

Adultery in the Heart

Matthew 5:27-30

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Good morning church family! If you would, please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5:27-30. Today, we continue our study of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. We have divided his sermon into a few series, and the title of our current series is "Focus on Your Witness." And, we have discovered that Jesus gives us a foundational premise for a strong witness through this section of verses. Let's look at the premise again:

The Premise for a Strong Witness

The attitude of your heart and the health of your relationships determines the strength of your witness.

Last week, we learned how Jesus desires for us to purge the attitude of anger in the heart, which is the root of murder. In its place, he desires for us to pursue reconciliation in our relationships. You see how this works with our premise? We will have a stronger witness when the attitude of anger cools in our hearts and a pursuit of reconciliation intensifies in our relationships.

Today, Jesus's teaching focuses on lust which he says is adultery in the heart. That is why I've titled the message Adultery in the Heart. So, let's read his words of Christ in Matthew 5:27-30:

Matt. 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

Matt. 5:28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matt 5:29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Matt. 5:30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Humans love to find loopholes. It is part of our sinful nature. For every law written by lawmakers, there will always be someone trying to find a means of evading their obligation to the law. The same can be said when it comes to God's Word.

There was a famous comedian in the early 1900s named W.C. Fields. A friend of his once said, "No man ever worked so patiently at wrecking his soul and body as did this prince of comedians." Another friend came to visit the comedian when he was dying in the hospital. To his surprise, Fields was lying in bed reading the Bible. When asked why he was reading it, the comedian replied, "I'm looking for loopholes."¹

Can you relate? Do you ever find yourself looking for loopholes to rationalize or minimize your sin? Do you ever find yourself looking for loopholes when it comes to following Jesus?

Now, the Pharisees and teachers of the law had little concern for internal sin. They were concerned with external acts. They could puff their chests up, hold their heads high, and declare that they are not guilty of the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery."

But, Jesus fulfills the seventh commandment to its fullest extent. For he doesn't just limit the seventh commandment to the physical act of adultery, which is voluntary sexual relations between a married person and a person who is not his or her spouse. He interpreted "You shall not commit adultery" in light of the tenth commandment - "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife."

In doing so, Jesus eliminates the loopholes. He takes it to the heart level and says, "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."² So, you create a phony loophole for the work Jesus wants to do in your heart when you draw the line at physical adultery and believe your heart is right with God if you don't cross that line.

So, what does it look like beneath this line? Rarely does the physical act of adultery just happen without there being an underlying progression of sinful lust. So, I want to show you *The Progression Toward Physical Adultery*.³ And, I am going to use this door to help illustrate it.

¹"I'm Looking for Loopholes", May 8, 2016, Quote Investigator. Accessed May 19, 2023 (<https://quoteinvestigator.com/2016/05/08/loopholes>)

²R.T. Kendall, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2011), 127.

³ *Ibid*, 129-130. Kendall's "Stages of Sin" have been modified and some content is used in the remainder of this section.

The Progression Toward Physical Adultery

1. Attraction

First part is attraction. In and of itself, attraction is not sinful. God-given physical attraction is a natural, innate desire untainted by the stain of sinful flesh. In God's wiring of humanity, it is normal to notice a person of the opposite sex - a woman's beauty or a man being handsome.

However, His plan and desire for humanity is for natural attraction to always be directed toward the God-designed and God-blessed marriage union between one man and one woman. The Lord Jesus said,

Matt. 19:4 “Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’

Matt. 19:5 and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’

Matt. 19:6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

So, God has given men and women natural attraction, but it is just one part of his design to help them move toward marriage. For in his perfect design, other attributes endure longer than physical appearance. Proverbs 31:30 says,

Prov. 31:30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last, but a woman who fears the Lord will be greatly praised.

John Piper writes about other attractive features that go beyond the physical. He says:

It's easy to notice physical features — almost any man in the world is capable of that — but discipline yourself to notice and appreciate true beauty, which is not flaunted, but buried in a woman's heart and expressed in things like patience, kindness, and selflessness.

Say a prayer of thanks for what you see in women like that. Turn the world's crude locker-room conversations on their head by commending true and lasting beauty with humility and respect.⁴

⁴John Piper, “*Isn't She Beautiful*,” *Desiring God*, May 19, 2016, Accessed at (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/isnt-she-beautiful>)

[ILLUSTRATION] So, this side of the door represents the heart of a Christian who is in tune with God's perfect design. On this side of the door we stand in the light of Christ and see things as God sees them. We see his purpose for marriage and fidelity. We recognize physical beauty without it being distorted by sin. We thank God for it.

