

**Matthew 5:27-30 – October 17, 2021**  
**“The Poison of Promiscuous Hearts”**

8:15 & 11:00am Morning Service

Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 5. I will begin by reading Matthew 5:17-20 for context, and then jump down to v. 27-30.

**Matthew 5:17-20**

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

**Matthew 5:27-30**

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

<sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> 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.

**This is the Word of the Lord.**

*Thanks be to God.*

Let’s pray together.

Marcion of Sinope was one of the most well-known and successful heretics in the early church. He refused to believe that the God of the Old Testament was the same as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, what did he do? He threw away the Old Testament and created his own Bible with a shortened version of select verses from Luke’s gospel and edited versions of Paul’s letters.

“When all the cutting and pasting was finished, Marcion had the Christianity he wanted: a God of goodness and nothing else; a message of inspiring moral uplift; a Bible that does away with the uncomfortable bits about God’s wrath and hell.” [Kevin DeYong]

Marcion wasn’t the last person to try to cut out sections of the Bible. In 1991, a group called

the Jesus Seminar got together and sought to convince the world to get rid of 80% of Jesus' teachings.

It should come to us as no surprise that people find portions of Scripture to be difficult. We read in Scripture of God's love and mercy, and then we read sections like this from Matthew, telling us that looking lustfully can put us in danger of hell.

Then comes the call to extreme obedience. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out, and throw it away. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

Jesus concludes by saying that it is better to lose a part of our body than to be thrown into hell because of our sins.

What is Jesus doing here? Why did God make these commandments? Are you tempted to throw it out? Or create your own Heretics Version?

### ***God a Taskmaster?***

Well, one way of reading these verses is to misunderstand God and picture him as a heavy-handed taskmaster. A God who cares about people following rules and laws so much that he will happily destroy any human being that dares to cross him or break his laws.

But if you know your Bibles, you know that that doesn't fit. God sent his son into the world to *save us from sin*. See, so we can't see God this way. God would not send his Son if he didn't love us.

This point is important, because if God has given us his commandments, *out of love for us*, not just because he has a punch list that all humanity must meet, there is more to these commandments than what we might see at face value.

I do think we struggle with this though. How many of us enjoy laws being imposed upon us? How many of us appreciate when we are told what to do, or what not to do?

I think we struggle with this a lot more than we realize.

I know very few people who love going to the DMV or Department of Licensing to get a driver's license. I've also yet to find someone who loves to pay their taxes.

We get frustrated by bureaucracy and many of the laws that make our lives more difficult. We don't like it when people tell us how to build our homes, how to drive our cars, or how to educate our children. We can be suspicious and resistant to the many laws that govern us.

I grew up sitting in many governments' passport and visa offices as our family served as missionaries. It didn't take me long to develop a frustration with the idea of bureaucracy.

And I think nearly all of us struggle with different laws that are imposed on us at different

levels.

Not many of us can relate to King David when he says,

**Psa. 119:92** If your law had not been my delight,  
I would have perished in my affliction.

**Psa. 119:97** Oh how I love your law!  
It is my meditation all the day.

**Psa. 119:174** I long for your salvation, O LORD,  
and your law is my delight.

And I went to some effort to highlight this, because I think it is very important that we realize that we might have a predisposition toward the concept of law. We can often see the law in a negative light and think of the laws as burdensome.

And that is a real problem when we approach God's laws. Because if we carry that same distaste for law into Jesus' teaching here, we can interpret his teaching as just one more way we are being forced to live. And this is so far from the truth of God's law.

If we look at the 10 commandments, for example, they are not burdensome. They are good. They are laws that are for our benefit. They are laws that are for our good!

Think for a moment of some of these. Remember the Sabbath day and do not labor. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not covet.

### ***The Law is for our Good***

These are not burdensome laws meant to beat us into submission, they are laws that are made for God's glory and our good. In fact, they are laws that are written on our hearts. Even unbelievers believe that adultery is wrong.

"A Gallup poll conducted May 10-14, 2001, found that 91% of Americans consider it to be either always or almost always wrong for married people to have sexual relations with someone other than their spouses, and in response to a separate but related question, 89% say that "married men and women having an affair" is morally unacceptable." [Gallup Poll]

In a country that denies God and biblical morals more and more every day, it is interesting to note that over 90% still consider it immoral and harmful for people to be unfaithful to their spouses.

Even from a worldly perspective, we see that God's laws are not burdens, they are good. They are for his glory and our good. The law calls us towards what is holy and away from adultery and all immoral living, not because God has some random set of antiquated laws he thinks are good, but because affairs, and sexually immoral behavior are entirely void of value. They will destroy us and will destroy those we love.

God's law actually serves to protect us from the death that sin brings.

If we can get our minds and hearts to embrace the idea that God's law serves our best interest, and that there is abundant life and joy in the holiness that his commandments bring, we can get a better sense of what Jesus is communicating here.

See, Jesus knows that we cannot fulfill the law perfectly. He knows that we will fail time and time again. But he calls us to it because it is what we need. And who we are called to be.

Jesus wants us to be free from the slavery of sin and death, and to have abundant life.

