

Michael McGowan

Exodus 20:14; Matthew 5:27-30 – “**The 7th Commandment: A Question of the Heart**”

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Exodus 20:14

You shall not commit adultery.

Matthew 5:27-30

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall 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. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, 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. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, 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.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Our North American culture is becoming more and more comfortable with adultery.

Some of this is not to subtle...

There are websites set up for people looking to have affairs.

But in more subtle ways we’re becoming more comfortable with adultery.

In the box office hit of the 1990s, *Titanic*, how many of us were pulling for Rose to end up with Jack?

We were happy when they got together and sad when he died.

But what we often neglect is that Rose was already committed to a man.

She was engaged!

But we want to see her find happiness and true love...

So we root for her to leave her current relationship.

This happens all of the time in our favorite TV shows and movies...

At the end of some movies I realize that I was rooting for a marriage to end...

Because I want to see the guy and the girl get together.

Our culture is getting more and more comfortable with adultery...

But the Word of God is clear on its stance.

When I was in high school there was a story going around about a popular guy a grade ahead of me...

He was at a party and had a lot of alcohol in him...

And was playing around by the fire...

Well, somehow fell in.

They said that when he went to take off his socks his skin came along with it.

This is an image that we're given in the book of Proverbs:

“Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?

Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?

So is he who sleeps with another man's wife.” – Proverbs 6:27-29

Wisdom literature tells us that God designed this world to work in certain ways...

There are ways of living that are good and right...

They are ways that God made for creation to work best.

Wisdom is warning us, in Proverbs, that adultery is a bad idea...

It causes problems...

When you play with fire, anticipate getting burned.

Proverbs are like a wise friend or parent putting their arm around us...

Urging us to think twice about our actions. (Christopher Wright)

The law takes a little more direct of an approach:

“You shall not commit adultery.”

God, the giver of the law...

Tells his people how to stay holy.

As long as they are in his presence, they are holy.

“Don't do anything that defiles you.”

They can no longer be in his presence when they're unclean...

He's too holy.

One way to maintain holiness is to recognize the boundaries around sex.

Sex is good—

God created it so that we could reproduce;

So that we could be close to our spouse;

So that we could experience pleasure—

But he only meant it for marriage...

Only in this relationship between the husband and wife.

Marriage was supposed to be a picture of God's relationship with his people...

God's people were supposed to remain faithful to him alone...

They were not allowed to worship any other idols or gods...

This was a form of adultery in their relationship with him.

Adultery was serious business to God.

It was so serious that there was a penalty attached to it:

“If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.” – Deut 22:22

Death was the penalty for adultery...

It wasn't meant for God's holy people.

No matter what the world is telling us...

Adultery is a problem.

Wisdom warns us to run away from it...

And the Law commands us not to do it.

At this point we haven't really given a clear definition of adultery...

We've really just identified that it's a problem...

That it goes against the intention of creation;

And it goes against God's will for his people.

With the way the law is written...

It seems like it's only concerned with married men and women...

Participating in sexual activity outside of their marriage.

But then Jesus comes along and helps us out.

“The Law says, ‘You shall not commit adultery...’”

“Well I’m going to tell you what that really means.”

Jesus takes us to the deep meaning of the law...

What it was originally intended to capture...

“*Anyone* who looks at a person in order to lust commits adultery with them in their heart.”

Along with other New Testament passages (Eph 5:1-3) we see that this command is not just for married people...

If we look at the 10 commandments as a whole...

We see that even in the 10th we’re all commanded not to desire our neighbor’s wife.

We’re all subject to this commandment...

Whether we’re young or old...single or married.

Jesus also expands this law to cover more than just actual sexual actions.

Anyone who looks at a woman to lust has already committed adultery with her.

Adultery is a matter of the heart...not just actions.

We’ve all heard of this word “lust” before.

It’s usually defined as something to do with a strong sexual desire...

It’s the desire that leads to the action.

You can have lust without having sex...

You can commit adultery without the physical act.

Lust is the *attitude* that objectifies a person.

Instead of recognizing the humanity and valuing that person as one of God’s creation—

As a son or daughter of God—

In our lust we see them as a sexual object.

They become something that we want to possess...

Stripped of their humanity and used only to satisfy.

Lust is self-centered...

When we lust, we make it all about us...

And what will make us feel good.

“Anyone who looks at someone lustfully commits adultery...”

This can be someone that we see out in public...

At the beach, at the gym, or at the grocery.

We're out and we notice someone attractive and—

Instead of practicing the spiritual discipline of looking at the pavement—

We indulge.

The lust inside of us desires to make that person ours...

So we take that second, and third look...

We give into the desire to look and gaze and imagine.

A perfect picture of lust is using pornography.

Maybe we're on the computer with no intention of looking at anything wrong.

