

Matthew 5:27-30

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[0 : 00] And open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5 and verse 27-30. Matthew chapter 5 is on page 810 if you've got a church Bible.

! I spoke at a conference a couple of years ago and there was a panel. I was the third guy on the panel. And the question was, what do you think is the biggest threat facing the church today?

What do you think is the biggest threat facing the church today? First guy said, internet pornography. Second guy said, internet pornography.

I said, sin and sin. And I do want you to hold that thought because I do think pornography is a huge problem.

If you look at the statistics, it's quite terrifying amongst men and growing amongst women. If you look in the church, the statistics are terrifying equally amongst people who are in church.

[1 : 11] There will be people in this room this morning that are addicted to internet pornography. There will be people that are struggling with it. And yet I want to say to you, and I want to say to myself, that is not the big issue.

It's not the big issue. Don't buy that it's the big issue. Because the big issue is, when you come to something like pornography, is pornography is never actually the problem. And that's what we're going to see when we get there today.

And Jesus is explaining the law of God in all its richness, in all its fullness, in all its beauty. And when he comes to the seventh commandment, he is showing you what does it mean to not commit adultery.

And he's showing you and I, what does it look like to live a life where our righteousness goes beyond the most religious people of their day, the scribes and Pharisees. And so what Jesus is doing, Jesus is pointing you and I to the kind of obedience that will fulfil this command.

He's not showing you how to become a Christian. He's not telling you this is the way you get into the kingdom of God. And he's saying, as somebody who is part of a follower of the Lord Jesus, this is how you ought to live.

[2 : 24] Two things. What sort of obedience is it? Number one, it's a repentant obedience. A repentant obedience. Look at verses 27 and 28. You've heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery.

Verse 28. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. He's not countering the same commandments.

He's not repealing it. He's saying there is more depth to it than you ever realised. Judaism, at the time, it did recognise that there was a certain depth to the law.

But it wasn't just external obedience. There had to be an inner obedience. There had to be a purity of mind. The religious leaders of the day, they recognised that.

It's not as if they were just centring on not committing the very act of adultery. But Jesus is saying to you, you need to be very careful in thinking that just because there's been an external obedience.

[3 : 34] An external, outward kind of obedience. Be careful of that. Because Jesus says the commandment is much, much deeper than that.

Jesus says, listen to me, verse 28. I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

We need to realise what Jesus is saying. First of all, there's his authority. Can you see that? I say to you, that every single one of his followers is under his authority.

But notice he's not forbidding looking. He's not saying that it's forbidden for a man to look at a woman.

God has created a world, a universe of beauty. A lot of beauty, isn't he?

[4 : 35] And a lot of beauty is found in those creatures called women. And I'm sure God does not want that beauty to be unappreciated. And Jesus is not saying here that you can look in a legitimate way.

Especially in the area of sexual desire. There is a legitimate God-given desire. To be fulfilled, isn't it?

The Bible says, The answer for sexual relationships, it is between a man and his wife. In the covenant, lifelong covenant of marriage.

So it's a bit like the second commandment. Do you remember we looked at that last week? And it said, Whoever is angry with his brother is liable to judgment. Does that mean you can never be angry? We know, don't we, that there is a legitimate anger.

There's a time when you ought to be angry, and it's right to be angry. But we also know that our sinful nature is such that even legitimate anger, even righteous anger, it's so easy, isn't it, to go over that line.

[5 : 45] And it becomes illegitimate, and it becomes sinful, and it becomes an ungodly anger. And so it's very difficult. You can't always separate them. But Jesus is not supposing that all looking, not all of a man looking at a woman, or a woman looking at a man, is sinful.

What is he doing? Well, the text helps us, doesn't it? He says, I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent, looks at a woman in order to lust, with the purpose of lusting, with the purpose of depersonalising that person, and seeing them as an object.

And notice he goes to the source of it. He says, if you have a man or a woman, but he looks at a man or a woman, a man or a woman, in order to lust, to feed his lust, to possess her when she's not his, if he looks in order to lust, he's already committed adultery with her in his heart.

And so there's the problem. And there is your problem. And there is my problem. It's the heart, isn't it?

It's a cliché, but the heart of the problem is the problem of the human heart. Do you remember Matthew chapter 19 and verse 20? Out of the heart comes what?

