

Matthew: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

Purity * Matthew 5:27-30

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew 5. As you are getting there let me reiterate that after the service today we will have CD sets of the Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage series available at Harmony Central. As a bonus we will also include a copy of today's sermon, which in many ways will serve as a sequel to that series. That's because today we are going to talk about purity, an issue that is absolutely central to a healthy marriage, both before and during the marriage.

And before we get into our text this morning, let me speak directly to our students for a moment. This message may very well be one of the most important ones you will ever hear. I realize you might think Sunday morning sermons aren't always relevant to you, but I can guarantee that this one will be. I honestly think it is fair to say the truths we are going to study today have the ability to completely change the direction of your life. And I hope to show you why this is the case in just a moment.

On that note, let's go ahead and read our passage together, starting with verse 27:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 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. 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. (Matthew 5:27-30, ESV)

Now, I think some of you realize already that this is going to be a painful message. And you know what, I think that by what Jesus says in verses 29-30, He realized that this would be the case. But don't let that discourage you, because Jesus wants this to be a good kind of pain. He wants it to be a healing kind of pain. And most importantly He wants it to be a freeing kind

of pain. So let me say from the outset that my goal today is that through these hard words of Jesus' we will experience freedom from lust. There is no doubt in my mind that many of us are held captive by this sin, and likely to a greater degree than we realize. And so although what Jesus asks of us in these verses is hard, He knows that with His help we can do it. And I hope we all experience His help today.

Ok, let's start by taking a moment to review the context of our passage. These verses are found in what is known as the antithesis section of the Sermon on the Mount. Six times in verses 21-48 of chapter 5 Jesus corrects a misunderstanding and misapplication of an Old Testament command. So far we have seen this with the issues of integrity and divorce. In the weeks ahead we will see how Jesus addresses the issues of anger, retaliation, and loving our enemies. But today we are going to see what He has to say about lust.

Now, in verse 27 Jesus quotes the 7th commandment verbatim. If you were to look up Exodus 20:14 you would find that it says, "You shall not commit adultery." And on the surface, this seems pretty clear. It basically means don't have sex outside of marriage. However, Jesus says in verse 28 that adultery goes deeper than the physical act. He says the real issue of the 7th commandment is a matter of the heart. You see, much like today, in Jesus' time the people had come to believe that as long as they didn't have sex outside of marriage, they were ok. They could think about and desire anyone they wanted, and as long as they didn't act on those desires they were obeying the 7th commandment. However, in verse 28 Jesus tells us that adultery is ultimately a matter of the heart. It's not simply about what you do on the outside. It's also about what is going on inside.

Now, let's talk about lust for a moment. What exactly is it? I found it interesting as I studied this week that very few people actually define it. There seems to be the general understanding that everyone knows what it is. However, I don't think this is true, which I believe leads to a great deal of confusion about this issue. So, let's take a moment to define lust and figure out what Jesus is prohibiting here.

Lust is sexual desire directed towards someone who is not your spouse.

What exactly is lust? Well, we can define lust as sexual desire directed towards someone who is not your spouse. Let's pick this apart a little bit. We first need to understand that lust and sexual desire are not the same thing. God creates us with sexual desire, and therefore it is good when it is expressed within the bounds of marriage. To be honest with you, the church has rarely done a good job of making this distinction. This goes all the way back to the third century when church father Origen castrated himself so that he could be free from the temptations of sexual desire. He took Jesus' command in verses 29-30 literally, but failed to understand that it wasn't his sex drive that was the problem. Unfortunately, the church has failed to learn from Origen's mistake and over the years has somehow given the world the idea that God is anti-sex. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, God is very pro-sex, and from what the Bible says, He wants us to have lots of sex, as long as it is within the bounds of marriage.

So sexual desire is not sinful in itself. The problem is that a) for most people sexual desire is very strong and b) because of sin we often direct that sexual desire towards people who are not our spouse.

