

Life Group Lesson

July 18th, 2010

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If 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. ³⁰And 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. – Matthew 5:27-30

Jesus addresses the issues of anger, adultery, and divorce in Matthew 5. He discussed them consecutively because they are so closely related. After all, most divorces are results of adulterous actions. Jesus had already addressed one of the Ten Commandments – Murder. He said there was a thing called **mental murder** – anger. He moves to another of the Ten Commandments – Adultery. He expands it from just an outward act to an inward thought – **mental adultery**.

Adultery is a sin that is committed by a married person who engages in an illicit intimate relationship outside that marriage. Adultery is a very specific sexual sin and is to be taken very seriously.

Have you ever read what Deuteronomy says about adultery and sexual sin? Chapter 22 lists a whole bunch of sexual sins. Concerning adultery, it says that if a married man is illicitly involved with another woman, then they are both to be stoned. What! Adultery requires capital punishment. Why did adultery require the death penalty? It was the breaking of a marital covenant (Malachi 2:13-16). If you broke your marriage covenant, you defiled your marriage. Marriage is to be taken seriously – it is the only illustration given about Jesus' relationship with the Church!

Is this text only directed at men? It is for both men and women, but Jesus is attacking His main audience for the Sermon on the Mount. This is the group He is most upset with. It was the religious crowd. You know, the group that says, "I've never had an affair. I would never commit adultery on my wife." This is the same group that lusts in their mind and lingers in their looking at women while thinking they are "OK" because they haven't acted on their inner thoughts. Jesus is taking on the warped teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. These religious men thought they were safe because they were not actually committing the act of adultery. When Jesus talked about sexual immorality, the religious crowd thought, "Bring it on Jesus!! We're not guilty. We haven't committed adultery and we think Jesus is soft on adultery (Jesus didn't stone the woman caught in adultery in John 8 so why would he stone them)."

But what Jesus says to them catches them right in their immoral tacks. Jesus finds them guilty of *mental* adultery. Everyone is guilty of this. Jesus standard was one that no one could escape. It brought out the secret sins of man – the sins no one else knows about. Jesus just defined adultery in whole new terms. Why? Because no one could think they were righteous by their lack of external actions. He was proving to them their need for forgiveness and repentance.

Jesus finds all the Pharisees and scribes guilty on every single dimension of adultery as He defines it. It is true, the Law forbade adultery. But Jesus takes it one step further, "**But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**" (Matthew 5:27).

What does it mean "whoever **looks** at a woman"? "Looks" is not just one look or a glance. It is "leering" or "staring". It is going back for a second (or more) look. "Locking on" and "lingering" is what

Jesus is attacking here, **it is not just a lustful look He is talking about - it is *looking to lust***. It is a very purposeful act. It is the same form found in Matthew 6:1, where Jesus says, “**Be careful not to display your righteousness merely to be seen by people.**” There your outward acts of righteousness are for the purpose of getting men’s applause. Here the look is a lingering look that has lust as its purpose and goal.

Got your attention yet? Jesus did. He had everyone’s attention in the crowd. ALL of them, male and female, found themselves under condemnation. We do too. Next, He talks about plucking out your eye and chopping off your hands. Again I say “What!”. This seems too radical. Does He really intend for us to do this? No, this is a hyperbole. He is overstating something to get His point across. He is saying we have to act quickly and decisively. Even if we did this, it would not solve our problems. Even though the eyes and hands, (looking and touching) are big elements in the realm of immorality and adultery, they are not what Jesus is concerned with. He is concerned with our hearts – our inward nature – righteousness. Righteousness cannot be measured or gained by external efforts. He didn’t want us to stop the looks by plucking out our eyes or the touch by cutting off our hands. He meant we must stop it no matter what it takes! We must be drastic with ourselves in how we do that. We must take drastic steps not to see it! In our culture, you almost have to wear blinders because it is in magazines, on billboards, or wherever you turn. It is seeking to grab you! Technologically, lust is now promoted in ways that it has never been before. The majority of the internet is pornography.

Why won’t external methods solve a lust problem? Because most would say, “I still have one hand and one eye.” Doing away with the hands and eyes won’t stop the mental adultery problem. You still have to address what is going on in our heart and our head! It is almost impossible to get rid of every external trigger of lust. Like I said before – IT IS EVERYWHERE. You can set up tons of safeguards – internet filters, cut off Pay Per View/HBO, don’t go certain places, etc. But that doesn’t touch the issues of the heart.

