

Adultery in the Heart (Matt. 5:27-30)

True religion is concerned with the heart

In these verses the chief Prophet and Teacher deals with the sin of adultery, which is forbidden in the law of God and deserves death (Ex. 20:14, Lev. 20:10). The scribes and Pharisees had reduced this sin to the *act* of adultery. But true religion is not just outward, but inward and in the heart (1 Sam. 16:7; Prov. 23:26). The Lord does not just want our speech to be proper and our lives to be decent; He wants our heart. People continually forget this. They think if they have never taken a life, they are free from sinning against the 6th commandment, and if they have never cheated on their wife, they think they are in the clear regarding the 7th commandment. Jesus says: If you look lustfully on a woman, you've already committed adultery in your heart. A man may be technically faithful to his wife, while his mind is a sewer choked by unclean desires, and even though he has never acted out his sinful lusts, he has committed adultery in his heart. Christ is not satisfied with our masks of religion and outward obedience. And He wants us to feel that heart adultery, the wandering eye, and the lustful thoughts are sin. What reason we have to ask Him to wash us and create within us a clean heart (Ps. 51:10)!

The reality of hell is a motive for holiness

Here is a call for God's people to pursue holiness, and the motive is: otherwise you will end up in hell. Matthew Henry: It is a startling argument, and it is repeated. It is better to go to heaven without an eye or an arm than to go to hell. There is a life that shows the grace of the gospel which leads to heaven, and a life that misses this inward purity of heart will lead to hell.

- Matthew Henry: "There are some sins from which we need to be saved with fear, particularly fleshly lusts... which cannot be checked, but by being frightened."
- Matthew Henry: "When we are tempted (in a way) that it is hard to deny ourselves and crucify our lusts, we ought to remember how much harder it will be to lie for ever in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." People don't really know what hell is, who would rather perish in those flames than deny themselves the gratification of sinful lusts.
- Matthew Henry: If we care for our bodies and souls, "we will possess them in sanctification and honour, and not in the lusts of uncleanness."

Yes, no matter how long you have been a professing Christian, the evidence that you are not going to hell is the way in which you deal with personal sin (E. Donnelly).

The Christian life calls for drastic action

Christ says: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out... if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." Of course, the Lord Jesus does not mean we must physically mutilate ourselves. An one-eyed man can still lust, and a one-handed man is still able to do terrible evil. And if we removed both eyes, with our mind and heart we can still lust and sin. The root of sin lies in the heart, not in bodily organs. He is saying: we must deal with the real cause of sin that stems from our heart,

which reveals itself in what we do with our eyes and hands. Matthew Henry: “the eye is both the inlet and outlet of a great deal of wickedness” (2 Pet. 2:14). Substitutes will not do. We must deal with whatever induces us to sin. Sin must be mortified, amputated. Are there things that compromise your Christian life? We need not do so in our own strength (Rom. 8:13). It is at the cross where the sinner is not only justified, but where sin is mortified. Let us consider what our sins did to Him, and ask Him to turn away our eyes from beholding vanity.

Discussion Questions

1. Luther said about temptation: “You cannot help birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.” What did he mean?
2. In what ways should women seek to apply these words of Jesus, and what role do parents have?
3. What can parents do in our age of internet, smart-phones?
4. John Owen said: “be killing sin, or it will be killing you.” How seriously do we take such words?