November 22, 2015

“You Shall Not…Lust”

Matthew 5:27-30

**FCF**: The danger of sexual lust

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Jesus has come to fulfill the law.

(magnet) We need to hear what He has to say on this – including adultery.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Our appetites, good in and of themselves, can kill us. The late radio host Paul Harvey told the story of how an Eskimo kills a wolf. First, the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and lets it freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is concealed by frozen blood. Then the hunter fixes his blade in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait, he licks it, tasting the blood. He presses in, licking faster and faster until the edge is bare. His hunger grows so great that he continues to lick, unaware of the razor edge now cutting into his own tongue and the taste of his own blood. But his appetite craves more. And dawn finds him dead in the snow.

Our appetites, good in and of themselves, can kill us. That applies especially to sex.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 5:27-30

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Here’s a Thanksgiving Holiday Public Service Announcement. Make the main thing the main thing. By that, I do not mean prioritize the preparations of the turkey over the stuffing – wise as that might be. I mean prioritize the people over the preparations. Don’t pressure the guests to finish their meal and shove the next course at them just so you can clear the table. Remember why you’re there, what the occasion is about. Make the main thing the main thing.

(READ Matthew 5:17) Those are striking words. We talked about this last week. All the Old Testament points to Him. All the ceremonies and sacrifices; the key figures, events, and places; the prophecies, poetry, and wisdom pointed to and prepared for His coming. And then the commands as well. The laws and testimonies, the precepts and rules, were right and true but served to anticipate His teaching that would fulfill them all, making clear their full meaning and intent. All that had been hinted at, alluded to, Jesus was making clear (READ Matthew 5:17).

Jesus came to fulfill the law. Now, as the Sermon on the Mount unfolds, He gives six examples – the first on murder, the second on adultery – of how His fulfilling the law plays out. Jesus came to fulfill the law. We need to hear what He says on this – including on adultery.

To get at this, we need to look at three things. First, the command itself. Second, the correction Jesus gives regarding the command. And, third, the needed cautions He gives us.

1. **THE COMMAND**

So, first, the command (READ Matthew 5:27). This is referring to the 7th commandment. And, like we did last week, we need to break this down into what was said and how it was read.

1. *What Was Said*

What was it that was said? From the start, what was the command driving at?

1. Adultery prohibited

All sexual relations between a married man or woman and a third party are prohibited.

1. The grounds for the prohibition

That’s the command. The grounds for this? Well, God intends the place for sex to be within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman. His design for marriage is a total, exclusive, permanent bond between them. Adultery is a deep betrayal of that bond, a violation of that covenant – which, by the way, was to be an image of the bond between God and His people.

1. *How It Was Read*

Well, by Jesus’ day, how was this command read? How was it understood?

1. Limited application

As having limited application. It was believed to be only about the physical act of adultery itself. And there was no regard for how the 10th commandment against coveting spoke into this.

1. The grounds for the casuistry

And the grounds for this casuistry? It’s easier. It’s easier to focus on the external and not deal with the heart. It’s more “refined” this way. And no need for repentance or dependence on God.

We need to be prepared to recognize that we may well be guilty of the same thing.

*Application:*

That temptation is always there. For there is a Pharisee within every one of us, wanting to qualify and condition the very life out of God’s commands. It’s so very appealing, so easy.

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1. **THE CORRECTION**

Well, His citing the command then leads to a correction (READ Matthew 5:27-28).

1. *Clarifications*

Before we get to the correction itself, let me give some clarifications that should help.

1. Not a critique of the law

First, Jesus is not critiquing the law. Hardly, for the law is good and eternal. He is not critiquing the law but the manmade traditions that had grown up around the law, focusing on the externals.

1. Not forbidding what can’t be helped

Jesus is not critiquing the law. Nor is He forbidding what can’t be helped. He is not forbidding our appreciation of beauty. Hardly. Nor is He forbidding our being tempted. Jesus Himself was tempted. No, but we could learn from Martin Luther who said that, while we cannot keep the birds from flying around our heads, we can certainly keep them from building nests in our hair.