The Progression Toward Physical Adultery

- 1. Attraction**
- 2. Temptation**

The second stage of the progression toward physical adultery is temptation. Temptation is not sinful either, but it does mean that someone has crossed over from normal attraction to being tempted. How do we know temptation is not sinful? Because Jesus was sinless and he was tempted:

Hebrews 4:14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Jesus was the only one to ever be tempted and not fall into sin. However, we are different in the fact that we all have been tempted, and we all have sinned in response. And, we can't blame God for this. Let's look at what James, the half-brother of Jesus, writes in James 1:13-14a:

James 1:13 And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. **14** Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away.

[ILLUSTRATION] Temptation is the door being open, but only a crack. There is darkness on the other side of the door. We know this, but there is something about this darkness that is alluring. Temptation is enticing. It is like bait to disobey God's revealed Word.

Satan may be the cause of the crack in the door or it may be caused by our own evil desires of the flesh, such as pride or self-gratification. But, the objective of temptation is

to pull us out of the light of God's truth and into a distortion of God's design and desires for us.

The Progression Toward Physical Adultery

- 1. Attraction**
- 2. Temptation**
- 3. Fascination**

The third stage of the progression toward physical adultery is Fascination.

[ILLUSTRATION] Fascination is when you see the doorway of temptation cracked open and you move in for a closer look into the darkness. For example, instead of scrolling away, you come in for a closer look at that risqué advertisement at the bottom of your news feed.

At the gym, instead of keeping your eyes on appropriate areas of another person's body or looking away, you continue to return for more glances, or your look begins to linger. Temptation has come, and there is an advancement past normal attraction. This is the stage where James says,

James 1:14 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions...

In the fascination stage, those lingering looks may also lead to an increased curiosity about a person. There may be thoughts of wanting to get to know a person more intimately because there is an attraction.

In the case of a married person, this is especially problematic because you are taking your eyes off of God's provision for you in your own marriage. You are taking a closer look upon a woman or a man who is not your spouse. And if those lingering looks lead you to a curiosity of getting to know someone better, then you are in danger of it progressing to the next stage.

The Progression Toward Physical Adultery

- 1. Attraction**
- 2. Temptation**
- 3. Fascination**
- 4. Fixation**

The fourth stage is Fixation. This is when a persistent idea dominates a person's thoughts. [Illustration] You have pushed the door halfway open and you are looking in.

While it is still not the physical act of adultery, your lingering looks have turned into a longing for sexual gratification or the desire for sexual intimacy with someone else.

Part of your body may still be in the light, but your eyes and your hands are in the darkness. You are living a divided life. In this stage, you might be regularly looking at things that you shouldn't on the internet. Perhaps you are regularly clicking on those risque advertisement images that fascinate you. Now you are fixated on seeing more. You are struggling with pornography and your thoughts are sometimes fixated on fantasy even when you aren't looking at a screen.

Your curiosity of getting to know someone better has now moved to intentional action. Perhaps you intentionally figure out ways to get closer to a specific person at your workplace. Perhaps you fantasize about a relationship with the person who has been nicer to you than your spouse, so you intentionally try and do things to get noticed. Fixation is what James says allows sin to grow.

James 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

This is the progression to the physical act of adultery. We have normal attractions. Then we are tempted. Neither of these are sins. However, Jesus says we commit adultery in the heart when we become fascinated with physical appearance by taking closer lingering looks.

The sin of lust grows when we become fixated on self-gratification, fantasy, and intentional acts of getting close to people who are not our spouse. When this sin of lust is allowed to grow it gives birth to the physical act of adultery.

[ILLUSTRATION] The door is wide open, and you have walked in fully embracing the darkness that God sought to protect you from when he gave the seventh commandment in the first place. The story of King David committing adultery with Bathsheba provides an illustration of the progression toward physical adultery. 2 Samuel 11:2-5

2 Samuel 11:2 One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. [Attraction] The woman was very beautiful, [Temptation]

Then temptation follows. So, he has a moment where he sees a beautiful woman. Maybe he looked away for a while. However, in his moment of recognizing beauty, the door cracks open and he is faced with temptation.

2 Samuel 11:3 and David sent someone to find out about her. [Fascination]

Instead of shutting the door to temptation, David decides to come in for a closer look. He takes the extra glances. Those glances now turn to a lingering look of lust which leads him to a curiosity to know more about her.

The man said, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” [Fixation]

David finds out more about her. She has a husband. But, he still moves in closer and his fascination now turns to fixation. His sin of lust has become fixated on self-gratification. He fantasizes about what it would be like to have her as his own. And then he opens the door all the way...

