiful, highly educated, and popular young woman fell into prostitution. By the time she was twenty-two years old, she was friendless, broken, and laid dying in a hospital in Cincinnati. Just before she died on a cold winter day she wrote a poem lamenting her life. The poem was published in a newspaper the next day and soon drew the sympathetic attention of thousands across the country. The poem ended with the lines:

Fainting, freezing, dying alone, too wicked for prayer,  
Too weak for a moan to be heard in the streets of the crazy town  
Gone mad in the joy of the snow coming down.  
To lie, and to die, in my terrible woe,  
With a bed and a shroud  
of the beautiful snow.

Sometime later a verse was added by another pen.

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Helpless and frail as the trampled snow,  
Sinner despair not, Christ stoopeth low  
To rescue the soul that is lost in its sin,  
And raise it to life and enjoyment again.

Groaning, bleeding, dying for thee,  
The Crucified hung, made a curse on the tree.

His accents of mercy fall soft on thine ear.  
Is there mercy for me? Will He heed my prayer?  
O God! in the stream that for sinners doth flow,  
Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Do you want a pure heart? Then you have to look in the right direction. You have to look away from the sin and you have to look fully into the face of God, and into the face of your spouse. Burn the bridges of temptation, make a radical break with the sin. Do it now and don't put it off. We need purity in our heart. Purity in the heart will lead to purity in the marriage, purity in the church, purity in the world.

We can't change other people's minds, but we can make decisions for ourselves and it's good to recognise the areas of your heart that require change, then do something about it by giving it over to Jesus and be obedient to Him. Jesus isn't finished with us yet.

**Amen.**