1. Not a prudish view of sex

Jesus is not critiquing the law or forbidding what can’t be helped. Finally, He is not pushing a prudish view of sex. Hardly. He has a high view of sex – both its purpose and power. Frankly, there is no such thing as “casual sex.” That’s a ridiculous oxymoron. For it has intense power.

1. *Intensifications*

Okay, that’s it on the clarifications. Now for the intensifications Jesus gives.

1. The nature of the command

Jesus deepens the nature of the command. He forbids the anger that leads to murder. And He forbids the lust that leads to adultery. He cares less about the acts than the heart, where it begins.

1. The nature of the penalty

He deepens the nature of the command and extends the nature of the penalty. Twice He speaks of hell, Gehenna. Not that everyone that commits sexual sin is going to hell. If you are a Christian, Jesus has borne all the guilt and shame of all your sin. But if you love sin, indulging it instead of resisting it, you are resisting not just the command but God Himself. Consider that.

We need to hear these clarifications and intensifications. We need to hear and heed them.

*Application:*

Jesus equates anger with murder and lust with adultery. We need to hear and heed this, to stop rationalizing, to stop saying, “That can’t be what He means” when it’s plain it is. We need to bow before the King and let Him determine what it means to be citizens of His kingdom.

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1. **THE CAUTIONS**

Well, with the command and correction come the cautions (READ Matthew 5:29-30).

1. *Understanding the Images*
2. The eye

Strong words. The image of the eye is that of the medium through which we are tempted to lust.

1. The hand

The image of the hand, of course, is that of the means by which we act on that lust.

1. *Working through the Ideas*

What are the ideas behind the images? Obviously, Jesus is trying to get our attention.

1. Go to the root

He means for us to go to the root. Meaning that whatever is causing the problem, ensnaring our soul, making us stumble, we need to deal with it. Not just at the surface but going to the root.

1. Take radical steps

And we need to take radical steps, to deal with it ruthlessly. Not mutilation but mortification, putting our sin to death. Jesus is speaking strongly here not of self-maiming but of self-denial.

Again, we need to hear and heed these cautions. For this is no game. It is war.

*Application:*

There’s much that could be said here but let me be clear and specific on this application. Pornography is a scourge in our land. It is evil in so many ways. It degrades women and tricks them into degrading themselves. It inflames lust. And it’s unfair to spouses – present and future – who can’t hope to compete against air-brushed, tweaked and tucked, narcissistic exhibitionists.

This is an area where we need to be tearing out our eyes and cutting off our hands. This is something from which we need to flee. I cannot encourage accountability enough here. Get software on your computers and mobile devices. And if the jaws of this beast are just too tight and you can’t break free, then get counseling. Call me. I promise that you won’t be the first.

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**CONCLUSION:**

One last thing. What if you find yourself saying, “I understand and agree with every part of that. The command, the correction, the cautions all make sense. But why do I keep failing?” That is a good question. The reason is you’re looking for the right thing in the wrong place.

Blaise Pascal spoke of a “God-shaped vacuum” in the human heart, a longing we all have that demands to be filled but only God can fill it. Which means that, in that moment when you’re giving into the temptation, you are trying a substitute that ultimately cannot sustain you.

Let me put it another way. A quote often (but erroneously) attributed to G. K. Chesterton goes like this, “The young man who rings the bell at the brothel is unconsciously looking for God.” That may sound scandalous or blasphemous. But it’s true, a tremendous insight. It’s that deep longing, that desire to know and to be known. But that longing cannot be met that way.

All of which is to say what? That temptation to lust, whatever its source, is the warning light on the dashboard. And it’s telling you that you’ve lost intimacy with Christ and that’s what you really want and need. So look to Him. The One who spoke these words – look to Him.

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