[7 : 07] Evil thoughts. Got that? Evil thoughts. Then what does he mention? He mentions murder, adultery, immorality, theft, false witnessing, slander, etc. These things defile a man.

But it's out of the heart. And so do you see that? This morning, your issue is not so much with, maybe, internet pornography. It's with your heart and my heart.

The centre of our being is awry and perverse. It's the sinful nature, and it's from the heart that these things come in other words. And so you can take a commandment, like the seventh commandment, do not commit adultery.

And you may keep it externally, and you may keep it literally, but you may have committed adultery because of the way that you feed your lust in your imagination, and in your thinking.

And you dwell on the images that you've seen and watched, and you think on it, and you replay it. You store it in your memory, and you commit adultery in your heart.

[8 : 12] Do you see how deeply Jesus goes? That's why when Jesus expounds God's law, and we see how deep it cuts, that we're driven back to the start of the Sermon on the Mount, because we realise that it can only be those who mourn.

Who mourn over their sin. Chapter 5 and verse 4. And as you understand this section on lust, and we're going to obey it, it is always going to be a repentant obedience.

And I think if we're honest this morning, and we look at this commandment as Jesus looks at it, and we go beneath the external, and the conformity, and we go to the depths of our imagination, and our hearts, and our desires, we have to confess, don't we, that we are a congregation of adulterers, and adulteresses.

And fornicators. And so do you see what Jesus is driving at here? You can have, this morning, a great sense of external conformity.

But what are the depths? What are the depths? This fellow was a vegetarian. He was a teetotaler. And he was a non-smoker.

[9 : 44] And he actually gave people lectures on not smoking. Do you know who that vegetarian, teetotaling, non-smoking man was?

Adolf Hitler. You can't tell, can you, much from externals. You can't tell much about the depths from the outside.

World War II in 1944. About 3,000 German soldiers got behind the American lines. They had American uniforms and American cheats. They had American ID. They spoke with American accents. They smoked American cigarettes. They used American swear words. And what were they doing? They got behind the lines, and they stirred up trouble. They changed road signs. And they took down warning signs off minefields. They watched and they plotted American troop reinforcements and movements and so on.

[10 : 43] And finally, when it got so bad, the kind of American counterintelligence corps had to crack down. There was chaos behind their lines. So any jeep that pulled up at checkpoint had a gun.

The driver had a gun put in their ribs and he was grilled until he found out were they for real or not. You couldn't just ask them where they were from because they had a good amount of knowledge. You had to sniff them out with questions that only a true American would know.

Like, where's the windy city or something like that? What is beet pan pizza or something like that? And that would give you an idea whether they were for real.

On one occasion, there was a group of lieutenants sitting in a jeep, supposedly, and Americans watching a troop of reinforcements rush by and someone went over to check them out. They had legitimate dog tags.

Their papers were checked out. They even had army camp experiences, they could tell. They said that they'd trade at Camp Hood. And it looked so legitimate. And finally, they were asked one more question before they went on.

[11 : 48] Ever been to Texas? Then said, no, stick them up. Camp Hood is in Texas. See, they had to go really deep, didn't they, to get beneath the surface.

on the surface. On the surface, it looked so legitimate. And it took so much to see that underneath, actually, they were a phony. And the law of God is like that.

We can conform to it and we can outwardly conform to it. But how deep it cuts our imaginations. and if you are a disciple, if you are a follower of the Lord Jesus, then you realise that even as a disciple and a follower of Christ, how far my obedience comes from really conforming to God's law. And when I see the true intent of God's law, I realise that I need a saviour. And as a Christian, if you've been a Christian any length of time and you study God's law and you love God's law, you will realise that again and again and again and again.

I need saving. And if we are going to seek to obey this commandment, we must not be naive for every single one of us.

[13 : 07] It will be a repentant obedience. And I think one of the functions that Jesus has in the Sermon on the Mount is that it brings Christian people to realise how deep the roots of sin are.

How deep the roots of sin are in our own imaginations and thoughts and it ought to bring us to repentance. And if we say we are going to obey this commandment, it will be with a repentant obedience.

And if you have not learnt it yet, the Christian life is one of ongoing lifelong continual joyful repentance.

And I use those words carefully. The Christian life is one of ongoing lifelong continual joyful repentance of bringing your sin to a God who knows about it already and who has dealt with it in the person of his Son and offers you free and full forgiveness.

