



The Heart of Adultery

Matthew 5:27-30

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Sometimes as I am preparing my message, I like to get up and walk or do something with my hands to keep me busy while I am thinking through what I am about to say. I was doing that last night – it works out well for my wife because one of the things that I’ll do those times is I’ll vacuum the carpet. And just the simple sweeping back and forth kind of frees up my mind, to keep my hands busy while my mind is working on what I want to say. I’m nervous today because I’m afraid my wife is going to say, “You know, after that message, I can see that you should have done the upstairs too” (laughter). She says stuff like that.

We are in the Sermon on the Mount this morning, Matthew chapter 5, and are examining over a period of the few weeks a very searching passage of scripture that begins in Matthew 5:20.

Just to hit the reset button for you a little bit as we think about the Sermon on the Mount, going back to things that we said months and months ago but that I want to keep in the front of your thinking: Jesus started His public ministry and Matthew records a summary statement of the thrust of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 4:17, where he records Jesus saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

What we have said over the past months or so is that as Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount, He is describing for us the life that flows from someone who has truly repented. Stated differently, He is showing us what repentance looks like. And here in this passage in Matthew 5:21-48, He is showing the stage where repentance works itself out as He displays the human heart. And He shows that sin is a matter of the heart; true spirituality, true sanctification is a matter of the heart, not external behavior. External behavior is kind of the tail to the whole dog; it is the heart that wags that tail, the tail of the external behavior that others see around us.

And what we have been saying is that God requires a heart-felt spirituality that was far different from the external religion of the Pharisees; in verse 20, Jesus said:

I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

And then in the rest of chapter 5, He takes six different illustrations of what righteousness looks like. He focuses on different areas of the heart. It is as though He goes into the

home of our heart and starts opening different doors to different rooms to see what is inside and He probes and He probes what is inside that house.

Maybe for some of you, the one room is clean but the other room is not. The fact that you have one room clean out of six doesn't mean that you are righteous. You can't focus on what is not an issue to you and declare yourself righteous as a result of that. We have to take the full brunt of Jesus' teaching and see what He says about heart righteousness, and that's what we are dealing with.

Last time we looked at verses 21-26 and saw Jesus dealing with the whole matter of anger and bitterness in relationships. And He said that that kind of simmering anger toward another person, the anger that expresses itself in harsh words toward others, is the moral equivalent of murder. Look at verse 22 with me, just by way of a quick review. Jesus says, just after He had described the commandment, "You shall not commit murder":

Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, "You good-for-nothing" shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, "You fool" shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

That kind of anger and bitterness deserves eternal judgment and this is so different from the way we normally approach the whole matter of personal righteousness, so different from what we are conditioned to do by things around us. We need to recognize that God is looking right into our heart. That heart of yours is laid open before Him and it is according to your heart that He will judge you.

And so it is very searching, and we saw in verses 23-26 that Jesus places an urgency, a primacy of importance, upon dealing with that kind of anger, going and seeking out reconciliation to those that you are estranged from. He says:

If you are presenting your offering at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you – more than just a brother, it's someone in your life, particularly within the family, if that's the case for you – leave your offering before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your offering.

This is a matter of spiritual priority; it transcends the importance of being at worship on Sunday morning, to make sure that you have done everything that you can to reconcile those estranged relationships. Jesus says that's what repentance looks like, that's how a truly repentant person deals with anger and bitterness – he goes and resolves it and he doesn't just let it stew.

As we come to our passage for this morning, verses 27-30, we are going to switch from the topic of spiritual murder to spiritual adultery, if I can put it that way. Jesus is going to give us another illustration of how deep the righteousness must be for someone to be

right with God. And as He does this, He is going to expose the dreadful sin of lust. Look at verse 27-30 with me where He says:

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 lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

As you see this passage and compare it with what Jesus had just said about anger and murder and so forth, you see that the specter of hell, the specter of eternal judgment, looms over this entire discussion. Jesus is the one who is speaking about this, speaking about it in terms of sin that leads to hell. And He does it in the context of adultery and makes the standard for righteousness in light of the commandment “You shall not commit adultery” far deeper than the mere physical act.

