

Overcoming Lust

Matthew 5:27-30

Gracious & Merciful Lord,

This hour, we come to that text in your great sermon where we all are immediately confronted with our personal battle with lust. We are quick to confess Lord Jesus that, at times, the power of lust overtakes our minds and hearts to the point where we find ourselves pursuing and enjoying the very vices that Satan intends for our demise. We lust for sex. We lust for money. We lust for material possessions. We lust for power and influence. Such lust takes what you made to be good, pure, and God glorifying and turns it into sin and wickedness.

Lord, this hour, by the guiding ministry of your Holy Spirit, lead us to find great hope in your priesthood, trusting that in You we have a great High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. May those of us who struggle daily with lust prostrate ourselves at the foot of your throne, knowing that there we are promised to find mercy and grace in our time of need and weakness.

At the same time Lord, may the convicting ministry of your Holy Spirit, lead us to listen attentively to your teaching and warning in this confrontational text. May we be convicted of the seriousness of sin and all forms of lust that may be either dormant or active in our lives. Guard us from the personal pride that so often deceives us into believing that we, unlike others, do not battle lust in its varying forms. Furthermore, give us the strength and desire to purge our lives from anything - no matter how valuable, prized, or precious - that may lead us into the barren and destructive wilderness of lust and sexual sin.

We pray these things in the victorious and gracious name of Jesus Christ the Lord!

Amen!

The TEXT

Today, after a few weeks of being away, we return to our Lord's great Sermon on the Mount. Immediately, we find ourselves thrust into a text that confronts us with issues we would rather sweep under the proverbial carpet. Jesus offers us no such option.

Adultery! Lust! Sexual immorality!

The very mention of these acts makes us feel uncomfortable, if not angry, guilty, and ashamed. But, this is not the all of it. Our Lord offers radical solutions. Those guilty of such acts, or even struggling with the temptation, are encouraged to tear out their eyes and amputate their hands.

Let us look more closely at the words of our Lord. Turn in your Bible to Matthew 5:27-30 and let us read together the call of Christ to overcome lust.

The CONTEXT

Once again, we find the scribes and Pharisees emphasizing an external while turning a blind eye to the internal cause of the act. In the previous text, the Pharisees emphasized murder while neglecting the motive behind murder – anger. In our text today, the Pharisees emphasize adultery while neglecting the internal cause of adultery – lust.

Can't you hear the Pharisees? *“Jesus, I've not committed adultery. I've not had extramarital sex with another woman. I'm a faithful husband.”*

Sound familiar? It should.

Are we really that much different than the Pharisees? The Pharisees gave the external appearance of righteousness. For the Pharisees, righteousness was entirely about outward living rather than inward transformation. Yes, their outward acts aligned with God's Word. However, the Pharisees internal thoughts, desires, and even their words, reflected self-righteousness rather than the spiritual righteousness God requires.

Is it not true that we often fall prey to this same way of thinking about God's call to live righteous and holy lives?

"Look Lord, I've never shed innocent blood. I've never murdered another person. My hands are clean." Yet, deep within our hearts, we harbor grudges and malice towards people who have hurt us.

"Look Lord, I've been faithful to my wife. As a married man, I've never had sexual intercourse with another woman. I've kept the marriage bed pure." Yet, playing on the screen of many men's minds are adulterous fantasies produced by lust.

ENGAGING the Audience

According to statistics, our society is drowning in the destructive waters of sexual lust.

Did you know...

- ⇒ Every second, \$3,000 is spent on pornography? In case you're wondering, that's \$180,000 per minute, \$10,800,000 per hour, and \$259,000,000 per day.
- ⇒ Every second, 28,000 people view Internet pornography?
- ⇒ Every second, 372 people type pornographic search themes into a search engine?

Did you know...

- ⇒ In 2006, worldwide pornography revenues exceeded \$97 billion dollars?
- ⇒ The pornography industry is larger than the combined revenues of the seven largest technology companies: Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo!, Apple, and Netflix.

Did you know...

- ⇒ There are more than 4 million pornography websites?
- ⇒ There are more than 420 million pornographic web pages?
- ⇒ 68 million search engine requests for pornography are performed every day?
- ⇒ The pornography industry sends out 2.5 billion pornographic emails every day?
- ⇒ 43% of all Internet users view pornography regularly?
- ⇒ 47% of Christians said pornography is a major problem in their home?
- ⇒ 9.4 million women view pornography every month?

To say that our culture has a lust problem would be a huge understatement.

The troubling reality is that these statistics only expose sexual lust. Imagine what data would reveal if it were possible to keep statistics on our lust for money, power, success, and material possessions.