It will also secondly be a rigorous obedience. Can you see that in verse 29 to 30? Verse 29 If your right eye causes you to sin tear it out and throw it away for it's better that you lose one of your members than let your whole body be thrown into hell.

[14 : 32] If your right eye causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away for it is better that you lose one of your members than let your whole body go into hell. What Jesus is saying there is that here is a way for you to begin to obey and deal with the seventh commandment from the very roots to deal not just with external conformity but seeking to obey it from your heart and here's the pattern there's something you can do in order to begin to get into obedience on this now what does he mean?

He says if your right eye and again you need to connect verse 28 with verse verse 29 and so he's just spoken about looking at a woman lustfully in order to lust after her I knew that a page of my notes blew away this morning but I couldn't work out which one so page 8 to page 10 let me just see no it definitely blew away and so what we need to do is we need to see the connection don't we

but what does Jesus mean?

does he mean this literally? does he mean it literally? of course he can't mean it literally the problem is we're so familiar with it aren't we we think that just because he can't mean it literally that it's just one of those things Jesus says it's hyperbole but it's not that it is a figurative expression and just because it doesn't mean literally that you have to self-harm your eye or cut off your arm and the reason why we know it can't mean that isn't it the reason why we know it can't mean it literally because if you pluck out your right eye you're still back with your left eye aren't you?

and so that's the reason why it can't be literal and actually if you pluck out both eyes the way lust works is that you'd still lust anyway wouldn't you?

and if you chop off your right arm you're still left with your left arm because the issue of lust is an issue of the heart alright and that was page nine now what does the figurative language mean?

[17:00] Jesus saying this really clearly he's saying you should be willing to go to nearly any extreme and he's saying you and I need to be willing to take drastic measures and you need to be willing to take any sacrifice make any sacrifice and you should be willing to endure severe hardship in order to avoid illicit sexual lust or any sin and that leaves me with a real big problem and it humbles me again because do you know what I don't really share that view of sin do I and I suspect neither do you to have such an animosity to have such a hatred towards sin and particularly towards illicit sexual lust that Jesus is speaking about here he's so opposed to it and he's saying his followers should be so opposed to it that they're willing to go to almost any extreme to avoid it and Jesus has a view of sin that's far more extreme and accurate and right and I don't begin to measure up to that and sometimes

I come every Sunday and I confess and I say it is terrible but that isn't always my practice in any given area and our view is more flippant than Jesus view and so it humbles us and what it does tell you is it tells you that the Christian life Christian discipleship is one of ongoing struggle it is a war and it is a fight not just with this particular sin but with any sin that's what he's telling you and we need to take hold of that because there is a view of the Christian life that's preached in lots of churches in London today that's basically this it's let go and let God do it Dr. Martyn O'Jones says there's a view which goes like this that when you get a particular kind of experience then you can kind of live off the fumes of that and your Christian life will go to a higher plane and you don't have to struggle with sin anymore

I don't know a Christian life like that John White was right when he entitled his book on the Christian life and it is a brilliant brilliant book the fight he called it the fight and what you have here is Jesus saying are you willing to go to any extreme are you willing to take any measure no matter however drastic in order to avoid sin and that is a passion with you he's not saying don't be passionate Jesus saying be passionate be passionate in your war against the wrong type of lust what kind of motivation does Jesus use here how does Jesus try to stimulate you to obedience and evaluate the situation well he says this he says get your eye and scoop it out and throw it from you and take any measure you can that you must in order to avoid sin or any sin and the motivation he uses is this it's better for you to lose one of your members either an eye or an arm or a leg than that your whole body is thrown into hell then he repeats it in verse 29 for it's better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell so what's the motivation motivation is fear and we might be really disturbed by Jesus like this you might say you should never motivate anybody like that that is negative we don't like that we particularly don't like that in our culture our church culture but I do want you to see that it is