One of the things that I want to do here is, before we go right into Jesus’ words, to kind of set a biblical context for what He says, because there are teachers over the years who have said that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was establishing a different ethic than what the Old Testament required. And that is just, in my judgment, a totally wrong way to view what Jesus is saying. When you consider what the Old Testament says about each of these issues, you see that Jesus is teaching in a manner that is entirely consistent with what the Old Testament said.

So what I want to do as our first point here is to just see that the entire Bible condemns adultery. You may think that that point doesn’t need to be proven. But I want to spend some time with you just going through and seeing this entire point and laying it out before you – I think it is important for us to spend a few minutes doing this.

1. The Bible Condemns Adultery

Now by way of setting the context, let’s just make really clear one thing. The whole idea of marital intimacy, physical intimacy, was God’s idea from the very start. He gave that gift to our first parents in the Garden of Eden, declaring to them that “it is not good for the man to be alone.”

And so as we are talking about what Jesus is going to describe here in verses 27-30, we need to make clear that He is talking about something that occurs outside the context of the marriage relationship. Inside marriage, sexual expression is not only permitted, it is not only good, it is specifically commanded in passages like 1 Corinthians 7. In the Bible, the book of the Song of Solomon is a part of the celebration of that intimacy. And what we are about to say here today is not an attack on sex in general, but rather the

unlawful use of sex, either with the body or with your mind. Because we understand that as the giver of the gift, God is also the one who declares the boundaries of its proper use.

I want to take you back to Exodus chapter 20 as we kind of dive into this and I just want to point a couple of brief things out to you from the Old Testament here in the Ten Commandments that God gave to Israel on Mount Sinai.

We see in Exodus 20:14 the simple statement:

You shall not commit adultery.

And that was the statement that the Pharisees picked up on and made a matter of external behavior. But understand this: this is so important to see the continuity of ethic between the Old Testament and what Jesus was saying. Look at verse 17, a commandment that is too often overlooked. God says in verse 17:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

So even in the Ten Commandments themselves, it goes to the heart desire and prohibits certain heart desires. Jesus wasn't saying anything new when He spoke the Sermon on the Mount. And so there is that forbidding of even the desire for adultery that is found within the Ten Commandments themselves.

Now with that said, understand that the whole prohibition against adultery is something that is of extreme seriousness before our holy God.

Leviticus 20:10 – I'll just read it for you – says this:

If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

And in Deuteronomy 22:22-24 it says:

If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.

If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death.

This whole matter of adultery and the desire for adultery is one of profound seriousness in the eyes of the thrice holy God; this is a matter of extreme importance and the penalty

that attaches to it is severe. We need to have that fresh in our minds as we come to Matthew 5 and realize that Jesus is equating mental lust, heart lust, with the physical act of adultery – they call forth the same penalty is the point.

It is not just in the Old Testament though. Just a couple of other passages from the New Testament for the sake of time – Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

This is a matter of eternal consequence, not to be trifled with. The writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 13:4 said this:

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled, for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

This sexual sin, this adultery, this fornication is a horrible, multifaceted sin that we need to realize for all of its ugliness and all of its dishonor.

- The adulterer disobeys God.
- Adultery betrays your spouse.
- Adultery betrays your children.
- Adultery breaks your wedding vow.
- Adultery violates someone's wife or future wife.
- Adultery betrays other Christians.
- Adultery tempts others to follow you into sin.
- Adultery violates your testimony to the lost.
- Adultery creates a reproach that follows you to the grave.

