

“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 lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Matthew 5:27-32

In the forests of northern Europe and Asia lives a little animal called the ermine, which is also known as a stoat or a short-tailed weasel. Ermine are most well-known for their snow white-fur which comes about in the winter; their pelts are invaluable and have been historically used to make royal robes throughout Europe. What is unique to about the ermine is that they instinctively protect their white coats against anything that would soil it. Fur hunters take advantage of this unusual trait. They don't set a snare to catch them, but instead they find their homes, which are usually in a cleft in a rock or a hollow in an old tree – and they smear the entrance and interior with grease and grime. Then the hunters set their dogs loose to find and chase the ermine. The frightened animal flees toward its home but will not enter because of the filth. Rather than soil their white coats, they are trapped by the dogs and captured while preserving their purity. For the ermine, purity is more precious than life.

It should be the very same for us. As born-again, followers of Jesus Christ we are called to a life of purity before God and the world. 1 Thessalonians 4:8 tells us: *“God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”* In James 4:8 we read that we are to: *“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”* Romans 13:14 says we should *“put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”* In Psalm 24:3-4 the psalmist writes: *“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.”* In Psalm 51:10 King David prays: *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”* In Romans 12:1 the apostle Paul exhorts us: *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”* In Matthew 5:8 Jesus himself declared: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

Today, as we continue in our walk together through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we also continue make our way down the path *with Jesus* the leads to the Kingdom of God. Right from the beginning in the Beatitudes, our Lord Jesus has been *with us* because he is the one who blazed the path that leads to the Kingdom of God. He did so by sacrificing his life on a cross in our place, for the forgiveness of our sins, so we might find our way back home to God. This is *also why* Jesus is with us. We could not make our way down that path on our own - because God's Word tells us that the path that leads to the Kingdom of God is paved with the perfection of righteousness, which, as naturally-born members of the fall in the Garden, is truly beyond us. Jesus is *with us* on the path because, as a perfect sacrifice, he is our perfect righteousness – and, at the very same time, Jesus is *with us* so he might lead us into the transformation of our hearts, which will reflection of the character of the Kingdom of God in our lives. What Jesus has been telling us is that if we are truly a people of the kingdom of God, our lives will have a transformational effect on our culture and society because righteous Kingdom conduct flows out of righteous Kingdom character. Character always comes before conduct, because what we are inside of our hearts determines the things that we do in our lives. In last week's text Jesus spoke of how righteous Kingdom character should affect our relationships. If we truly love God and follow Jesus and submit the Holy Spirit – we will pursue reconciliation *because* the greatest need of every human being is that of reconciliation. Kingdom reconciliation means getting right with God and right each other.

“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 lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). Last week Jesus defined how righteous Kingdom character should affect our relationships by looking at the issue of anger - in the context of how scribes and Pharisees interpreted the sixth commandment of the Ten Commandments: *“You shall not murder”* (Exodus 20:13). While the religious leaders of the day went to the extremes regarding their interpretation of keeping the Sabbath, they did not go far enough when it came to prohibiting murder. We see the same this week in today’s text, as Jesus now defines how righteous Kingdom character should affect our *purity* by looking at the issue of lust in the context of how the scribes and Pharisees interpreted the seventh commandment of the Ten Commandments: *“You shall not commit adultery”* (Exodus 20:13). Again, as the scribes and Pharisees went to extremes in other interpretations, they did not go far enough in this one by narrowly focusing on conduct instead of the character that caused that conduct. Jesus said lust is a sinful act conceived in the heart, before it is physically culminated. That means righteousness of the Kingdom of God defines *lust as adultery*.

The heart of what Jesus is saying here is that our choices about sexuality flow from deep with our souls. We are more than just physical bodies. We are complex individuals, souls made up of emotions and intellect and will. And so, in the same way that murder assaults another’s character and soul, our Lord is telling us that violations of sexual purity go far beyond just what is physical. Sexuality begins in the heart, and intentionally flows out from there. Jesus spoke of this when we *“look”* at others with *“lustful intent.”* The word *“looks”* here is a strong present-tense verb, which means *“looks”* is not a casual glance – but rather a fixation, an intention of continuously looking. Jesus is acknowledging here that we are fallen creatures who live in a fallen world, where men and women are physically attracted to one another, which means there are going to be all kinds of issues we will struggle with in this area.