### ***External Conformity to God's Law***

That is why Jesus takes more issue with the people going through the external motions of following the law.

God didn't send us his Son so that we could sit in church in our Sunday best and remain unchanged. He sent Jesus to change us from our hearts. External conformity to God's law is not what God is after. It never has been.

David wrote in Psalm 51, that God does not delight in the external...he is not pleased with sacrifices and burnt offerings. He writes, "God delights in truth in the inward being....The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. [Psalm 51:6,16-17]

So, it is no wonder that Jesus took issue with the Pharisee's minimalist perspective on God's law. It is blasphemous to think that God's only desire is that his people don't cross the line into *actual* adultery.

God is not in the business of mere behavior modification. God's focus has *never* only been on what we *do*. He is concerned with our hearts. He calls us to fight the temptations of adultery at the level of our hearts. And Jesus starts with our eyes.

### ***The Manifestations of Adultery in the Heart***

Jesus calls us to fight the sin of adultery, and all the unlawful immorality that is at the heart of it. Whether practiced by married or unmarried people, Jesus is not forbidding looking at someone from the opposite gender, but looking lustfully. And each and every one of us knows the difference between looking and lusting. [Stott, 87]

But adulterous behavior manifests itself in many different ways. Pornographic materials continue to destroy the lives of millions of people. And while it is perceived as a male-only temptation, that is simply not true anymore. Both genders must be on high alert and set up guards and accountability to overcome this temptation.

And while pornography might be an obvious issue, one issue that might not seem as obvious or feel as convicting is watching movies or television shows that appear to be more

subtle. While explicit imagery might be absent, it is alluded to and left to you, the viewer, to fill in the gaps and be captured by the director's leading. They take your mind and heart into the moment, causing your heart to participate in another's romantic moments, and to do something you would not do in front of other people. All while letting your mind begin to consider yourself in their shoes.

The same can be true of lewd books, songs, magazines, social media apps, and inappropriate messaging or chats. Anonymous encounters online with strangers, creating a life that while artificial, becomes more and more real as each day goes by.

Perhaps you are involved in sports or activities that for many might be perfectly normal, but for you they tempt you to give of yourself to another in a way that you know crosses the line. Be it physically or flirtatiously or emotionally.

Unmarried romantic relationships are other areas where all are called to guard your own purity and the purity of the person you are with. In a country where premarital intimacy is increasingly normal, churches are also seeing a parallel rising trend within their own number. More and more people find themselves physically further along than they wish they were or should be.

A pastor preaching on this passage mentioned a case-study he had read in seminary about a Christian woman who was having an extramarital affair. The pastor found that what drew this woman to this affair was not money, looks, or romance, but rather that she was most attracted to this man's spirituality. Satan's tactics are disguised. We read that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Do you find yourself in a similar position? Longing and/or lusting for someone else's spouse? Do you wish your spouse was less argumentative, impatient or fill in the blank? Do you compare your spouse to others and wish you were *with* that other person? Do you imagine them to be more fun, caring, rich, romantic, or godly? Do you dream or think about them? Do you go out of your way to interact with them?

While you might not be with them physically, Jesus' message today is that these inward and outward behaviors, glances, and thoughts and many more like them are ways in which we break the seventh commandment. They are ways in which we continue to live in sin and in which if we continue, we are in danger of God's wrath.

Some might be surprised to even hear of such things, but the power of temptation is such that once someone enters into it, "it darkens the mind." It blinds the eyes and blocks the understanding, such that a person is not able to make a right judgement of things once he is in it. He or she becomes so fixated in their thoughts on the object of their lust that the mind is distracted from all the reason and help that they would normally pursue. [Owen, 109]

For that reason, Jesus calls us to mortify sins in all areas of life. To flee from sin and its lure and consequences before they darken your mind to the warnings and teachings of the Scriptures.

### ***Jesus calls us to fight sin radically***

In the book of Deuteronomy we read, “If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So, you shall purge the evil from Israel.” [Deut. 22:22]

In Ancient Israel, the sin of adultery was taken very seriously. The sin of adultery had devastating effects on marriages, children, extended families, and communities. So, in order to maintain the purity and holiness of Israel, the commandment required deadly consequences for the offending parties.

And in a similar vein, Jesus, bringing up this very same commandment regarding adultery also says, “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. .... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.”

At face value, this can be shocking. How are we to apply that in our lives? What do we do with this passage?

Origen of Alexandria is one of the most well-known examples of someone who took Jesus’ teaching here at face value. He went to the extremes of asceticism and self-discipline. He gave up his possessions, food, sleep.

AND “in an over-literal interpretation of Jesus’ words here in this passage (and in Matthew 19:12), he actually made himself a eunuch.”

Was Origen right in mutilating himself? Is this what Jesus is calling his disciples to do? No! Shortly after Origen, in AD 325, the Council of Nicea forbid this horrible practice. One author notes that “*Origen’s zeal greatly exceeded his wisdom.*” [John Stott, 89]

Stott explains that “the command to get rid of troublesome eyes, hands and feet is an example of our Lord’s use of dramatic figures of speech. What he was advocating was not a literal physical self-maiming, but a ruthless moral self-denial.