Now understand, I'm not saying that adultery is the unforgivable sin; maybe it is premature for me to say that. But we need to hold this sin forth in all of its ugliness and realize how abominable it is. Those and a thousand other reasons are sufficient to vindicate God's harsh judgment against the sin of adultery. Adultery is serious; it is damnable. It shatters lives; it disrupts families, even the lives of the innocent in those families. And adultery is ultimately a fist shaken in the face of God saying, "I'll do it my way. Get out of my way, I'll do what I darn well please." It is intrinsically evil and God's fierce and holy judgment through multiple proclamations in the scriptures is against it.

So, what should we say about the culture in which we live where adultery is rampant? What should we say when adultery is the subject of so much of what passes for entertainment in our programs and movies and in the culture around us? Beloved, I say this gently: what should we say about our own spiritual state when we can see all these

things around us and not be outraged by the affront to God's holiness and just live comfortably among it as if it doesn't really bother us?

Well, before we get too far into that analysis, before we get too far in answering those questions, may be we should step back and consider point two, which is this and will take us into our passage:

2. Jesus Condemns Heart Adultery

The Old Testament condemns this as well, but I'm just saying Jesus because Jesus is the one who is speaking in the passage before us here in Matthew chapter 5. So turn to Matthew chapter 5 with me again if you are not already back there and let's ask this question: If the Bible so roundly condemns adultery, if it is so clearly brings forth the judgments of God, then it would be good for us to answer this question: who is an adulterer? Before we get too outraged about the culture around us, the things that are outside of the walls of this room, let's hear what Jesus says about this issue and see whether it has any personal application to you and me, where it says in verse 27: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'"

Now the Pharisees – just like they had with the commandment against murder – the Pharisees had given a conveniently narrow definition of sexual sin, and this is what Jesus is referring to. He is not referring to the commandment specifically, but He is referring to the interpretation of that commandment that had been placed upon it by several hundred years of Jewish tradition. What the Jews had done, what the Pharisees had done is that they had essentially limited this commandment to the physical act of adultery. If you are innocent of the physical act, then you have met the standard of righteousness that the command requires was their basic teaching.

But that wasn't true even to the Old Testament. We have already seen that that's not even true to the Ten Commandments. And so while in a strict sense what they said was true enough, the way they taught it turned it into a falsehood because they stripped it of any meaningful internal force; they gutted the law of God of its true meaning. What Jesus does here is He blows away the dust, He scrapes away the crud of their tradition, and He cleans off the commandment to be able to show it forth in all of its pristine clarity – that's what He is doing here in this passage.

The true meaning of God's command against adultery is much wider and much deeper than merely prohibiting outward acts of sexual immorality. Jesus, as the ultimate authority on the law of God since it is His law anyway, proceeds to give its true interpretation in verse 28, and O does this search our hearts! Look at verse 28. As the Lord of the universe, the sinless Son of God, speaks, He says:

But I say to you, that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus is bringing out the moral force of the law on the basis of His own authority. He is declaring what He truly means over against what the scribes and Pharisees had said, against those scribes and Pharisees who had dumbed down the law to a mere external act. Jesus brings forth the fullness of what God entirely meant all along, and He says, “I say to you that every one who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

I want to handle this very carefully, or at least as carefully as I am capable of doing so, to help you understand precisely what Jesus is talking about. He is not talking about simply noticing a woman as she passes by – that’s not the issue and the grammar on this is very clear. When Jesus says, “Everyone who looks at a woman...” He uses the Greek present tense which is significant. He is describing the look that is an ongoing look – it is a look that is more than a casual glance, it is a look that focuses in and with mental intention in the look – it’s not an inadvertent glance. When He talks about “looking at a woman with lust for her,” what Jesus is describing here is – the underlying grammar in the Greek is very clear on this – Jesus is describing – get this and listen very carefully – Jesus is describing *a purposeful look by a man who is seeking to indulge a sexual desire that is in his heart*. That’s what He is describing – the language on that is very clear.