Now, let's look at verse 28 a little more closely to see how Jesus brings this out. Note that He doesn't say it is sinful for a man to look at a woman. Jesus isn't saying we need to walk around with our heads down and avoid looking at members of the opposite sex. Rather, He is saying it is sin when a man looks at a woman with lustful intent. In other words, it is sin for a man to look at a woman with sexual desire in his heart. In fact, I actually think Jesus gives what is perhaps the best definition of lust when He calls it adultery of the heart. Lust is: desiring in your heart what would be sin if you were to do it in practice. Did you catch that? Lust is desiring in your heart what would be sin if you were to do it in practice. Let me give an example. If I kiss my wife, that's a good thing, right? However, if I were to kiss another

woman, that would be problematic. It would be sin and I would get fired. Well, what Jesus is saying here is that the simple desire to kiss another woman is just as sinful as actually doing it. To Jesus, lust = adultery. Lust is desiring in your heart what would be sin if you were to do it in practice.

So, to clarify, when we look with desire or in order to desire, the looking becomes lust. If a man sees a woman and continues to look – Jesus is actually referring to what we might call staring or checking out– and/or if he begins to think about that woman so that desire forms in his heart, then that is lust, and Jesus calls this adultery.

Now, let me point out three important implications from verses 27-28.

1. Lust is sin whether you are married or not.

One, lust is sin whether you are married or not. We need to be careful that we don't limit what Jesus is saying here to married people only. If you lust after anyone other than your spouse, it is sin, and therefore those who are single shouldn't be directing their sexual desire to anyone at all. Your sexual desire is to be reserved for your spouse, even if you don't have a spouse currently. Now I recognize in our world today this seems nearly impossible, but let me point out to you what God calls us to in this regard. Ephesians 5:3:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. (Ephesians 5:3, NIV)

God desires for His people to be free from lust. In a moment we will talk about how we can live this out, but for now note that His desire is for us to be lust-free, whether we are married or single.

2. It is a sin to act in such a way to tempt someone else to lust.

Two, if it is a sin to lust than it is also a sin to act in such a way to tempt someone else to lust.

Seventeenth century pastor Matthew Henry once wrote:

And if looking be lust, they who dress and deck, and expose themselves, with design to be looked at and lusted after (like Jezebel, that `painted her face and tired her head, and looked out the window') are no less guilty. Men sin, but devils tempt to sin.¹

Let me just say this. We need to be very careful how we act, dress, and speak around members of the opposite sex. We need to constantly consider how our interactions are impacting others and make sure that we are not tempting them to lust in any way. And I think this especially needs to be the case in the church. I'd like to say a word here to the ladies, especially with summer coming on. I would like to ask you to please help your brothers out a little bit. Please think carefully about what you wear, what you say, and how you interact with us. Please do everything you can to help us in this area. The issue of lust is especially difficult for men, and nearly everywhere we go we are bombarded with temptations in this area. And I have to be honest that at times it is discouraging to find that the church is not a place where we can avoid these temptations. I know that a great majority of our ladies have no intention of causing men to stumble, but I also recognize that you don't really understand the struggles that we face and perhaps don't think about it enough. So, please think about what you wear. Consider how you interact with us. Help us in this area where we greatly struggle.

3. Jesus takes lust very seriously.

The third implication from these verses is that Jesus takes lust very seriously. We know this because He equates it with adultery, and the penalty for adultery in the Old Testament was stoning. And when you think

¹ Henry, Matthew, 1991. Pg. 61. Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible. Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers.

about it that way, its pretty scary, because if the penalty today for lust was stoning, most of us would be killed numerous times a day. Now, more to the point, look again at how Jesus says we should protect ourselves from lust in verses 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. 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. (Matthew 5:29-30, ESV)

The heart of what Jesus is saying here is that we must deal radically with sin. In the first century the right eye and the right hand were considered a person's best and most precious faculties.² They were both highly valued. And yet Jesus says if you find these things are leading you to sin, you are better off getting rid of them. Sin is not something to be toyed or trifled with, it is something to be killed. Either you kill sin or it will kill you.