There's no ifs, ands or buts about it – we are lustful people. We lust for sex. We lust for money. We lust for success. We lust for power. We lust for influence. And, we lust for all kinds of material possessions.

What exactly is lust? Lust is when a person intentionally and repeatedly fixes his or her gaze upon something for the purpose of enjoying it the mind and heart.

It is lust, this internal fixation and craving, that produces adultery, materialism, greed, and all sorts of insatiable appetites.

Let each of us be forewarned, lust does not simply display itself in the arena of sexuality. This is a most unfortunate and irresponsible assumption. Lust does not discriminate.

It is quite possible that there are those here today that are not currently struggling with sexual lust. Such victory does not exonerate you from the powerful grip of lust. For you see, if the truth were known, there are some here today who have a lust for money. There are others who lust for material possessions. There are still others who lust for success, influence, and power.

Matthew 5:27-30

In our text today, Jesus emphasizes adultery, like he did with murder in the previous passage, to teach us once again that the righteousness He requires is a righteousness of the heart – a righteousness that must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Like us, the Pharisees had never physically murdered another human being. Thus, in their mind's eye, they had honored and kept the Sixth Commandment – *You shall not murder.* Yet, Jesus condemned their righteousness by exposing their internal anger and hatred toward other human beings created in the image of God. In the eyes of Christ, they had committed murder in their hearts.

Likewise, the Pharisees had never committed the physical act of adultery. Thus, in their mind's eye, they had honored and kept the Seventh Commandment – *You shall not commit adultery.* Yet, once again, Jesus condemns their righteousness by exposing their lustful fantasies. In the eyes of Christ, they had committed adultery.

So, what do these sobering, if not haunting words of Christ, teach us about overcoming the sin of lust?

Dealing Drastically with Sin

In our text, Jesus is clear. **We must deal drastically with sin!**

Is this not what Jesus teaches us when He tells us that it is better to tear out our eyes and cut off our hands than to have our body cast into Hell?

The Right Eye *Interview with Dr. James Goodson*

This morning, I have asked Dr. James Goodson, an eye specialist, to come and help us understand why Jesus emphasizes the eye. Dr. Goodson is a board certified ophthalmologist who has performed thousands of delicate eye surgeries during his career.

In our text, Jesus graphically portrays how seriously we should deal with sin by telling us that it is better to tear our right eye than to have our whole body cast into Hell. In light of this statement, I'd like to ask Dr. Goodson three important questions.

1. **What are some interesting/fascinating facts about the human eye?**
How many muscles are in the human eye? How many images can the average human eye process in a second, minute, hour, or day?
2. In the Jewish culture of Jesus' day, the right eye and right hand were considered a person's best and most precious faculties. In particular, the right eye represented a person's best vision. **When it comes to the human eye, are people naturally one eye dominant?** I guess what I'm asking is this, **"Is there any merit, from an ophthalmology**

perspective, to the Jews belief that the right eye represents the best vision?

- 3. Have you ever had to surgically remove a person's eye? What are the consequences of an adult losing one his or her eyes? How does it affect vision, depth perception, physical activity, reading, etc.?**

As we've just learned, the eye is an amazing and highly valuable member of our body. The eye can process more than 1.5 million images in a millisecond. Seventy-five to eighty percent of people are right eye dominant. And, losing an eye has a radical effect on a person's ability to perform many daily functions we normally take for granted.

Notice that Jesus also emphasizes the right hand.

Did you know that 87% of men and 90% of women are right handed? There are 20 bones, 20 major joints, 123 ligaments, 34 muscles, 48 nerves, and 30 arteries in the human hand.

Here's what else is amazing. According to medical research conducted on the human brain, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the motor cortex, that section of the human brain that controls body movement, is devoted to operating the hands.

Just stop and think of what we do with our hands? We drive cars, type emails, write notes, brush our teeth and hair, swing golf clubs, play pianos, give massages, and eat food with our hands. Like the eye, the hand is an amazing and highly valuable member of our body.

The point Jesus is making is quite simple, and quite provocative too. We must deal drastically with sin. We must be willing to part ways with the most anything, regardless of value, if it causes us to sin.

D.A. Carson puts it this way...

“We are to deal drastically with sin. We must not pamper it, flirt with it, enjoy nibbling a little around the edges. We are to hate it, crush it, dig it out.”

Carson goes on to write...

“Our generation treats sin lightly. Sin in our society is better thought of as an aberration, or as an illness. It is to be treated, not condemned and repented of....In Jesus’ teaching, sin leads to Hell. And that is why the ultimate reason why sin must be taken seriously.” (p.47)

Read Colossians 3:1-6 & Hebrews 12:1-4.