By way of illustration, we can think back to when King David was on his roof and saw Bathsheba bathing a short distance away. The initial noticing of that was not the sin in itself. But at some point he crossed over from having noticed her – maybe only in a matter of a few moments – at some point he crossed over from that look as he looked out across the countryside to a lustful stare, and it was that lustful stare that was the seed of all of the sin that followed as he sinned with her and then killed her husband in an effort to cover it up. In Jesus’ analysis, David had committed adultery with Bathsheba long before his servants brought her to him because the purpose, the intent, had already been settled in his heart: “That is what I will do; that is what I want. I want that; I’m going to focus on that; I want that and my heart pursues it.” That’s what Jesus is describing here is that purposeful look.

And notice what He says about that purposeful look in verse 28. He says when your eyes have latched on to someone else in that manner – He says, “You have already committed adultery with her in your heart” – past tense. In terms of guilt before the standard of God, adultery has already taken place. And what this does, beloved, is that those kinds of lusts, those kinds of private thoughts that you deceive yourself into thinking that no one knows about – those lusts are the evidence of sin that dwells within you.

The fact that your mind and your desires move in the direction of sexual sin shows what is really in your heart. And the fact that maybe some of you are innocent of the physical act does not exonerate you before the standard of the law of God because your heart is supposed to be that pure, untainted place where God is worshipped alone and adored. And how disgusting the thought to drag that kind of sin into that sanctum where God is to be worshipped – that’s where the problem lies; that’s where the sin lies. It’s because your inner man is sinful – those lusts flow from a perverted heart that seeks after that which God has forbidden.

What that means is that this commandment against adultery prohibits all impure thoughts and desires of the heart. Now beloved, that is a far higher standard of righteousness than anything the Pharisees knew. It shows the depths of the righteousness that God requires to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is positive heart virtue not just the negative avoidance of the outward act – to which we could all probably say a collective “Ouch! You mean over the course of my entire lifetime, from the days of my youth until now, that is the standard?” That’s right. “You mean to say that a single lustful look makes me an adulterer, guilty in the eyes of God?” That’s right; that’s exactly what it means.

And just in this matter of lust – neglecting the other five areas of this section of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus uses to expose the true standard of inner righteousness that God requires, just focusing on the standard of lust – if I said that that standard applied to every moment of our lives condemns every one of us, I cannot possibly be too far from the absolute truth. And if we think just a little bit further, we will see that the implications of this are just absolutely enormous.

I like what Arthur Pink said about this topic. Listen to it carefully because he works out the implications of this in a way that few writers have. He says:

If lustful looking is such a grievous sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with desires to be looked at and lusted after... are not less, but even more guilty. In this matter, it is 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 women who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of our young men. And how much greater is still the guilt of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses.

We need to understand that this standard of God has massive implications throughout all of our thought lives and through the way that we dress and the way that we interact with one another. And everything that Pink refers to there is absolutely right – everything has to be brought into subjection to this great commandment. And with the recognition that somewhere in our lives, at some time or another, you and I have violated this standard – without getting even into the physical aspect that you also know about – either with our minds or with our bodies. We realize that once again, God’s standard for righteousness simply condemns us all and leaves us without excuse. This is what God requires; He sees right through it all.

So who is the adulterer? What do we say about the culture around us that thrives on adultery and peddles it like it is simply food to be consumed? Beloved, before you point your finger outside the walls of this room, take a look in the mirror and ask yourself what God sees there – that’s where we have to come out on it. Jesus doesn’t give us this to simply condemn others with; this searches our own hearts. And if we are honest, we find ourselves lacking what God requires.