I hope we can grasp this morning just how serious Jesus is about this issue. He says that it is better to get rid of something, even if it is extremely valuable, than to allow it to tempt you to lust.

Frederick Bruner explains it this way:

The meaning of Jesus' challenge is to take decisive action against that habit, thing, or person that, though pleasurable and perhaps even seemingly indispensable for living, is in fact ruining our lives. Jesus does not advise cautious, gradual action; he counsels surgery, and immediately. He does not advise Band-Aids; he commands amputations. "Desperate cuts require desperate cures."³

² MacArthur, John (2001). Pg. 304. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

³ Frederick Dale Bruner. *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12* (p. 223). Kindle Edition.

Now let's make sure to understand Jesus isn't speaking literally here. He's not saying that if we struggle with pornography we should go home today and pluck our eye out. But He is saying that we need to take radical steps, even steps that may seem illogical and crazy in order to protect ourselves from lust. Here's an example. I have a friend who several years ago got rid of his smartphone and went back to a regular cell phone because it was too much of a temptation for him to view pornography. He is a businessman who is regularly out of the office and a smartphone in his line of work is considered essential. But because he knew what was at stake, he took a radical step and got rid of the phone.

And I hope we all can see what is at stake here. Look at verse 29 again. Jesus is telling us that if we follow the path of lust, we may very well end up in hell. And therefore, we need to do everything we can to protect ourselves in this area. Suffice it to say, Jesus is very serious when it comes to lust.

So, that is the text. I'd like to transition now and to talk about how we address the issue of lust today, specifically regarding how we can practically apply what Jesus is saying in verses 29-30. How do we deal radically with lust? In a culture where we are daily bombarded with pornographic material, how do we overcome lust and pursue purity? To answer that, let me give you four steps for overcoming lust and pursuing purity.

Step 1: Be On Guard

Step 1 is Be On Guard. If we are going to fight the battle against lust, we have to know what we are up against. And I know I refer to this passage quite often, but it is never more appropriate than in the area of purity:

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8, ESV)

I truly believe that for many of us, the number one way the devil attacks is by tempting us to lust.

And of course today his primary avenue for doing so is pornography. Since this is the case, I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about the prevalence and results of pornography. I am going to do this because I am afraid that we don't really recognize how widespread it is and just how much damage it causes. So, let me share a few statistics.

- Internet porn is a \$4.9 billion worldwide industry.
- 12% of the websites on the Internet are pornographic (24,644,172 sites).
- 40 million Americans are regular visitors to pornographic sites.
- 25% of all search engine requests are porn related (68 million per day).
- 34% of Internet users have experienced unwanted exposure to porn.
- 70% of men age 18-24 visit porn sites monthly.
- The average age at which a child first sees pornography is 11.
- Children are starting to watch porn as early as 6 and are flirting online at 8.
- 50% of men and 20% of women in the church are addicted to porn.

This means that there are likely hundreds of people in this room today who are addicted to porn, with the rest of us extremely susceptible to being so. And, we could go on and on, but I think this is enough to show that the temptation of pornography is massive. But you know, we need to not only understand how widespread the temptation is, but also the incredible damage it is causing. So, let me share with you five primary consequences of porn.

1. Pornography warps our view of sex.

Number one, pornography warps our view of sex. The plain fact of the matter is that pornography never reflects reality, and therefore it gives a false impression of what sex truly is and how it truly works. God created sex to be an intimate experience enjoyed in the context of marriage; pornography tells us that sex can be enjoyed whenever and however we want. The result is that we have an ever-increasing percentage of our population that is incapable of enjoying and experiencing sex as God

intended it to be experienced. The truth is that rather than enhancing sex, pornography is ruining it.

2. Pornography warps men's view of women.

Number two, pornography warps men's view of women. Another result of pornography is that men begin to view women simply as objects. We need to realize that we are raising a generation of young men who are constantly being taught that the only reason women exist is for their sexual pleasure. This is one of the most terrifying things for me as a father. I am scared about how young men view my daughters, and I am scared about how my sons are learning to view young women.