2 Samuel 11:4 Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her [Adultery].

According to James, this story is an example of how when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. Go read the rest of it in 2 Samuel 11. In response to his sin of adultery, David tried to cover it up and it ended up snowballing into a whole bunch of other sins.

Ultimately, his sin of lust and adultery led to death. He had Bathsheba's husband killed. He experienced death to his joy, death to his peace, death to relationships in his family, and death to his honor, respect, and reputation in his community. At this point in his life, no one is thinking of the brave shepherd boy who killed Goliath, or the great king and mighty warrior of God. Let's remember that premise for a strong witness:

The Premise for a Strong Witness

The attitude of your heart and the health of your relationships determines the strength of your witness.

David's progression toward physical adultery happened when he allowed lust to become the attitude of his heart. In the aftermath, his relationships became entrenched in turmoil, and as a result, the strength of his witness for God deteriorated. The same can happen to us. So, in his sermon on the mount, our Savior tells us three things that will help us maintain a strong witness.

How do I maintain a strong witness?

1. Remove the Sin of Lust

Jesus says “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out” and “if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.” He is not telling you to actually get out a knife and start cutting off body parts. It is believed that one of the early church fathers took this passage literally and mutilated his body because he was struggling with sin.

That is not what Jesus is saying. How do we know? Because Jesus says the issue is in the heart. Even if you had no eyes or hands, you could still lust in your heart. Instead, Jesus is urging us to be radical about amputating sin from our heart. We have to be serious and radical about closing the door to any sin that is currently rampant in our hearts.

Why? Because Jesus says adultery and lust lead to hell. Remember last week, we learned that the word used in this verse for “hell” is the Greek word Gehenna. This is an actual place. It is the garbage dump where trash and the bodies of criminals were burned. So, for the unbeliever, if your sin, in general, is not forgiven and your heart is not covered by righteousness, then you are destined for an eternity of hell.

However, if you would repent by changing your mind by believing and trusting in Jesus for salvation from your sin (all sin), his righteousness covers you. You are then saved from hell and promised a new eternal destination with Christ in heaven.

But, what about a believer? Repentance for a believer is a change of mind by confessing your sins to God and trusting in his promise to give you grace daily. Many of us confess sin to God all of the time, but never get over the guilt of it because we lack faith in his promise that he cleanses us from the wickedness. Look at his promise 1 John 1:9:

9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

In addition to confession and trusting in God’s grace, we also must follow the Spirit of Christ to correct our behavior. Jesus wants you to repent of sins in your heart so that you can live an abundant life that he has promised. He wants you to look more like him, so you can have joy, peace, and clarity of purpose in life to be a powerful witness to others who are not yet in the kingdom of God.

Repentance from sin means taking drastic steps to remove sin so that you can reclaim the kingdom life God desires for you to live. My Christian brothers and sister, please

listen. Quit looking for loopholes. One way or another, God is working to remove sin from you and conform you to his image.

He will use his Spirit to convict you and lead you to repent internally, or he will use something external to catch you in your sin. Listen to the Psalm David wrote regarding his conviction over his sin of adultery and murder:

Psalm 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

Psalm 32:4 For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

It is a miserable place to be when you resist the conviction of God. When that didn't work for David, God sent his prophet, Nathan, to confront him and catch him in his sin. Then, David finally repented. In Psalm 51, he writes down the prayers of his heart:

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

However, if you continue to reject his conviction, and refuse to repent even when you get caught, then you will face your failure to mortify the deeds of the body at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

1 Cor. 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

1 Cor. 3:13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.

1 Cor. 3:14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

“Jesus is saying to us: Whatever is painful for us to do, whatever we may have to give up in this life, is nothing compared to the way we will feel in the end when we realize we have lost forever rewards that could have been ours.”

“He is not saying a believer will go to everlasting hell because he has lusted. He is most certainly saying that we will suffer pain at the Final Judgment—if we have not repented in advance of that day. We will not be eternally lost, but we nonetheless will suffer loss of rewards and inheritance. We will be saved, but as one escaping through the flames.⁵”

For those of you struggling to maintain purity, I want to recommend a book to you called:

***Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* by Heath Lambert.**

Right now, the book is \$11 - \$12 on Amazon. If you want to be serious about removing the sin of lust, then start reading this book as soon as possible. He devotes an entire chapter to radical and practical measures you need to employ immediately. If you are struggling with lust or adultery, you need to take some radical measures in your thought life, your use of time, and your access to the things that are destroying you.

[ILLUSTRATION] Jesus is telling you what you need to do - Remove sin and close the door. Obviously, we need to rely on the power of His Holy Spirit working within us, but this book gives us some practical considerations and action steps on how to remove the sin of lust.