But then that feeling comes up inside of us—

That wave comes crashing over us—

And we just have to feel pleasure...

We have to have sexual satisfaction...

Lust.

We know those things that excite/arouse us—

Or that bring pleasure—

So we give into the lust...

And we go to that website.

As we look at or watch the images on the screen...

They're not humans...

They're objects that we're using...

Just bodies.

Lust strips these people of their value...

Of their unique identity as those created in God's image.

Lust takes us into a world of fantasy where nothing is real.

It is anti-reality...

Centered only on this lust-driven version of ourselves.

We can have lust even sitting in an empty room...

Or driving down the Hway in the middle of the day.

We don't need people or computers to lust.

Lust lives in our head...

It drives us to recall sexual images or situations...

And it leads us to these strong feelings and desires.

No, you don't have to have physical actions in order to break the 7th commandment...

You don't have to be married to sin against God's will for your life regarding sex...

The 7th commandment is a matter of the heart...

Anyone who looks at a person lustfully commits adultery...

Anyone living in lust breaks God's command.

Jesus takes lust seriously...

So seriously that he offers radical means of dealing with it:

“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away.”

“If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.”

Of course he's using exaggeration to make his point—

So don't go tearing out your eye or cutting off your hand—

But do deal with your lust...

Be ruthless in dealing with the first signs of lust. (NT Wright)

Be drastic with the measures you take.

Be willing to make tough sacrifices.

If you have a pornography problem...

Then stop it.

Stop and stay stopped.

Get rid of your smart phone.

They still make flip phones.

Get rid of your computer...

You won't die.

Or get blocking software on your computer.

If you're married and thinking about getting involved with a co-worker...

Slam that door shut right now...

Don't leave it open even a crack...

No more flirting. No more IM or Facebook messages.

You can't put fire in your lap and not expect to get burned.

If you're already in a relationship outside of your marriage...

End it!

Not tomorrow...not when the time is right...now.

End it and keep it ended.

Don't run back to it when times get tough.

Jesus is saying to go to extreme measures to get this stuff out of your life.

The most extreme thing that you'll probably ever do is talk to someone about it...

Come clean about what you've got going on.

The embarrassment or shame you think you'll feel...

Is better than the alternative...

Living in active sin...actively disobeying God...

Reaping the punishment due for your looks, thoughts, and actions.

Come and talk to me about it.

If you come into my office and say, “Pastor Michael, I have a problem with #7...”

Know what I’ll say right off the bat?

“Thanks for coming to talk to me. It takes a lot of courage to take this step.”

Jesus takes lust and adultery very seriously.

But it’s merely a symptom...

It’s an outworking of a greater ailment that we have.

The greater disease that we suffer from is sin.

Because we have fallen from our original goodness...

We are corrupt.

We have a disposition that is sinful...

We inherited this from our first ancestors (original sin).

So now it is our tendency to sin against God and sin against our neighbors.

This is our natural disposition after we turned from God.

This is the condition of our heart.

Sin is deep within us...

Reaching to the core of who we are.

We have been fatally touched by sin...

And lust is just one way that sin shows its ugly head in our lives.

Maybe you’re feeling the weight of this commandment...

And the guilt that it brings.

More than any of the other commandments that have to do with our relations to others...

The 7th may dig the deepest into us.

It may be the commandment that most causes us to recognize our deficiency...

That causes us to recognize our lack...

And our need.

This commandment has been impossible for us to keep...

And lust brings us to our knees time and again.

Or if we don't struggle with lust ourselves...

Maybe we're "inciting" someone to lust as the catechism says.

Maybe we don't so much lust as we desire to be lusted after.

Whatever the case, this commandment strikes us as impossible...

And it causes us to feel the weight of our sin.

But what it does is lead us to Christ.

The 7th commandment—

Just like the other 9—

Exposes our sin for what it is.

It shows us how we can never live up to God's standards...

How we always fall short of the way he wants us to think, talk, and act.

The law shows us the ugliness of our sin and points us to the Savior.

It points us to the one who came down from heaven to live as one of us.

Jesus Christ was tempted by the same things that tempt us...

He probably noticed that women around him were attractive—

And he was probably tempted to desire them sexually...

He was tempted to lust—

But he walked in perfect obedience while he was here.

Jesus didn't break any of God's commands...

And yet he was still crucified.

He was crucified because we didn't keep God's commandments...

He didn't and we couldn't...

We were too tainted with sin.

He gave his perfect life and obedience and righteousness to us...

Because we couldn't get there on our own.

Jesus died for our disobedience and our guilt.

We are washed clean by his sacrifice...

And now his perfect obedience is given to us.

Brothers and sisters, know that in Christ your sins are forgiven...

Know that it is only in Christ Jesus that we are saved.

Amen.