When Jesus speaks to the woman caught in the act of adultery (notice that the man wasn’t brought to Jesus – what a double standard), He says, “**Go and sin no more.**” Adultery is sin.. We need to understand that when Jesus says it is better to lose one member of your body than have the whole body thrown in hell, He is talking about eternal destruction. Committing adultery will surely make you guilty of sin and will condemn you to hell! He is saying you have to take this sin seriously, and do whatever it takes to remedy it! Remember that Paul talks in Romans 6 about taking the members of our bodies and presenting them as instruments of unrighteousness. These members that we seek to gain pleasure from, that we actually serve, are the very things that we ought to put to death for the sake of eternal life and the kingdom of God.

To be clear - Jesus is not against the pleasures of marriage. He created sex. But **Hebrews 13:4** says the marriage bed is to be kept undefiled – without sin! God has given this gift to us to enjoy, but the sinful pleasures must be avoided and are forbidden. When Jesus says, “Cut it off! Pluck it out!” He is literally saying “deal with it quickly because it can destroy you!”

When Jesus started naming sins like murder, adultery and divorce the Pharisees and scribes thought they were safe. But Jesus was saying to them that they were guilty of breaking all the law. **What He is saying is evangelistic!** Remember, the Law’s purpose was not to make us perfect so we could get to heaven by good works. The Law’s purpose is to show us that our hearts and our hands are unclean, that we have nothing to commend us before God. Why did Jesus appear to be soft on sin with the adulterous woman? Because He came not only to show us we are sinners, but He came to bear the penalty of our sin. He bore the penalty for all of our guilt and offers us salvation through the

Cross. He appears to be soft because He wants to save. He doesn't want to stone and destroy. He wants to forgive and save.

Ok, ladies. You don't get off that easy. Lust isn't just a man thing. Proverbs has a lot to say about women in relationship to adultery. One of the things it says is, "Don't be a provocative woman." I am not talking just about the way you dress. The provocative woman in Proverbs is provocative by the way she talks, and in the way she looks at you. There are all kinds of provocations, and the way you dress is just one of them. Women, do not be provocative! It seems to me that women are just as guilty as men in this area. The triggers may be different, the mechanism may be different, but I think that it is possible that women are often seduced more by what they hear, by warmth and affection, and tenderness and kindness, than they are by the physical. The truth is we are all guilty.

Alright, the unmarried people are safe in this passage, right? After all, He's talking about adultery – an act that can only happen if you are married. If you have the unclean, impure thoughts of lust, you too, whether you are married or not, are guilty. Don't miss it! Jesus is pointing your sins out so He can point you to the Savior.

If you have been through adultery, there is healing and forgiveness. The first step to restoration is repentance. You have to forsake your sin – this means cut off all ties with the person you had an affair with (email, texting, phone calls, Facebook, quit your job, etc.) You must deal with it radically and drastically. Be careful. Some people are engaged in adultery in the making. Now, this doesn't often happen quickly. It is subtle. Stop the flirting. Reserve certain things for your spouse only!

Anger and adultery are related. Why else did Jesus start with it and lead into adultery and divorce? Paul says to husbands, "... **do not be embittered against your wives**" (Colossians 3:19). Now, anger isn't the only reason for adultery. But, if your marriage relationship is not healthy, you are on your way to trouble. If your relationship with the Lord and/or spouse is lacking, you are on the wrong track. Recognize your need for the Savior's help.

Questions:

1. Are you engaged in acts that are leading to adultery?
2. How is your thought life? Is it like Philippians 4:8? Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.
3. Do your eyes linger? Read Job 31:1.
4. How do you keep your way pure? Read Psalm 119:9.
5. Is your lust problem out of control?
6. Are you one with your mate? Do you have things against each other that would cause you to stray? Anger, offense, bitterness, unhealthy or no sex life?
7. Do I have external safeguards set up to monitor and help maintain my inner righteousness? (i.e. accountability partner, internet filters, locks on my Pay Per View)

Suggested resources:

- Be Safe Internet Filter - <http://www.bsecure.com/> They also have an app for the iPhone.
- **Every Man's Battle: Winning the War on Sexual Temptation One Victory at a Time [Book]** by Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker, Mike Yorkey
- **Every Woman's Battle: Discovering God's Plan for Sexual and Emotional Fulfillment [Book]** by Shannon Ethridge, Stephen Arterburn