Sexuality will be a struggle for us and we just can’t close the door, turn out the light and ignore it. Jesus is saying that we will encounter and wrestle with sexual urges – and he is straight out telling us that when we focus our attention, fixate and let our mind dwell on a person or an image, we are at that very moment beginning to walk down the path of adultery - which leads us far away from the path of righteousness that leads to the purity of God’s heart. While we cannot control what comes into our view and into our minds through our senses, we can by God’s grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit control *what we do with it*. This is difficult in the days we live in because our culture uses sex to sell everything from cars and boats to toothpaste, toilet paper and candy bars. Movies and television are full of sexual images. Pornography is no longer in a dark corner; it’s right in our home on the internet.

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” (Matthew 5:29-30). Again, by what we are reading here, we can see how deadly serious the issue of *“lust”* can be. With the reality of *“hell”* once again before us, we are to remove everything from our lives that would start us down the path sexual temptation and indulgence that will lead into eternal destruction. Jesus proposed drastic measures to fight against getting drawn into the sin of adultery. His instruction to tear out our eyes and cut off our hands would have shocked those who heard him, as it still shocks us today. But Jesus never intended we take his words literally, but rather he used hyperbole to get our attention. Adultery of the heart is inconsistent with the transforming, recreating, perfecting work of the Holy Spirit within us. Avoiding spiritual downfall is worthy of *any sacrifice* - no matter how great. John Stott said: *“If your eye causes you to sin because temptation comes to you through what you see, then pluck out your eye. That is, don’t look! Behave as if you had actually plucked out your eyes and flung them away, and were now blind . . . Again, if your hand or foot causes you to sin, because temptation comes to you through the things that you do or the places you visit, then cut them off. That is: don’t do it! Don’t go! Behave as if you had actually cut off your hands and feet, and had flung them away, and were now crippled and could not do the things or visit the places that caused you to sin.”*

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matthew 5:31-32). One of the real-life effects of allowing our hearts to drift from God’s original intent of purity is that of divorce. Lust within the heart often leads to adultery – an unfaithfulness that is always spiritual in nature, which often leads to physical adultery. Jesus continues to speak about the “*kingdom*” view of adultery by taking on how the Jews viewed divorce. While the scribes and Pharisees disagreed on the grounds for divorce, they both assumed that divorce was a biblical option. Some felt a man could divorce his wife for any kind of reason; others argued divorce could be granted for any kind of marital impurity. In Matthew 19:7 the Pharisees argued that Moses “*commanded*” a man give his wife “*a certificate of divorce*” if he desired to do so. But Jesus corrected them by saying: “*Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery*” (Matthew 19: 8-9).

Jesus upholds the sanctity and importance of marriage here by implying that we must not embrace a casual attitude toward divorce, and that the proper place for physical intimacy is exclusively within the relationship of marriage. The exception clause “*on the ground of sexual immorality*” points out the reality that lust of the heart is the root cause of adultery. Notice Jesus doesn't command divorce when adultery happens, but he allows it - *because* violating the purity of the sexual relationship within the bond of marriage goes right at the heart of what God intended for us. The “*kingdom*” standard of “*righteousness*” in marriage is the original intent of God “*in the beginning*” of creation - “*that a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24). Jesus said that divorce is a breaking of that “*one flesh*” and the only ground on which God “*allows*” divorce is that of “*sexual immorality.*” This was a much narrower view than that of the Jews.

This is also a much narrower view than that of our culture. But just because divorce is legal, doesn't make it acceptable to God. Divorce is a great struggle in our day. Many of us have been stung by the pain of divorce in our lives and in our families. I went through this myself years before I came to faith in Christ. Yes, divorce is a sin; Jesus gave us an exception to God’s original intent of marriage *because of* the sin of physical, emotional and spiritual “*sexual immorality.*” But regardless of the reason for divorce, we know that there is only one unforgivable sin – and it’s not divorce. The real issue Jesus is addressing here is our sinful tendency to look for a way to justify divorce rather than to humbly embrace God’s “*righteousness*” for our lives and for our marriages. Yes, God grants forgiveness for divorce, but it comes at a high price - a high price for us (brokenness, confession, humility, repentance, and surrender) and a high price for God (the sacrifice of His only begotten Son on a bloody cross). Forgiveness for divorce is not a personal right that can we demand from God, but rather an act of undeserved mercy from our most holy and loving God. God has done that for me as I have been supernaturally and joyfully blessed to be married to Nancy for over 36 years. God is good, all time - even when we are not. Jesus calls for us to live out His kingdom character in everything we do. There is no exception from that in marriage. Marriage is sacred; our kingdom conduct should reflect that.