The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin

This leads us to a second, and more significant action. We must acknowledge what Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls *“the exceeding sinfulness of sin.”*

As Christians, we have distanced ourselves from the doctrine of sin and the call of God to repent. Instead, we have focused on “sins.” Sins like adultery and lust. We have, at least in our minds, categorized sins. Some sins are far more heinous than others.

Yet, the deeper truth is this. We will never overcome our struggles with specific sins until we come face-to-face with our sinfulness.

Listen carefully to how Martyn Llyod-Jones explains this.

“Sin is not merely a matter of actions and of deeds; it is something within the heart that leads to the action. Sins are nothing but the symptoms of a disease called sin and it is not the symptoms that matter, but the disease, for it is the disease that kills and not the symptoms.”

Lust is one of thousands of symptoms that expose our sinfulness. We will never have victory over specific sins until we first understand that we are infected with the disease of sin. We lust because we have a disease called sin.

Maybe an example would be helpful at this point.

Not too long after entering my 30's, I began struggling with recurring sinus infections. Along the way, I have learned how to identify and treat the symptoms. Now, when I feel a sinus infection emerging, I simply call my doctor and request an antibiotic and the wonder drug called Prednisone. Within a day or two, I'm back to normal. My sinus pain is gone. My senses of smell and taste have returned. My swelling has subsided and I can breathe thru my nose.

But, here's what else I've learned. My sinus infections keep coming back. Do you know why? I suffer terribly from allergies. Allergies are the disease; sinus infections are the symptom.

Treating my symptoms with antibiotics and Prednisone will never cure my allergies. All I'm doing at this point is prolonging the inevitable – sinus surgery. My allergies are going to continue to surface and wreak havoc on my sinuses. What I need to do is confront my disease. What I need are four to five years of allergy shots. Until then, I will never experience sinus health.

Lust and adultery are symptoms of a deep-rooted disease called sin. Simply dealing with the symptoms may offer temporary relief. But, like my sinus infections, lust will continue to resurface and wreak havoc on our lives. We must come face-to-face with our sin-disease that is producing the symptom.

Don't miss this!

⇒ **Focusing on sins (i.e. symptoms) encourages us to find remedies on our own.**

⇒ **Focusing on our sinfulness (i.e. disease) encourages us to find our cure in Christ.**

This is precisely why Satan wants us to focus on our symptoms rather than our disease. When we focus on our symptoms, we look for solutions within ourselves. When we focus on our disease, we look to the only Person who can cure us – Jesus Christ.

May I ask you, does Satan have you in the trap of focusing on your symptoms rather than your disease? Does Satan have you focused on your lust, your pornography viewing, or your mental adultery? These are but mere symptoms of your deadly sin-disease.

To overcome sins like lust, we must acknowledge that God, thru Christ, dealt drastically with not simply with our “sins,” but our “sinfulness.” Thru the Cross and Resurrection, Jesus Christ became our sin and in doing so, He became our only cure. His sinless blood sacrifice has the power to heal your life from the deadly disease of sin. Go to the Cross my friend. Run to it. For it is there that you will find forgiveness, healing, and victory.

The Pharisees never saw their disease; they simply dealt with their symptoms. Jesus condemned them for such an error. Symptoms can be managed without Christ. Only Christ, His cross, and our faith in Him can cure us from the disease of sin.

A righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees is one that understands the disease of our sinfulness and runs to the Mercy Seat of Christ with a heart and spirit that is helpless, brokenhearted, and weeping over such sinfulness. (Heb. 4:14-16) It is there that we are promised to find mercy and help in our time of need.

Does our sinfulness produce a “poor spirit” within us? Does our sinfulness cause us to “mourn?” Does our sinfulness cause us to “hunger and thirst for the righteousness” that only Christ can give us thru faith?

A righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees is one that recognizes that nothing other than the cleansing blood of Christ can heal us and put us in righteous standing before the holy God.

How do we overcome our sins?

We look to Christ, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross and despised its shame. (Hebrews 12:1-4) God, thru Christ dealt drastically with our sinfulness. Jesus gave up His life to deal with our sinfulness. When we fix our gaze upon Jesus, the Founder and Perfector of our faith, we will be moved to deal drastically with our sins – our lust, our greed, our materialism, and our idolatry.

We will be moved to “put to death” our sins because Christ died for our sinfulness. We will be moved to deal drastically with those things that lead us into sin – no matter how valuable they may be.

Dear friend, victory over sins like lust come only when we choose to see our sinfulness and acknowledge that only Christ and His effectual work on the cross can save us.