And I think it is helpful at this point to remind us of what Paul told Timothy about how he was to treat the women in his church:

Encourage older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. (1 Timothy 5:2, ESV)

And I just have to say, that unless we are radical in our fight against lust, this will be nearly impossible to do today. It's very hard for a man to indulge in what the world has to offer on a regular basis and then try and view women as either a mother or a sister. It's very hard indeed.

3. Pornography warps women's view of themselves.

Number three, pornography warps women's view of themselves. Not only does pornography lie to men about the true purpose of sex and women, it also lies to women about the true nature of beauty. Pornography tells women that beauty is found in having the right shape, size and sex appeal. And the damage caused by this is untold. Here is what a recent American Psychological Association report concluded:

The saturation of sexualized images of females is leading to body hatred, eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, high rates of teen pregnancy and

unhealthy sexual development in our girl children. It also leads to impaired cognitive performance. In short, if we tell girls that looking 'hot' is the only way to be validated, rather than encouraging them to be active players in the world, they under-perform at everything else. ⁴

Let me say this to our women. While the APA's analysis is correct, the way you are validated is not through being an active player in the world, whatever that means. The way you are validated is by understanding that you are created in God's image and so regardless of your shape, size, or looks, you have incredible value. Your value is not determined by your height, weight, or sex appeal, but by the fact that God created you just the way He wanted you. What's more, God sees you as so valuable that He sent His Son to die for you. And therefore, regardless of what anyone else might say, you are beautiful in His sight. And if God calls you beautiful, who is anyone else to argue? A lot more could be said there, but lets move on.

4. Pornography is enslaving.

Number four, pornography is enslaving. Some of you really need to get this. Proverbs 27:20 says this:

*Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and never satisfied are the eyes of man.
(Proverbs 27:20, ESV)*

Just like hell is never satisfied, neither is the lustful heart. The reality of pornography is that it never satisfies, and because it never satisfies it always leaves us wanting more, which ultimately leads to despair. That's because you can never get enough, and when you eventually realize this you find yourself as a broken person, in bondage to a terrible master. Listen to me closely. It is an incredibly short jump from viewing pornography for the first time to being addicted to the point that it completely ruins your life. Pornography is incredibly powerful, and if we aren't careful it will grab hold of us and never let go.

⁴ Chester, Tim (2012-06-11). Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free (Kindle Locations 275-278). Intervarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

5. Pornography weakens our relationship with God.

Number five, and most importantly, pornography weakens our relationship with God. Isaiah 59:2 says this:

Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. (Isaiah 59:2, ESV)

I believe guilt from pornography addiction is one of the reasons so many men have a difficult time worshiping. I really wonder how many blessings we are missing and how much greater our experience of God's presence would be here on Sunday mornings and throughout the week if unrepentant lust was non-existent in our lives. As we saw earlier in 1 Timothy, God desires for there not to even be a hint of impurity in our lives. And yet the sin of lust is dominating and preventing so many of us from experiencing the blessings of being close to him.

And we are now going to move on to the solution, but before we do let's affirm both the prevalence and the danger of this sin.

Step 2: Set Safeguards

So, step 1 is to be on guard. Step 2 is to set safeguards. Now, I talked about this in detail back in Matthew 4, so I will simply give a summary here. Safeguards are boundaries or guidelines that help us avoid temptation in the areas where we are weak or that hold a special danger for us. And in light of what Jesus has to say in our text today, we need to be radical about this. We need to be aware of what, where and when we are most likely to be tempted, and we need to protect ourselves and our families. As part of this I would strongly suggest that you have someone you are accountable to in regards to how you are doing with lust, especially on the Internet. One suggestion is a software program called Covenant Eyes. The software can be installed on computers, iPhones, iPads and iPods and provides accountability and filtering for the entire family for less than \$10 a month. All of our computers here at the church have the software, and we have it

installed on our computers and devices at home.