How do I maintain a strong witness?

- 1. Remove the Sin of Lust**
- 2. Resist the Temptation to Lust**

In addition to removing the sin of lust, Jesus says we will maintain a strong witness if we resist the temptation to lust. He doesn't just say to cut it off or remove it, but he also says to “throw it away.” In verses 29 and 30, Jesus uses the Greek verb Βάλλω (ballō) which means to throw. This word is where we get our English word “ball.”

The tense of the verb that Jesus uses doesn't mean to just throw it away one time, but rather throw it away and continue throwing it away. So, Jesus is not only commanding us to take drastic steps to remove current sin in our lives, but also to continue throwing it away when we face the temptation to lust.

⁵These words are taken from segments of Kendall, *Sermon on the Mount*, 132-133.

We will never get to the place where we are immune to temptation. We need to prepare ourselves every day. In this regard, we cannot get complacent and think that we won't have to worry about the possibility of sinning anymore.

[ILLUSTRATION] So, as often as the door of temptation opens, keep closing it every time. You will not be alone. You will not be dependent on your own strength. God promises to help you in 1 Cor. 10:13 and Romans 8:12-13

1 Cor. 1:13 The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. (NLT)

Romans 8:12 Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do.

Romans 8:13 For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.

Once again, pick up this book. There are practical steps to resist temptation and fight for purity. He tells you how to get healthy, safe accountability in your life. He tells you how to maintain appropriate transparency. Jesus tells you the what and the why, and His Holy Spirit and brothers in Christ like Heath Lambert help you to understand how to do it.

Jesus says we will maintain a strong witness when we remove the sin - cut it off. Secondly, he says we must resist the temptation and continue to throw it away. Lastly, we need to replace the lies of lust.

How do I maintain a strong witness?

- 1. Remove the Sin of Lust**
- 2. Resist the Temptation to Lust**
- 3. Replace the Lies of Lust**

Satan wants you to believe the lie that it is better for you and everyone around you if you would just remain in the darkness of your sin of lust. But Jesus says "It is better for you" to remove sin and to continue throwing it away.

No matter the cost, or what you think you will lose if you repent, hear our Savior's words: "It is better for you." Replace the lie with the truth. It is better for you to live your life in the freedom of God's design.

[ILLUSTRATION] When standing out here in the light, things are clear. When we are growing in the truth of God's Word, we are able to train our minds that have been polluted by lust. God's Word helps us to remember the lies of lust behind that door..

So, when the door of temptation opens to a crack, think of things above. Replace the lies with truth. Think of the future reward as opposed to the temporary pleasures of the world.

Colossians 3:2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. [The truth]

Colossians 3:4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [The Truth]

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. [The Lies]

Colossians 3:6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. [The Truth]

That is the truth, you used to walk in these ways. Don't believe the lie that you have to walk in them any longer. Remove any adultery of lust in your heart. Continue to resist temptation by living in the light of God's grace so the attitude of your heart can be pure and your relationships won't suffer as a result. In doing so you will maintain a strong witness for Christ as you live in the light of his truth. Let's pray.

We are going to partake in the Lord's Supper together as the first part of our response to the message today. On each table, you will notice the verse on the table that gives you the reason to set your minds on things above, not earthly things. Here is the reason: You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

So, at the Lord's table, we remember what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. He gave his life on the cross so that the guilt of our sin could be cleansed by the grace of God. So, I want to invite you to go to the tables and get the bread and the juice and bring the elements back to your chairs. We will then partake together.

1 Cor. 11:23 The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

1 Cor. 11:25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

1 Cor. 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Now that we remember what Jesus has done for us by his death on the cross, we must remember that his power now lives in us to overcome sin in our hearts. Are you struggling with the sin of lust? Perhaps it is not sexual in nature. This progression of sin is all too common with other vices.

Do you lust in your heart for money? Do you lust for fame? Lust for power? Lust for substances? Lust for acceptance? Lust for approval? The remedy is the same. Repentance. Remove the sin. Resist the temptation. Replace the Lie with Truth.

We are going to sing a song called Run to the Father. Have you carried a burden for too long on your own? Are you hearing the invitation to let it all go. Do you want to lay down the burden of sin? Are you done hiding? Why don't you run to the Father and fall into his grace.

As we sing, we would love to pray with you if you need prayer. You may need to kneel at your seat or come to this stage, but don't waste this moment. Perhaps you want to respond to God's gift of salvation and believe in Christ Jesus for the first time today. Come now, we want to pray with you as you make a public declaration of your heart's desire today.