What Jesus is telling us here is that the heart of the seventh commandment prohibiting adultery is about *our heart attitude towards God*. God unconditionally and completely loves each and every individual that He has ever created. And so, when we engage in sexual immorality through lust and physical intimacy, we fail to love someone whom God truly loves. *Lust at the level of the heart in adultery is rooted in our lack of love for God*. If we loved God as God created us to do, we would not have the sexual issues and marriage problems that we have had all throughout all of human history that still continues today. Again, a human being is more than a body. Adultery is more than just about physical immorality. The body is also connected to an eternal soul that was created in the image of God by God. When we lust after or have an immoral sexual relationship with someone, we are, in essence, lusting after or having an immoral sexual relationship with a God-created soul of another human being.

God created the heavens and the earth. God created human beings. God created sex and marriage. God is the author and director of the great story of the glorious work of His sovereign grace in this life and in the life to come. The *first chapter* of the great story of the glorious work of God's sovereign grace is the *Creation*. God created everything in the universe, and Genesis 1:31 says: "*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good*" – and the purity of sex and marriage were "*very good.*" The *second chapter* of the great story of the glorious work of God's sovereign grace is *The Fall* – human beings created in the image of God sinfully rebelled against God - which twisted, warped and ruined everything – and the purity of sex and marriage became sinfully twisted, warped and ruined. In Romans 1:21-27 we read that, "*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*" Jesus pronounced the severity of hell in the judgement of God on those who lust and commit adultery because *the relational intimacy of sex is all about God.*

The *third chapter* of the great story of the glorious work of God's sovereign grace is *Redemption* – Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross in our place for our sinful rebellion against God is paid for and forgiven, for those who surrender their hearts to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, granting them redemption and eternal restoration with God. 1 Peter 3:18 tells us: "*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*" The *fourth and final chapter* of the great story of the glorious work of God's sovereign is *Glorification*. In Matthew 24:30-31 we read that by the power of God revealed in Jesus' resurrection and ascension, our Lord will someday return to earth "*on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*" And it's here, the apostle John, who is present by the power of the Spirit, then writes: "*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new''*" (Revelation 21:1-5). Jesus pronounced the severity of hell in the judgement of God on those who lust and commit adultery because *the relational intimacy of sex and marriage is all about God.*

In order to truly know God's view on sexuality and marriage, we must embrace the great story of the glorious work of God's sovereign grace through Jesus Christ. And in order for that great story of the glorious work of God's sovereign grace to purify our views and our hearts and our lives and our sexuality and our marriages we must 1) first praise God for the "*very good*" of sexuality and marriage in His creation; and then 2) humbly acknowledge the reality of the sinfully twisted, warped and ruined condition of our sexualities and marriages because of the Fall; and then 3) desperately embrace and joyfully commit our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior Lord, whose sacrificial death on a cross in our place for our sinful rebellion against God, paid for and forgave our sinful rebellion, granting eternal restoration with God through Redemption; and then 4) open our hearts and live out our lives to the promise of the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will not only come to take us home and make all things new – but also *fulfill the purpose of sexuality and marriage.*

God created sexuality and marriage to glorify His God-ordained relationships of love. God made intimate, physical, sexual union for a purpose - which is that of an intimate love for God and an intimate love for one another that unites a husband and a wife together into one flesh in marriage. But God also had a bigger purpose in creating sexuality and marriage, in that they also are a glorious reflection of God's love for us as a husband, as we are His bride through the intimate spiritual union we have with Him in Jesus Christ. This reality can be uniquely lived out and modeled on earth through the union of two different kinds of human beings, male and female. Marriage is a living parable, a concrete symbol, that models for the world the mystery of the union that we have with Jesus Christ.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:22-33