Not “mutilation” but “mortification” is the path of holiness he taught, and “mortification” or “taking up the cross” to follow Christ means to reject sinful practices **so resolutely** that we die to them or put them to death.” [Stott, 89]

Jesus calls believers to take sin so seriously, that they are willing to go to extreme measures, not to fall into the lure of temptation.

### ***Mortify the Root***

As I read through John Owen’s volume on *Temptation and Sin*, it struck me that he was a man who took temptation and sin so seriously that he dedicated nearly 650 pages of thoughtful, deep meditation and study into the subject of how to avoid, fight and kill sin.

From his writings, one constant refrain is his call to root out sin. It is not enough to simply

change behavior and try to be better. He argued that we must attack the root of the problem.

You must take intentional steps to overcome any sin that has taken up residence in your life. Some men allow the sin to remain. They think they'll risk it all toying with sin, and think they will not be burned by the fire, but then sadly they are mistaken. [Owen, 120]

Whenever I think of sinful or evil roots, all I can think of are weeds. If you have ever taken care of a lawn, you know that it is never enough to just mow over the weeds. If you do that, you will certainly cut down the flower and the stock, but the seeds will scatter everywhere, and the original weed will continue to grow since it still has its roots.

We must battle at the level of the heart's desires. Adultery is the final step of an internal battle that was going on for some time. It is the culmination of secrecy, premeditation, and broken desire.

While you can and should set up accountability measures to battle against many of the manifestations of lust in your life, you must also go after the heart. No accountability software will be good enough to heal a heart that is giving in to sin.

### ***Keep Watch***

In an effort to root out sin in your life, you must take steps now to confront your sin and root it out. Make a plan now so that you will repent of it. Find someone trustworthy that will help you truly deal with your sin. We are here to help.

Owen notes that if you do not make a plan to keep watch and to mortify your sin, you are like a fortress that has a traitor within its gates ready to betray you in every opportunity. There are traitors in our hearts, ready to take part, to side with every temptation, and to give up all to them." [Owen, 105]

Jesus' followers must do whatever it takes to be rid of sin, to be free from temptation and sin. Paul calls us to "*flee* from sexual immorality." Peter calls us to be self-controlled and alert, noting that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Disguising himself "as an angel of light." [2 Cor. 11:14]

That means that Paul and Peter's warning is urgent, just as is Jesus'. The devil is seeking to cause all men and women to stumble into sin. He is looking for someone to devour.

Both these men, apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, recognized the danger of letting one's guard down against sin. They had seen the devastating power of sexual brokenness in the churches they had visited. We can infer this, because they were constantly warning the body of Christ to fight against the temptations of sexual immorality.

Paul writes, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands ***take heed*** lest he fall." [1 Cor. 10:12]

You know, I don't know where you are this morning. If you have past sin in your life that you are burdened with. Or if you are living in sin right now and feel like it is impossible to get out. Or perhaps you are starting to toy and entangle yourself in something and you know you have failed. And you are tired of it. And you are beating yourself down.

But I hope that wherever you are, that Peter's example might bring you some encouragement. Peter, with all the passion in the world, told Jesus that he would never deny him. ***"Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!"*** and the disciples said the same. Peter looked into Jesus' face, and in no uncertain terms declared that he would not fail him. And then he denied Jesus in his greatest moment of need. Three times.

Imagine the shame that Peter must have felt and carried. Imagine how that must have felt to him to betray his Lord.

Brothers and sisters, these adulterous sins that we've mentioned today are some of the most challenging and devastating sins we face in this life. They can cause deep pains and brokenness. They can tear you down and leave you feeling helpless and alone. The pain can be intolerable.

But by God's grace, Christ is greater than our sin. He is greater than all our brokenness and pain. And he is able to heal and restore and bring together what no one else possibly can.

Jesus restored Peter, giving him an opportunity to confess his love to Jesus 3 times, and then put him back on track, "now follow me." So also our Lord will restore us when we confess our sins and repent from them before him.

And the command for Peter is the same command for us. Don't wallow in your sin, get up and follow me.

And yet, our gracious Lord, also, commands us to get up and to fight the good fight to resist sin in all areas of life. He knows that letting down our guard will only cause us more harm.

So, we are called to be faithful in the little and in the secret. Where no one but you and God might know what is happening. To be pure and holy in your thoughts, in your daydreams, in your reading, in your viewing, relationships, phone and computer usage, in your activities.

Jesus is interceding and fighting for us, that we might be holy. That we might enjoy the benefits that accompany a holy mind and holy heart, that we might delight in holy actions and holy parenting, holy attitudes, holy goals, and holy passions.

For in guarding our hearts from adultery and all of its accompanying temptations, we die to sin and death and live in the joy of God's abundant provision of life in Jesus.

Amen.



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<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=2419130517563> [Kevin Kisler – Cornerstone Presbyterian Rochester, NY]

*T: Jesus calls us to love holiness in our inner being, and to flee from sin and its consequences.*