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And the guilt of that, the condemnation of that, is a good thing – it is a good thing because the conviction of sin is what is alone will truly drive you to Christ. Whether you are an unbeliever hearing this and having it come to your heart with power for the first time and saying, “Woe is me, I’m undone, and I’m a man of unclean lips and an unclean heart. Where do I find deliverance from this great sin that has engulfed me?” – or whether you are a Christian, just realizing, “I have let the weeds grow up in my heart in a way that is detestable as I understand the law of God apply to my heart” – either way, that conviction should drive you to the Lord Jesus Christ. That conviction should drive you to an utter despair of having any righteousness of your own that would commend you to God. When we understand the commandments of God for the full force that they truly bear on our inner man, we abandon forever the idea that “I can somehow be good enough to stand before Him in heaven.” Your righteousness, as Isaiah said in 64:6, is like “filthy rags.”

And I say that not to discourage you, but to convict you and, by the power of the Holy Spirit I would pray, to bring to your mind and to your heart conviction and upon your conscience the fact that you have no righteousness of your own to offer up to a holy God and to drive you outside of yourself and to look upon Christ and see in Him the only hope for forgiveness and the only hope for righteousness that you could possibly have.

Listen to the words of Paul. The apostle Paul in Titus 3:3-7 in this context – the only hope that any of us have when we understand the standard that Jesus laid upon us – Paul says:

For we also were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

But when the kindness of God our savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of these which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our savior so that being justified by His grace, we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Listen, beloved, it is when you see the depth, and it is only when you see the depth of your sin compared to the law of God, it is only when you see your total lack of righteousness that you will have any appreciation or desire, true desire for the Lord Jesus Christ. As long as you think you somehow meet God’s standard, you are lost, you are doomed.

You have to let this come to bear on your conscience. You have to despair of any hope of your own righteousness because then and only then do you look upon that crucified Christ on Calvary. Then and only then you look at Him resurrected and ascended into heaven and say, “There is my hope for forgiveness. He alone is my righteousness. Christ

is the one who fulfilled these commands of God – He alone. That is the righteousness that I need – it is outside of myself; I need God to give it to me.” That’s where this drives us: it drives us to the grace and the mercy, to the love and kindness of God. Because you see, beloved, in Christ even you who are adulterers can find grace. That’s the glory of the gospel, it condemns us, but it offers us hope in Christ.

The other thing that it does for those of us that know Christ in terms of having our sins washed away, we still have this life to live here on earth, Jesus says one other thing here in this passage that would give us our marching orders if you are a true Christian:

3. Jesus’ Cure for an Adulterer’s Heart

Jesus’ cure for an adulterer’s heart is what we are going to see in verses 29-30, where He says:

If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Here in verses 29 and 30, Jesus has switched from a plural form of “you” to a singular form. He is using the singular “you” as He speaks, and what that does is that it makes the application more immediate for each of you that would be under the sound of my voice. Jesus is speaking to you as if the two of you were alone in a room together. He is speaking directly to you and saying this is what you must do. It is not simply a general precept with no immediate application. No, this goes directly to you.

“So, what do I do Jesus?” Well, He says in verse 29, “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you.” This idea of stumbling – it has the idea that if there is something in your life that is repeatedly a problem for you, that repeatedly causes you to enter into mental or physical sin, you have to get rid of it. The word for stumbling carries the idea of setting a trap or a snare – there is something that you get in and it grabs you and holds on to you and won’t let go. Jesus is using that picture to describe whatever that thing is in your life that leads you into temptation and sin. James said: “We all stumble in many ways.” And so it has to be direct application for you of this in one manner or another. What do you do with that thing that causes you to stumble or sin? What do you do?

It is not that hard, beloved. You don’t need a seminary degree to give the answer to this question. What do you do with that? You get rid of it. Man, that’s complicated; you wouldn’t believe how I labored over the Greek to understand that point! If there is something that is a threat to you, you get rid of it. If you have cancer in your body, you go to the doctor and try to get rid of it. If there is a cancer on your soul, something in

your life that drives you into sin, then you get rid of it with a greater urgency than you deal with the tumor of cancer. Look at what Jesus says here, He says: “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you.” And then He goes on in verse 30, “If your right hand...” – it has the same response.