The first two things that normally jump out when we read this text is the *submission of wives* to their husbands and *headship of husbands* over their wives. That we tend to either despise or pass over the biblical roles of headship for husbands and submission for wives - is an indictment against our modern society and the contemporary church. This is not a cultural issue nor a historical issue - this is a love for Jesus issue and a submission to Jesus issue. When we read this text *submission* and *headship* should not be what jumps out at us. What should jump out at us is *Jesus*. When Paul talks about marriage, he talks about *Jesus*. He does so because marriage is about *Jesus*. Wives are to submit to their husband because "*the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*" Husbands, as "*the head of the wife*" are to love their wives "*as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*" When wives love Jesus, and submit to the authority of Jesus, they will love their husbands and humbly submit to their husbands; when husbands love Jesus, and submit to the authority of Jesus they will love their wives and lead their wives by sacrificially giving up their lives for their wives. We cannot love Jesus in isolation from all other relationships in life. Our love for Jesus, which is our love for God, is our heart commitment to God, to Jesus, that is expressed in all our conduct and relationships - the most intimate being that of one flesh in marriage in Christ. Paul wrote of this in Ephesians 5:1-14.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Ephesians 5:1-14

In our text for today Jesus pronounces the severity of hell in the judgement of God on those who lust and commit adultery because the relational intimacy of sex and marriage *is all about loving God*. Again, this means is that we cannot love Jesus in isolation from all other relationships in life. Our love for Jesus is our heart commitment to God, to Jesus, that is expressed in all our conduct and relationships – most primarily and specifically our love relationships in marriage. When we are truly in love with God and truly following Jesus the powerful transforming, recreating and perfecting work of the Holy Spirit will cause us to humbly and joyfully love God, which will cause us to others as God has loved us.

James 1:14 says: “*Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*” When we love things or people or ourselves more than God, we are prone to lust *because* we will be satisfied with any other love. We are created in the image of God, and 1 John 4:8 tells us that “*God is love.*” In Psalm 42:1-2 the psalmist writes: “*As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*” When we love God, we will thirst and hunger for God, as only He will satisfy the hunger and thirst of our souls. Jesus said: “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*” Those of the Kingdom of God are only satisfied with God.

In the midst of being called out because of his sexual sin of adultery, King David confessed his sin, and then he cried out: “*Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit*” (Psalm 51:8, 12). In these words, King David is confessing that he knows that his sexual sin is a symptom, not a disease. The truth is that people give way to sexual sin because they are filled with other things rather than the fullness of “*joy and gladness*” of God. Their spirits waver. They are enticed and give way because God does not have the supreme place in their hearts, minds, souls, feelings and thoughts as He should. David knew that about himself. It’s true about us too. Our joy in loving God is our greatest weapon against sexual lust.

In his book of prayers entitled “Confessions” the famous church father Augustine of Hippo wrote: “Thou have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.” Augustine believed that the grace of God that governs our lives is that of making God the supreme joy of our heart and lives. And he went on to say that if God is the supreme joy of our heart and lives, it will radically change our understanding of the concept of the freedom to choose between good and evil. What that means is that if God truly is the supreme joy of our heart and lives, we would be so in love with God that we would never have to make a choice between God and anything or anyone else - *because* our joy in God is the greatest source and supreme fullness of joy, over and above any other kind of joy we could ever know. When God is our greatest joy, our greatest love, our greatest treasure, He surpasses the idea of making another choice. In Augustine’s view, purity of heart with God does not equate the ability to make choices between God and another alternative as a sign of the freedom of the will, but rather as a disintegration of the will. Augustine believed that the struggle of freedom of choice is a necessary evil in this fallen world until the day comes when discernment and delight unite in a perfect apprehension of what is infinitely loving and delightful, namely, God. Augustine said: “The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire.” In other words, the key to purity of heart with God is a thirst and a hunger for God that can only be joyfully satisfied by God and with God.

Jesus pronounced the severity of hell in the judgement of God on those who lust and commit adultery because the relational intimacy of sex and marriage is all about loving God. God created the heavens and the earth and human beings and sex and marriage. God is the author and director of the great story of the glorious work of His sovereign grace of Creation, the Fall, Redemption and Glorification. God has graciously written us into His story. And the story tells us that when God is the sole object and sole subject and sole source of our love and joy - we will know sexual purity, marriage purity, relational purity, spiritual emotional purity, mental purity, moral purity, and heart purity. Kingdom purity comes about when Jesus is our greatest treasure. May the Lord increase our hunger and our thirst for God. And may He grant us, by the power of the His Spirit, the fullness of His joy over and above everything!

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