I really hope that you will take this seriously. If you don't can I just say you are being foolish. I read a quote this week from a guy who said that today the struggle with porn is like being an alcoholic and everywhere you go they are offering free beer to sell things. That's pretty much the way it is, and if we don't protect ourselves, and do so radically, we are going to fall.

Step 3: Grow to Hate the Sin

So, be on guard, set safeguards, and Step 3, grow to hate the sin. If we are really going to be successful in overcoming lust, we must come to the point where we abhor it. I am going to be transparent at this point and share that this is the step that I need to grow in the most. I know that lust is dangerous, and I have numerous safeguards setup in my life. However, I still experience a greater attraction to it than I should, and when I honestly evaluate my heart I know that this is largely due to the fact that I have not come to hate it as I should. As Tim Chester writes, the reality is that I dislike the shame and the consequences of sin, but I still like the sin itself.⁵ Perhaps the same is true for you.

And so, how do we grow to hate lust? Well, first we have to continually remind ourselves of the results of lust. We have to remind ourselves of the devastation that it causes. We have to reflect on facts such as pornography being a leading contributor to sex trafficking. We have to tell ourselves things like, "If I look at that I am contributing to millions of underage girls being kidnapped and sold as sex slaves." We have to remind ourselves of the harm lust will do to our spouses, our families, and our relationship with God. We have to remind ourselves that lust is enslaving and if we give it an inch, it will take a mile. Most of all, we have to remind ourselves that lust makes empty promises. It tells us that that we can have unhindered, hidden pleasure, when the truth is it only brings momentary pleasure followed by a lifetime of consequences.

⁵ Chester, Tim (2012-06-11). Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free (Kindle Locations 171-172). Intervarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

The second thing we can do to grow to hate lust is pray. We can pray that we will hate lust so much that pornography will become abhorrent to us. We can pray that God will bring us to the place where we will hate it deep within our hearts. We can pray that we will come to the point where just the thought of pornography will disgust us. Now, I just want to admit that I am not there myself, but that is what I am striving and praying for and I hope that you will do the same.

Step 4: Pursue Christ

Here's step 4: Pursue Christ. This is what it comes down to friends. While the first three steps are important, ultimately the answer to overcoming lust is to replace it with love for Jesus Christ. Lust is so powerful that being on guard and setting safeguards and even striving to hate it will fail us if we don't passionately pursue a relationship with Jesus. Lust is a very powerful affection and if we don't seek a more powerful affection we will always fight a losing battle. Therefore, the most important step in overcoming lust is growing in our love for Jesus. That's because as our relationship with Him grows, we come to realize that what He offers is so much better than what lust can provide. We come to realize that He can provide us with the pleasure that lust promises, only His pleasure is a lot better and a lot longer lasting. We come to realize that instead of guilt, He gives us the security that comes from being right with God. And we come to realize that instead of being enslaved to something beyond our control, we are freed to experience life as God intended for us to experience it. Let me share with you a great passage from Acts 13, where Paul says this to the Jews in Antioch:

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38-39, ESV)

A relationship with Jesus frees us from everything. Let that sink in for a moment. Whatever you find yourself enslaved to today, whether it is lust or

some other addiction or sin, know you can have freedom through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

To conclude, I want to share with you how to experience this freedom on a daily basis. You might look at Acts 13 and say, ok, I understand that Jesus has freed me from lust, but how do I actually experience that freedom on a daily basis? Well, I think the answer to that is found in 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul writes this:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, ESV)

The way to experience freedom from lust on a daily basis is to continually remind ourselves of Christ's great love for us, because when we do that love will control us in such a way that we will stop living for ourselves and start living for the one who for our sake died and was raised again.

You see, the way to be freed from the control of lust is to be controlled by something much greater – the love of Christ. And the way that we are controlled by the love of Christ is by continually remembering what He did for us on the cross. It's by remembering that He took upon Him all of our lust – every single bit of it – and in return gave us a record of perfect purity. And when we consistently, day after day, remember this truth, we can't help but be overwhelmed by the love of Jesus and in return live for Him and not for lust.

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