Now beloved, keep in mind what we have been saying all along as we have gone into this section of verses 21-48, we have been saying all along that God requires an inner heart righteousness. He is talking about heart matters here. And that context alone should be enough to keep us from the mistakes that some have made over the course of church history, where they have taken this literally and actually harmed themselves physically in an effort to fulfill this verse – that is not what Jesus is talking about here at all. Jesus is not commanding self-mutilation. What He is commanding is self-control.

He says and He makes a point that you go so far – He says your spiritual life is so important, God’s standard of righteousness is pervasive and such a priority – that even if your most valuable eye or most valuable hand would make you stumble, you would get rid of it. But understand that He has just been saying that adultery and murder are things that go on in your heart; they are matters of mind and attitude. And so cutting your hand off or plucking your eye out isn’t going to solve that heart problem. But He is using hyperbole to make this point. If you would do that in the most extreme case as it were your right eye, if it were your right hand, and you would get rid of it, then – the logic of this, the force of this, is compelling – then, how much more should you get rid of something of lesser value that causes you to sin.

And when Jesus said in verse 29, “Tear it out and throw it from you,” and in verse 30 He says, “Cut it off and throw it from you,” the grammar underlying this in the original language is a language that speaks of urgency, a matter of uttermost priority. This command is meant to be acted upon now – you have to act upon this now. Don’t give this room to fester; don’t approach this and say, “I’ll deal with this sometime; I’ll get around to dealing with that.” No, that kind of attitude towards something that causes you to stumble is in itself sinful. You must deal with the causes of sin in your life immediately, you must deal with them dramatically, you must deal with them mercilessly, you must deal with them ruthlessly – that is the only way that you can put sin to death.

And beloved, without fear of contradiction I would say this: that your willingness to forsake those things in your life that we are talking about, your willingness to attack those things and kill them is the expression of your true desire for righteousness. The man or the woman who truly desires righteousness cuts no corners, has no protected area in their life that is immune from the scrutiny of what God would command – “If there is something in my life that leads me into sin, then I have to get rid of it.”

Jesus is speaking of what the theologians call mortification. He is telling us that anything that stands between us and the pursuit of righteousness must be ruthlessly, even savagely, torn out and cut off and thrown away. Drastic measures are always appropriate in order to protect your spiritual health.

And so the application of the way you work out this command not to commit adultery is this: instead of cherishing adultery in your mind and saying, “I’m innocent of the command because I haven’t done the physical act,” you realize that your mind is the real battleground here, and you set your heart against those lusts and you eliminate that which feeds them. You do it first; you do it fast; you do it as the matter of top priority. The way it works is that you stop and you get rid of it and you replace it with something else – that is the way that you pursue this kind of sanctification.

And so let me give you a couple of simple examples – way too simple; I want to keep it simple. When your eyes are attracted to another person, instead of continuing to look and focusing in on it – you know what I’m talking about here – instead of continuing that look, you forcibly turn your head away and you pray, “God, keep my mind pure; I’m going to cut that off.” And you may say, “But man, I’d have to do that 24, 35, 60 times a day maybe.” Precisely. If you were in a war, how many times would you hold up the shield to keep the arrow from entering into your heart? Every time that arrow comes – the shield, the shield, the shield. Every time that allurements presents itself, you turn your head away and you replace what would have been the thought with prayer, “God, You have got to keep my mind pure. I’ve given up far too much ground in this battle as it is.”

If your computer or your television is drawing you into sin, turn it off, get up, move away, and start doing something constructive. And if you are in a relationship that is flirtatious or downright sinful, break it off today; make the phone call before you get to the worship service second hour and say, “This is over, don’t call me back, we’re done. Because you are the thing that causes me to stumble, I’m going to pull my eye out as it were and fling you out of my life.” That’s the only way you can deal with it. As long as you give room for it, as long as you give it an inch, it will take a mile. Do what Joseph did: you get up and you run from that compromising situation.