Jesus the gracious son of God who talks about hell and one of the reasons it doesn't disturb us very much is because hell is just a four letter word for most people isn't it there's no reality to it and it's basically empty we use it all the time but do notice it is Jesus who talks about hell C.S. Lewis and Walter Hooper are sitting in Lewis' study reading one particular day it's a sunny day and Walter Cooper makes the comment a little bit too loud Lou it's as hot as hell in here and Lewis says how do you know and Jesus is really serious about this isn't he what is he saying he's saying on any given sin but particularly in this case illicit sexual lust he is saying any given sin that's unattended unchecked unatoned for that is nursed that is kept that is cuddled will place you in hell and he says it's better that you take any measure any measure that you must take to avoid sin any measure that you can to the utmost of your ability than to end up in hell with your sin

John 5 there's a guy that's been paralysed for 38 years and Jesus raises him up and he sees him later on in the temple and he says don't go on sinning lest something worse happen to you and I

don't know exactly what Jesus was saying but did you hear what Jesus said he said there is something worse than 38 years of utter paralysis it's an amazing statement and so we need to stick seriously his word when he says sin unattended sin indulged sin left alone sin nursed will place you in hell we might say that he's motivating us by fear but there's nothing wrong with that as long as it's a true fear you don't motivate people by untrue things do you but if it is someone and something that is true then it's perfectly right what would we do if someone ran in here this morning and they screamed fire fire would we say oh will you stop being so negative come on you can't motivate us like that we ought to be motivated by grace well that warning is proper to take isn't it a legitimate motivation and what

[23 : 45] Jesus' word requires is vigorous obedience if we're willing to do practically anything in order to obey his commandments in order to harness this matter of illicit lust and so on what does it require well it means that we'll take measures won't it so that our lust isn't fed we'll avoid situations that stimulate lust but again you've got to realise the problem is the heart you've got a betrayer within you the problem is with your sinful nature that remains it's true we deal with all the outside stimuli that we can we get internet accountability we meet with people and confess our sins we get people to ask us the hard questions but we've got to realise the problem with that is the problem with the heart isn't it the primary problem the primary issue is evil nature within so there's kind of craze we must have really close accountability groups but we all know really accountability groups don't work why don't accountability groups work because if you're going to sleep with your brother's wife you're going to lie to your brother about it aren't you you'll keep yourself from that because the problem is it's my heart we automatically think don't we

I've talked about it a number of times internet pornography but there's something much deeper going on here and we need to be aware don't we of the culture that we live in and our culture's approach to relationships and what is normal and what is allowable behaviour and to recognise that according to the bible the only place for sexual relations is within the context of a marriage relationship lifelong between your husband and the wife and I know that you can't fly out of the world I know you've got to go to work tomorrow and you've got to go to school and you can't escape this but actually we have to change our thinking and our minds and we need to see sexual behaviour outside of marriage for what it is which is pathetic and I don't say that lightly we need to deal with the visual is it and the mind there's going to be different issues to different folks there'll be different temptations but it's the same answer for each one it really is it's simple it's not easy it's pluck out your right eye and cut off your right hand that may mean you get out of your smartphone so I'd be seen as a total dinosaur people will laugh at me well total dinosaurs and people who are laughed at will be in the kingdom of heaven the stakes are too high maybe that you just don't get into that

I'm not a raving radical I just think if we take Jesus' words in verse 29 and 30 seriously then whatever makes you susceptible in this area of sin in so far as it depends on you you'll want to get rid of it and you'll not expose yourself to it and that is going to look differently in different people isn't it there's no one straight rule I wish there was but there isn't but the principle is caring about following the Lord and so what does Jesus require of us in the seventh commandment Charlie Brown and Lucy Charlie Brown cartoon character says beauty is only skin deep Lucy says I deny that beauty goes down layer after layer after layer and she looked in her mirror again and said I have very thick beauty what's Jesus want of his disciples in obedience to the seventh commandment he wants very thick obedience obedience that goes down into the depths of our hearts and our imaginations and also that reaches up to the heights of being willing even to sacrifice sacrifice some good things good things which are not wrong but if in our case they lead us to sin we'll want rid of them and so he wants a very thick obedience don't think don't think people of God don't think that Jesus wants to squash your lust he doesn't Jesus wants you to lust he wants to stir up your lust he wants to inflame your lust he wants you to lust after purity and so it's so helpful isn't it that we come to the table we come to the table of the Lord for sinners for people that struggle with their sin that struggle to know that they are cleansed from their past sin and yet we know the blood of

Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin as we heard earlier this morning and we ask that as we eat of the bread and drink of the wine that he would stir us up he would strengthen our desires for purity let's pray those those those!