

EXTREME MAKEOVER

Character Edition

Lust and Developing the Kingdom Heart: Matthew 5:27-30

As I preach a series on the extreme character requirements of Jesus, it is important for me to ask myself, what I am trying to accomplish big picture. Ultimately, it shapes the way the sermon flows by giving it direction and purpose.

I chose to preach on kingdom character traits because I want us to work on being the kind of person Jesus wants us to become. Ultimately, he does not want there to be any barriers that hinder us from freely loving God and others more. My hope is that we draw closer to God and develop this kind of kingdom heart that will go a long way in making a difference for his kingdom.

With that stated upfront, we move to the next hot topic Jesus addresses; it was hot back then and it is still a steaming issue in our culture today. It seems no matter how we try to separate ourselves from those "primitive" folks back then; we eventually discover that we struggle with the same kind of thoughts, insecurities, and emotions that affected them. We may have better living conditions, more technology, more resources medically, but when all that is stripped away and we look at ourselves in the mirror, we are not so different in our emotional and physical makeup. Consequently, the Sermon on the Mount is just as convicting today as it was back then.

Therefore, as we continue our study, Jesus takes us again to the Ten Commandments, this time moving from the sixth, which we discussed last week, murder, to the seventh, which deals with the issue of adultery. Likewise, Jesus surprises us again by throwing another curve ball. He does not just deal with the physical behavior, which we can hide, he deals with the stuff that is going on in our heart. If we are to make a difference in God's kingdom, we have to get the heart stuff, right.

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 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.

Most people would agree that committing adultery is wrong. Even the great Greek thinker, Aristotle, four hundred years before Jesus, said adultery was wrong in any circumstance. As a result, there is a basic consensus here, but where people really divide is on the issue of what Jesus calls, *adultery of the heart*.

For example, liberal churches will challenge this teaching of Jesus. For them, an unknown author penned these words on spiritual adultery, not Jesus. As a result, they do not believe lusting or actively fantasizing is wrong because it does not hurt the other person. From their perspective, everyone lusts and therefore would be an adulterator. Moreover, there is even a group of scholars known as the *Jesus Seminar*, who meet annually to distinguish between what Jesus actually taught and what the early church forged. According to these "prestigious" scholars, much of the content we have of Jesus is not authentic. In the end, about all they agree on unanimously is the Scripture that says Jesus wept.

However, the reality of the situation is that we have too much textual support to verify that Jesus did teach what he says in the Bible. We have too many manuscripts and fragments that are in harmony here. Jesus consistently said that following him would be hard; it would require a new way of thinking on many facets of life, including what we understand as adultery. He essentially says, adultery occurs first of all in the heart. What this does is place married and single folks on the same playing field, each have the capability of being an adulterer in the eyes of God. As we work through this issue, the important question here, revolves around what it means to lust with intent. We have to be careful to draw the line between temptation and sin, even Jesus was tempted but did not sin. So, what does it mean to look upon a woman with lustful intent?

What Does it Mean to Lust with Intent

Does he mean that if you are attracted to someone of the opposite sex, married or not, and your gaze demonstrates this, that you are an adulterer according to Jesus? Does it mean that if a male or female captures your stare un-expectedly for a moment that you are an adulterer if a sexual thought races across your mind? Some people draw that tough line claiming you must look away instantly and avoid eye contact. However, the reality of the situation is most if not all would qualify as an adulterer at some point in our lives.

Understanding what Jesus means will make this issue easier to get a handle on. The term, lustful intent, is used in the sense of doing something with a clear purpose or goal in mind. In other words, one is purposely looking at a woman with the intent to lust after him or her, undressing them with their eyes. There is no innocence here. There is no surprise attraction encounter. There is no struggle of the conscious. No, this is a deliberate mindset where a person is self-focused on fantasizing for his or her own personal benefit, imagining what it would be like to use his or her body for their own pleasure.

One more thing that is important to mention, this is not just a onetime scenario, where a person stumbles, (which happens to most), but rather it is a condition that has become a habit. Remember the core issue here is the heart, not just the physical act. It is the kind of heart where given the right opportunity; it is almost a certainty that physical adultery would result. In reality, many folks genuinely struggle here, especially young people, but they experience conviction and they want to change. However, the folks Jesus mentions here display no such conviction. Ultimately, there heart is desperately diseased by sexual sin.

What makes a person commit adultery on their spouse anyway? I believe the answer ties into what Jesus said last week about contempt. Something happened in the marital relationship where one has hardened his or her heart against their spouse to the point where there can be no more intimacy. Furthermore, because we all desire intimacy, one becomes motivated to look elsewhere for this need can be fulfilled. Instead of dealing with the heart condition, which Jesus advocates, spouses blame the other and look for intimacy outside the marriage. But once again, the heart is always diseased long before the physical act. The scary part of this reality is that today people do not necessarily need a partner to become unfaithful; this can happen through pornography on the internet.

The Reality of Pornography

Here are some staggering statistics when it comes to the porn industry.

- As of 2003, there were 1.3 million pornographic websites;
- 47% percent of families said pornography is a problem in their home
- 57% of pastors say that addiction to pornography is the most sexually damaging issue to their congregation
- At a 2003 meeting of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, two thirds of the 350 divorce lawyers who attended said the Internet played a significant role in the divorces in the past year, with excessive interest in online porn contributing to more than half such cases.