Let me encourage you that you are not spiritually alone as you do this. It is when you affirm your faith in Christ, it is when you affirm your trust in Him for your salvation and you understand that you have the indwelling Holy Spirit to help you as you put these things to death – that is the key to victory. Paul said in Romans 8:13:

If you are living according to the flesh, you must die. But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

And so you take this drastic approach, you take these drastic measures with a conscious dependence on the fact that, “I need the Holy Spirit’s help to help sanctify my life,” and you do these things not out of self-effort, but in an effort that is rooted in trusting Christ. You have a dependence on the Spirit of God that says, “I recognize the commandment, I recognize Christ, I know I have the indwelling Holy Spirit; on that position of strength, I’m going to put these things to death in my life. And I’m not going to abandon the fight until the day I die.” That’s the resolution that it takes because I understand that it may require a long-term relentless fight against these things, especially if you have developed

long patterns of sin. But you are commanded to deal with it, beloved – not by me, but by Jesus Himself.

After that word of what I trust is hope and encouragement about being able to deal with it, let me express this word of caution as well. Beloved, if you are settled into refusal that says, “I’m not going to go there. That is something that I’m not going to give up,” look at what Jesus says – He says: “It is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” What He is saying is if there is a sin that you want to hold on to, realize that you are holding on to that at the risk of your eternal soul. Maybe you are not even saved, because the truly repentant person, the truly saved person, puts no limits on putting the deeds of sinful flesh to death. And if you are not willing to do that, then you have to step back and ask a more fundamental question, because in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes how the truly repentant live out their lives. And beloved, if righteousness is not a top priority for you, if it is not an urgent priority for you, you have reason to question whether you have truly been born again.

And I have to say, in this context: you can’t hide behind the old line, “I go to Grace Church.” If that’s all the deeper your commitment to Christ goes and it doesn’t flesh itself out in your daily life, that’s not much of a hope you are standing on. Grace Church can’t save anybody. If you pursue sin during the week while coming to Grace on Sunday, God have mercy on you – God have mercy on you! Because Jesus said: “Many will come to me on that day and say ‘Lord, Lord, did we not...’ and I will say to them, I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.”

So beloved, what you have to see is that there is so much at stake in this. Jesus has been talking to us about the sin of adultery and lust in our hearts, but there is even a bigger principle at stake, there is a whole matter of the way that you think about righteousness. For the truly redeemed, whatever is in your life that exposes your soul to unholy desires, you must abandon them. And the righteous person says, “Amen, thank you for saying that; I’m at it, I’m on it.” And that, beloved, is the way – that is another illustration of how your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if you wish to enter the kingdom of heaven. Ultimately, positionally, the only righteousness that will satisfy is the righteousness of Christ to ourselves, counted to our account – that is the only righteousness that meets God’s standard. But for the one who is truly repentant, he pursues the outworking of that righteousness in his own life. He is not indifferent to holiness. No, holiness is a matter of top priority.

And so we are shut up to Christ by these things, and at the same time, for those of us who are redeemed, we will say, “I’ve got my marching orders. I’ve got things to work on. God, help me to that end.”

Let’s pray:

Our Father, these things are so searching and Your righteousness is so great and so deep and so profound. We wouldn’t even know where to begin. If it were not for Christ, we would all be lost. We would all be condemned without hope and without any manner of

encouragement in this world, our Father. But Christ has come, Christ has died for sins, Christ is risen from the dead. You do set forth Your love upon sinners.

So Father, for the coming week, search our hearts. For those of us who know Christ, renew our commitment to deal with sin ruthlessly until we put it to death in our lives. For those that are convicted by these words, O God, realizing they are lost and without hope, may Your Spirit graciously, gently leave them to the loving Savior who says, "The one who comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out."

Father, even adulterers are welcomed to Christ. Those that are like that here today, Father, bring them to Him in humble repentance that they too might be one who enters into the kingdom of heaven. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.