Machele has a very dear friend in Portland whose marriage ended because of pornography, and ultimately, physical adultery. Just recently, she and her two children, moved in with her mother in a different city. We are not certain how she will make it because she was dependent on her husband being the provider. When you get married, this kind of thing is not supposed to happen. Marriage is supposed to bring stability, supposed to last forever. Unfortunately, her husband's heart became diseased, which ultimately led to him developing complete contempt for his wife. Here is the scary part, if you asked him; he would tell you he is a Christian.

Taking Immediate Action

In the end, what Jesus is saying here is that his followers must live by higher standards. They must deal with the junk that is going on in their hearts and fix it, no matter what it takes. This leads to the next section in Jesus' discourse on adultery of the heart. He wants our hearts to receive a transplant.

29 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.

30 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.

Now, Jesus is not really advocating self-mutilation. He is using hyperbole to illustrate that dealing with this heart condition takes drastic, immediate action. You see, for a person whose heart is not right, being blind or not having any limbs would not prevent a person from lusting after someone. The key is recognizing what is going on inside and taking immediate action. Things like, cutting off your internet, cancelling your cable subscription, or just putting the television away are examples of the immediate action that is required. Many people also become part of support groups that deal with treating people who are caught up in these sexual addictions. It is important to realize these are not overnight fixes, they require time, commitment, and sacrifice and a deep desire to change. Ultimately, this is a heart issue, which developed over time. When it comes to lusting with intent, we need to do everything we can to allow God to help us develop the kingdom heart Jesus requires.

1. There Needs to be Deep Consistent Confession to God and to your wife (if married)

Ultimately, there is no book or formula that will free one from sexual sin. As Dr. Phil says, you have to "get real." As a result, this means getting real with God and your wife, which involves deep confession. This by no means is a onetime confession; it is an ongoing commitment to bringing this stuff before God. It means communicating with your wife and talking about your heart. The hope is this will tremendously humble you and present yourself as ultimately weak and in need of change. I believe God works when we just confess our deepest darkest struggles and commit to talking about him, scheduling alone time with him. If you commit to this, make sure you stop talking and listen. Listen how God speaks to you through His Spirit and pray that God continue to clean out the "manure" in your heart. When we talk about our weaknesses, we don't keep them bottled up inside and we show that we really want to get better. It will make a person uncomfortable, but God is the One who can clean up this junk and you have to commit to developing the kind of heart God wants you to have.

2. You Should Search the Scriptures and Study the heart of Jesus

There is no better way that to explore the kingdom heart than by studying the character of Jesus in Scripture. How he dealt with strangers, his relationship with his Father, his heart for the outcasts, his commitment to discipleship, his desire to leave the comforts of heaven to walk hand in hand with our sin-filled culture.

There was something different about Jesus. He loved His Father and he loved people. Even when he was nailed to a cross as a beaten and bludgeoned man, he did not insult his enemies or defend himself in a self-righteous demeanor; no he prayed for them. Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing. His heart was not corrupted by the culture and the injustice he received. His heart was right before God and he made a difference. Yes, study the heart of Jesus, don't rely on your own. In order for your heart to change into a kingdom heart, you have to know what one looks like. "Lord, change my heart so that I have a heart that is freely able to love, despite the circumstances.

3. You should Surround Yourself with Others who Strive for a Kingdom Heart

Lusting after someone is usually something done in secret, though much of the sexual harassment in the workplace revolves around this lust-filled mindset. Much of what we do is the result of who we associate with. When you are battling sexual sin, you have to initiate finding people who can encourage you in your pursuit of a kingdom heart.

Find those people who have a burden for the lost. Who love fellow Christians. Who's life demonstrates godly characteristics like not holding grudges, forgiving others, living in humility, find value in others, and delight in God's goodness. We need to be around these people so that we can be a part of a community that is committed to developing a kingdom heart.

4. You Must Establish Your spouse as Your Standard of Beauty

As a husband, I live with the reality that my wife is my standard of beauty, she is the epitome of true beauty in my life, and every other girl is compared to her. It is also immensely important that Machele knows she is my standard of beauty, she does not have to second-guess.

If I were staring at other girls, involved with pornography, or spending too much of my time with someone of the opposite sex, she would not feel that way, she would have questions, even concerns in the back of her mind. In the end, I am not a perfect husband, but I do what I can to make sure she knows she represents true beauty in my life. I hope that whether you are married or single, you share that same conviction.

If you have to get rid of your friends, television, computer, do whatever you can to make sure your focus revolves around her and build from there. By Standard of Beauty, I do not mean you have to find the most beautiful girl in the world to everyone. In reality, many may not like some of the things about your wife or your dating interest. However, in your eyes, she must represent true beauty and she must feel like you see her in the fashion. If you are not there, this is a great goal to work towards. You must begin by taking inventory of your thought life, lustful tendencies, and even "old flames" that you may not completely be over yet. Work on those issues and placing your wife or significant other on the pedestal of the most beautiful person in the world to you, inside and out.

Develop that kingdom heart in your marriage.